



Redefining Gendered Leadership Stereotypes: The Hustler, Hipster and Hacker Roles in Addressing the Double Bind Dilemma in Women-Led Startups

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Abstract

The paper aims to examine how leadership stereotypes are redefined in women-led startups, focusing on the roles of Hipster, Hacker, and Hustler. It discusses how women entrepreneurs face the double bind dilemma as they must maintain balance between their traditional gender roles and moving toward authenticity in their leadership styles. This study is embedded in a multi-theory framework, using Role Congruity Theory as the underpinning theory; Social Exchange Theory, and Authentic Leadership theory as support theories. These theories investigate how traditionally masculine Hipster, Hacker, and Hustler roles influence the women entrepreneur to an increased double bind dilemma in their startups. This paper has reviewed the relational dynamics of women leaders and their various stakeholders using social exchange theory, focusing on how such interactions are informed by gendered stereotypes. This study also draws on authentic leadership to explore ways in which women entrepreneurs can reinvent such roles that is true to themselves and their leadership styles, further stimulating authenticity and inclusiveness within the startup ecosystem. This study uses exploratory qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of gender stereotypes in leadership in women-led startups. The study was carried out in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and a purposive sampling technique was selected for deriving a heterogeneous sample of 20 women entrepreneurs who were leading startups across different sectors. Data collection is done through semi-structured, in-depth interviews that provide an overarching understanding of the experience and views of the women leaders. The paper provides empirically testable propositions to further investigate how gendered roles will influence the degree of leadership authenticity across diverse women-led startups. The study shows how the reconceptualization and redefinition of gendered leadership roles through the lens of authentic leadership may foster inclusive business practices. Through the double bind dilemma, addressed by women entrepreneurs, the ability to claim an authentic leadership will serve to transform traditional gender stereotypes. The study contributes to the literature on gender and enterprise through an exploratory analysis with respect to redefinition on how gendered leadership stereotypes can be treated within the authentic leadership theory, with respect to Pakistan. It also presents a new conceptual framework that helps to understand how women entrepreneurs



overcome gender-based difficulties by navigating and transforming their roles, with enhanced implications for both theory and practice, especially towards the complexities of dynamics in entrepreneurship.

Key words: Gendered leadership, Stereotypes, Role Congruity Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Authentic leadership, Women-led startups, Double bind dilemma, Hipster, Hacker, Hustler, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Women entrepreneurship is determined as an integral driver of economic growth, creating job prospects, and social change globally. In the last few decades, significant research has focused on understanding the multifaceted contribution of women entrepreneurs in fostering economic development and enhancing diversity in various economic contexts (Brush & VanderWerf, 1992; Jamali, 2009; Kelley et al., 2010; Marlow et al., 2012; Henry et al., 2016). However, women's entrepreneurial potential remains highly underutilized, especially in developing nations such as Pakistan, where powerful socio-cultural and institutional barriers have slowed down and delayed women's entry into entrepreneurship (Rizvi et al., 2024). According to Baughn et al. (2006) and Roomi & Harrison (2010), such underutilization is not only an economic constraint but also depicts a clear picture of prevailing gender disparity associated with societal attitudes and expectations. Various studies have shown that such disparities in leadership opportunities between women and men have their deep roots in societal stereotypes and prejudice (Babar & Abbas, 2023; Qureshi et al., 2021). While studies have given substantial evidence of these disparities (Alateeg & Al-Ayed, 2024; Henry et al., 2016), these analyses lack the depth of economic research into the causal relationships underlying gender inequalities in leadership. This gap not only underlines the need for nuanced research into cause-effect relationships but also reconsiders the business case for greater inclusion of women in leadership positions, particularly within entrepreneurial firms (Gohar, Abrar & Tariq, 2022).

Literature shows that stereotypes and prejudice serve as contributing factors to underrepresentation of women in leadership position (Hussain, 2024; Rizvi et al., 2024). Hoyt and Murphy (2007) found that the threat of being labeled as incompetent negatively influenced the leadership performance and desire of women to hold leading positions. This stereotype threat is complex and moderated by the interaction of gender, leadership role, and situational factors (Babar et al., 2023). This emotional stereotype of women in forming perception and legitimacy among women leaders, has been relatively neglected in research on leadership. Studies show that such stereotypes lead to a risky psychological state amongst women leaders, arguably leading to inappropriate leadership behaviour in the organization (Gohar, Abrar & Tariq, 2022; Tahir & Raza, 2020). This situation is recently explained by Lawson et al (2022) who mentioned that racial and demographic stereotypes hinders women's leadership opportunities. Rosette et al. (2016) also presented an interesting analysis of how stereotypes of women's agency vary across different racial groups, illustrating the intersectional nature of these stereotypes and how they help to shape the prospects of women in leadership. Given



that, it is important to understand such intersectionality to view the complexity and range of barriers facing women in leadership.

