

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women in Leadership: Evidence from the U.S. and Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how gender and national culture jointly shape perceptions of women in leadership roles, focusing on attitudes among participants from Brazil and the United States - two major economies with increasingly integrated workforces. Using the 21-item Women as Managers Scale (WAMS), survey data were collected from 1,427 individuals (1,052 from the U.S. and 375 from Brazil), the majority of whom had professional work experience. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed significant differences in attitudes by gender and culture, with women and Brazilian participants consistently expressing more favorable views of female leaders. While gender emerged as a slightly stronger predictor than culture, notable interaction effects indicated that the influence of gendered leadership perceptions varies across cultural contexts. These findings offer valuable insights for organizations seeking to design culturally responsive leadership development and diversity initiatives, especially those operating across U.S.–Brazil borders. Although the sample was drawn from a university population, its high employment rate and diversity in professional roles make it a meaningful representation of the existing and emerging workforce. The study provides timely evidence on evolving leadership attitudes in two key global markets and extends prior research by highlighting how cultural norms interact with gender stereotypes to shape leadership perceptions.

KEYWORDS

Leadership, Gender, Culture, Attitudes, Perceptions, Management, Brazil, United States

Introduction

The economic and cultural ties between the United States (U.S.) and Brazil are deep and multifaceted, reflecting their status as the two largest economies in the Western Hemisphere. The U.S. is a leading source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Brazil, holding the largest single-country stock of FDI, accounting for 29.1% of all FDI as of 2021 (U.S. Department of State, 2024). In 2023, U.S. FDI in Brazil totaled \$87.9 billion, a 13.6% increase from the previous year, while Brazilian FDI in the U.S. reached \$6.5 billion, a 35.3% rise from 2022 (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, n.d.). This relationship has grown significantly in recent years and continues to do so, with bilateral trade reaching \$92.0 billion in 2024 (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.). In 2022, U.S. multinational enterprises (MNEs) operating in Brazil employed approximately 529,000 people, generating \$196.3 billion in sales, while Brazilian MNEs in the U.S. employed around 104,700 people, generating \$73.9 billion in sales (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, n.d.). Additionally, approximately 65% of Fortune 500 companies have a presence in Brazil, including major firms like 3M, Amazon, General Motors, Intel, and Johnson & Johnson, all of which operate in both the U.S. and Brazil (Faugeres, 2023; Amcham BR-US, n.d.).

However, despite this robust economic relationship, significant gender disparities persist in both countries. In Brazil, the second largest economy in the Western Hemisphere and the eleventh largest globally (U.S. Department of State, 2024), gender inequality remains a critical challenge. For instance, women hold just 15.2% of officer, board, and fiscal council positions in publicly traded Brazilian companies, with 17.5% of these companies reporting no women on their boards (Brazilian Institute of Corporate Governance, 2023). Additionally, women in Brazil earn 19.4% less than men on average, with this gap widening to 25.2% in managerial roles (Secretariat of Social Communication, 2024).

These disparities extend to political representation and workforce participation. Despite comprising 51.5% of the population and 53% of the electorate, Brazilian women hold only 17.7% of seats in the Federal Chamber and 12.3% in the Senate (Quartucci, 2024). Furthermore, as of 2021, only 53% of women in Brazil had formal employment, compared to 72% of men, reflecting a persistent gap in job security and career advancement (Zimmerman, n.d.). Women occupy just 13% of senior leadership roles in Brazil's media industry, compared to 44% in the U.S. (Eddy et al., 2023; Pennacchio, 2023).

International comparisons further underscore these challenges. The World Economic Forum's (2024) Global Gender Gap Report ranks Brazil 70th out of 146 countries in overall gender equality, compared to 43rd for the U.S. This ranking reflects Brazil's lower scores in economic participation and opportunity (88th), educational attainment (54th), and political empowerment (74th), despite achieving a top ranking in health and survival (1st, tied). In contrast, the U.S. ranks significantly higher in economic participation (22nd) and educational attainment (1st, tied) but lags in health outcomes (77th) and political representation (63rd).

