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In The Eyes of the Beholder: Followers' Gender and Their Perception of Authentic Leadership in Pakistan

Haroon Bakari, University of Southampton Malaysia

Stephen Jaros, Southern University

ABSTRACT

Authentic leadership is a growing object of study within the broader leadership domain. Despite advances in understanding the nature of authentic leadership, there is still much that is not known regarding the interplay between followers' gender and authentic leadership, particularly in developing countries. This study aims to address that by analyzing a data set comprising two samples across Pakistan examining male and female followers' perception levels on dimensions of authentic leadership, and possible gender differences in the effects of authentic leadership dimensions on behavioral support for change. We used an independent sample t-test to compare means. The direct effects of authentic leadership dimensions on behavioral support for change and moderation of gender were tested using the PLS-SEM approach through Smart PLS 4. The results indicate that male and female followers differently rated their leaders only on the dimension of relational transparency, whereas no significant difference was observed on other dimensions. PLS-SEM results found that dimensions of authentic leadership positively predicted behavioral support for change and gender moderated the links of relational transparency (stronger for males than females) and balanced processing (stronger for females than males) with behavioral support for change. This study is a significant contribution to the debate on followership and authentic leadership, role congruity, and gender differences in leadership. The main implication of this study is that leaders need to focus on the gender of their followers while designing their communication and interactional strategies, especially in change-management situations.

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical and practical aspects of leadership have long been a topic of debate within the academic community and practitioners. Dating back to Fiedler's (1964) pioneering work, which posited that leader effectiveness hinges in part on the quality of "leader-Member Relations", or the degree of trust and cooperation between a leader and their subordinates, to Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory's emphasis on the importance of developing strong dyadic relations between a leaders and their subordinates (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), there is a large amount of scholarship discussing the characteristics, traits, and qualities of leadership as well as methods to develop and train leaders (Agho, 2009; Crossman & Crossman, 2017). One branch of this research tree focuses on *Authentic leadership* in helping organizations achieve their

goals and objectives. Authentic leadership refers to the impact of a leader's character and values as a determinant of how followers respond and perform (George, 2003). The basic idea is that followers will trust, and therefore be willing to accomplish tasks on behalf of leaders who embody and exhibit high ethical and moral standards.

While authentic leadership has been subject to critique, current research is supportive of its basic tenets (cf. Farid et al., 2020). In their review of extant research on authentic leadership, Gardner and colleagues (2011) proposed that understanding of authentic leadership could be improved by, among other things, generating more knowledge about (a) how follower characteristics influence the efficacy of authentic leadership, and (b) conducting more research in non-Western environments to reveal whether authentic leadership functions the same way or differently in a variety of cultural and national contexts.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, female leaders of Taiwan, New Zealand, and Germany were regarded as performing disproportionality better than their male counterparts in other states (Fincher, 2020). Moreover, research suggests that female workers face greater levels of workload and job stress at times of crisis as compared to men (Bulog et al., 2022). This ignited further debate on topics like gender in the leadership domain, role incongruity, and gendered differences in followership (Davidson-Schmich et al., 2023). Although studies focusing on leader's gender and organizational outcomes have been widely published, little focus has been paid to studying leader-follower dynamics, followers' characteristics, perceptions, and their impact on leaders' effectiveness (Stanley, 2022). Conventional literature has focused on highlighting the need to understand followers' gender differences about leaders' authenticity and identification between leaders and followers (Eagly, 2005; Karacay et al., 2018).

A recent study by Wulffers and Carmichael (2020) involved interviews with executive-level participants of an authentic leadership development program who were interested in developing a "true north" or an optimal state of being authentic leaders. While discussing many positive areas of authentic leadership, the authors mainly focused on the need to explore the challenges that authentic leaders face while working with followers from diverse backgrounds and different gender identities. They argued that without understanding leader-follower dynamics and gender differences, authentic leaders cannot optimize their leadership style to be genuine authentic leaders and avoid traps of failure, especially when attempting to operationalize organizational change efforts.

This study addresses some of these research gaps by examining whether follower gender, male or female, influences how followers respond to authentic leadership, and whether any gender differences influence follower willingness to help achieve the leader's objectives. Thus, the major research questions this study addresses are 1. How may gender differences impact followers' perceptions of their leader's authenticity? 2. What is the impact of dimensions of authentic leadership on "behavioral support for change"? 3. How does gender moderate the impact of authentic

leadership on “behavioral support for change”? Our study offers a unique contribution to gender and followership scholarship as gender-in-leadership is considered to be a highly “thought-provoking domain” in management and organizational literature (Rodriguez et al., 2023).

Furthermore, this study answers the recent calls for research to expand authentic leadership beyond the North American context (Gardner et al., 2021), collect data from other cultures, including followers’ differences regarding gender (Helmuth et al., 2024; Fletcher et al., 2024).

We do so in the context of a developing country, Pakistan, which has not been studied as frequently as many Western countries. We also focus on the gender differences in followers’ perceptions of their leaders’ authenticity (Zhang et al., 2022). Results obtained reflect south Asian culture and contribute to widespread discussion about the relevance of authentic leadership in a non-western context (Den Hartog & De Hoogh, 2024). To develop our hypotheses, firstly the concept of authentic leadership is described. Next, we examine how authentic leadership drives behavioral support for change and why follower gender may influence the authentic leadership process. Then, we describe the study conducted to test our propositions. Finally, our results are presented and discussed to facilitate future research.

Authentic Leadership

Theories of authentic leadership have roots in the theory of positive organizational behavior. Authentic leadership refers to leader behavior that is characterized by integrity, openness, genuineness, transparency, and core and personal values (Sidani & Rowe, 2018). Authentic leaders are responsible for instilling these values into followers, and this form of leadership has been defined as a "process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Similarly, Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined “authentic leadership as the behavior of the leaders which emanates from positive organizational behavior with a major focus on ethical climate”.

