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Iron ladies, men of steel: The effects of gender stereotyping on the perception of male and female candidates are moderated by prototypicality

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Abstract

Women remain a minority in politics. In nearly all countries, including parliamentary democracies, women are still underrepresented in national parliament and other representative institutions. Research has argued that there is a bias against women in elections. Here we study the process behind this phenomenon by investigating the effect of a candidate's gender and gender prototypicality on judgment of the suitability of this candidate in elections. The first experiment shows that when voters think topics that stereotypically demand male characteristics (e.g., competitiveness) are important, they prefer male candidates, while they prefer female candidates when topics that stereotypically demand female characteristics (e.g., pro-sociality) are important. Experiment 2 replicates this and shows that this effect is fully reversed for counterprototypical (i.e., in physical appearance) candidates. This supports a stereotyping as prediction account, and has important theoretical and practical implications. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Women are still a minority in politics. Although only a few countries actively deny or discourage women from running in elections, worldwide barely 16 per cent of parliamentary seats are held by women (Karam, 2005; Kelber, 1994). Even though in some countries women have reached equal or almost equal representation (e.g., 47% of elected representatives in the 2006 Swedish parliament), in most countries women are still far behind (12% in the 2002 French parliamentary elections, 17% in the 2006 Italian parliamentary elections, 20% in the 2005 United Kingdom elections, 32% in the 2005 German elections, and 37% in the 2006 Dutch elections)¹. Equal participation of women is however vital for many reasons. First, the United Nations Development Programme (2000) stresses that women's political empowerment is essential for good governance. Second, the idea of democracy is incompatible with partial exclusion of half the population. Third, the participation of women in representative bodies can also bolster emancipation because female politicians may act as role models.

In this manuscript we would therefore like to address this bias against female representatives. Research suggests that sexism and gender stereotypes negatively affect the election of women in representative bodies. Gender is one of the most salient social categories and often the first categories on the basis of which people are judged (Allport, 1954). Although expressions of sexism have become less hostile, more subtle, and more benevolent in tone, they continue to have negative effects on how women are perceived and how people behave towards women (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). The negative effects of gender stereotypes extend to the political domain. In an analysis comparing 19 countries across the world, Glick et al. (2000) found that the level of sexism in a nation negatively influences the degree of participation of women in the economy and politics of that nation. Stereotypically, women are seen as communal and concerned with the wellbeing and welfare of others. Men are typically

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¹See the website of IDEA at <http://www.quotaproject.org> for current numbers.

seen as agentic, assertive, and controlling (Eagly, 1987). These stereotypes of men and women also extend to how voters perceive male and female *politicians*. Male politicians are seen as competitive and assertive, female politicians are seen as pro-social and communal (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Falk & Kenski, 2006; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kinder, 1986; Kinder, Peters, Abelson, & Fiske, 1980; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986).

Stereotypes allow people to comprehend and make sense of others, because they offer easy access to a wealth of information about someone (Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1998; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Kunda, 1999; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Van den Bos & Stapel, 2008). Stereotypes should therefore be (partially) seen as tools for prediction. Voters make use of stereotypes to obtain a quick image of political candidates and predict their competencies and weaknesses. Because men are seen as competitive and assertive and women as communal and pro-social, people expect male politicians to be better at competitive issues in which the primary aim is to defeat the competition (e.g., the economy, the military, big business), while people expect female politicians to be better in communal issues, in which the primary aim is to help people (e.g., health care, education), (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Brown, 1994; Brown, Heighberger, & Schocket, 1993; Falk & Kenski, 2006; Iyengar, Valentino, Ansolabehere, & Simon, 1997; Kahn, 1996; Matland, 1994; McDermott, 1998; Mueller, 1986; Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989; Sapiro, 1982).

We suggest that because voters expect male politicians to do better on certain issues and female politicians to do better on other issues (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988), the degree to which people favor a male versus a female politician is at least partially determined by what people think is the most important problem (MIP) facing the country (Falk & Kenski, 2006). Some for instance will think that terrorism is the most important problem, while others might think the quality of health care is more important. People then look for a candidate who seems to best fit the profile, and they base this partly on gender stereotypes. Hence, if voters think the country is facing problems that stereotypically require an assertive, competitive politician (terrorism), they prefer a male politician, while they prefer a female politician if they think the country faces problems that stereotypically require a pro-social, communal politician (health care).