Organizational structural dynamics explain the scarcity of women leaders. For example, the concept of the glass cliff has been studied by Ryan et al. (2011), who refer to situations where women are promoted into precarious leadership positions that are closely associated with failure. This indicates that women face challenges at the top of the organization and experience precarious leadership position. On the other hand, women who break through the glass ceiling in male power-dominated organizations distance themselves from other feminine relationships (Alqahtani, 2020; Minehart et al., 2020). This phenomenon, known as the 'queen bee effect', is a term used to describe the situation where women in leadership positions separate themselves from other women in the organization to align themselves with the male-dominated power structure (Steffens, Viladot & Scheifele, 2019). But this whole situation increases the inequality between genders within organizations (Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019). Koburtay & Syed (2019) also added that group dynamics determine the extent to which women emerge as leaders in a male-dominated group. In this regard, Lemoine, Aggarwal, and Steed (2016) provided evidence that the composition of group personality, especially extraversion, plays an important role in the emerging process of women as leaders. As per Baldner & Pierro (2019), decision-making procedures adopted within groups affect the ways in which women exercise authority or manipulate influence.

Literature exhibits another critical area of concern, the effectiveness of organizational and societal interventions in increasing the representation of women in leadership positions (Minehart et al., 2020; Qureshi et al., 2023). For instance, Kalysh, Kulik, and Perera (2016) opined that family-oriented work-life practices positively affect women's representation in leadership; however, these effects have been contextual and will take time to actualize. In this regard, Sojo et al. (2016) recommended that setting goals and implementing diversity policies to improve female underrepresentation in top leadership positions have crucial role. The authors further demonstrated this as an effective intervention in many organizational and country contexts. According to Samo, Qazi & Buriro (2019), societal beliefs and stereotypes of entrepreneurial leaders are important indicators in shaping perceptions and opportunities within entrepreneurship. Bano & Nadeem (2024) further added that societal beliefs and expectations significantly evaluate entrepreneurs and create legitimacy in society about leaders. This is particularly critical for women entrepreneurs because stereotypes about leadership and gender impact resource acquisition and talent attraction (Rocha & Praag, 2020; Tonoyan et al., 2019). Moreover, the media give more attention to young male entrepreneurs like Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs, which further complicates gendered stereotypes and shapes mental images about what a typical entrepreneur should look like (Azoulay et al., 2020). In this regard, Pakistan being a patriarchal society presents unique challenges to women entrepreneurs. There is a continuous incongruity of roles that perceives women as lacking the agentic traits associated with effective leadership, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, traditionally required among leaders because of the nurturing and compassionate qualities typically linked to women (Kausar, Hafeez



& Anwar, 2024). This incongruity is more pronounced within the entrepreneurial contexts, where leadership functions are mainly linked with masculine characteristics, such as the Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker (Rudic et al., 2021; Raja & Riaz, 2024). This further marginalizes women and limits their chances of advancement in entrepreneurial landscapes (Brown & Mason, 2017; Rudic, Hubner, & Baum, 2021). The role congruity theory by Eagly and Karau (2002) synthesizes this knowledge to provide a theoretical framework on how mismatched communal attributes ascribed to women and the agentic qualities necessary for leadership result in biased evaluations and underrepresentation of women in leadership (Raja & Riaz, 2024). According to the role congruity theory, a societal norm exists that women should act with behaviours congruent with the communal attributes associated with women, like nurturing and compassionate. This shows societal bias when women enact qualities associated with agency, necessary for leaders (Mursaleen, 2024). Furthermore, the double-bind dilemma complicates women's effective navigation of their roles in leadership, where they get penalized for being either too assertive or too passive (Yahya, Anwar & Zaki, 2024). This becomes intense in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, considering that traditional masculinity finds itself in the role of Hustlers, Hipsters, and Hackers, making gendered expectations reinforce more bias (Awan, Yousaf & Malik, 2024). It is further exacerbated in the context of Pakistan through an interaction between gendered leadership stereotypes and socio-cultural constraints imposed on them. Essentially, Pakistani society is patriarchal by nature, which nurtures those stereotypes and severely restricts women's opportunities, particularly in leading positions within the startup ecosystem (Rana et al., 2024). Women entrepreneurs from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are from the northwestern part of Pakistan, which is prominent for conservative norms. They face extra challenges while trying to hold on to their authenticity of leadership and strive to fight the given stereotypes (Hussain, 2024).