More recently, it has been proposed that authentic leadership is composed of four conceptually similar dimensions that include relational transparency, self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, and balanced processing of a (Puni & Hilton, 2020; Bakari et al., 2017; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness relates to developing an awareness of his/herself, their goals, objectives, cognitive abilities, emotions, and feelings (Lagan, 2007). In other words, the degree to which the leaders are aware of their capacities and shortcomings. A "self-aware" leader also has an awareness of their followers’ strong and weak points, knowledge about work context, and the conditions that may foster or impede their behavior (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Self-awareness also encompasses

knowledge about what others know about you. In other words, having accurate knowledge about others' perceptions of their behavior, motives, values, passions, and morality (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 4; George, 2003, p. 11). In short, self-awareness refers to the leader's ability to know their followers, to know the work context, and to be cognizant of what impact these factors may have on their behaviors.

Relational transparency. Transparency in leaders' communication with others, dealing with others, the depiction of genuine self as opposed to distorted and 'fake' self (Gardner et al., 2011) is called relational transparency. This involves being open to others and dealing with everyone equally and impartially. Such transparency and impartiality will foster trust and commitment in followers (Gardner et al., 2005; Kernis, 2003).

It also represents a leader's behavior in which leaders don't hide anything, they display true emotions and say exactly what they want to say. They are open to accept and correct their mistakes if committed and realized. They are also open to criticism of their behavior, their decisions, and personality. They display emotions as per their feelings. In short, authentic leaders do not discriminate, do not cheat, do not hide rather they promote justice, equality, openness, harmony, and fairness (Gardner et al., 2011).

Balanced processing. Apart from transparency in interpersonal interactions, balanced processing suggests that leaders should display justice in information processing, especially in decision-making. It concerns leaders analyzing objective and true data and looking into different aspects of any problem before making inferences and decisions (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Authentic leaders do not decide intuitively and based on selective information. They are not hasty in making decisions, rather they invite others to share their views, and welcome opinions that may contradict their beliefs. They do not consciously distort and exaggerate information (Gardner et al., 2005). Through balanced processing, authentic leaders reach accurate decisions which in turn, foster leaders' integrity in the eyes of followers (Gardner et al., 2005) which improves decision quality.

Internalized moral perspective. This dimension relates to the core and personal values of the leader. Leaders' ability to know their personal and core values and make their behavior consonant with those values is called internalized moral perspective. Moreover, authentic leaders need to transfer these values to their followers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). But, knowledge and transfer of these values is not enough, authentic leaders need to follow these values in their decisions and adjust their behavior to them. Leaders high on internalized moral perspective model ethically relevant behavior and make fair and transparent decisions based on high ethical standards. These decisions reflect the values of leaders, groups, and organizations. There is no disharmony between the values proposed and practiced (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

In short, authentic leadership reflects leaders' awareness about themselves, their followers, and their context, ability to decide based on true and objective data, to deal with their followers justly, without discrimination, and to make ethical decisions.

Gender and Authentic Leadership

Authentic leaders adhere to their core and personal values to make transparent and just decisions, they are not supposed to deviate from norms to please others (Caza et al., 2010; Endrissat et al., 2007). Authentic leadership has traditionally been considered by some authors as a gender-neutral style of leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Patterson et al., 2012), however, more recently, a school of thought has emerged that argues that gender is an important determinant of leader behavior and influence on followers (Liu et al., 2015). This latter focus is based on Eagly's work. Eagly (2005). Building on role congruity theory, she argues that followers interpret the leadership role in terms of their values regarding gender roles. For example, female leaders leading groups having a majority of males are considered by these male followers as members of an outsider social group and thus tend to not be welcomed by them as authentic leaders (Eagly, 2005, p. 462). Also, studies show that women as leaders often adopt more participative, person-centered, and transformative leadership styles as opposed to men who adopt more autocratic styles (Bass et al., 1996; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). This research suggests the possibility of gender differences in the practice of authentic leadership by leaders, and in how followers react to "authentic leadership displays" by their leaders.

Gender and authentic followership

Although mainstream literature documents the influence of a leader on followers' behavior, research also suggests that the influence of authentic leadership varies per followers' characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and gender (Woolley et al., 2010, p. 3). This is because follower perceptions of authentic leadership are socially constructed and are highly influenced by the extent to which it is portrayed by the media (Kapasi et al., 2016). Evidence shows that authentic leadership may generate behaviors and outcomes different for men and women followers (Sims et al., 2017; Woolley et al., 2010). Eagly and her colleagues consider the gender of leader and follower to be characteristics that are due to a variety of reasons and affect leaders' influence on followers' behavior (Eagly, 1998, 2005; Eagly & Diekman, 2005; Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender of leaders has also been found to impact rating by followers such that women leaders received biased ratings when they were rated by men and/or when they were engaged in 'masculine' roles of autocratic leadership styles (Eagly et al., 1992; Lord et al., 2017).

Concurrent with this research, a focus has developed to know how followers' gender moderates authentic leadership's impact (Sims et al., 2017; Woolley et al., 2010) on followers' outcomes. Extant literature suggests that follower gender may influence leader-follower relationships (Vecchio, 2002; Vecchio & Brazil, 2007).

