



RESEARCH PAPER

Not all Women in Leadership and Management Positions Exhibit “Queen Bee Behaviour”

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: March 29, 2022 Accepted: June 27, 2022 Online: June 30, 2022 Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Inclusive Leadership, Leadership Styles, Mentorship, Queen Bee Syndrome, Supportive Behaviour, Women in Authority *Corresponding Author: bushrarajputraja@ gmail.com	The Queen Bee Syndrome, a term used to describe the situation where senior women in leadership and management positions exhibit hostile behavior that can impede the career progression of other women. But the literature suggests that the situation cannot be generalized. In order to gain a more profound insight into this perspectives, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 48 women occupying diverse roles within public sector universities in Pakistan, The analysis of the collected data revealed multiple themes, indicating that this phenomenon is indeed not universally prevalent. Some women in leadership roles actively support and mentor their female counterparts. Which in turn facilitated their professional growth and advancement opportunities. This supportive behavior exhibited by female executives presents a positive example of role models for empowering women and enhances the aspirations of other women. These findings bear significant relevance for both organizations and individuals striving to promote gender equality and foster inclusive work environments.

Introduction

The notion of "Queen Bee Behavior" has long pervaded discussions about women in positions of authority. It refers to the phenomenon where successful women distance themselves from other women in the workplace, often undermining and sabotaging their female colleagues. However, it is important to recognize that not all women in authority display such behavior. This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of research and insights on the topic of Queen Bee Behavior, highlighting the diversity of behaviors and attitudes exhibited by women in positions of authority.

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on gender equality and empowering women across various sectors of society. Despite significant strides, obstacles still persist in hindering women's progress within the workplace. One such challenge is known as the "Queen Bee Syndrome," where senior women in positions of authority undermine and obstruct the advancement of other women within the same professional environment. This study aims to look into the Queen Bee Syndrome from a qualitative standpoint, to gather comprehensive data on the experiences and perceptions of women who have either encountered or observed women in leadership roles in the workplace. The objective is to ascertain the prevalence of this phenomenon and whether it is exhibited universally by all women or if there are exceptions to this behavior.

The outcomes of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the "Queen Bee Syndrome" and its implications for women in the workplace. Furthermore, these

findings may serve as valuable insights for the development of interventions and policies aimed at addressing this issue and advancing gender equality.

Literature Review

This literature review aims to explore the existence of "Queen Bee Behavior" among women in positions of authority, challenging the stereotype that all women leaders exhibit such behavior. According to Jayarante, Tavriss, and Staines (1973), the Queen Bee Syndrome is a concept that describes a situation where women in positions of authority exhibit negative behaviors toward their female subordinates due to gender-based biases. This theory has received support from various academic investigations. Another interpretation of this syndrome defines it as the deliberate withholding of knowledge and support by successful women towards other women in order to impede their progress. These behaviors encompass lack of support, criticism, and the restriction of opportunities for career advancement. The studies have examined the prevalence and consequences of the Queen Bee Syndrome, revealing that women in leadership roles who exhibit Queen Bee behaviors may experience elevated levels of stress, burnout, and reduced job satisfaction. Additionally, such conduct contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Women who perceive their female colleagues as threats are more likely to engage in Queen Bee behaviors. Moreover, women who encounter Queen Bee behavior from their superiors may demonstrate lower job commitment and reduced inclination to pursue leadership roles in the future (Larrieta-Rubín de Celis et al., 2014).

However, considerable variation exists among women in leadership roles. It's crucial to note that not all women leaders exhibit "Queen Bee Behavior." A study by Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2016) illuminated the diverse array of leadership styles among women. Some actively support and mentor their female colleagues, aiding in their professional growth. This diversity emphasizes that "Queen Bee Behavior" is not an inherent trait among all women in leadership positions.

The prevalence of "Queen Bee Behavior" depends on the specific context. For instance, in academia, research by Die, Debbs Jr., and Walker Jr. (1990) revealed that female university professors displayed "Queen Bee Behavior" when evaluating female graduate students. This conduct arose from the perception that female students were less committed to their careers than their male counterparts. However, recent studies (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman, 2010; Ellemers et al., 2020) have shed light on the possibility that this behavior may serve as a coping mechanism in response to gender discrimination. Hence, the manifestation of "Queen Bee Behavior" is significantly influenced by the surrounding context and prevailing culture. Evidence suggests that women who have encountered bias may apply gender stereotypes they encountered in their own careers and highlight their differences from other women. Researchers recommend addressing this issue at the organizational level to eliminate this phenomenon (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, and Rudman, 2010; Ellemers et al., 2020).