This study explores entrepreneurial leader stereotypes and redefines gendered leadership to resolve the double bind dilemma. It identifies three entrepreneurial leader stereotypes: the Hustler, the Hipster and the Hacker, each linked to entrepreneurial leadership, youth, and masculinity. Through an investigation into these stereotypes, this study attempts to understand how such perceptions affect the opportunities and challenges women face in leadership within startups. The paper contributes to the increasing evidence of research on gender and entrepreneurship by providing insight into the socio-cultural and institutional determinants of women's leadership opportunities. More precisely, this study was conducted in Pakistan, where women face severe socio-cultural and institutional obstacles to entrepreneurship (Roomi & Parrott, 2008; Naseem et al., 2024).

Historical and Cultural Context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) has a unique cultural or historical background that shapes the lives and opportunities available to women. Throughout history, KP has been the focal point of several forces: the tribal customs, Islamic traditions, and colonial legacies combined to shape the present socio-cultural setting (Wagha, 2024). The traditional Pashtunwali code is resorted in KP social life, which reveals immense reliance on male



dominance and restricts the public role of women (Bilal, Hassan & Gul, 2024). This creates serious barriers for the women entering the leading positions in organizations. Over time, these historical influences blended into a patriarchal structure in the society where women faced immense difficulties getting access to education, employment, or entrepreneurship (Wasim, 2024). The pressure exerted by culture with respect to family honour and the purdah system applied to seclude women further complicates this scenario, making it tough for the women to emerge into the public domain and establish themselves as leaders.

Understanding this deep-seated historical and cultural context is important to understand the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. One of the most consistent barriers to women's advancement into the leadership role is gendered leadership stereotypes, especially in entrepreneurial context (Jahan, 2024). A range of studies have well documented the disparities in leadership opportunities to men and women (Wagha, 2024), where stereotypes and societal prejudices have been significant in sustaining these inequalities (Rasheed & Mar'iyah, 2024). However, majority of the studies lack depth required to explore the cause-and-effect relationship of gender inequalities in leadership, especially in the economic context of developing regions like Pakistan. This gap also underlines the need for nuanced research to investigate not only these cause-effect relationships but also to reassess the business case for increasing women's participation in top positions, especially in the entrepreneurial context (Khan et al., 2024).

Institutional Environment and Support Mechanisms

The government of Pakistan, within the recent past, has initiated several programs aimed toward providing support to women entrepreneurs, recognizing the critical role women can play economically. Institutions, like the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority (SMEDA) and the Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry, have been established for the purpose of providing women entrepreneurs with finance and technical support (ur Rehman, 2023). However, such initiatives face limitations in reaching and ensuring effectiveness in regions such as KP (Jahan, 2024). The socio-cultural hindrances at the local level and lack of awareness about the availability of resources usually negate institutional facilitation for female entrepreneurs in KP (Ali & Rasheed, 2021). While some institutions, such as SMEDA, have taken positive steps in the direction of providing training and financial aid, such efforts' beneficial effect is mostly diminished by the entrenched gender roles that discourage female contribution to business activities (Idris & Ghaffar, 2022). Moreover, the dysconnectivity of national policy from regional realities brings more challenges and complicate institutional support in KP. Given that, there is a need for nuanced approach to describe challenges and propose solutions targeted for this region.

Expanding the Theoretical and Empirical Base

Following the rich theoretical underpinning, present study combines Role Congruity Theory, Social Exchange Theory, and Authentic Leadership Theory to explain how gendered leadership stereotypes and entrepreneurship interlink in the KP. According to



the Role Congruity Theory, gender stereotypes trigger prejudiced judgments of women engaged in the leadership role since their communal attributes contrast with typical agentic qualities ascribed to leadership (Khan et al., 2024). While the social exchange theory points how these stereotypes affect social interactions and the effectiveness of leaders (Nachmias et al., 2022), authentic leadership theory gives way to women to redefine such roles to their true selves in terms of values and leadership styles (Gardner et al., 2021). Apart from these well-established theories, this study aims to contribute to the extended empirical base by including the latest research on socio-cultural and institutional factors of female entrepreneurship in Pakistan. Few studies that have focused on medial representation, access to digital platforms, and grassroots movements, have described the challenging traditional gender norms and construct new pathways into entrepreneurship for women in KP (Azoulay et al 2020; Tonoyan et al 2019). This study aims to draw on a wider array of studies and incorporates recent research in an attempt to attain a better understanding of what underpins women's leadership in this area.