Hypotheses Development

More closely related to authentic leadership, research suggests that men and women are different in their expectations of leaders. Women tend to be more concerned about fair treatment and relational transparency from authority figures. In contrast, men

are outcome-oriented (Buttner, 2016). Role congruity theory (Eagly & Diekman, 2005) argues that there should be harmony between a person's roles and social expectations based on stereotypes. In other words، when a person displays a certain behavior, people tend to match that behavior based on characteristics such as gender and see whether that role matches norms and values already set and socially accepted for that gender. If a woman occupies a leadership role, followers tend to compare her role in the organization to her traditional role such as rearing children. Any mismatch between these (leader role vs. gender role) may lead followers to consider their leaders less authentic (Sims et al., 2017). Besides congruity in roles, harmony in leader and follower values also influences behavior. Followers will be more satisfied with their leader when they observe a high similarity between leaders' values with their values (Meglino et al., 2016).

Among prior studies that have analyzed differences in the perception of men and women followers relating to authentic leadership, Caza et al. (2010) argue that there may be important gender differences (p. 56), such that the gender of the preceptor may be an important determinant in predicting leaders' authenticity (Caza et al., 2010). Experimental research suggests that women rate their leaders more positively than men (Butler & Geis, 1990; Shelton, 2008). Authentic leadership is popularly considered a positive trait (unlike abusive leadership), so female followers may attribute greater authenticity to leaders (Caza et al., 2010, p. 57). In studies where men and women were asked to find out who is a good leader, women attributed goodness to those leaders who were fair in interaction, shared more ideas, and were perceived as transformational (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1995; Rosener, 1990).

Therefore, this study posits that:

H1a: *Men and women will differ in perception of their leaders' Balanced processing such that women will tend to rate their leaders higher than men.*

H1b: *Men and women will differ in perception of their leaders' Moral / Ethical standards such that women will tend to rate their leaders higher than men.*

H1c: *Men and women will differ in their perception of their leaders' Relational transparency such that women will tend to rate their leaders higher than men.*

H1d: *Men and women will differ in their perception of their leaders' self-awareness, such that women will tend to rate their leaders higher than men.*

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT FOR CHANGE

Change Management. Change management has been defined as “the methods and manners in which a company describes and implements change within both its internal and external processes. This includes preparing and supporting employees,

establishing the necessary steps for change, and monitoring pre- and post-change activities to ensure successful implementation." (ASQ, 2025). As this definition suggests, "preparing and supporting employees" is an important component of achieving successful organizational change initiatives, a component that emphasizes the role of leadership in encouraging subordinate behaviors and actions that implement successful change efforts. Similarly, in their recent review of change management research, Errida and Lofti (2021) highlighted the importance of the behavioral, not merely the structural or technological, dimensions of change management as an important contributor to implementing successful change initiatives. Their research highlights the importance of change leadership in overcoming resistance on the part of subordinates, motivating subordinates to "buy in" to the need for change, and effective leader communication in creating "readiness" on the part of followers to help implement changes.

All of this is critical, as organizational change initiatives often fail, such that a majority of change management initiatives are not successful because of various reasons (Burnes, 2015). Some authors say these failures are due to flawed implementation of change management initiatives (Georgalis et al., 2014) and some others focus on the failures of leaders who are unable to acquire adequate employee support for organizational change (Armenakis et al., 1993). Apart from the context, process, and content of change, leadership is considered a paramount factor in driving employee behavioral support for change (Holt et al., 2007; Holten & Brenner, 2015) and employee performance (Kaštelan Mrak & Grudić Kvasić, 2021).

Recent research considers leaders credibility as important for the effective management of change and a major driver for getting employee support across different sections of society (Ouedraogo et al., 2023). A recent study has found that authentic leadership predicted employee behavioral support for change (Bakari et al., 2017). A very recent study from the Indian context has found authentic leadership as a main predictor of employee readiness for supporting change (Sengupta et al., 2023). Behavioral support for change is regarded as an extra role behavior that is achieved when employees' feelings of being valued are higher, while their doubts, skepticism, and insecurities are removed (Islam et al., 2020). A recent study found that authentic leadership not only removes cynicism towards organizational change but fosters supportive behaviors for the change (Bakari et al., 2019). Based on these findings, this study hypothesizes that:

> ***H2a:*** *Balanced processing is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.*
>
> ***H2b:*** *Moral/ethical standards are positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.*
>
> ***H2c:*** *Relational transparency is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.*

H2d: *Self-awareness is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.*

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT FOR CHANGE: GENDER AS A MODERATOR

Organizational change occurs in public sector organizations of developing countries as they aspire to meet the challenges of global competitiveness and the strong need for good governance. Leaders of organizational change strive to elicit employee behaviors that facilitate change implementation. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) proposed behaviors representing employee support for organizational change. Compliance behavior represents employee behavior that fulfills a minimum requirement of change support. Compliance behavior refers to employees' willingness to undertake actions essential to implement organizational change. Lack of minimum support will be regarded as resistance to change (Baraldi et al., 2010, p. 350; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Johnson, 2016). This study thus utilizes the compliance dimension of Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) to reflect behavioral support for change.

In the Pakistani privatization context, several factors influence employee behavioral support for change. As job insecurity and role ambiguity negatively influence behavioral support for change (Baraldi et al., 2010), authentic leadership, by providing clues of moral and ethical behavior, justice fairness, transparency, and incorporation of various points of view may signal employees to exert behavioral support for change at least at a minimum (Author et al., 2017).

In leadership scholarship, multiple factors have been considered to understand the determinants of leadership effectiveness. These factors include different leadership styles, personality traits, psychological states, and demographic variables. Major questions regarding the interactive effects of these factors have remained unanswered. A meta-analysis of 117 articles found that perspectives related to social identity, status, relationship, and congruence are important interactions in leadership research (van Knippenberg & Dwertmann, 2022). A recent study in the Asian context focused on the congruence of a leader's role with the leader's gender as an important point of interest (Shao et al., 2023). As men and women followers may respond differently to perceive their leaders' authenticity, namely that females are more likely to be responsive to authentic leadership, as indicated by our above discussion, this study proposes that gender may moderate this relationship.