This prediction has until date not been tested. Although Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) show that people use gender stereotypes in assessing the qualities of male and female political candidates, they do not manipulate or otherwise take into account what people perceive as the MIP. Falk and Kenski (2006) do take into account the MIP, but they employ a correlational design. Although they show a correlation between the perception that certain stereotypically masculine policy areas are important (e.g., homeland security or the American occupation of Iraq) and a bias against female politicians, this does however not prove a *causal* relationship. Perhaps those people who feel these problems are important also have more traditional or sexist values.

We therefore consider it highly relevant to test the effect of gender stereotypes on the bias toward male over female candidates in an experimental design, in which we manipulate rather than measure the Most Important Problem and then measure voter preference for male versus female candidates. Using such staged elections is an often-used method to study influence of external factors on voting behavior (e.g., Cohen, Ogilvie, Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2005; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). The first advantage of manipulating the MIP would be to find evidence for causation. Manipulating the MIP would be a realistic simulation of the process by which, in actual society, modern mass-media shape and influence what people think is the most important problem facing a country (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Kinder, 2000).

The second advantage of using an experimental approach is therefore that it allows the use of hypothetical politicians. In the study of Falk and Kenski (2006), American respondents were contacted by phone and asked questions about politics. They might have interpreted these questions as being about the current political situation, or even specific political leaders. It seems plausible that people who agree with current president Bush's policy in Iraq also think that terrorism and domestic security are important (as these were after all among the reasons for invading Iraq in the first place). In fact, people might have translated the question whether a female president would be a good president to the question whether the Democratic senator Hillary Clinton would be a good president, as she at the time of Falk and Kenski's (2006) survey was the only potential female presidential candidate. By using simulated elections and hypothetical politicians we block the influence of pre-existing political preference for candidates or their parties. This offers a methodologically cleaner test of the proposed effect of the perception of the MIP on the preference for male versus female political candidates.

The third advantage of an experimental approach is that it also allows testing more subtle effects of political candidate's gender characteristics, thereby allowing a more substantial demonstration of the underlying effect. All previous research in this domain (to our knowledge), treated the gender of politicians as a dichotomous construct. This is problematic because research has shown that exemplars within a category can differ strongly from each other. For example, Friedman

and Zebrowitz (1992; see also Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002; Zebrowitz, 1996) demonstrated that prototypicality can fully moderate how a member of a certain gender is perceived. In their study, participants who were presented with counterprototypical faces stereotyped the men as having female characteristics and women as having male characteristics. Thus, people do not stereotype based exclusively on membership of certain (gender) groups, but rather use more subtle characteristics of someone's appearance.

By taking into account these more subtle within gender differences, the current approach also offers the fourth advantage; it offers more evidence of the underlying process. If people really use gender stereotypes to predict how politicians are like and favor male or female candidates based on such predictions, then the effects of gender on such bias for male versus female candidates should be reversed for counterprototypical candidates. After all, counterprototypical targets should be stereotyped to have characteristics that are usually associated with the opposite category. That is, counterprototypical male politicians should be stereotyped to have female characteristics (e.g., warmth and pro-sociality), while counterprototypical female politicians should be stereotyped to have characteristics typically associated with male politicians (e.g., competitiveness and assertiveness). If we indeed find that counterprototypical male candidates are rated higher when the MIP suggests the need for a leader with stereotypical female characteristics, and if we find the opposite for counterprototypical female candidates, then this offers additional proof that voters do not base themselves on absolute gender in predicting the strengths of candidates, but rather use a more elaborate and complex way to establish such strengths.

This is important for three reasons. First, it marks a boundary condition to the effect that is suggested in literature and that we aim to show in Experiment 1. Second, it will have an important theoretical implication as it would offer additional proof that the effect of gender stereotyping on voting preference should be seen as the result of a need for prediction, rather than a more blunt sexist association against female politicians as a whole. Third, it will have important practical implications because it can show how the interaction of the MIP, a political candidate's gender, and his or her gender-prototypicality can influence his or her election outcomes. By analyzing this effect, we may offer advice to female candidates about how to best make use of gender stereotypes in elections.

In Experiment 1, we will study the effects of the perception of the MIP on the preference for male versus female candidates. Specifically, we will manipulate the MIP and subsequently measure the effect on preference for male versus female candidates. In Experiment 2, we will replicate Experiment 1, but use both prototypical and counterprototypical male and female target candidates. We hope to show in Experiment 2 that the effects of gender stereotyping are reversed for counterprototypical men and women.