Problem Statement

While much has been documented in previous studies about leadership dynamics, a gap remains in literature on how gendered leadership stereotypes affect women, and especially in startups. Cultural stereotypes of leadership as masculine have been a key barrier to attaining leadership positions by women, who are ascribed as lacking agentic traits crucial for effective leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sundermeier, 2024). These stereotypes contribute to biased assessments and to greater role incongruity, since women are perceived as less suitable for leadership roles owing to the perceived mismatch between communal female attributes and the agentic demands of leadership roles (Awan, Yousaf & Malik, 2024). This is an issue that is particularly evident in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, where such leadership roles as the Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker are implicitly aligned with male-dominated attributes. The double bind dilemma, where women in leadership are penalized for showing either too much or too little agency, further complicates their ability to lead effectively within these roles (Ofir, 2023). Whereas these stereotypes and related double bind dilemma have been identified, how these affects women-led startups have not been elaborated in the extant literature, hence exists a wider gap in our understanding of gendered leadership (Alateeg & Al-Ayed, 2024). Besides, existing leadership theories have neglected challenges particular for women leaders, especially within the process of realizing relational authenticity (BarNir, 2021). Authentic leadership, with its focus on self-awareness, transparency, and relational integrity, offers a way forward in the reconstitution of gendered leadership roles (Grangeiro & Gomes, 2023). However, its application to women-led startups remains limited, hence leaving an important gap in the literature (Liñán, Jaén & Rodríguez, 2024). Relational dynamics within leadership have been explored using social exchange theory, which highlights that gendered stereotypes influence social exchanges and interactions in leadership contexts (Bertolone, 2021). These dynamics are important in setting up how women experience or work toward legitimacy and effectiveness in their leadership, especially where



environments exist that still harbor traditions of male-oriented thought with respect to leadership roles (Tonoyan & Strohmeyer, 2021). Given these theoretical and contextual gaps, it is important to carry out research about the interrelations between gendered leadership stereotypes and authentic leadership, where double bind dilemma is being placed under the spotlight by women-led startups. These are important to develop a sophisticated understanding and highlight strategies that can support women in efforts to overcome such barriers against effective leadership in entrepreneurial contexts. By addressing these gaps, this paper seeks to contribute both to the broader discourse pertaining to gender equity in leadership but also provides actionable insights valuable for crafting an inclusive, supportive environment for women entrepreneurs leading startups.

Theoretical Background

The study of gender and leadership has undergone many changes, especially with the rise of academic interest in how gender roles influence entrepreneurial ecosystems. By convention, leadership is biasedly framed within a masculine context that projects assertive and competitive characteristics, a concept referred to as Eagly and Karau (2002) as "role incongruity." This is the incongruity i.e. the perceived requirements of leadership are in opposition to cultural stereotypes of femininity, creating significant barriers for women who seek and desire leadership. The issues have been well documented because many women are engaged in leadership, and there is an increase in academic research into the complexities of gendered leadership stereotypes (Xiong et al., 2022). It is authentic leadership theory that can be used as theoretical framework because it insists leaders are in tandem with themselves, leading openly and ethically in establishing relationships, reducing challenges (Begeny et al., 2022). This is also within women-led startups where the traditional roles of gender clash with the required style of leadership, needed for a successful business. Authentic leadership provides a lens through which women can enact their leadership in a challenging way, reaffirming the gendered expectations (Lawson et al., 2022). However, its use in entrepreneurial ecosystems within women-led startups has not been captured well (Shah, 2023). Besides, Social Exchange Theory also offers a useful framework where relational dynamics shape and affect leadership within organizations. Social exchange involves a series of related activities over time, which generate obligations based on expectations of return and trust (Heilman, Caleo & Manzi, 2024). From a leadership perspective, such dynamics may be particularly influenced by gendered stereotypes, which affect the way leaders are perceived and evaluated (Alateeg & Al-Ayed, 2024). However, while the dynamics of social exchange intersect with the gendered leadership stereotype in the start-up environment, little attention is directed at how such stereotypes influence the relational exchanges between woman leaders and their stakeholders (Laguía et al., 2022). This, therefore, suggests that more research is needed into how social exchange in both ways influences startup leadership. The nature of leadership experiences is also determined by the socio-cultural context where women entrepreneurs operate. In developing countries like Pakistan, for example, where traditional gender roles are inculcated into the culturally bound, women entrepreneurs face unique challenges that



is not commonly manifested in Western contexts. Based on the Institutional theory developed by Scott (2001), such an institutional structure may be inbuilt in both cultural and social fabrics within society. For this reason, they further formal and unwritten rules within society to promote or suppress entrepreneurial endeavours (Ong, 2022). Women entrepreneurs in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have to negotiate these institutional barriers and also the gendered expectation of leadership, a requirement largely unexplored by the literature so far, (Roomi et al., 2018). The double bind dilemma, one where women receive criticism for being too aggressive or too passive still constitutes a major challenge for a women leader (Røhnebæk & Breit, 2022). This is particularly true in startups, where the strong, powerful leader role often conflicts with the stereotypical ideals of female femininity (Lemoine & Blum, 2021).