Despite these challenges, both Brazil and the U.S. remain attractive destinations for expatriates, with Brazil ranking 7th globally and the U.S. ranking 35th, according to the Expat Insider report (Bloom, 2024; InterNations, 2024). The significant volume of trade, investment, and corporate integration between these countries has created a dynamic environment where both men and women increasingly pursue international assignments. These cross-border opportunities have important implications for perceptions of leadership, as both gender and cultural norms significantly influence how leaders are evaluated in different contexts.

Given these intersecting economic, cultural, and gender dynamics, a deeper understanding of how gender and national culture shape leadership perceptions is essential. This paper seeks to contribute to this understanding by examining the complex interplay of gender, cultural expectations, and leadership perceptions in the U.S. and Brazil. The following sections will integrate psychological theories of leadership bias with cross-cultural frameworks to explore these dynamics, addressing research questions that seek to clarify the impact of gender norms and cultural context on leadership perceptions. This approach aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the barriers women face in leadership roles and the strategies needed to overcome them.

Literature Review & Theory Development

Despite progress in gender equity, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles globally. This disparity is influenced not only by gender norms but also by the cultural environments in which leadership perceptions are formed. To understand how gender and national culture interact in shaping these perceptions, this literature review integrates psychological theories of leadership bias with cross-cultural frameworks. The study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do gender differences shape perceptions of women in leadership roles across Brazil and the U.S.?

RQ2: How do the cultural contexts in Brazil and the U.S. influence perceptions of women in leadership roles?

RQ3: How do gender and cultural context interact to influence perceptions of women in leadership roles in Brazil and the U.S.?

Gender and Leadership Perceptions

To address RQ1, the literature explores how gendered stereotypes and expectations shape evaluations of women in leadership. Role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) posits that societal expectations of

women—communal, nurturing, deferential—conflict with stereotypical traits of effective leaders—assertive, dominant, and agentic. This incongruity results in negative evaluations of women when they seek or occupy leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman, 2012).

In Brazil, where traditional gender roles and institutionalized machismo persist, role incongruity seems particularly pronounced. Research has shown that Brazilian women in executive positions face heightened scrutiny, are less likely to be promoted, and experience significant resistance when occupying high-status roles (Huse & Solberg, 2006; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). While the U.S. has made strides toward gender equality in the workplace, women leaders still encounter the “double bind”—criticized for being too assertive or too passive (Rudman & Glick, 2001). These perceptions reflect enduring stereotypes about women’s competence and likability in leadership contexts.

Social role theory (Eagly, 1987) complements this framework by arguing that societal divisions of labor historically assigned communal roles to women and agentic roles to men. These expectations are reinforced through descriptive (what is) and prescriptive (what ought to be) stereotypes (Heilman, 2012). In Brazil, women leaders are often expected to be both competent and nurturing, which creates a contradictory set of expectations that can be difficult to navigate (Figueredo & Cavazotte, 2023; Huse & Solberg, 2006). In the U.S., although women are increasingly accepted in leadership positions, they still face pressures to conform to male-centric leadership norms (Koenig et al., 2011).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) provides further insight by suggesting that individuals evaluate leaders more favorably when they share salient group characteristics, such as gender. In male-dominated environments, both in Brazil and the U.S., this in-group favoritism reinforces existing power structures and limits opportunities for women (Koch et al., 2015). Similarly, the similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) explains that decision-makers tend to prefer and support individuals who resemble themselves demographically. In both countries, male leaders disproportionately mentor and promote other men, perpetuating gender inequality in leadership advancement (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gerk et al., 2022; Ibarra, 1993; Carneiro & Santos, 2024) and corporate board representation (Hanashiro et al., 2024).

Cultural Contexts and Leadership Perceptions

To address RQ2, it is necessary to consider the broader cultural environments that influence leadership norms. Two foundational frameworks—Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and the GLOBE study—provide cross-national tools to compare how societal values shape leadership perceptions.

Hofstede’s (1980, 2001) model identifies key differences in national cultures. Brazil scores high on power distance, reflecting a cultural acceptance of hierarchical structures and authority. The U.S., by contrast, has low power distance and emphasizes individualism, promoting egalitarianism and personal achievement. These distinctions influence how leadership is defined and who is seen as fitting that role.