Insights offered by Stoker, Van der Velde, Lammers, and Jordan (2019) shed light on the relationship between the representation of women in leadership roles and the prevalence of "Queen Bee Behavior." Their research suggests that organizations with a higher proportion of women in senior positions tend to experience a lower incidence of this behavior. This underscores the importance of enhancing female representation across all organizational levels to cultivate a more supportive and inclusive workplace environment. The authors propose that having women in leadership positions can contribute significantly to fostering a more supportive and inclusive workplace environment for women across all levels of the organization. When women observe other women holding authoritative roles, it can serve as a source of inspiration, motivation, and

encouragement. Women in leadership positions can assume the role of role models and mentors, providing guidance and support to their female peers. They are also more likely to champion gender equity and challenge any discriminatory or biased practices within the organization.

Furthermore, an increased representation of women in leadership roles can help break down the stereotypes and biases that often surround women in the workplace. It challenges the misconception that women are inherently less competent or suitable for leadership positions and reinforces the idea that women can excel in authoritative roles. By creating an environment where women are uplifted and empowered, organizations with a higher number of women in leadership roles can alleviate the negative impacts of the "Queen Bee Syndrome". Women may feel less pressure to adopt Queen Bee behaviors as a means of fitting in or surviving, as they can find camaraderie, mentorship, and solidarity among their female leaders.

However, it's crucial to recognize that the study's findings do not imply the complete eradication of the Queen Bee Syndrome in organizations with a higher representation of women in leadership roles. The presence of this syndrome can still be influenced by various factors, such as individual attitudes, organizational culture, and the unique dynamics within a workplace. Furthermore, the study's results may vary depending on the context and culture of different organizations. To further cultivate a supportive environment and reduce the prevalence of the Queen Bee Syndrome, organizations should continue to prioritize increasing the number of women in leadership positions. This can be achieved through targeted recruitment and development programs that offer opportunities for women to acquire the necessary skills and experiences for advancement. Additionally, organizations should strive to foster a culture that places value on collaboration, mentorship, and inclusivity, regardless of gender (Larrieta-Rubín de Celis et al., 2014). Despite some progress, the Queen Bee Syndrome remains a significant issue in many workplaces. Women who have encountered the Queen Bee Syndrome are more likely to harbor negative job attitudes and experience lower job satisfaction compared to those who have not encountered such behavior. The Queen Bee Syndrome continues to hold relevance and significance in workplace culture, particularly for women who aspire to attain senior leadership positions. Strategies like bolstering the representation of women in leadership roles and promoting supportive workplace cultures could prove instrumental in mitigating this phenomenon (ibid).

To combat the Queen Bee Syndrome and cultivate more inclusive and supportive workplace cultures, organizations should consider implementing strategies that address its underlying causes. Increasing the representation of women in leadership roles is one effective strategy. When more women occupy positions of authority, it not only challenges the misconception that women are ill-suited for leadership but also provides support, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement to women at lower organizational levels. This can contribute to the creation of an inclusive environment where women feel empowered to pursue their career goals and aspirations.

Promoting a supportive workplace culture is another critical step in mitigating the "Queen Bee Syndrome". Organizations should cultivate an environment that values collaboration, teamwork, and mutual support among all employees, irrespective of gender. Encouraging mentorship programs, establishing networks for women, and promoting a culture characterized by respect and inclusivity can all play a role in reducing the prevalence of "Queen Bee behavior". Additionally, organizations should actively address gender biases and discrimination through diversity and inclusion initiatives, unconscious bias training, and equitable evaluation processes.

Theoretical Framework

The chosen theoretical framework for this study is Social Identity Theory, which is a psychological theory that explores how individuals' social identities, such as their gender, influence their behavior and interactions with others. Social Identity Theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into various social groups, and their self-esteem and self-concept are to some extent derived from their identification with these groups.

In the context of this study, Social Identity Theory helps us understand why women in positions of authority might respond differently to their gender identity and how it impacts their interactions within the workplace. Some women in leadership roles may strongly identify with their gender group, meaning they perceive their gender as an essential part of their identity. As a result, they are more likely to engage in supportive behaviors towards other women, viewing them as part of their in-group. These behaviors can include mentorship, advocating for gender equity, and creating an inclusive and supportive environment for female colleagues.

On the other hand, some women in leadership positions may distance themselves from their gender group and exhibit what is often referred to as 'queen bee behavior.' In this case, they may perceive themselves as exceptions to traditional gender roles in leadership and may distance themselves from other women to align more with the dominant group (typically men). This distancing behavior can manifest as competition with other women, reluctance to mentor or support female colleagues, or even actively obstructing their advancement.