The theoretical framework for this research was derived by combining the theories of Role Congruity, Social Exchange, and Authentic Leadership Theory in an attempt to study how women-led startups redefine stereotypical gendered leadership. This model has its significance, especially relevant in the context of the socio-cultural environment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, where traditional gender roles and societal expectations turn out to be proportionally challenging. Role Congruity Theory by Eagly and Karau (2002) provides a fundamental framework in which the mismatch between social expectations of leadership and the communal qualities normally ascribed to women can be analyzed. The theory has been used to explain why women are perceived as less fitting for leadership, since the qualities believed relative to leadership, such as assertiveness and competitiveness, are perceived as masculine traits. This incongruity generates biased evaluations and contributes to underrepresentation of women in leadership for such highly valued traits, especially in entrepreneurial settings (Lemoine & Blum, 2021). This theory is in line with these and evidence that woman occupying the position of leadership have the traditional mindset in the case of Pakistan. They are burdened with the dual pressure of fulfilling the stereotypical gender role and carrying the agentic attributes of being a leader accordingly (Hirji, 2021). On the other hand, Social Exchange Theory is described by Blau (1964) and further developed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), states relational dynamic between the stakeholders of a female leader company and is considered critical. The starting point for the theory was social behaviour is a result of an exchange process in which people try to maximize the benefits while minimizing costs in their interactions (Ciurria, 2023). In line with gendered leadership, this theory can explain how conditioning gender stereotypes affect women leaders' expectations and performance evaluations in a workplace. Chikwe, Eneh & Akpuokwe (2024) indicated that women leaders in conservative societies are at the mercy of negotiating complex social exchanges deeply influenced by entrenched gender biases, which means they have to perform additional emotional and social labour to maintain legitimacy and authority in their roles (Lučinskaitė, 2024). These findings were also consistent with the broader literature on gender and leadership, which has suggested that women need to be arduous in their social exchanges to offset the negative effects of gender stereotypes on perceptions of their leadership. Furthermore, the authentic leadership theory challenges gendered expectations, which is developed by Avolio and Gardner (2005) and extended by Gardner et al. (2011) to investigate how



female entrepreneurs can exercise leadership in a real value and personal identities congruently. Authentic leadership emphasizes self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective in the development of trust for authentic leadership. Authentic leadership offers possible avenue that allows women to navigate a double bind dilemma since, in highly patriarchal societies such as Pakistan, strong social pressures exist for female leaders to conform to traditional gender roles (Sahar, 2022). To that end, an argument can be made that both genders suffer negative actions, if they are more assertive and passive-assertive. These findings suggest that through authentic leadership, women entrepreneurs may redefine their roles in a way that empowers themselves as leaders and also contributes to a more inclusive and supportive organizational culture (Awan, Yousaf & Malik, 2024).

This integration of theoretical lenses in the given paper contribute to the greater discussion of issues raised by gender and entrepreneurship regarding emergency and further development perspectives of women entrepreneurs in conservative societies (Mujahid, 2023). The findings emphasize that the systemic biases and social dynamics at the heart of such gendered stereotypes about leadership need to be addressed and point toward authentic leadership as a key strategy to overcome. This theoretical framework not only deepens our understanding of gendered leadership in non-Western contexts but also carries pragmatic implications for promoting gender equity in leadership across diverse cultural settings (Hafeez & Zahid, 2021). This idea is corroborated by research studies conducted by Brush et al. (2009) and Javed (2025). It is believed that the implications of this research go beyond the specific context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and provide important lessons for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars interested in promoting more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystems globally.

Research methodology

We conducted 20 qualitative interviews to investigate the dynamics of gendered leadership stereotypes in women-led startups within the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A qualitative approach was found relevant because it provided an opportunity to look through the subjective experiences and perceptions of women entrepreneurs in this socio-cultural environment. The purpose was to interpret how these women navigate leadership roles amidst societal gendered expectations. For this purpose, purposive sampling was carried out to develop a heterogeneous group of women entrepreneurs leading startups across sectors such as technology, agriculture, education, and healthcare. This method aimed to ensure that our sample included direct experience of women entrepreneurs with challenges related to leading a startup in traditionally conservative societies. Selection was based on their size of operation, leadership experience, and engagement with gender-related challenges matched within the scope of the study's objectives. Primary data collection was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews that ideally captured the meaningful experiences of respondents. Through semi-structured, they allowed an interviewer with some latitude, during the discussion, to explore aspects of interest. Major themes explored during the interviews included leadership style, the impact of gendered stereotypes, and strategies