The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) expands this understanding by introducing culturally endorsed leadership profiles and dimensions such as gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, and humane orientation. Brazil scores low in gender egalitarianism and moderately in assertiveness, reflecting a traditional and often paternalistic culture where leadership is closely associated with masculinity (House et al., 2004). Conversely, the U.S. ranks higher in both gender egalitarianism and assertiveness, although these values sometimes clash: women are expected to lead assertively but may face backlash when they do (Den Hartog et al., 1999; House et al., 2004).

Table 1. Cultural Comparison of Brazil & U.S.

Cultural Dimension	Brazil	U.S.	Source
Power Distance	High – hierarchical acceptance of unequal power	Low – preference for equality and flat hierarchies	Hofstede (2001)
Individualism	Low – collective identity and group loyalty	High – individual achievement and autonomy	Hofstede (2001)
Gender Egalitarianism (GLOBE)	Low – traditional gender roles remain strong	Moderate to High – more gender equality norms	House et al. (2004)
Assertiveness (GLOBE)	Moderate – indirect communication common	High – direct, competitive, and dominant behavior	House et al. (2004)
Humane Orientation (GLOBE)	Moderate – concern for others emphasized	Low to Moderate – emphasis on self-interest	House et al. (2004)

These cultural values shape expectations about how leaders should behave and influence how leadership effectiveness is interpreted. For example, in Brazil, high power distance reinforces deference to traditional authority, often disadvantaging women who challenge gendered hierarchies (Huang et al., 2020). In the U.S., while structural support for women in leadership is greater, lingering gender bias continues to affect evaluations of competence and likability (Koch et al., 2015).

Gender and Culture: Interactive Effects

RQ3 integrates the prior questions by examining how gender and cultural context jointly influence leadership perceptions. Neither gender norms nor cultural values operate in isolation; rather, they intersect to create a layered framework of expectations that can either inhibit or support women's advancement in leadership.

For example, the interaction of role congruity theory with cultural masculinity is more pronounced in Brazil, where traditional norms dictate both how women should behave and who qualifies as a legitimate leader. Brazilian women must navigate both prescriptive gender stereotypes and culturally sanctioned power hierarchies, leading to compounding disadvantages (Ibarra et al., 2013). In contrast, U.S. women may face more subtle forms of bias, such as role spillover, where cultural expectations for assertiveness clash with persistent norms about feminine warmth and likability (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Moreover, organizational cultures shaped by national values also moderate the expression of gender stereotypes. For instance, in collectivist Brazil, group loyalty may further entrench in-group favoritism among male leaders, reducing access to mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for women (Gerk et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2020). In the U.S., individualism may increase access to opportunities, but the burden of proving leadership legitimacy often falls more heavily on women, who must continuously demonstrate competence in male-dominated spaces (Foschi, 2000).

This layered theoretical integration offers a robust lens through which to investigate the cultural contingencies of gender bias in leadership. It supports the proposition that efforts to promote gender equity must consider not only gendered expectations but also the cultural norms that reinforce or challenge them across national contexts.

Methods

Procedure

The data for this study were gathered through an opinion survey. Prospective participants received an email invitation outlining the study's purpose, which aimed to better understand job-related attitudes to enhance their future work experience. The invitation encouraged participation, assured them that their responses would remain completely confidential, and explained that the data would be sent directly to the researchers, with no access to individual responses granted to others. Both demographic and attitudinal information were collected. For demographics, participants were asked questions such as "What is your age?"; "What is your ethnicity?"; and "Are you currently employed? If so, how would you categorize your position?" Participants then filled out a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of women in managerial roles. The survey was administered electronically via Qualtrics.

Sample

Although all participants were university students, the high employment rate among them, combined with a significant number of non-traditional students (those with substantial work experience), warranted referring to them as 'workers.' In total, the study included responses from 1,052 U.S. workers (510 males, 542 females) and 375 Brazilian workers (170 males, 205 females). The participants were recruited from two institutions: (1) a large public university in the Southeastern U.S. and (2) a large private university in Southeast Brazil.

The average age of U.S. workers was 28.13 years (28.90 years for males, 27.41 years for females), while Brazilian workers averaged 25.49 years of age (25.58 years for males, 25.33 years for females). U.S. participants identified as 76.1% Caucasian, 12.3% African/African American, 4.3% Hispanic/Latino, and 7.4% from other ethnic groups. Brazilians identified as 76.3% branco (white), 13.4% pardo (brown-skinned), 6.7% preto (black), and 3.7% from other backgrounds.

