

Abstract: **Man Up, Girls! ...But not Too Much.**

A Study of Gender and Leadership and Its Potential Implications for International Conflicts

According to a popular belief and a scientific theory, women are more likely than men to respond with peaceful solutions in times of crises. This “Women and Peace” hypothesis is countered by the “Think Male, Think Leadership” paradigm which posits that there is a perceived connection between leadership and masculine attributes such as assertiveness. Evidently, these two ideas do not match but rather suggest that powerful female politicians’ demeanor will be nothing short of their male counterparts. So how reasonable is it to think that more peaceful solutions will be negotiated when spearheaded by female leaders? In order to find out, my study examined the connection between gender and leadership and its potential impact on international conflicts. However, given that there are simply not enough women leaders to obtain conclusive results, I could not directly address the Women and Peace theory. Instead, I indirectly investigated this broader topic by examining a more concrete research question inquiring about how far career advancement of female politicians is linked to a shift in gender stereotypical behavior. Hence, the goal of my research project was two-fold. On the one hand, I sought to find an answer to my research question, on the other hand, this question attempted to address the greater issue surrounding the belief that female political leaders, as women, are generally expected to put forth peaceful solutions in times of crises. I tackled my research question(s) through content analysis and the additional consideration of triangulatory data. Based on this examination, I was able to show for my cases under study that in societies where gender stereotypes are deeply rooted and in working environments where femininity and competence appear to collide, which is what we often see in politics, female career advancement seems to be positively affected by shifted gender stereotypical behavior. To be more precise, professional advancement is linked to shifted gender stereotypical behavior insofar as the women leaders I examined must show a sufficient amount of masculine behavior during their political ascent. Accordingly and based on my cases under study, I also found that women who do not display sufficient masculine behavior at the beginning of their political career, need to enhance their gender stereotypically male demeanor throughout their political career. Finally, despite this apparent masculine requirement, female leaders are still required to exhibit feminine qualities at the same time. The demand to remain feminine ensures that gender norms are maintained. Through all this, women manage not only to signal that they are “man enough” to lead but that they are also sufficiently feminine so that they do not violate commonly held gender stereotypes which can damage female advancement through double binds and backlashes. As my research represented a small-N study, my results should not be considered representative for all women leaders. Nevertheless, they provide first important indications of gender issues pertaining to many leading women in politics.

Altogether, my research illustrates that, to date, women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions. While this is due to a wide range of different causal factors, my analysis still provides clues regarding the gender normative aspect of female representation in the professional sphere. As I show, sheer merit may not be the only predictor for a person’s rise to senior ranks which, in turn, results in a very selective permeability to political leadership. Apart from professional qualifications and competencies, a decent dose of masculine behavior can serve as an

“open sesame” for women to attain executive jobs. Politics have traditionally been and continue to be a male dominated sphere where women must learn male practices to be heard. Of course, I cannot exclude the possibility that women reach executive positions without adopting a more manly rhetoric. Overall, however, my results suggest that the opposite might represent a pivotal advantage for professional advancement. Furthermore, my analysis demonstrates that especially in hyper male-dominated political fields such as security and foreign affairs, masculinity is still perceived as a necessary quality: Women will need to keep up with their male colleagues and try to become “*one of the boys*” (NORTHRUP 1994: 275) in order to ensure success.

My observations clearly suggest that society, in large, must critically reassess the way it pigeonholes men and women and examine whether gender stereotypes lead to healthy and just outcomes. Similar studies show that black and white stereotypical thinking cannot only have an impact on who gets promoted or not but they also show that if stereotypes are not being questioned, they can cement themselves to become generally accepted norms everyone has to comply with. Gender stereotypes are highly restrictive and can be damaging to women politicians in particular. I conclude that society must overcome gender stereotypes – not only for the sake of equality and fairness but also because it is utterly ignorant to override and lose out on the social and economic potential of half of the world’s population. Of course, the revision of mindsets represents a Herculean task when considering how deeply rooted gender stereotypes are. Nonetheless, the election of female top politicians demonstrates that change is possible. Admittedly, my study has shown that women candidates are not necessarily “women’s candidates” but this is exactly what could change once society is ready to let go of gender stereotypes. I do not mean to imply that all women would be peace-loving creatures when unaffected by gender stereotypes in leadership positions because there still is no absolute consensus regarding the connection between women and peace. Rather, I want to suggest that in a world free from rigid gender norms, all ambitious women – shy or outgoing, cold or cordial – would have the chance to attain professional success regardless of their resemblance to their male counterparts or adherence to female “standards”.

If extrapolatable, my study does not necessarily support the conclusion that women leaders are systematically more peaceful than men or that the world would be a more peaceful place if it was run by women. But remember: The Women and Peace theory cannot be directly addressed given that there are not enough women leaders to obtain conclusive results. I suggest three possible courses of action in the political sphere vis-à-vis gender normative structures and female representation to find out whether women really are the more gentle sex: Firstly, there could be a greater effort placed on changing mindsets in order to enable society to forgo gender stereotypes and allow for a more diverse range of women in leadership positions. However, mindsets are slow to change and the ruling male elite will most likely be unwilling to just cede large parts of its power. Therefore, the second and more likely possibility would be for women to wait for another 50 years or more, before gender equality will find its way into senior positions. Finally, the last option for assessing whether women are more peaceful leaders is to actively increase the number of qualified women in decision-making positions. Considering the numerous past wars and the current resurgence of violent conflicts around the world, this last possibility should be worth a try. However, wide resistance against measures of gender mainstreaming illustrate that female politicians will continue to operate in a deeply masculinized system. Therefore, ambitious women in politics will still be pressured to “man up” – but not too much, please.