PILOT STUDIES

Before performing both experiments, we however first performed a series of pilot studies to establish a reliable dataset of faces of political candidates. Specifically, for the first experiment we tried to establish a dataset of five prototypical male and five prototypical female faces that are comparable in attractiveness. In the second experiment, we wanted to add the factor of prototypicality and therefore tried to establish a dataset of three prototypical male, three prototypical female, three counterprototypical male, and three counterprototypical female faces that were comparable in attractiveness, and comparable in prototypicality (across gender).

First, 14 participants voluntarily rated pictures of 36 snapshots of members of the Swedish parliament. Participants were told that all portraits were of politicians and were asked to indicate for each target on a 9-point scale whether (s)he thought the portrayed target person was "competitive and assertive" (1), or "communal and warm" (9). We further explained that with the first we meant people who can beat the competition, and with the latter we meant people who can help others and improve social relations. For our first experiment we selected five male targets that all scored significantly below the neutral midpoint of 5, $p < .01$ in a one-sided t -test, and five female targets that all scored significantly above it. This yielded five prototypical male ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.03$) and five prototypical females ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 0.60$). For these two categories, the distance from the neutral midpoint of 5 is equal, $t(13) = -.91$, $p = .38$. That is, the two groups are similarly prototypical. In a second pilot we then asked 13 participants to rate the attractiveness of these 10 pictures on a scale between 1 (unattractive) and 9 (very attractive). This showed that the pictures of the males ($M = 6.42$, $SD = 0.72$) were equally attractive as the pictures of females ($M = 6.20$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(12) = 1.04$, $p = .32$.

For our second experiment, we then selected on the basis of the first pilot study, three male and three female targets that all scored significantly below 5 as prototypical male and as counterprototypical female targets, respectively, and three male and three female targets that all scored significantly above 5 as counterprototypical male and as prototypical female targets. This yielded three prototypical male ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.88$), three prototypical females ($M = 6.26$, $SD = 0.87$), three counterprototypical male ($M = 6.64$, $SD = 0.82$) and three counterprototypical female candidates ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.76$), or 12 target pictures in four categories. These pictures could be equated across gender in terms of prototypicality; together the six male candidates ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 0.61$) were not seen as more prototypical than the six females ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 0.43$), $p = .30$. In a third pilot we then asked 18 participants to rate the obtained 12 pictures for attractiveness. This showed that the pictures of males ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 0.82$) were equally attractive as the pictures of females ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.09$), meaning that the pictures could also be equated across gender ($p = .30$). Differences within gender and across prototypicality were neither significant ($p = .41$). Finally, none of the differences between any other combinations of subcategories was significant (all $ps > .45$).

EXPERIMENT 1

In our first experiment, we aimed to study the effect of the perception of the MIP on the preference for male versus female political candidates in a staged election.

Method

Participants and Design

Fifty-nine participants, all students at the University of Groningen (35 women, 24 men; mean age 20.4 years) were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions of a three (between participants, MIP is communal, competitive, or not-specified [control condition]) by two (within participants, gender of political candidate target) factorial design. Students participated in return for 9 Euro or in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure and Measures

After signing informed consent forms, participants were seated behind PCs in individual cubicles. Participants were first given a six item Dutch translation of the *Modern Sexism Scale* (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim et al., 1995). Next, participants read that they would play voter in presidential elections in an imaginary country. It was explained that to increase realism, participants were first given a short "State of the Union Address," so that participants had some notion of the political situation of the imaginary country. In reality, the content of this State of the Union was dependent on the experimental condition of the participant and was meant to manipulate the MIP. In the *communal condition*, participants read that the country suffered from the fact that health care needed attention and that a president was needed who could end social discord and reunite different social groups (tasks that require stereotypical female, communal qualities). In the *competitive condition*, the text described that the country suffered from an economic malaise and from infrastructural problems (tasks that require stereotypical male, competitive conditions). Past research has shown that voters associate these two political domains as being stereotypically female and male, respectively (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Falk & Kenski, 2006; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kinder, 1986; Kinder et al., 1980; Miller et al., 1986).² In the *control condition* it was told that there were no major problems and a president was needed who could just "mind the shop."

²To test that our participants have the same gender stereotypical association with these domains, we also performed a pilot study in which participants were presented with these four stereotypical domains and two filler items and were asked to indicate whether they thought they were more associated with women (1), more with men (9), or with neither one of them (5). Simple two-sided *t*-tests showed that both female issues were significantly below the neutral midpoint of 5 (health care: $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.21$, $p < .001$; social accord: $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.69$, $p = .003$) and both male issues were significantly above 5 (economy: $M = 7.11$, $SD = 1.18$, $p < .001$; infrastructure: $M = 7.67$, $SD = 0.91$, $p < .001$).