H3a: *The impact of Balanced processing on behavioral support for change is different for female and male followers such that the effect will be stronger for females than males.*

H3b: *The impact of Moral/ethical standards on behavioral support for change is different for female and male followers such that the effect will be stronger for females than males.*

H3c: *The impact of relational transparency on behavioral support for change is different for female and male followers such that effect will be stronger for females than males.*

H3d: *The impact of self-awareness on behavioral support for change is different for female and male followers such that effect will be stronger for females than males.*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study has adopted survey design research to address hypotheses. Data was collected from two sectors that were undergoing change processes. The first sample includes 216 respondents from a large public-sector railroad company, of which the majority were male. Most respondents were moderately educated (60% had a 12-year education). The second sample includes 260 respondents from the health sector, 73% male respondents. Both organizations had recently undergone change processes. Data was collected from doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff of public sector hospitals in Sindh province, which were handed over to private sector organizations to improve services. We were mainly concerned with how effective, authentic leadership is in privatizing public sector unionized organizations (hospitals and railways in our sample) and how followers' gender makes a difference. Data was collected through paying personal visits. Meetings with the respective heads of hospitals and departments at the railroad company were held to brief them about the research objectives. These two samples were selected mainly because at the time of data collection, both the sectors i.e. our sampled hospitals and railroad company were experiencing significant organizational changes. This context was suitable for understanding followers' responses to authentic leadership because followers undergo a significant amount of cognitive pressure when organizational changes are being implemented (Bakari et al., 2019). Therefore, as per the theoretical requirements, these two samples were relevant at the time of this study.

Data Collection

After the formal permission was acquired, paper questionnaires in sealed envelopes were distributed among employees through the respective sectional supervisors. No identifiable information was sought to protect the respondents' identity and the data's confidentiality. Across the two samples, there were 476 respondents, 333 males and 143 females. Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' Profile

	GENDER	
	Number	**Percent**
Male	333	70.0
Female	143	30.0
Total	476	100.0
	AGE	
	Number	**Percent (%)**
Below 25	3	.6
26-35	277	58.2
36-45	142	29.8
45 – 55	35	7.4
Above 55	19	4.0
Total	476	100.0
	EDUCATION	
	Number	Percent (%)
Matric	31	6.5
FA/Fsc	52	10.9
Bachelors	273	57.4
Masters and above	120	25.2
Total	476	100.0

Measures

To measure authentic leadership, a 16-item authentic leadership questionnaire (ALQ) was used. This questionnaire includes four dimensions Internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, self-awareness, and relational transparency (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Respondents were asked to show the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements. Five-point Likert scale was used such that 1 represents strongly disagree and 5 represents strongly agree. Examples include- My immediate boss "Accurately describes how others view his or her capabilities" (*Self-Awareness*), "Is willing to admit mistakes when they are made" (*Relational transparency*), "Makes decisions based on his/her core beliefs" (*Internalized Moral Perspective*), "Listens carefully to different points of view before coming to conclusions" (*Balanced Processing*).

To measure behavioral support for change, the 3-item scale developed by (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) was used. Sample item includes "I comply with my organization's directives regarding the change".

All the items were translated into Urdu following translation back translation method (Brislin, 1970).

Gender was modeled as a categorical variable where 1 reflects males and 2 reflects females. In the software, these were termed 0 and 1 respectively. A dummy variable was created with the name of the sector where 1 referred to the health care sample and 2 was used to refer railroad company. This dummy variable was used to control any problem related to sample heterogeneity.

Analytical Strategy

This study has two major objectives. The first objective was to test gender differences in followers' perceptions of their leaders' authenticity. These objective and related hypotheses (H1a to H1d) are tested using an independent sample t-test employing SPSS v25. However, the second objective was to check how authentic leadership relates to behavioral support for change and how gender may moderate this relationship. These objective and related hypotheses (H2a to H2d and H3a to H3d) are tested with the help of SmartPLS 4 using the PLS-SEM approach. Both approaches are further explained below in their related sections.

Results

As discussed above, the data set for this study contains responses from 476 respondents from two samples, health sector and railroad company. Both organizations were undergoing some restructuring at the time of data collection. For simplicity of the analysis, data from both samples has been combined. Combining the different samples is common in authentic leadership studies focusing on exploring different theoretical mechanisms (Avolio et al., 2018). As indicated above, a dummy variable was constructed for an additional control where 1 reflected the health sector and 2 for a railroad company. The model used this variable, named 'sector,' as a control variable. Results revealed that there was no significant difference across the type of sample ($p>0.05$) suggesting suitability for combination in our analyses. Table 3 reports the correlations among constructs. Results reveal that all the variables are moderately and positively correlated with each other as expected.

Tests of H1A – H1D

An independent sample t-test was employed to compare means to test four elements of the first hypothesis, which address whether males and females differ along four dimensions of authentic leadership. SPPS software was used to employ the test. Results are presented in Table 2. Results suggest no difference in the dimensions of authentic leadership across males and females except on the relational transparency (mean=1.9399, SD = 0.594 for females and mean=2.145, SD = 0.680 for males)

dimension. Results show that males rated authentic leaders more relationally transparent than females.

Table 2. Gender Difference in Perception of Authentic Leadership

	GENDER	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
RT	Male	333	2.1447	.68059	3.124	474	.002	.07602	.33375
	Female	143	1.9399	.59436	3.297	305.507	.001	.08261	.32716
MO	Male	333	2.0736	.66952	-.586	474	.558	-.17437	.09425
	Female	143	2.1136	.71560	-.571	253.502	.569	-.17830	.09817
BP	Male	333	2.3524	.80865	-1.475	474	.141	-.28178	.04009
	Female	143	2.4732	.84329	-1.451	259.014	.148	-.28485	.04316
SA	Male	333	2.1419	.71238	-1.682	474	.093	-.26472	.02053
	Female	143	2.2640	.75688	-1.642	254.815	.102	-.26854	.02435

Note: SA = Self Awareness; RT = Relational Transparency; MO = Moral / Ethical standard; BP = Balanced processing.