used by women entrepreneurs in overcoming challenges that took center stage. In addition, the participants were sought after for their perception roles in both the organizations and in the general entrepreneurship ecosystem.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, which was more helpful in terms of observing non-verbal behaviour and body language of respondents that helped to enhance the qualitative information. Each interview was audio-recorded with the consent of interviewees and transcribed precisely to ensure that stories were adequately captured. The duration for these interviews was 45-90 minutes, depending on the extent of the discussion and how willing the participant was to tell his or her story. First, we began the analysis process after data collection by doing line-by-line reading of the interview transcripts and making abundant notes to convey the first impressions. Then, we proceeded with the inductive coding by underlining key statements and phrases pertaining to gendered leadership stereotypes, leadership behaviours, and socio-cultural influences of the leaders. These were organized into broader themes through an iterative process of constant comparison between the emerging data and the existing literature. By nature, the coding and theme development across members of the research team were inherently collaborative to ensure that our findings would be reliable and valid. Several discussions were held to understand discrepancies and arrive at consensus in interpreting data. We also theoretically triangulated by comparing our findings with established theories and prior research to set our results into greater academic literature. This study provides empirically deductible propositions that seek in-depth investigation on how gendered roles influence leadership authenticity in women-led startups. These propositions are rooted in rich qualitative data from the interviews and provide a foundation for future research testing, in a quantitative way, the generalization of findings across contexts.

Results

Our findings explore the perceptions of gendered leadership stereotypes navigated by women entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Drawing on our data, we constructed typical categories, namely the 'Hustler', the 'Hipster', and the 'Hacker'. Each had specific typical features i.e. they shared commonalities in their leadership behaviour and perception within the entrepreneurial landscape. These categories also corresponded to the stereotypes identified by Rudic, Hubner, and Baum (2021) when they examined potential employees' perceptions of entrepreneurial leaders; hence provided reason for the reliability of these stereotypes across various contexts. The subsequent sections initially give an account of each category based on what sets them apart, followed by a discussion of the commonalities between these archetypes, focusing on their relation to authentic leadership.

The Hustler

The most reported category was the 'Hustler' with twelve interviewees primarily relating to this archetype. The 'Hustlers' are dynamic, authoritative, and outgoing leaders who are highly animated by entrepreneurial success. Characteristically they are confident, able to take risks, and with convincing eloquence, they are often referred to as the



pivotal characters that "set the tone" within their startups (ID 9). The latter archetype is the stereotypical leader: in command and commanding respect and decisiveness. Further, this was agreed by Rudic et al. (2021) when they described the Hustler archetype as a stereotype suitable for traditional masculine traits and supporting typical gender expectations of leaders. The 'Hustlers' are supposed to exercise goal-oriented, demanding leadership, create an environment where others can widely participate, show initiative, and become aligned with the high demands of the startup. This is underscored by one interviewee as follows: "Hustlers are the ones that push everybody forward; they're the heartbeat of the startup, making sure everybody is all-in" (ID 13). Relating this to authenticity in leadership, 'Hustlers' are authentic leaders since they are true to their values of hard work, determination, and leadership transparency (Tonoyan et al 2019). At the same time, they need to balance assertiveness with authenticity to avoid alienating their employees, especially in the very conservative region where conventional femininity expectations may demand a more subdued woman. In this case, authentic leadership would involve Hustlers continuing to be true to their entrepreneurial vision while promoting genuine relationships with their teams.

The Hipster

The second most frequent archetype was 'Hipster', which was featured in the interviews of nine of the respondents. Hipsters are viewed as innovative, independent, and egalitarian leaders who believe in facilitating creativity without adhering to organizational hierarchies. They have also been described as those types of leaders who promote an inclusive, team-oriented culture wherein every employee is valued and equal. Because, as remarked by Rudic et al. (2021), while the Hipster stereotype includes some of the key contemporary aspirations surrounding leadership, it nonetheless embeds gendered expectations that may produce complications for women leaders in balancing inclusivity with authority. According to one participant (IP7), Hipsters are leaders who like to rebel against the norm. They value new ideas and are always looking to improve things in unconventional ways. Hipsters tend to maintain a casual, approachable demeanor, often described as young and stylish, embodying a laid-back leadership style. Transparency in leadership and building genuine connections are close to Hipsters because of their authentic leadership. Flat hierarchy and inclusiveness demonstrate true will to empower its employees and drive innovative ideas. Productivity should be ensured but this seems the biggest challenge and must be maintained to ensure authenticity and at the same time productivity, especially in the case of a startup where results matter. At Hipsters, authenticity and laid-back style need to be cautiously mixed with inspiration and drives toward the goals of a startup.