To further justify the classification of participants as workers, it is worth noting that nearly 78% of U.S. participants were currently employed (43.5% in entry-level roles, 39% in supervisory or managerial positions, 2.7% in executive roles, and 14.9% in other roles). In comparison, 64% of Brazilian participants were employed. Additionally, U.S. participants were drawn from programs with a high proportion of non-traditional students—those with established work histories. Although some participants were not currently employed, as future members of the workforce approaching full-time employment, students represent a meaningful sample that reflects the future cultural and managerial landscape of organizations in their respective countries (Cordano et al., 2002).

Measures

Women as Managers Scale (WAMS)

Participants responded to 21 attitudinal statements regarding various perspectives on women in managerial roles, known as the Women as Managers Scale (WAMS) (Peters et al., 1974; Terborg et al., 1977). The scale consisted of 11 positively worded items and 10 negatively worded items (reverse coded), all rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher WAMS scores indicated more favorable attitudes towards women in managerial positions, while lower scores reflected less favorable views. Sample statements included, "It is acceptable for women to compete with men for top executive positions," "Women have the capability to acquire the necessary skills to be successful managers," and "On the average, women managers are less capable of contributing to an organization's overall goals than are men" (reverse coded). The reliability and construct validity of the WAMS have been well-documented in numerous studies (e.g., Ilgen and Moore, 1983).

To ensure the cultural equivalence of questionnaire items, a rigorous process of forward-translation and back-translation was implemented, involving multiple bilingual translators. The measure showed robust reliability overall ($\alpha = 0.89$), as well as for U.S. ($\alpha = 0.91$) and Brazilian ($\alpha = 0.77$) workers individually.

Results

First, as shown in Table 2, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess whether statistically significant differences existed between gender and culture groups on any individual items of the WAMS scale and the overall WAMS scale (i.e., the combined 21 items). The results revealed significant effects for gender ($F(21, 1403) = 8.16, p < .001$), culture ($F(21, 1403) = 8.74, p < .001$), and a significant interaction between gender and culture ($F(21, 1403) = 1.91, p < .01$).

Table 2. MANOVA for Gender and Culture Group Differences

MANOVA				
Variable	Between-Subjects Effects			Partial Eta Squared
	F	df, error df	p	
Gender	8.16	21, 1403	***	0.116
Culture	8.74	21, 1403	***	0.109
Gender X Culture	1.91	21, 1403	**	0.028

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for male and female workers, both for each individual item on the WAMS scale and for the overall WAMS scale (i.e., the combined 21 items). Univariate analyses (ANOVAs) revealed significant differences in gender on 18 of the 21 items and on the overall WAMS scale, with females expressing more favorable attitudes across all 18 items and the overall scale. These findings directly address RQ1, which asks how gender differences shape perceptions of women in leadership roles across Brazil and the U.S. The largest gender difference in mean scores was found for the item 'On average, a woman who stays at home full-time with her children is a better mother than one who works outside the home at least part-time (reverse coded),' while the smallest difference was observed for 'It is not acceptable for women to assume leadership roles as often as men (reverse coded).'

Table 4 provides the mean scores and standard deviations for workers in the U.S. and Brazil, both for each individual item on the WAMS scale and the overall WAMS scale. For the culture comparison, significant differences were found on 17 of the 21 items and on the overall scale, with Brazilian workers expressing more favorable attitudes on 15 items and the overall scale. These findings directly address RQ2, which asks how the cultural contexts in Brazil and the U.S. influence perceptions of women in leadership roles. The largest difference in mean scores between U.S. and Brazilian workers was for the item 'To be a successful executive, a woman does not have to sacrifice some of her femininity.' In contrast, the smallest differences were found for the items 'Women would no more allow their emotions to influence their managerial behavior than would men' and 'Women possess the self-confidence required of a good leader.'