By applying Social Identity Theory to this study, we can explore the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive these different responses among women in positions of authority. It allows us to look into the reasons why some women in leadership roles identify more strongly with their gender group, fostering a sense of solidarity and support, while others distance themselves and display behaviors associated with the 'queen bee syndrome.' This theoretical framework provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between gender identity, social dynamics, and behavior in the workplace, contributing to a deeper understanding of the observed phenomena.

Material and Methods

In order to investigate the research questions effectively, a qualitative research approach was selected for this study due to its suitability for exploring the complex nature of the phenomenon under examination. Qualitative research is well-suited for acquiring in-depth data directly from participants, which enables a profound comprehension of the subject matter. In this study, qualitative techniques, including individual interviews and focus groups, were employed to collect essential data from the participants. These methods provided participants with the opportunity to openly discuss their personal experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding the presence or absence of the "Queen Bee Syndrome" within university settings and how it influenced their career advancement.

Population and Sample

The sample for this study was drawn from eight public sector universities. The decision to focus on these particular universities was driven by their consistent systems for promotion, selection, seniority, salary structures, and basic pay scales (BPS), especially when compared to the private sector. Moreover, public sector universities in Pakistan play a significant role in the education sector. These selected universities were strategically

located in four cities: Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Gujrat, and Lahore. These cities were chosen due to their accessibility for both respondents and organizations. These universities comprised a diverse mix, including both well-established and newer institutions, coeducational and women-only colleges, located in urban centers as well as smaller towns, with or without specific area specializations. The rationale behind this selection was to thoroughly investigate a range of perspectives and conduct a comprehensive analysis of potential factors that influence women's career progression.

Study Participants

The study involved a total of 48 female participants. Among them, 30 were senior women holding positions in university management, including Deans, Directors, Heads of Departments, Registrars, Treasurers, and other representatives from various management units. All of these senior participants were in cadre/basic pay scale (BPS) 18 or above.

The remaining 18 participants were younger women in positions corresponding to cadre/BPS 17, such as Assistant Controllers, Assistant Registrars, Assistant Treasurers, and Assistant Directors. These younger participants shared similar demographic characteristics with the senior women, providing a well-rounded perspective on the subject of the study.

Data Collection

For the qualitative study, a wide range of data collection techniques were employed. These methods encompassed in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The mode of conducting these interviews and discussions was adapted to the preferences of the participants, accommodating geographical distances and enhancing the diversity of participants. This involved conducting interviews through face-to-face interactions, phone calls, video calls, and using conference calls for focus group sessions. During the interviews, conversations were meticulously recorded through audio or video means, accompanied by comprehensive note-taking to ensure thorough analysis. This approach was chosen to guarantee that no critical details were overlooked during the data collection process.

By implementing this methodology, the objective was to obtain a comprehensive and rich dataset that would yield profound insights into the subject under investigation. The integration of in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and various interview mediums facilitated a robust exploration of the phenomenon from multiple vantage points.

Data Analysis

In the qualitative study, the data obtained from semi-structured interviews and focus group sessions underwent a rigorous data analysis procedure. Thematic analysis was the selected method, involving a systematic exploration to identify recurring patterns, themes, and categories within the data, ultimately leading to valuable insights.

The initial step in this process was the transcription and organization of the interview and focus group data. This meticulous step ensured that all the information gathered from participants was efficiently prepared for analysis. Subsequently, researchers engaged in a process of becoming intimately familiar with the data by repeatedly reading and re-reading it. This iterative approach allowed them to immerse themselves in the narratives provided by the participants, resulting in a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the content.

Results and Discussion

After rigorously analyzing the collected data using thematic analysis, several overarching themes have emerged. These themes shed light on the complex dynamics and obstacles encountered by women in the workplace, with a particular focus on their interactions with female bosses:

Recognizing the Crucial Role of Senior Female Mentors for Women in the Workplace

Mentorship is crucial for professional development, as it provides guidance, support, and valuable insights to help individuals navigate their careers. For women, having a senior female mentor can be especially beneficial, as they can offer unique perspectives and share experiences related to gender-specific challenges in the workplace. Nevertheless, when senior female leaders refrain from providing mentorship, it deprives younger participants of the chance to access valuable guidance and assistance, which could profoundly influence their career development. This situation can lead to a sense of uncertainty, leaving them without a clear path for effectively managing their professional journeys.