The Hacker

The important status of the 'Hacker' archetype was less frequently observed and was pointed out by the five interviewees. Undoubtedly, the hacker is knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the technicalities of his ventures. They are the technical experts who drive innovation through their own specialized skills, often working behind the scenes to bring what the startup has envisioned. This archetype represents the Hacker stereotype,



which was identified by Rudic et al. (2021). Rudic et al (2021) argued that Hacker focuses on technical skills but often does not cover the relational aspects of leadership, especially in the context of women in male-dominant environment. The Hackers were described as "the ones who might not be at the forefront but are crucial for the technical backbone of the startup" (ID 20). While the skill is highly valued, Hackers usually possess poor interpersonal and motivational skills, which are linked to leadership. They are perceived as those leaders who inspire less and execute more, which may lead to problems in managing the team. The legitimacy of the Hacker archetype as a leader finds expression in their profound dedication to work and openness of knowledge. But the challenge for them is to develop authentic leadership competencies that are not solely technical in nature; inspiring and connecting on a personal level with their teams. For authenticity, Hackers need to step out of their technological comfort zone and become more holistic in their approach toward leadership.

Resolving Double Bind Dilemma through Authentic Leadership

What characterized women in all three archetypes, i.e., Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker, was the increased hope to break free from double bind dilemma of being both accessible and assertive, commanding and innovative, and capable and a leader. All three archetypes represent a survival approach to deal gendered requirements in an entrepreneurial life in a different manner. In line with Rudic et al. (2021)'s findings, such stereotype not only shape female leaders' perception but also re-adjust and re-align with such gendered requirements at a constant interval. For example, one of the interviewees stated, "Being a female, one cannot be one-dimensional. One must be strong but not too strong, creative but yet in command, and capable in terms of technology, yet a leader" (ID 11). One can evidently notice in such statements is, the manner multidimensional strategies have to present to make a move through the gendered entrepreneurial sphere. Authentic leadership opens a window of opportunity for females to respond to the problem in what manner one can make a move through the double bind because leaders are those who is being followed. Instead, in such a position, females can become leaders in a real manner by being truthful in terms of values, creating relations in harmony with how a person is and not with their appearances, transparently and with integrity communicating one's vision and obstacles. All three of these archetypes- Hustler, Hipster and Hacker-one must have a real style of leadership that not only encounters but overcomes gendered stereotypes. In creating an awareness of the multi-facets of leadership embraced by the female entrepreneurs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and categorized under three archetypes: Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker, this study raises an awareness. Consequently, these categories encompass women have approaches towards and transcending gendered leadership stereotypes. That, in its turn, permits a sophisticated observation of how they navigate and redefine a role in an entrepreneurial context. Besides, anchorage in authentic leadership brings out being oneself, a critical in leading. It helps counter double-bind pressures and constructs an environment in entrepreneurship that is both more inclusive and, in its turn, even more effective.



Discussion

The present study addresses overcoming gendered leadership stereotype in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for female entrepreneurs with stereotypical role of Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker under role congruity theory of Eagly & Karau, (2002), social exchange theory of Cropanzano & Mitchell, (2005), and authentic leadership of Gardner et al., (2011). In line with Rudic, Hubner, and Baum (2021), whose similar stereotypes for entrepreneurial leaders for potential workers have been identified, our work takes a similar path. These archetypes not only represent the leadership approaches taken up by female entrepreneurs but also highlight the enduring gendered expectations with which these must handle. This study yields a more nuanced view of obstacles encountered and approaches taken by such women in exercising leadership in an authentic manner; hence, resolving the double bind dilemma.

Theoretical Contributions

This article critically examines the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship by deconstructing the entrepreneurial stereotypes of Hustlers Hipsters and Hackers in the context of women-led startups, expanding the theory in gender and entrepreneurship. The Hustler stereotype which is attributed with dimensions such as industriousness, confidence, and unrelenting drive for success, conforms to traditional masculine conceptions of leadership underlined by Rudic et al. (2021). This is in line with role congruity theory, by Eagly & Karau, (2002), reinforcing gendered constraints, where in female leaders who show such agentic behaviour face social penalties. This finding conforms with observations by Rudic et al. (2021) and Koenig et al. (2011), where female leaders exhibit such agentic behaviour as Hustlers act. Despite parallels with the findings of Rudic et al (2021) and Koenig et al (2011), this construct remains problematic as it explains how leadership legitimacy continues to be assessed under the masculinized lens. The Hipster, which is characterized by innovation, egalitarianism, and inclusivity, is in contrast with traditional hierarchical conceptions of leadership. As Rudic et al. (2021) showed, such stereotype broadens leadership conceptions, but in this context, it shows a paradox where women leaders must navigate the conflicting expectations of being inclusive whilst exercising authority. That finding extends Eagly and Carli (2007)'s work and confirms the hypothesis that female leaders encounter challenging requirements to behave relational and commanding in behaviour, simultaneously. The supposed progressiveness of the Hipster archetype is still questionable as it demand to conform to gendered leadership expectations instead of dismantling them.