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Gender

Gender								
		Males N=680		Females N=747		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
1	It is less desirable for women than men to have a job that requires responsibility. (R)	6.01	1.35	6.15	1.42	0.00	1, 1423	n.s.
2	Women have the objectivity required to evaluate business situations properly.	6.08	1.32	6.37	1.15	8.89	1, 1423	**
3	Challenging work is more important to men than it is to women. (R)	5.73	1.54	6.33	1.18	36.33	1, 1423	***
4	Men and women should be given equal opportunity for participating in management training programs.	6.69	0.75	6.82	0.75	2.45	1, 1423	n.s.
5	Women have the capability to acquire the necessary skills to be successful managers.	6.59	0.87	6.81	0.75	14.71	1, 1423	***
6	On the average, women managers are less capable of contributing to an organization's overall goals than are men. (R)	6.26	1.28	6.70	0.76	36.01	1, 1423	***
7	It is not acceptable for women to assume leadership roles as often as men. (R)	6.37	1.15	6.48	1.22	0.58	1, 1423	n.s.
8	The business community should someday accept women in key managerial positions.	6.41	1.07	6.75	0.75	20.70	1, 1423	***
9	Society should regard work by female managers as valuable as work by male managers.	6.51	1.01	6.77	0.82	13.67	1, 1423	***
10	It is acceptable for women to compete with men for top executive positions.	6.59	0.86	6.78	0.73	5.67	1, 1423	**
11	The possibility of pregnancy does not make women less desirable employees than men.	5.34	1.87	5.91	1.74	22.75	1, 1423	***
12	Women would no more allow their emotions to influence their managerial behavior than would men.	5.14	1.79	5.58	1.66	24.28	1, 1423	***
13	Problems associated with menstruation should not make	6.11	1.36	6.63	0.98	36.50	1, 1423	***

Gender								
		Males N=680		Females N=747		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
	women less desirable than men as employees.							
14	To be a successful executive, a woman does not have to sacrifice some of her femininity.	5.94	1.48	6.26	1.45	7.82	1, 1423	**
15	On the average, a woman who stays at home all the time with her children is a better mother than a woman who works outside the home at least half time. (R)	5.32	1.75	6.31	1.24	112.12	1, 1423	***
16	Women are less capable of learning mathematical and mechanical skills than are men. (R)	6.36	1.19	6.73	0.88	22.65	1, 1423	***
17	Women are not ambitious enough to be successful in the business world. (R)	6.26	1.42	6.68	1.08	22.65	1, 1423	***
18	Women cannot be assertive in business situations that demand it. (R)	6.35	1.14	6.71	0.82	24.68	1, 1423	***
19	Women possess the self-confidence required of a good leader.	6.14	1.23	6.56	0.92	36.37	1, 1423	***
20	Women are not competitive enough to be successful in the business world. (R)	5.99	1.59	6.48	1.27	25.03	1, 1423	***
21	Women cannot be aggressive in business situations that demand it. (R)	6.15	1.35	6.57	0.92	24.27	1, 1423	***
-	Overall WAMS Scale (all 21 items combined)	6.11	0.81	6.49	0.51	63.61	1, 1423	***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Culture

Culture								
		US N=1052		Brazil N= 375		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
1	It is less desirable for women than men to have a job that requires responsibility. (R)	6.01	1.34	6.28	1.51	11.83	1, 1423	***

Culture								
		US N=1052		Brazil N= 375		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
2	Women have the objectivity required to evaluate business situations properly.	6.12	1.31	6.53	0.96	30.19	1, 1423	***
3	Challenging work is more important to men than it is to women. (R)	5.96	1.42	6.28	1.30	15.43	1, 1423	***
4	Men and women should be given equal opportunity for participating in management training programs.	6.72	0.79	6.86	0.63	9.80	1, 1423	***
5	Women have the capability to acquire the necessary skills to be successful managers.	6.66	0.86	6.83	0.68	12.55	1, 1423	***
6	On the average, women managers are less capable of contributing to an organization's overall goals than are men. (R)	6.41	1.10	6.72	0.91	23.67	1, 1423	***
7	It is not acceptable for women to assume leadership roles as often as men. (R)	6.36	1.20	6.62	1.13	13.40	1, 1423	***
8	The business community should someday accept women in key managerial positions.	6.55	0.97	6.71	0.79	8.72	1, 1423	***
9	Society should regard work by female managers as valuable as work by male managers.	6.57	1.01	6.86	0.58	29.11	1, 1423	***
10	It is acceptable for women to compete with men for top executive positions.	6.64	0.85	6.82	0.62	14.82	1, 1423	***
11	The possibility of pregnancy does not make women less desirable employees than men.	5.57	1.82	5.82	1.83	4.85	1, 1423	**
12	Women would no more allow their emotions to influence their managerial behavior than would men.	5.38	1.72	5.32	1.78	0.68	1, 1423	n.s.
13	Problems associated with menstruation should not make women less desirable than men as employees.	6.31	1.23	6.58	1.12	14.90	1, 1423	***
14	To be a successful executive, a woman does not have to sacrifice some of her femininity.	5.97	1.51	6.49	1.26	35.07	1, 1423	***
15	On the average, a woman who stays at home all the time with her children is a better mother than a woman who works outside the home at least half time. (R)	5.81	1.57	5.91	1.64	0.58	1, 1423	n.s.
16	Women are less capable of learning mathematical and mechanical skills than are men. (R)	6.51	1.07	6.69	0.98	8.12	1, 1423	**