"We all commend your efforts to raise awareness among stakeholders about the vital role senior women can play in supporting the advancement of other women in a patriarchal workplace. Such support is essential for creating a conducive environment for other women, as they may otherwise face numerous challenges." (Focus group discussion).

Lacking access to mentorship, junior participants might encounter difficulties in acquiring essential skills, broadening their professional networks, and achieving visibility within the organization. Additionally, they may grapple with deciphering the unspoken norms and anticipated behaviors of the workplace, potentially impeding their career progression. Furthermore, the scarcity of senior female mentors can exacerbate feelings of isolation and disempowerment among junior women. It may perpetuate the perception that there exists insufficient support and unity among women in the workplace, ultimately eroding their self-assurance and drive.

Empowering Women in Leadership: A Catalyst for Inclusive Workplace Cultures

The participants emphasized the importance of recognizing that not all women in positions of authority exhibit "Queen Bee" behavior. In fact, many women in leadership roles actively endorse and empower their female counterparts in the workplace. These women are being acknowledged as positive role models, mentors, and advocates for gender equality. These supportive leaders grasp the significance of nurturing an inclusive workplace culture that values collaboration, mentorship, and support among all employees, regardless of their gender. They comprehend the advantages of diversity and actively strive to dismantle obstacles while promoting opportunities for women to thrive. According to the joint statement issued by the focus group, it was evident that women in positions of authority were actively providing support to their junior female colleagues, peers, and friends.

"We forcefully and resolutely affirm that the female bosses known to us, exhibit exceptional support, compassion, and consideration. They serve as exemplary role models for fellow women, providing guidance, motivation, and actively pursuing avenues for our professional advancement. We hold them in the utmost esteem, and our profound respect and admiration are extended wholeheartedly to them." (Focus group).

When women in leadership roles empower and support their female colleagues, it initiates a constructive ripple effect within the organization. This fosters a culture of collaboration, teamwork, and the exchange of knowledge and expertise. Additionally, it nurtures an environment where women experience a sense of value, encouragement, and motivation to realize their complete potential.

Women Mentorship and Role Models in Women's Career Advancement

Mentoring involves a seasoned and influential figure within an organization, as described by Dougherty and Dreher in 2007. These mentors have already attained high positions and the requisite experience to advance the careers of less experienced individuals. Aside from providing moral and financial support, mentors also offer motivational backing, particularly in the context of women's career advancement, as highlighted by Hoigaard and Mathisen in 2009.

"My female supervisor, even though she has been retired from the university, she remains a reliable source of advice and guidance whenever I seek her input. Her ongoing support and dedication to knowledge dissemination are truly remarkable"

Through the interviews, it became apparent that women in senior management positions served as exemplary mentors and role models. They represented a diverse range of women in top positions, and most interviewees held positive views of other accomplished women, making them well-suited mentors. Instances of negative female role models were rare and uncommon.

Inspiring Success through Experienced Female Leaders in Higher Education

The research uncovered that the participants had the opportunity to work under the guidance of highly successful female leaders in universities known for their competent leadership and management. These experiences were truly inspirational and instrumental in shaping their career choices.

One interviewee shared their experience, saying:

"At the beginning of my career, I worked as a research officer with a dynamic woman. She has always been and continues to be a significant driving force in my career. I was deeply impressed by her leadership style, which served as an ideal model for successful leadership. I learned invaluable lessons from her and have incorporated her leadership qualities into my role as head of a university department. (Senior interviewee, 6).

Continuing Inspiration: The Enduring Influence of Senior Women as Career Role Models

The data also revealed that some participants found successful women who acted as role models during their current career phase. These mentors earned high praise for their contributions and career guidance. They offered consistent support throughout the participants' careers, creating opportunities for them to showcase their skills and capabilities. As one interviewee shared,

"I can never forget the names of two senior women who inspired me at every stage of my career. Their influence on my career aspirations was profound. One of them held an executive position, and I had the privilege of working with her for many years. She recently retired, but her guidance and advice were instrumental in every step of my career journey" (Senior Interviewee, 2).

The data further illustrated that ongoing guidance and support from significant figures provided participants with opportunities and bolstered their self-confidence. The high expectations placed on their abilities and potential paved the way for their ascent to top positions.