After reading this text, participants were shown high-quality color pictures of 10 possible presidential candidates for which they could vote, of which 5 were male and 5 were female. The target pictures that we used were taken from the website of the Swedish Riksdag (national parliament). We did this to make sure that the target politicians looked like politicians but were unknown to the Dutch participants. The target pictures showed faces and parts of shoulders of the politicians. Participants were then given the opportunity to rate the 10 target candidates separately and in random order on a 9-point scale (1 = very unsuitable, 9 = very suitable presidential candidate). Finally, participants were asked to write down in their own words what they thought the aim of the experiment was. Participants were then thanked for participation.

Results

None of the participants mentioned the experimental manipulation (the “State of the Union Address”) in his or her description. A three (between subjects: MIP manipulation) by two (within subjects: candidate gender) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the mean ratings for the political candidate targets showed, as predicted, a significant two-way interaction between candidate gender and MIP manipulation, $F(2, 56) = 7.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. As can be seen in Table 1, *post hoc* tests (using Fisher’s Least Significant Difference) showed that male targets were rated higher in the competitive than in the communal condition ($p = .04$). In contrast, female targets were rated higher in the communal condition than in the competitive condition ($p = .004$), and also were rated marginally higher in the communal condition than in the control condition ($p = .09$). Comparisons across gender showed that in the competitive condition male politicians were rated marginally higher than female politicians ($p = .09$), but that none of the differences in the control ($p = .23$) and communal ($p = .26$) conditions were significant. In a second analysis we also included participant gender, modern sexism, and their interaction with the experimental condition. This analysis showed no main or interaction effect of gender ($ps > .50$), no main effect of sexism ($p = .13$), but did show a significant interaction between modern sexism and preference for male versus female candidates, $B = -.46$, $SD = 0.20$, $p = .02$. After performing a median split, we found that the interaction effect between candidate gender and MIP manipulation was stronger for participants high on modern sexism, $F(2, 25) = 5.94$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .34$, than for participants low on modern sexism, $F(2, 28) = 2.51$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 = .15$.

Discussion

This study experimentally demonstrates that voters use gender stereotypes when judging political candidates. Men are seen as better when the most important issue is a competitive one. Women are however seen as better when the most important issue concerns communal problems.

In Experiment 2, we wanted to study the effect of prototypicality on the effect of gender stereotyping on the preference for male versus female political candidates. We aimed to replicate Experiment 1 but adding the counterprototypical pictures of political candidates that we also obtained in the pilot study, thus adding the between participant factor of prototypicality.

EXPERIMENT 2

In our second experiment we aimed to study the effect of the perception of the most important problem on the preference for prototypical and counterprototypical male versus female political candidates.

Table 1. Means and SDs of the ratings of male and female target candidates as a function of MIP manipulation (communal, control, competitive), in Experiment 1

	Communal	Control	Competitive
Male targets	5.06 (1.21) _a	5.35 (1.05) _{ab}	5.77 (.73) _b
Female targets	5.36 (1.09) _b	4.98 (.85) _{ab}	4.43 (.95) _a

Note: Judgments were made on 9-point scales (1 = unsuitable, 9 = suitable). Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ using Student’s *t*-tests.

Method

Participants

Ninety-eight participants (56 women, 42 men, mean age 22.2 years) participated in return for 7 Euro and were randomly assigned to one of three conditions of a three (between participants: MIP manipulation) by two (within: gender of target politician) by two (within: gender prototypicality of target politician) factorial design. Students participated in return for €7 or in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

Procedure and Measures

The procedure of Experiment 2 was similar to that of Experiment 1, with the exception that we now used the pictures selected in the pilot and thus added an extra factor in the design. We did not measure Modern Sexism in Experiment 2.

Results and Discussion

Two participants guessed the true aim of the experiment and were removed from the analysis, although inclusion did not change the analysis in a meaningful way. We performed a three (between subjects: MIP manipulation) by two (within subjects: target gender) by two (within subjects: target prototypicality) ANOVA on the mean ratings for the political candidates, which revealed the expected three-way interaction between gender, prototypicality, and MIP manipulation, $F(2, 93) = 14.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$, and no lower order interactions. We also found a less interesting main effect of prototypicality, $F(1, 93) = 11.27$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$, which will be discussed in the “General Discussion.”