Source: Developed for this study

Table 3. Correlations

	MO	BP	SA	BSP	RTT
MO	1				
BP	.318**	1			
BSP	.525**	.512**	.617**	1	
RTT	.454**	.486**	.541**	.516**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

AL and Behavioral Support for Change

For the next stage of analysis, “Partial least square structural equation modeling” was used. Smart PLS 4 software (Ringle et al., 2022) was used to conduct PLS-SEM. Firstly direct relationships between dimensions of authentic leadership and behavioral support for change were tested (H2a to H2d). Secondly, the moderating role of gender was tested in the relationship between dimensions of authentic leadership and behavioral support for change.

PLS-SEM is a variance-based technique used to conduct structural equation modeling to test the hypotheses. It tests two models, the measurement model, and the structural model (Hair et al., 2017, 2022).

Measurement model Analysis. The measurement model is called the outer model because it relates to the relationship between indicators and their focal construct. The measurement model is mainly used to test the reliability and validity of items and constructs. Outer loadings are used to see how much an individual indicator contributes to the focal construct. Values of outer loading greater than 0.70 are thought adequate to indicate good indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2017). For internal consistency among indicators, Cronbach's alpha was used. A value of alpha greater than 0.50 indicates better consistency among indicators. As Cronbach's alpha is susceptible to sample size and other limitations (Agbo, 2014; Cho & Kim, 2014), composite reliability is proposed (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Composite reliability, also called the omega coefficient, reflects the dependability of a composite scale comprising several indicators. Again, values of CR above 0.70 are considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017).

The fourth estimate in reliability and validity testing is a measure of the average variance extracted (AVE). AVE above 0.50 is considered adequate. The fifth test is the measure of discriminant validity. HTMT values are calculated to test discriminant validity, which is the measure of testing whether the model's conceptually distinct constructs are not empirically similar (Henseler et al., 2015). To establish discriminant validity, values of inter-construct correlations were calculated. HTMT values below 0.85 reflect excellent discriminant validity, and above 0.90 reflect poor discriminant validity (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019).

Table 4 and Figure 1 present the results of measurement model analysis to establish reliability and validity. Results indicate acceptable reliability as the values of both the estimate, such as factor loadings and composite reliability, are greater than threshold values, such as 0.70. Regarding convergent validity, all the values of AVE for constructs of this study are greater than the 0.50 threshold. The second validity estimate is discriminant validity (Table 5), for which HTMT values are calculated. Results again indicate that all values of HTMT are less than 0.85; thus, all the constructs of this model are conceptually related but empirically different from each other (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019; Hair et al., 2019; Netemeyer et al., 2003). In a nutshell, the model of this study yields acceptable reliability and validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4. Reliability and Validity

Variable name	Item code	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Balanced Processing	BP1	0.784	0.761	0.862	0.676
	BP2	0.851			
	BP3	0.83			
Behavioral Support for Change	BSP1	0.827	0.773	0.869	0.688
	BSP2	0.845			
	BSP3	0.815			
Moral / Ethical	MO1	0.816	0.824	0.883	0.654
	MO2	0.848			
	MO3	0.797			
	MO4	0.773			
Relational Transparency	RT1	0.725	0.799	0.864	0.564
	RT2	0.8			
	RT3	0.824			
	RT4	0.562			
	RT5	0.812			
Self-Awareness	SA1	0.829	0.842	0.894	0.678
	SA2	0.855			
	SA3	0.815			
	SA4	0.795			

Figure 1. Measurement Model Reflecting Reliability and Validity.

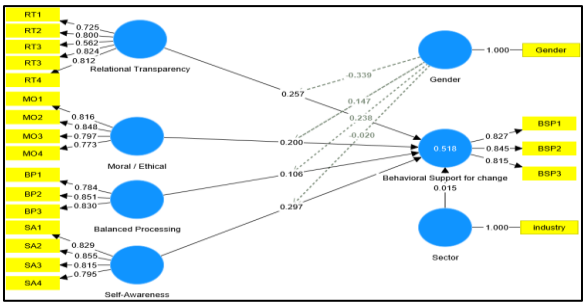


Table 5: Discriminant Validity - HTMT

	Balanced Processing	Behavioral Support for Change	Moral / Ethical	Relational Transparency	Self-Awareness
Balanced Processing					
Behavioral Support for Change	0.671				
Moral / Ethical	0.406	0.656			
Relational Transparency	0.625	0.657	0.567		
Self-Awareness	0.72	0.765	0.537	0.66	

Structural Model Analysis. Here we report the assessment of the structural model, which is used to test the hypothesis. As this study collected data through a self-report survey, the concerns for common method bias are always present (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). Therefore, this study first checked values for the inner model's variance inflation factor to see whether CMB is an issue (Kock, 2015). Results indicate the VIF values of the inner model of this study are less than 3.3 and range between 2.061 to 2.868. (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006).

The structural model was analyzed to test hypotheses. Bootstrapping technique with 5000 resampling was employed. Following published guidelines (Hair et al., 2020; Hair et al., 2014), beta coefficient values, t statistics, and confidence intervals were mainly used to decide the acceptability of the hypothesis. Results of the structural model are presented in Table 6 and Figure 2.

