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Street Syd

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Approx. duration 25 Minutes

Welcome to Country

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and in the spirit of reconciliation pay my respects to elders past and present.

Introduction

Before I commence this discussion about the future of leadership, I want to start with a story.

A young would-be politician, in her mid-40s, agrees to do a profile piece with an Australian magazine. Her intention is to use this piece to announce her ambition to be the next Australian Prime Minister. This isn't her first foray into national politics, she had recently fought for a very high-profile seat and lost.

She followed that defeat with a period of soul-searching, leaving her husband and children at home while she travelled and publicly documented her three-month sabbatical.

But now, she is ready. It is time. She proudly proclaims to the journalist: *“I want to be in it. Man, I’m just born to be in it”. “You can probably tell that I want to run. I do. I think I’d be good at it.”*

The magazine runs these words on the cover with a shot of the politician. To prepare for the taking of that image she has done nothing. She has let her hair dry naturally, without styling it. She wears no makeup and she is clothed in a plain, unbuttoned shirt and chinos.

How do we think the Australian public would react to all this? Would voters conclude this woman has got the right “stuff” to be a leader?

Or do we think the reaction would be what kind of mother abandons her children for three months? Why does she look such a mess? Doesn’t she own a hairdryer? A lipstick? How up herself is she? How cold, how grasping?

Of course, this story isn’t really about an Australian female politician. It is about Beto O’Rourke, one of the current Democrat contenders for the US Presidential nomination.

Now Beto certainly faced some flack over the article. In particular the Twitterverse shredded him for the ‘man I was born to be in’ over - claim.

But he wasn’t pummelled for looking casual and natural. The criticism of him going on a journey of self-discovery after his defeat in the Senate election in Texas was muted.

People were not saying how dare he aspire. He was not vilified for saying he would be good at being President.

Tonight, I want to explore with you how gender stereotyping impacts our perceptions of leadership. Then I am going to explore two other fundamental questions; first, are we even looking for the right traits in our leaders or are we too beguiled by attributes like confidence and charisma? Second, in our political system are we focussed too much on local connections and too little on global experience?

Exclusion

First, on gender, in my thought experiment about how a female version of Beto would be received, I wasn't just guessing. What I identified as the likely reaction was based on psychological research.

It specifically shows that we are prone to conclude women leaders are unlikeable.

In 1969, Virginia Schein broke a glass ceiling when she became the first woman to receive a doctorate in industrial psychology from New York University. Armed with this impressive qualification, she went to work in the insurance industry where there were few women managers.

Inquiring about this phenomenon, she was told women were just not interested.

Dissatisfied with this answer, Virginia started researching into gender stereotyping and management jobs. Her 1973 study¹ gave birth to the *Think Manager – Think Male* analysis. Virginia showed that when people were asked to describe the attributes a manager needed, and the characteristics they perceived men to have and women to have, that men were seen to be the ‘natural’ fit.

Almost forty years later, researchers reviewed the many studies since Virginia’s ground breaking work. This meta-study² concluded that views of the qualities a leader needed had broadened over time to include traits more associated with women like sensitivity, warmth and understanding. However, there had been no reduction in the similarity people saw between traits seen as male and those required for leadership.

The data collected did not identify the cause of the change in views. Potentially, increased experience with women leaders was having an impact. Or, the move away from old “command and control” style hierarchies to flatter, more agile management styles might have changed perceptions. A bit of both seems the most likely explanation.

So a bit of good news, but overall the findings do not justify reaching for champagne just yet. It concluded that men continued to fit better with people’s images of leadership, and the more senior the position the more male its traits were perceived to be.

¹ Schein, V.E. (1973). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57, 95-100.

² Are Leader Stereotypes Masculine? A Meta-Analysis of Three Research Paradigms, Anne M. Koenig University of San Diego, Abigail A. Mitchell Nebraska Wesleyan University, Alice H. Eagly Northwestern University & Tiina Ristikari University of Tampere

Harvard did a great experiment to highlight this kind of unconscious bias.

There, a group of male and female students were brought together to learn about a businessperson's career.

Half the students read a version where the businessperson was a woman, half read exactly the same story except that the businessperson was a man. A poll was then conducted on how likeable the businessperson was and whether the student would want to work with them or for them. The students found the man likeable and the woman selfish and not likeable. Disturbingly, both the male and female students came to these conclusions. This shows success and likeability are positively correlated for a man but not for a woman.

More evidence on women, on leadership and like-ability comes from the university sector, which in the US has an online tool called Rate My Professor that students use to critique their lecturers.

A huge interactive exploration of 14 million reviews on the site discovered that male professors are disproportionately likely to be described as a "star" or "genius". Female professors are disproportionately described as "nasty", "bossy" or "disorganized", or my personal favorite: "ugly".

An unkind person might say that this was simply the reality, not the product of any gender bias.

However, let's talk about the results of an experiment conducted at a university in North Carolina. There researchers asked students to rate

teachers of an online course. The students never met the teacher in person and this enabled the researchers to present the same teacher to some students as a man and to other students as a woman.