As can be seen in the first line of Table 2, simple comparisons within category, across condition revealed that prototypical male target candidates were rated higher in the competitive than in the communal condition ($p < .001$). They were also rated as higher in the competitive than in the control condition, ($p < .001$). In contrast, counterprototypical male target candidates—in the second line of the table—were rated *lower* in the competitive than in the communal condition ($p = .04$). Prototypical female target candidates—in the third line of the table—were rated marginally higher in the communal condition than in the competitive condition, ($p = .07$). In contrast, counterprototypical female target candidates, in the fourth line of the table, were rated as higher in the competitive condition than in the communal condition, ($p = .01$). They were also rated as marginally higher in the competitive condition than in the control condition, ($p = .07$).

Comparisons between categories showed that in the communal condition (in the first column of data) prototypical females were rated as better candidates than prototypical males ($p = .06$), and as better candidates than counterprototypical females ($p = .005$). Furthermore, in the communal condition, counterprototypical males were rated as better candidates than counterprototypical females ($p = .01$) and as better than prototypical males ($p = .01$). In the competitive condition (last column), prototypical males were rated as better candidates than prototypical females ($p < .001$) and as better candidates than counterprototypical males ($p < .001$). Furthermore, in the competitive condition counterprototypical females were rated as better candidates than counterprototypical males ($p = .05$) and as better than prototypical females ($p = .05$). In the control condition no difference reached significance.

Table 2. Means and SDs of the ratings of prototypical and counterprototypical male and female target candidates as a function of MIP manipulation (communal, control, competitive), in Experiment 2

	Communal	Control	Competitive
Prototypical male targets	4.61 (1.08) _a	5.09 (1.50) _a	6.16 (.96) _b
Counterprototypical male targets	5.20 (1.02) _b	4.87 (1.53) _{ab}	4.47 (1.48) _a
Prototypical female targets	5.32 (1.54) _b	5.19 (1.41) _{ab}	4.67 (1.28) _a
Counterprototypical female targets	4.39 (1.48) _a	4.67 (1.17) _{ab}	5.26 (1.30) _b

Note: Judgments were made on 9-point scales (1 = unsuitable, 9 = suitable). Means in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ using Student's *t*-tests. Means in the same row that do not share superscripts differ at $p = .07$ using Student's *t*-tests.

We also performed a similar three (between subjects: MIP manipulation) by two (within subjects: political candidate gender) ANOVA as in Experiment 1, on only the prototypical candidates. This revealed a significant two-way interaction between MIP manipulation and gender, $F(2, 93) = 10.58, p < .001, \eta^2 = .18$, which replicated the findings of Experiment 1. In fact, the findings are a bit stronger as now the contrasts for both comparisons are significant (see the upper two rows of Table 2).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Past research has suggested that voters use gender stereotypes when choosing between political candidates (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Falk & Kenski, 2006; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Kinder, 1986; Kinder et al., 1980; Miller et al., 1986). No research has however manipulated the most important problem and studied the effect on gender preference for male and female political candidates. Experiment 1 did exactly this and showed that male politicians are rated as better candidates when participants are told that problems that stereotypically require competitiveness in a candidate, such as the economy or infrastructure, are the most important problems in the current political setting. In contrast, female presidential candidates are rated as better candidates when participants are told that problems that stereotypically require communality in a candidate, such as health care, are the most important in the current political setting.

Our research further added to existing knowledge on these gender stereotyping effects by taking into account the effect of prototypicality. We hypothesized that if voters use gender stereotypes to judge whether a politician “fits the profile,” then the effects of gender stereotyping on bias toward men and women should be reversed for counterprototypical candidates. Indeed, Experiment 2 showed that the effects found in Experiment 1 only apply for gender-prototypical candidates. For counterprototypical presidential candidates (as determined in a pilot test) the opposite effect occurs. Counterprototypical male candidates are rated as better candidates when participants think problems that require communality are the most important, while counterprototypical female candidates are rated higher when participants think problems that require competitiveness are the most important.