Tests of H2A-H2D

Our second set of hypotheses concerned checking the impact of authentic leadership dimensions on behavioral support for change. Findings indicate that balanced processing positively correlates with behavioral support for change. However, the p-value is slightly higher than the threshold values. Therefore, hypothesis 2a is partially accepted. Hypothesis 2b proposes a positive relationship between moral and ethical perspectives and behavioral support for change. Findings support this hypothesis as the beta coefficient is positive, and there is no overlapping between upper and lower levels of confidence interval ($\beta = 0.200$, $t = 3.563$ (> 1.96), $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2c proposes a positive relationship between relational transparency and behavioral support for change. This hypothesis is also accepted because beta coefficients are positive and t-values are as per threshold ($\beta = 0.257$, $t = 3.720$ (> 1.96), $p < 0.01$). Hypothesis 2d concerns the relationship between self-awareness and behavioral support for change. This hypothesis is also supported by findings ($\beta = 0.297$, $t = 4.121$ (> 1.96), $p < 0.01$).

Figure 2. Structural Model

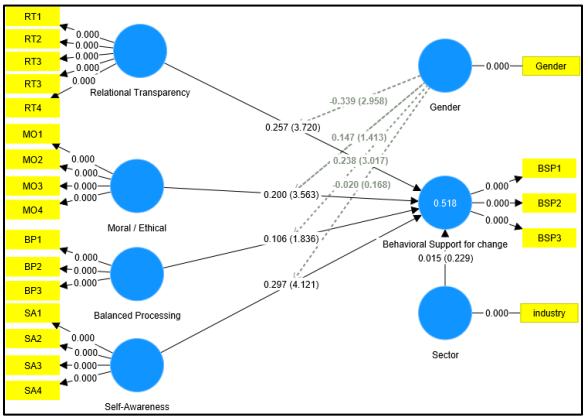


Table 6: Hypothesis Testing

	Beta	SD	T statistics	P values	LL CI	UL CI	f2 effect size	Decision
Sector -> BSP	0.015	0.064	0.229	0.819	-0.1	0.131		
BP -> BSP	0.106	0.058	1.836	0.067	-0.013	0.219	0.010	Partially Accepted
MO -> BSP	0.200	0.056	3.563	0.000	0.089	0.303	0.040	Accepted
RT -> BSP	0.257	0.069	3.72	0.000	0.116	0.384	0.048	Accepted
SA-> BSP	0.297	0.072	4.121	0.000	0.166	0.45	0.064	Accepted
Gender x BP -> BSP	0.238	0.079	3.017	0.003	0.11	0.398		Accepted
Gender x MO-> BSP	0.147	0.104	1.413	0.158	-0.053	0.368		Rejected
Gender x RT -> BSP	-0.339	0.115	2.958	0.003	-0.538	-0.11		Accepted
Gender x SA -> BSP	-0.02	0.118	0.168	0.867	-0.254	0.200		Rejected

Note: BP = Balanced Processing; BSP=Behavioral Support for change; MO=Moral / Ethical perspective; T=Relational Transparency

Moderation Analysis (H3A – H3D)

The third set of hypotheses involved assessing the moderating effect of gender between authentic leadership dimensions and behavioral support for change. H3a proposed that gender will moderate the relationship between balanced processing and behavioral support for change. Results found support for this hypothesis as the interaction term between gender and balanced processing has a positive and significant impact on behavioral support for change ($\beta = 0.226$, $t = 4.382$ (> 1.645), $p < 0.01$). H3b proposed a moderating role of gender between moral/ethical perspective and behavioral support for change. Results did not support this hypothesis as the p-value is greater than 0.05. H3c proposed gender moderation between relational transparency and behavioral support for change. Results of PLS-SEM have supported this hypothesis ($\beta = -0.339$, $t = 2.958$ (> 1.645), $p < 0.01$). The fourth sub-hypothesis, i.e., H3d, which was about moderation of gender between self-awareness and behavioral support for change, is not supported. So, out of four sub-hypotheses, two hypotheses are accepted, such that gender moderates the relationship between relational transparency and behavioral support for change and between balanced processing and behavioral support for change.

The second stage in the moderation test is an examination of simple slope analysis for the two confirmed hypotheses. We have provided a simple slope analysis for both hypotheses to understand them further. These figures are again generated by Smart PLS 4 software (thanks to (Ringle et al., 2022)). It should be noted that gender was a dichotomous variable in this study, where males were coded as 0 and females were coded as 1 in the model. Therefore, for balanced processing (H3a), the beta coefficient of the interaction term between gender and balanced processing is positive. The simple slope (Figure 3) reflects that the impact of authentic leadership's balanced processing dimension was stronger for females than males. The green line reflecting the female gender modeled at one is steeper than the red line. For relational transparency (H3c), the beta coefficient is negative (B=-0.339), and the simple slope (Figure 4) reflects that the impact of the relational transparency dimension of authentic leadership on behavioral support for change is stronger for males than females. A red line in the graph reflecting males (gender at zero) is steeper than the green line reflecting females (gender at one).

Figure 3. Moderation of Gender Between BP and BSP

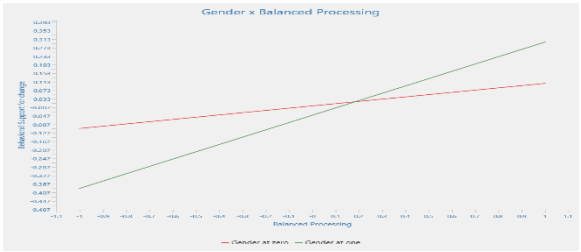
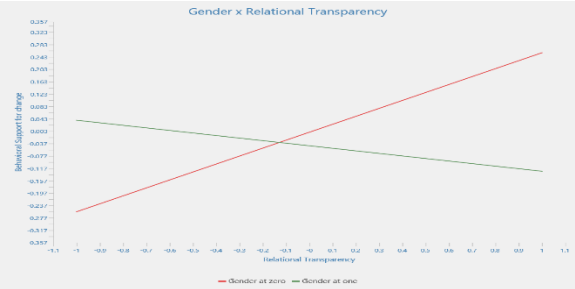