Disturbingly, when students were taking the class from someone they believed to be male, they rated the teacher more highly. The very same teacher, when believed to be female, was rated significantly lower.

Given this research, the fact that gender influences perceptions seems undeniable.

The results of these studies and the many others like them are driven by cultural stereotypes that live so deep in our brain we are not really conscious of them. Distilled crudely and simply, these are that men think, women feel; that men are to be judged on their actions, women on their appearance; that men lead while women nurture.

These stereotypes whisper to us that a woman leader cannot be likeable because she must have given up on the nurturing and feeling.

We saw this clearly during the 2016 Presidential Election Campaign in the United States. Hillary Clinton was plagued by criticisms of being unlikeable. Of being cold, too distant, too ambitious. A columnist from the *New York Times* wrote:

Clinton gives off an exclusively professional vibe: industrious, calculated, goal-oriented, distrustful. It's hard from the outside to have a sense of her as a person; she is a role.

*. . . to many she seems Machiavellian, crafty, power-oriented, untrustworthy.*³

Reading words like this I don't know whether to laugh or cry. Are we seriously being told that being hard working and professional is such a liability?

Where are all the opinion pieces telling us Donald Trump's very ambition to be President and pursuit of that outcome made him inherently unlikeable?

These words from a commentator help us see the narrow path women leaders have to try and walk.

If she is funny and jokes around, then people will say 'silly girl, why does she think she can run the country? She's frivolous ... flighty'.

Too stern and serious? Then people think you're cold and hard.

Ambitious? Hard working? You are untrustworthy, ruthless, devoid of personality. "Something is wrong with her, why doesn't she have hobbies? Why is there no fruit in her fruit bowl? She is out of touch!"

But drift too far the other way, and people say that you can't handle the pressure. You won't 'cut it'. You are too soft, too emotional.

³ https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/24/opinion/why-is-clinton-disliked.html?_r=0

All this means that in general, men are rewarded for exhibiting confidence and charisma, women are punished for demonstrating either too much or too little.

The traditional leader

A quick google search of “charismatic leaders” brings up examples like Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Elon Musk, President Barack Obama. Some lists include Oprah Winfrey as a lonely female. Similar searches also bring up – alongside these notable politicians and visionaries – dictators, war mongers, and cult leaders.

And this, really, is the crux of the problem.

Professor Chamorro-Premuzic, an organizational psychologist, this year released his rather wonderfully titled: *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders? (And how to fix it)*. I recommend flashing the cover around in crowded public spaces for maximum impact.

In his book, he writes that we should be viewing traits like overconfidence and self-absorption as red flags, when, in fact, we often instead think: that charismatic man sure has leadership potential!

Mistaking confidence for competence, Chamorro-Premuzic argues, results in both business and politics having a surplus of incompetent men in charge, which pushes down the general standards of leadership for everyone.

The leadership “industry”

The core message of his book is that instead of examining the traits of confidence and charisma and asking if they are actually positively correlated with good leadership, we assume they are. Then, to compound the problem of making this assumption without an empirical backing, we tell people to replicate these traits in order to ‘get ahead’.

Women are told to Lean in, or Fake It Till You Make It.

Leadership seminars train confidence, assertiveness, proud stature and strong body language.

Women are told they aren’t assertive enough in meetings. That they apologise too much, that they should stop moderating their expression in emails, and that they should be tougher.

We are told that the pay gap exists because women lack the confidence to ask for more money, and that they don’t really want, or don’t have the drive, for the ‘hard’ jobs.

The Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at King’s College, London, which I Chair, advised LinkedIn on research that examined the reactions of different genders to language in the workplace, as well as what women and men look for when applying for jobs. What the research found was that there was very little difference in what people are looking for in a workplace: it suggests that both men and women want good salaries and work-life balance.

Our researcher, Laura Jones, concluded that we need to abandon the idea that any difference in negotiations for jobs is down to a lack of confidence, and that the advice for women to behave more like men in order to receive the same rewards not only misdiagnoses the problem...it also prescribes a solution which on its own could cause more harm than good.⁴

Too much of the leadership “industry” is premised on replicating behaviours that we now know to be largely unrelated to good leadership. Yet workplaces continue rolling out training sessions, seminars, conferences and camps, in order to “fix” the men and women who don’t yet exhibit these traits.

What we are learning about leadership

Professor Chamorro-Premuzic argues that the traits we really need for effective leadership, which on the basis of his research summary include emotional intelligence, altruism, self-awareness, and humility, are overlooked in favour of confidence and charisma.

We fall time after time, when selecting leaders in workplaces, community groups, politics, and the list goes on, for swagger that isn’t backed up by talent.

⁴ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/its-a-myth-women-and-men-want-different-things-from-their-careers>

Beyond Confidence and Charisma-what do we need to be a leader in the future?