Empowering Pathways to Senior Leadership: Organizational Support and Guidance in Career Advancement

Some participants emphasized the significance of receiving support and encouragement from their organizations in their journey toward career success. They recounted instances throughout their careers where they were financially supported, motivated, and mentored by organizations led by female executives. Contextual factors played a crucial role in nurturing the career aspirations of those aiming for senior roles. The study revealed that the heads of their institutions and senior female educators played a pivotal role in providing early career encouragement, inspiring them to aspire to top-tier positions. The following excerpt succinctly captures the sentiments of these individuals:

"I received sincere advice and organizational support particularly from my female boss to get my PhD degree in my field [...]. This gave a new direction to my career. Otherwise, I thought Master's level education was the highest I could get as I was living in a small town and getting a Master's degree from a well reputed university situated in a big city was believed to be a great achievement [...]. The suggestion of getting a PhD was very interesting but new for me. I had no idea what kind of issues were involved, for example, how to apply for funding, how to get a place [...] To be honest, I have not much confidence in myself [...] My English was not very good at that time. I thought it was not easy to obtain a higher degree in a foreign country [...]. My female teachers at university encouraged me to be confident in my potential and aptitude. They made me believe that I had the self-confidence to be able to do that. They guided me in each and every step. So it was easy in terms of my career progression [...] Because of institutional financial support and cooperation I developed my initial plan to get my higher degree. This has now provided a very strong base for my senior position in the same university". (Senior Interviewee, 19)

Equal Opportunities and Organizational Support: Women's Advancement in Academia

The research also explored how women were given career advancement opportunities and what they considered their organizations headed by women boss had done to support their advancement:

"All through my educational and career journey I have been very lucky as organizational support was behind me. From my Master's degree followed by my PhD and postdoctoral work in a foreign country, I was appropriately guided by my senior female colleague. I was financially supported. Otherwise, I had a very average family background. The members of my family were not well educated. Lack of familiarity and exposure to the academic realm was a prevailing issue for them. They acknowledged that their achievements would not have been attainable without the support of the organization and the mentorship provided by teacher, as expressed by Senior Interviewee 17.

It is clear from the available information that a female individual received substantial support from her senior female colleague to pursue a higher degree and gain opportunities for career advancement. This support likely encompassed various aspects, such as mentorship, guidance, advice, and potentially even advocacy within the workplace. The involvement of a senior female colleague in facilitating these opportunities underscores the importance of women supporting each other in the workplace. It

exemplifies how mentorship and guidance from experienced professionals can empower individuals to pursue their educational aspirations and advance in their careers, especially in contexts where gender equity may be a challenge. This collaborative and supportive dynamic among women is instrumental in breaking down barriers and fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

According to one of the key informants who her-self was head of a sample institution:

"Our approach is to choose the most qualified individual for the position, regardless of their gender. We are committed to offering equal career development opportunities to all employees, as emphasized by Key Informant 2.

Conclusion

The research underscores the critical role that senior female mentors and supportive women leaders play in the career development of women in various professional fields, including academia. The absence of such mentors can create barriers and uncertainties that hinder women's progress, while the presence of these mentors can foster a culture of empowerment and inclusivity.

Throughout the investigation, it became evident that women who had access to senior female mentors were not only better equipped to navigate the challenges unique to their gender but also had a greater chance of reaching their full potential. These mentors provided guidance, support, and motivation, helping junior women build essential skills, expand their networks, and break through the glass ceiling.

Moreover, it is found that many women in leadership roles actively promote inclusivity and support their female colleagues. They serve as exemplars of positive leadership and contribute to creating an environment where women feel valued and empowered. These leaders recognize the benefits of diversity and are committed to dismantling obstacles that hinder women's career advancement.

Above all the research findings suggest that the Queen Bee Syndrome, characterized by senior women in leadership positions exhibiting hostile behavior towards other women, may not be a prevalent phenomenon in the studied context. Instead, the research indicates that many senior women in leadership roles actively support and mentor their female colleagues, fostering a culture of empowerment and inclusivity. This absence of a widespread Queen Bee Syndrome highlights the positive influence of women in leadership positions and their commitment to promoting gender equality within the organization.

Practical Implication of the Research

It's important to acknowledge that "Queen Bee Behavior" is not a one-size-fits-all characteristic seen in all women in leadership positions. Instead, it's a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by individual distinctions, organizational variables. Embracing this diversity within female leaders is vital for advancing gender equality and nurturing supportive workplace environments. Organizations can reduce the occurrence of "Queen Bee Behavior" by enhancing the representation of women, fostering a culture that values cooperation and mentorship, and actively addressing gender bias and discrimination across all organizational tiers. Ultimately, gaining a nuanced understanding of "Queen Bee Behavior" is a pivotal stride in the journey toward creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces for women in leadership roles.

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