Figure 4. Moderation of Gender Between BP and RT



Next, f^2 effect size values are assessed to check the strength and relevance of structural paths. Findings suggest a small effect of all the dimensions on behavioral support for change in this model as all values are less than 0.15. however, the model shows 51% variance in the endogenous variable, and R^2 is 0.518. (f2=0.296; > 0.15) (Cohen, 2016; Hair et al., 2017). Furthermore, these effect size values are in the same order of strength as per the magnitude of path coefficients (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 7. Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses	*Decision*
H1a: Men and women will differ in perception of their leaders' Balanced processing such that women will tend to rate their leaders lower than men.	*Not accepted*
H1b: Men and women will differ in perception of their leaders' Moral / Ethical standards such that women will tend to rate their leaders lower than men	*Not accepted*
H1c: Men and women will differ in their perception of their leaders' Relational transparency such that women will tend to rate their leaders lower than men	*accepted*
H1d: Men and women will differ in their perception of their leaders' self-awareness such that women will tend to rate their leaders lower than men	*Not accepted*
H2a: Balanced processing is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.	*Partially accepted*
H2b: Moral/ethical standards are positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.	*Accepted*
H2c: Relational transparency is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.	*Accepted*
H2d: Self-awareness is positively and significantly related to behavioral support for change.	*Accepted*
H3a: Follower gender moderates the relationship between Balanced processing and behavioral support for change	*Accepted*
H3b: Follower gender moderates the relationship between moral/ethical standards and behavioral support for change	*Not Accepted*
H3c: Follower gender moderates the relationship between relational transparency and behavioral support for change	*Accepted*

H3d: Follower gender moderates the relationship between self-awareness and behavioral support for change	*Not accepted*

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to know whether authentic leadership is perceived differently by men and women in the context of a developing country, Pakistan, as part of a broader goal of extending the study of authentic leadership beyond the usual "western" confines. Results revealed no significant difference in ratings authentic leaders receive from men or women on balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and self-awareness. However, our results showed a significant difference between women and men in relational transparency, such that men rated their leaders higher than women. This finding contradicts what the theory generated in Western countries led us to predict. One interpretation of this result may be that women in Islamic countries like Pakistan may less frequently interact with leaders due to cultural and religious barriers. In some instances, leaders, too, keep themselves at a distance from female followers because of a stigma attached to free interaction between men and women in Muslim countries (Sidani, 2018, p. 31). Furthermore, while there is current debate among Islamic researchers about what the Qu' ran says about gender relations, leaders in our study may have held to the traditional idea of female subordination (cf. Aziz, Abdullah & Prasojo, 2020), which could cause male leaders to feel less obligated to be open with their female followers when they do interact, as one might be inclined to share more complete information with gender-equals, other men, rather than gender-subordinates who might view viewed as less deserving of this consideration. Thus, these results suggest that leaders in Muslim countries like Pakistan, due to cultural boundaries and traditional religious beliefs, may engage in less interaction with females than with males and might be more reticent in sharing complete information when they do, because leader-follower dynamics in Pakistan are greatly influenced by culture and belief systems that shape gender roles and identities (Shah, 2017). In effect, leaders in our study may be treating female employees as a kind of "out group" as described by LMX theory, while males may be treated moreso as "In Group" subordinates. If so, leaders in such countries may need to make an extra effort to interact with their female subordinates and in ways that are open and complete regarding information exchange, so as to create the positive interactions needed to foster a higher sense of relational transparency.

This finding could also have ongoing implications for leaders in Western contexts as well. As societal concern about sexual harassment at work has increased, as exemplified by the "Me Too" movement in the West, there is recent evidence that male managers are becoming reticent about interacting with female followers as closely as with male followers to discourage the perception that they are exhibiting unethical sexual behaviors towards their female subordinates (Fottrell & Settembre, 2019). If so, our research suggests that this kind of distancing could result in lower ratings of leadership authenticity for male leaders of female subordinates. Thus, to generate the

benefits of a high perception of authentic leadership among female subordinates, male managers will have to learn how to engage with female subordinates closely but in professionally appropriate ways.

Our second set of hypotheses concerned relationships between dimensions of authentic leadership and their relationships with behavioral support for change. All hypotheses (H2a – H2d) were accepted such that each dimension of authentic leadership increased employee support for change. These findings support the established notion that leader authenticity helps remove employee resistance (Mousa et al., 2020), and cynicism towards change (Williams et al., 2012), and increase supportive behaviors for change (Author et al., 2017).

Our third set of hypotheses was related to the moderating role of gender between the four dimensions of authentic leadership and behavioral support for change (compliance). Compliance behavior reflects the minimum support employees may offer to accept the change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Out of four hypotheses, two hypotheses were accepted. Moderation analysis revealed that gender significantly moderates the relationship between balanced processing and behavioral support for change and between relational transparency and behavioral support for change. The other two hypotheses were rejected.

H3a was about moderating the role of followers' gender between balanced processing and behavioral support for change. Results supported this hypothesis such that the impact of balanced processing on behavioral support for change was different for males and females. More specifically, this impact was stronger for females than males. Balanced processing is mainly concerned with how procedures at organizations are carried out how leaders decide based on data, and taking steps to include stakeholders before deciding (May et al., 2003). As per social exchange theory, followers reciprocate behaviors when they feel that they are being valued, heard, and given a chance to speak their minds (Blau, 1964), and in such a situation, followers are more likely to display commitment and behavioral support for organizational initiatives (Batra & Rastogi, 2023). This finding indicates that authentic leaders, when soliciting views from male and female employees, are more likely to value the viewpoints of female followers than male followers.