Culture								
		US N=1052		Brazil N= 375		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
17	Women are not ambitious enough to be successful in the business world. (R)	6.55	1.05	6.28	1.74	12.68	1, 1423	***
18	Women cannot be assertive in business situations that demand it. (R)	6.48	1.02	6.71	0.93	16.03	1, 1423	***
19	Women possess the self-confidence required of a good leader.	6.35	1.07	6.41	1.18	0.67	1, 1423	n.s.
20	Women are not competitive enough to be successful in the business world. (R)	6.33	1.21	6.02	1.95	13.17	1, 1423	***
21	Women cannot be aggressive in business situations that demand it. (R)	6.35	1.16	6.42	1.19	1.04	1, 1423	n.s.
-	<i>Overall WAMS Scale (all 21 items combined)</i>	6.27	0.75	6.44	0.52	17.15	1, 1423	***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Finally, Table 5 presents the results for the interaction between gender and culture, revealing significant differences on 11 of the 21 items and on the overall WAMS scale. These findings directly address RQ3, which explores how gender and cultural context interact to influence perceptions of women in leadership roles in Brazil and the U.S., suggesting that the relationship between gender and attitudes toward women in managerial roles varies across cultural contexts.

Table 5. Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results by Gender X Culture

Gender X Culture											
	US Males N= 510		US Females N= 542		Brazilian Males N = 170		Brazilian Females N= 205		Between-Subjects Effects		
Survey Item	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	df, error df	p
1	5.87	1.35	6.15	1.31	6.44	1.26	6.16	1.68	11.59	1, 1423	***
2	5.95	1.37	6.29	1.23	6.48	1.06	6.57	0.87	2.89	1, 1423	n.s.
3	5.60	1.58	6.29	1.16	6.12	1.37	6.42	1.22	5.49	1, 1423	*
4	6.63	0.81	6.81	0.75	6.88	0.48	6.84	0.73	6.38	1, 1423	*
5	6.53	0.89	6.77	0.81	6.76	0.81	6.89	0.54	1.18	1, 1423	n.s.
6	6.16	1.31	6.65	0.79	6.58	1.13	6.83	0.66	3.85	1, 1423	*
7	6.27	1.19	6.45	1.20	6.65	0.95	6.59	1.27	2.92	1, 1423	n.s.
8	6.33	1.13	6.76	0.74	6.67	0.81	6.74	0.77	10.62	1, 1423	***
9	6.40	1.09	6.73	0.89	6.82	0.57	6.90	0.59	4.98	1, 1423	*
10	6.51	0.94	6.77	0.74	6.84	0.50	6.80	0.71	9.88	1, 1423	**
11	5.25	1.85	5.87	1.73	5.59	1.88	6.01	1.77	0.88	1, 1423	n.s.
12	5.20	1.76	5.56	1.68	4.96	1.89	5.62	1.62	2.17	1, 1423	n.s.
13	5.99	1.40	6.61	0.94	6.46	1.15	6.69	1.09	7.79	1, 1423	**
14	5.78	1.52	6.15	1.49	6.42	1.22	6.54	1.30	2.08	1, 1423	n.s.
15	5.30	1.74	6.30	1.21	5.40	1.82	6.33	1.33	0.13	1, 1423	n.s.
16	6.27	1.23	6.73	0.85	6.61	1.00	6.75	0.96	6.75	1, 1423	**
17	6.29	1.24	6.79	0.75	6.16	1.85	6.38	1.64	3.59	1, 1423	n.s.
18	6.25	1.17	6.69	0.79	6.63	0.99	6.78	0.88	5.80	1, 1423	*
19	6.12	1.19	6.56	0.90	6.22	1.36	6.57	0.98	0.47	1, 1423	n.s.
20	6.03	1.40	6.61	0.92	5.87	2.05	6.15	1.87	2.99	1, 1423	n.s.
21	6.09	1.35	6.60	0.87	6.33	1.34	6.50	1.05	6.23	1, 1423	*
Overall	6.04	0.87	6.48	0.52	6.33	0.56	6.53	0.47	9.31	1, 1423	**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Given the significant interaction between gender and culture on 11 items and the overall WAMS scale, a series of simple main effects analyses were conducted to further explore these relationships (see Table 6). These analyses revealed statistically significant differences in mean scores between U.S. male and U.S. female workers on all 11 items and the overall WAMS scale, with females consistently showing more favorable attitudes toward women in managerial roles than males. Differences were also found between U.S. male and Brazilian male workers on 10 of the 11 items and the overall scale, with Brazilian males showing more favorable attitudes than U.S. males. Similarly, Brazilian females demonstrated more favorable attitudes toward women in managerial roles than U.S. males on 10 of the 11 items and the overall scale. However, between U.S. female and Brazilian male workers, a significant difference emerged on only 1 of the 11 items, with U.S. females showing more favorable attitudes, while no differences were observed on the overall scale.