Thus, these findings simultaneously qualify (in a practical sense) by identifying a boundary condition and strengthen (in a theoretical sense) the existing knowledge on the effect of gender stereotyping on bias toward male and female political candidates. They add to previous findings by showing the importance of peripheral cues, such as facial characteristics, on voting behavior (Todorov et al., 2005). The fact that mere facial ratings correlate so well with actual election results points to the importance of seemingly superficial first impressions, based on facial appearance. Although party affiliation remains the most important determinant of voting behavior (Bartels, 2000; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), peripheral cues have an important influence on how people vote. When voters engage in a closer inspection of a candidate, for example by finding out a candidate’s ideology, political experience, or past voting behavior, this closer inspection does add, but typically does *not override* the effect of initial impressions. Rather, the effects of such initial impressions and the more deliberate, effortful and deep judgment of candidates should probably be seen as parallel independent processes (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Smith & DeCoster, 2000). Given that both routes work independently, the importance of peripheral cues will likely increase if the more effortful route loses impact. In that light, the often noted decline in party identification and increase in independent, floating voters (Greenberg & Page, 1997; Smith, 1988) suggests that in the near future the importance of peripheral cues will most likely only increase.

Our experiments were arguably rather abstract recreations of real elections and some may wonder whether the effects that we obtained can actually be generalized to real elections. We point however to findings by Todorov et al. (2005), that showed that judgments of pictures of male political candidates—much like those used in the current studies—successfully predicted 71.6% of real election outcomes (races) between two U.S. Senate candidates, and 66.8% of the outcomes for elections for the House of Representatives. Thus, simple facial ratings such as in the current manuscript do have sizable power in predicting real world election outcomes.

Although visual cues have an influence on voting preferences, most likely these are not the only peripheral cues that influence voting preference. An important peripheral cue that has been given little attention, but which most likely has important effects on ratings of political candidates is voice. Research has shown that gender associated differences in voice, in particular pitch and resonance, can greatly influence gender stereotyping (Ko, Judd, & Blair, 2006). Possibly,

differences in voice between political candidates also influence the degree to which voters predict these candidates are able to handle stereotypical male and female policy areas.

Turning to the more practical implications, these experiments add to the impressive literature on gender bias in hiring decisions (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 1999; 2001) and show that these effects extend to the political domain, in particular elections. They show that political candidates should be aware of the influence that their visual appearance may have on how they are perceived by voters. Future research could try and determine the degree to which perceived prototypicality can be influenced by the perceiver. Literature suggest however that this is quite limited; prototypicality is probably related to inborn physical differences, such as length of jaw, size of eyes, angularity of cheekbones, etc. (Gray, 1985; Friedman & Zebrowitz, 1992; Guthrie, 1976). Furthermore, in Experiment 2, comparisons of the means between the various target categories showed that although counterprototypical female candidates profit when the MIP stereotypically requires male associated qualities such as competitiveness, female candidates still perform less well than prototypical male candidates in that same condition. Overall, Table 2 shows that counterprototypical candidates are in general rated lower than prototypical candidates. This corresponds to past research that has shown that for women counterprototypical behavior often leads to negative reactions and punishment (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 1999; 2001). This might limit the practical value that female political candidates might find in appearing in a counterprototypical manner.

Perhaps a better way for female politicians to profit from this research is that they should be aware that their electoral success may depend on the degree to which people think stereotypically female problems are currently important. Past research has shown that the most important criterion that people use when evaluating presidential candidates is the degree to which they think that candidate can promote international defense, economy, and big business (Mueller, 1986; Rosenwasser & Seale, 1988). Thus, when judging presidential candidates, people focus on stereotypical male issues and ignore stereotypical female issues. If people can be convinced to focus on communal issues that are associated with female stereotypes, female candidates may profit. Correlational data have already shown that women can use their gender as an asset by focusing on such issues in their political campaigns (Herrnson, Lay, & Stokes, 2003).

We must realize however, that the degree to which an individual candidate can change what the public sees as the most important problem is usually quite limited, as it is primarily determined by the mass media (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The media is especially prone to focus on international crises and war, because of the drama associated with these (Taylor, 1998). Heads of states have a similar tendency to focus on foreign threats and aggression and the need for military action, rather than on communal issues (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kahneman & Renshon, 2007). This tendency will most likely not weaken but rather strengthen in the near future because of neo-liberal policies (Wacquant, 2001, 2002).

CONCLUSION

The United Nations acknowledges that women's political empowerment is essential for good governance (United Nations Development programme, 2000). Nonetheless, women remain a minority in the representative bodies of most countries. This research shows that as long as there is a bias against communal issues there is a bias against female politicians. It seems therefore unlikely that in the near future this election bias against women will disappear. Of course, this does not mean that women *cannot* reach political office, as is demonstrated by many excellent female politicians across the world. We should however realize that there are stereotypes that work against them. These require our constant attention to the problem. Awareness of such biases is important, and should force us to rethink the importance that we attach to competitive (male) and communal (female) leadership.

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