Another hypothesis that was accepted was about the moderating role of gender between relational transparency and behavioral support for change. Interestingly, the results of this hypothesis indicate that gender does significantly moderate the relationship between relational transparency and behavioral support for change, but the nature of the interaction is different such that the impact of relational transparency on behavioral support for change is stronger for males than for females. This finding reflects the interaction between males and females in conservative society where cultural norms prohibit male leaders from engaging in frequent interaction with their female followers (Shah, 2017).

Eagly (2005) argues that the major focus of authentic leadership is to obtain relational authenticity, which is achieved when leaders promote core values that support

the interests of the community and convey these values to the followers. Leaders' relational authenticity is achieved when followers display identification with leaders' values. Eagly (2005) further argues that "obtaining this identification is more challenging for females than males (p.1)". An exploratory study from the Middle East sample has suggested that leader-member identification varies concerning the gender of the followers. They found that female employees believed that authentic leaders should communicate more openly and transparently with followers **(**Karacay et al., 2018**).**

Hypothesis 3b was about moderating the role of gender between moral/ethical standards and behavioral support for change, which was not accepted. Hypothesis 3d was also not accepted, which was about moderating the role of gender between self-awareness and behavioral support change. One explanation for these results is that both dimensions relate to leader behavior having less societal or community impact than relational transparency and balanced processing. Moreover, it is not uncommon that in some studies involving leadership styles such as transformational leadership, the moderating role of employee gender was insignificant (Reuvers et al., 2008). We leave these relationships to be further explored by future research.

CONCLUSION

Although surveys are often viewed with skepticism in Pakistan, and people hesitate to share their opinions on delicate issues such as privatization (Kalyal et al., 2010), results of this study suggest that authentic leadership may exert a positive impact on change. This reinforces the findings of this study because it means that the female gender amplifies the impact of authentic leadership on ensuring employee behavioral support for change. Still, this effect will not be generated if females do not perceive leaders to be authentic to begin with.

This is an important study that has analyzed data from multiple samples and argues that authentic leaders are considered by females more relationally transparent than males. Moreover, overall authentic leadership influences female employees more than males such that the impact of authentic leadership on behavioral support for change was stronger for females than males. This study adds to the existing discussion on authentic followership (cf; Gardiner, 2016) such that it suggests that leaders will need to focus on the gender of their followers while designing their communication and interactional strategies.

***Limitations and future recommendations*.** First, the lower participation of females is a common problem for organizational research in Pakistan as the general ratio of females in the workplace in Pakistan is very low compared to males. Approaching female respondents on the part of researchers is also an issue due to the typical environment in organizations where females interact with strangers less frequently. In other words, the same cultural factors that limit leader interaction with female employees also limit male researchers' contact with female respondents. Future research may gather data from samples with a greater female ratio so that exact inferences may be made regarding the differential effects of gender on authentic leadership. Doing this might mean being mindful of the gender makeup of the research

team, an issue that is not often thought of in mainstream organizational behavior. In this case, our research team was all-male. A research team with female members might overcome female employee reticence by interacting with the researchers or male researcher reticence about approaching female respondents.

Conversely, this problem will be less prevalent if more leaders are themselves, female, a problem everywhere (Kapasi et al., 2016) but particularly acute in the Middle East. Thus, this study highlights a gender disparity issue that is unfortunately prevalent in management research and practice, namely that most researchers and leaders are male. Moreover, this is a fact that seems to span both Eastern and Western cultures.

More technically, this study used cross-sectional data for testing the hypotheses. This may still be a limitation as inferences made based on cross-sectional data may not depict the true picture of causality. Therefore, it will be interesting to know in longitudinal design whether authentic leadership influences females and males differently in different time horizons. Trust takes time to develop, authentic leadership's influence is also mediated by trust (Coxen et al., 2016). therefore, a future agenda item for research may be to test trust as a mediator between change-supportive behaviors and authentic leadership.

This study has tested the perception of followers in organizational settings. While the behavioral support for change measure developed by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) has often been used in the study of organizational change, nevertheless, we did not assess actual behavior. Future research may do that. Moreover, this era of digital technology and social networks has created new foci of followership on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Many studies in Western countries are paying attention to how Twitter followers contribute to the increased reputation of organizations (McCoy et al., 2017) and the impact factor of journals (Hughes et al., 2017) as well as the formation of opinion leadership. In an organizational context too, the use of Twitter by CEOs fosters the development of personal public relations (Hwang, 2012). Such studies of social media followers and their impact on corporate life in Pakistan are scarce and thus warrant further research.

Moreover, this study has tested follower gender as a moderator. Research suggests that the gender of the leader also has a role in the relationship between follower and leader. More specifically, Tibbs et al. (2016) found that female leaders were rated high on authentic leadership by female followers and male leaders were rated higher by male followers. In Pakistan, women leaders are scarce, and there are many stereotypes against women leaders (Samo et al., 2019), it will be interesting to know how male and female followers in Pakistani setting rate female leaders. This area is amongst the least researched regarding leadership studies in general and gender-based differences in particular (Karacay et al., 2018).

***Final Practical Implications*.** This study may offer some practical implications for organizational leaders and policymakers. It is pertinent to mention that authentic leadership is equally important for both males and females; therefore, there is a need to develop authentic leadership in managers of organizations in Pakistan. In doing so,

promoting more females to leadership positions may benefit organizations, as recent research suggests they are more amenable to employing authentic approaches to leadership (cf. Larsson & Alvinius, 2019). Moreover, the differential effects of authentic leadership on relational transparency warrant focusing more on interaction with female employees in Pakistani organizations, in addition to the need to develop more female leaders. Replicating these findings in other cultures and geographic areas, including western ones, could advance our understanding as well.

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