No significant differences were found between U.S. female and Brazilian female workers on any individual items or the overall scale. Lastly, Brazilian females showed more favorable attitudes toward women in managerial roles compared to Brazilian males, but only on the overall WAMS scale, with no significant differences on individual items.

Table 6. Main Effect Analyses for Gender X Culture

Gender X Culture							
Survey Item		US Males vs. US Females	US Males vs. Brazilian Males	US Males vs. Brazilian Females	US Females vs. Brazilian Males	US Females vs. Brazilian Females	Brazilian Males vs. Brazilian Females
1	It is less desirable for women than men to have a job that requires responsibility. (R)	**	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
3	Challenging work is more important to men than it is to women. (R)	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
4	Men and women should be given equal opportunity for participating in management training programs.	***	***	**	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
6	On the average, women managers are less capable of contributing to an organization's overall goals than are men. (R)	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
8	The business community should someday accept women in key managerial positions.	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
9	Society should regard work by female managers as valuable as work by male managers.	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
10	It is acceptable for women to compete with men for top executive positions.	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
13	Problems associated with menstruation should not make women less desirable than men as employees.	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
16	Women are less capable of learning mathematical and mechanical skills than are men. (R)	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
18	Women cannot be assertive in business situations that demand it. (R)	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
21	Women cannot be aggressive in business situations that demand it. (R)	***	n.s.	***	*	n.s.	n.s.
-	Overall WAMS Scale (all 21 items combined)	***	***	***	n.s.	n.s.	*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Partial eta squared was used to assess the magnitude of effects for the gender, culture, and gender by culture (i.e., interaction) variables. Partial eta squared is a measure of effect size that reflects the proportion of total variance in a dependent variable explained by the variation in an independent variable. According to Cohen (1988), an eta squared value of $> .14$ indicates a large effect, between $.06$ and $.13$ indicates a medium effect, and between $.01$ and $.05$ indicates a small effect. The partial eta squared for gender ($.116$) was slightly higher than for culture ($.109$), and nearly four times larger than for the gender by culture interaction ($.028$). Similarly, the partial eta squared for gender on the overall WAMS scale was greater than that for culture, while the effect of culture was greater than the gender by culture interaction. These results suggest that gender exerts a stronger influence on attitudes toward women as managers than cultural differences between the U.S. and Brazil. However, cultural differences between the U.S. and Brazil still have a greater influence than the combined effect of gender and culture taken together (e.g., comparing U.S. male workers to Brazilian male workers).