Friends, my proposition to you tonight is that a radical shift in the way we think about leadership and how we identify leaders is required. We can be helped in that task by the empirical research about structural changes that work.

Researchers like Iris Bohnet at Harvard, are already looking at evidence-based interventions we can implement to change the structural biases of organisations and government. We can learn how to change our hiring and promotion systems to promote better and more diverse models of leadership.

Structural change won't just open up more opportunities for women, and the men who don't demonstrate the 'typical' leadership characteristics, but as Chamorro-Premuzic points out, it will elevate the standard of leadership across the board.

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership will contribute to this research base not only through our work in London but in partnership with an Australian-based satellite at the ANU.

You might be thinking to yourself that the gender field is already awash with research, that every day there is a new study or finding.

In some senses that's true, but when you dig a little deeper you find that most of that so-called research is small scale, even anecdotal, with the tendency to assume correlation is causation. We are determined to create a richer evidence base and to get that material in to the hands of people who can use it to implement change.

Quotas

But that doesn't mean we should do nothing until all the evidence is in.

We can be spreading the impact of what has already been shown to work.

In Australian politics, we already have evidence that affirmative action targets work. Since the ALP passed its first affirmative action resolution in 1994, the party has seen representation skyrocket from around 14% towards 50% in recent years.

Instead of trying to "fix" women – whether by training or otherwise - the ALP worked on fixing the structures that prevent women getting preselected, elected, and having fair opportunities to be leaders.

The outcome is clear – the targets have worked.

To date, the Liberal Party has missed the opportunity affirmative action provides. It's time for the Liberal Party to act on this and better promote merit by more fairly including women.

Diversity & Global Talent

Tonight, I have primarily spoken about gender: I can't do it justice in the time I have allocated to speak, but I also acknowledge there is a much broader discussion to be had about diversity and leadership. Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of launching a report by this year's Emily's List and Julia Gillard Next Generation Intern. The research by Stephanie Milione provided insightful, evidence-based recommendations for increasing ethnic diversity in Australian politics, right from the decision to run for parliament through to preselection, campaigning and career support.

Having political leadership that truly represents multicultural Australia and gender equality are both vitally important.

Now in arguing for more diversity, I do not want you to conclude I am lending my voice to the regular cry in the media that there are too many political staffers or union officials in parliament.

Few occupations enable a person to learn more about the stresses and strains that come with being a representative of the people than working in a trade union. I also do not see why it should be held against political representatives that prior to being elected they learned the ropes as a staffer. In any event, these media stories usually overlook the fact that being a union official or a political staffer is only one part of the newly elected member's CV.

So I am opposed to this kind of commentator bias against certain sorts of work experience in Australia.

But a quite different kind of issue about work and life experiences before parliament does concern me. All political parties put a premium on preselection candidates having paid their political dues through party involvement or by being deeply engaged in the life of a local electorate or both. For example, people get known because they become involved in the party and get themselves elected to state or national conferences, or policy or administrative committees. In addition, they can stand out because they are so clearly a credentialled local representative, involved in everything from school council, to neighbourhood watch, to the local chamber of commerce to local government to grassroots sport.

Historically, these ways of individuals standing out as potential candidates have generally been good enough. Both political parties from time to time have reached outside this class of candidates to laterally recruit a high calibre, well known Australian. Labor did this with Peter Garrett for example. But at core, preselection systems have been biased to those who live and work in Australia, paying their political dues or working locally or both.

However, now is the right time to ask whether this approach is fit for purpose in today's world where it is more and more common for talented Australians to live and work overseas for a substantial period of time. Think of the many people you know who, post the completion of their education, spend 10, 15 even 20 years working overseas. What often brings them back is family reasons like aged parents or children being of

high school age and their desire for their offspring to have that experience in Australia. Of course, some do not come back at all.

How do we create preselection systems that put a fair value on this global experience, which necessarily precludes the local paying of political dues or involvement in on the ground community matters? When will we see political parties laterally recruiting global figures, inviting them to move directly from New York, London, Shanghai or Nairobi straight on to the candidate slate?

I do not have the answers to those questions but believe we must find them, otherwise we risk excluding from our politics an increasing number of the best, brightest and most equipped Australians to help our nation navigate this globalised era.

Please note the 'we' in that sentence. The people who in my view must search for the answers are both those in political parties and the Australian community generally. There is some evidence that Australians prefer a 'local' as their member of parliament.⁵ Unless Australian voters value global experience, it will be hard for political parties to do so.

Conclusion

To conclude, tonight I am inviting you to be participants in a wide-ranging discussion about what leadership is, how we value diversity and how we embrace a global search for talent in our political system.

⁵ S. Childs & P. Cowley, 'The politics of local presence: Is there a case for descriptive representative?', *Political Studies*, Vol 59, 2011, p. 5, citing Studlar and McAllister, 1996.

However, in addition to joining that conversation, I am also urging all of us to action, especially to personally examine our own biases when we assess leadership potential.

I thank you for your time, and I look forward to Martin's reply.