The Hacker archetype further complicates the gendered dynamics of leadership by intertwining technical expertise with leadership legitimacy. Women in such a role encounter the "lack of fit" bias, in that their technical expertise is noticed but their viability for being leaders is systematically undermined through the influence of gendered stereotyping. As Rudic et al. (2021) have argued, such a stereotype of having a deep grasp of technology is not an issue for males but a significant issue for females, in that such an assumption of having a deep grasp of technology blocks them from being seen as believable leaders. This aligns with Ridgeway, (2001) findings about the



credibility of women having lack of experience in male-dominated fields, reinforcing the systematic barriers that pertain in tech entrepreneurship. Moreover, the assumption that technical mastery must be complemented by relational leadership competencies for authentic leadership imposes additional burdens on women compelling them to validate their leadership potential continuously (Alateeg & Al-Ayed, 2024). These findings show deeply ingrained gender biases within entrepreneurial stereotypes and brings new understandings regarding double bind problem for female entrepreneurs in terms of dealing with it. The concept of authentic leadership which is attributed by self-awareness, transparency and relational integrity shows itself as a potential pathway for female leaders to navigate gendered performance expectations. However, in region like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where entrenched traditional gender roles exert immense social pressure (Roomi & Parrott, 2008), such leadership strategies may remain limited by wider structural limitations. As a result, rather than redefining gendered leadership, these entrepreneurial stereotypes reinforce existing inequalities, necessitating a more radical reassessment of leadership frameworks in entrepreneurship.

Practical Contribution

These findings have important real-life consequences for female entrepreneurs, leadership development programs, and for policymakers. With such stereotypes revealed in Rudic et al. (2021), it is important that leadership development programs address authenticity and inform female entrepreneurs about knowing how to navigate such gendered expectations; such an act will allow them to extract their own strengths towards resolving double bind issue in leadership practice that can become even strong and feasible according to sustainability. This is in line with Ely et al.'s (2011) recommendation that development of female leaders must specifically address such concerns that face women. Incubators and accelerators having platforms for developing female entrepreneurs should react sensitively to such leadership-related stereotypes and provide training in overcoming such stereotypes for women (Rudic et al. 2021). This might include mentorship and coaching in both technical and relational aspects of leadership in developing integral approaches to leadership that will resonate with philosophies of authentic leadership. Policymakers would have to pay attention to gendered stereotype's role in creating opportunity for leadership and develop supportive and empowering environments for female leaders. This could include programs in terms of gender equity in entrepreneurship, funding for female-owned start-ups or networks for connecting them with mentors and role-models. Such programs are a necessity in provinces such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in which socio-cultural barriers to female entrepreneurship are most acute.

Limitation and Areas for Future Research

The following points limit the generalizability of the given study and should be considered in future research. This study has used sample of women-led startups in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa but limited number of women-led startups may pose limitation on generalizability of findings. Future research can extend current work through larger samples and/or female entrepreneurs in a range of regions and cultures to evaluate



generalizability of archetypes constructed in current work, given the dynamics of demographics. Current work targets a specific socio-cultural environment, i.e. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where polarization in terms of traditional gender roles is extreme. Thus, comparative analysis that seeks out gendered leadership stereotypes in a variety of cultural and institutional settings can make a contribution towards a better interpretation of such dynamics. That will follow a demand, heard in a variety of studies, including both Scott (2001) and Jamali (2009), for a greater regard for context in reading entrepreneurial experience. Finally, although in this work, authentic leadership is one of the potentially effective strategies in redefining double bind dilemma, future studies will have to investigate in a longitudinal direction and examine the long-term impact of authentic leadership both in terms of performance at an organizational level and gender leadership fairness. Longitudinal studies can sort out useful information regarding female entrepreneurs with an authentic leadership style in dealing with changing requirements necessitated through entrepreneurship and leadership.

Conclusion

This study was carried out using entrepreneurial stereotypical forms of Hustler, Hipster, and Hacker through which female entrepreneurs navigate gendered forms of leadership in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study aids in contributing towards greater understanding about gender equity in leadership, providing effective avenues through which female leaders can practice leadership in a real and effective manner in entrepreneurial settings.

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