Discussion & Conclusion

In this study, we examined the influence of gender and cultural context on perceptions of women in leadership roles, focusing on participants from Brazil and the United States. The results indicate that gender significantly shapes attitudes toward female leaders: across both countries, women consistently expressed more favorable views of women in managerial positions than men. Cultural context also played a notable role, with Brazilian participants reporting more positive attitudes toward women in leadership compared to their U.S. counterparts. Further analysis of the interaction between gender and nationality revealed that U.S. females and Brazilian participants of both genders held more favorable perceptions of women leaders than U.S. males, while few significant differences were observed between U.S. females and Brazilian respondents, regardless of gender. Overall, gender emerged as a slightly stronger predictor of attitudes than culture, although both factors exhibited medium effect sizes. The interaction between gender and culture, while present, demonstrated a comparatively smaller effect.

Our findings underscore the influence of both gender and cultural context on attitudes toward women in leadership roles. Consistently less favorable perceptions among U.S. male participants, compared to females in both countries and Brazilian males, suggest a persistent gender-based bias in leadership evaluations within the U.S. sample, in line with role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In contrast, the more favorable evaluations provided by Brazilian males complicate expectations derived from broader cultural indicators, such as Brazil's higher power distance and lower gender egalitarianism scores reported in the Hofstede and GLOBE frameworks. These findings suggest that the manifestation of gender bias in leadership perceptions is not uniform across cultural settings and that cultural factors may moderate the expression of gender stereotypes in context-specific ways.

Additionally, the gender gap in leadership attitudes was more pronounced in the United States than in Brazil, where male and female evaluations were more similar. This pattern indicates that gender-based stereotypes about leadership may be less differentiated in the Brazilian context, challenging universalist applications of social role theory (Eagly, 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While demographic similarity (e.g., shared gender) may influence attitudes, the findings suggest that broader cultural norms – such as collectivism and preferences for relationship-oriented leadership – may mitigate these effects. Such patterns point to the importance of considering national culture when assessing psychological mechanisms that drive leadership evaluations, particularly those related to gender.

For multinational corporations operating in both the U.S. and Brazil, these findings underscore the importance of culturally tailored approaches to leadership development and diversity initiatives. The more favorable attitudes of Brazilian employees toward women in managerial roles – despite cultural indicators indicating otherwise – suggest that U.S.-designed diversity programs may require adaptation for effective implementation in Brazil. Additionally, the pronounced gap between U.S. male and female attitudes points to a need for targeted interventions, particularly among U.S. male employees, who expressed the least favorable views of women leaders. Rather than adopting uniform, global strategies, organizations should consider developing gender- and culture-specific training programs that address the distinct biases observed across demographic groups.

These findings carry important implications for cross-border talent management and expatriate preparation. U.S. female executives relocating to Brazil may encounter more supportive attitudes than cultural stereotypes would predict, potentially enhancing their leadership effectiveness. In contrast, Brazilian women in leadership roles may face greater resistance in U.S. settings, particularly from male colleagues. Human resource professionals should integrate these gender–culture dynamics into expatriate training and succession planning. Given the stronger effect of gender relative to culture, efforts to mitigate gender-based bias should be prioritized, while also accounting for how such biases manifest differently across national contexts.

Nevertheless, some methodological limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, although the student sample included many employed participants with work experience, it may not fully reflect the broader workforce in either country, particularly at senior leadership levels, where gender biases may differ. Second, the use of self-reported attitudes introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, especially in cultural contexts with strong normative commitments to gender equality. The study design also limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the development of attitudes over time or in response to shifting social norms. Additionally, the smaller Brazilian sample relative to the U.S. sample may have reduced statistical power to detect subtle interaction effects.

Future research could build on these findings in several important directions. First, longitudinal studies examining how attitudes toward women in leadership evolve within different cultural contexts would provide insight into the temporal dynamics of gender bias. Second, investigating intersectional identities—such as race, age, and socioeconomic status—would offer a more nuanced understanding of how multiple social categories jointly influence leadership evaluations. Third, experimental designs that manipulate leadership behaviors could assess whether identical actions are perceived differently depending on the leader’s gender and cultural background. Finally, examining the moderating role of organizational culture in shaping or mitigating national-level biases would clarify how companies can more effectively promote gender equity in leadership across diverse cultural environments. Such research would advance theoretical frameworks and provide actionable insights for multinational organizations seeking to foster inclusive leadership globally.

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