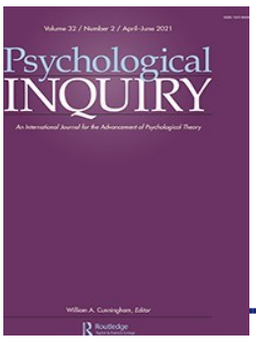

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Built on Uneven Ground: How Masculine Defaults Disadvantage Women in Political Leadership

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How can we understand and rectify gender disparities in United States political leadership? We argue that the culture of U.S. political leadership is rooted in biases that prioritize and center stereotypical notions of masculinity and Whiteness, fostering an environment that disadvantages women and especially women of color above and beyond traditional gender discrimination. Heck, Santhanagopalan, Cimpian, and Kinzler (this issue) advocate for developmental interventions designed to increase women's interest in future political careers. We propose that increasing women's interest must be accompanied by addressing the disadvantages posed by the environment of political leadership itself. Currently, political leadership is characterized by masculine defaults, in which traits and characteristics associated with the male gender role are valued, rewarded, or regarded as standard (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Until we dismantle masculine defaults embedded in American political leadership, increasing young women's interest in political careers will likely fall short of securing their long-term retention and success.

We first define masculine defaults and argue that the culture of U.S. political leadership is historically and currently rooted in bias and constructed to advantage masculinity and Whiteness. We then address the ways in which masculine defaults are privileged in the current U.S. political climate and may systematically disadvantage women. We suggest that reducing masculine defaults by enacting a significant shift in the culture of political leadership is necessary to enable more gender-diverse leadership and deconstruct White supremacy culture. Finally, we examine policy implications, providing recommendations for change efforts that address the gender bias that is endemic in American political leadership.

Defining Masculine Defaults

Masculine defaults exist when traits and characteristics associated with the male gender role are valued, rewarded, or rendered standard practice (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Gender roles constitute the cultural scripts considered appropriate for and typical of one's gender (Eagly, Wood, & Diekman, 2000; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Valuing hypercompetitive behavior, combative interactions (Glick, Berdahl, & Alonso, 2018; Haslanger, 2008), toughness (Ely & Meyerson, 2010), and "brilliant" visionaries (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009) are masculine defaults that exacerbate gender inequities in many male-dominated environments. Notably, masculine leadership styles do not predict more effective leadership despite being privileged in U.S. culture (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003).

Masculine defaults are distinct from differential treatment, in which women are treated or regarded differently than men (Ceci & Williams, 2011; Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham, & Handelsman, 2012). Women who pursue careers in political leadership face being judged as less competent than men and too emotional (Carnevale, Smith, & Campbell, 2019; Smith et al., 2018). They are also sexualized, objectified, and threatened with violence (Astor, 2018). Addressing differential treatment is crucial to increasing women's representation in political leadership. However, we focus here on masculine defaults as a distinct form of gender bias. Masculine defaults are particularly insidious and difficult to detect yet exert a powerful influence on women's abilities to enter majority-male careers and be successful (Cheryan & Markus, 2020).

Masculine Defaults in Political Leadership are Historical, Durable, and Widespread

The contemporary culture of U.S. politics emerges from a legacy of inequity rooted in the earliest expressions of our national identity. The United States is founded upon the ideals of freedom and equality. While this ideology purports to value and represent all of its citizens, history has shown otherwise. The U.S. government's discriminatory policies and exclusionary political culture have consistently sought to advance the norms, values, and interests of White men. For example, the right to vote was initially only afforded to landowners, and only White men could own land. Women were not able to vote until the ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920, with many women of color continuing to face voter suppression well into the present day. White men's legacy of hoarding political power allowed them to shape the culture of political leadership according to their own ideals, values, and interests. As a result, hegemonic masculinity is embedded in the foundations of U.S. political discourse and the culture of political leadership (Ducat, 2004).

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The imperialist nature of the United States, through its repeated participation in war and interference in global affairs, has contributed to a public belief that elected political leaders should embody physical prowess and stoicism (Messner, 2007). Political figures such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Donald Trump capitalize on how Americans often find stereotypically masculine traits desirable in political leaders (Kurtzleben, 2020; Messner, 2007; Vescio & Schermerhorn, 2021). This same political system affords a partial status increase for men of color and White women due to male and White privilege respectively (e.g., Case, 2012; Kolb, 2007). U.S. imperialism has contributed to a cultural mismatch (e.g., Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012) between stereotypical femininity and the stereotypically masculine environment of political leadership, which likely imposes barriers to belonging and retention for women into the present day (Cheryan & Markus, 2020).

Masculine defaults may be unequally distributed across political contexts. There may be differences in the prevalence and types of masculine defaults in local, regional, and national politics or in different political careers, though women are underrepresented at every level of political leadership in the United States (Center for American Women and Politics, 2021a). U.S. political parties have different gendered valences, with Americans holding explicit and implicit associations between Republicans and masculinity versus Democrats and femininity (N. J. G. Winter, 2010). Republicans strategically cast candidates from their party in the role of strong protectors while feminizing Democratic candidates (Katz, 2016). However, masculine defaults are likely present even in contexts where they are less immediately evident.

Masculine Defaults Disadvantage Women

Masculine defaults disadvantage women in political leadership. Women who deviate from the female gender role can face social and economic sanctions (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Williams & Tiedens, 2016). Furthermore, women candidates who embrace traditionally masculine goals (e.g., seeking power) can be met with strong negative emotional reactions such as contempt and disgust (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). To succeed as political leaders, women must balance performing a complex and contradictory set of desirable characteristics, presenting themselves as "up for the job" in stereotypically masculine ways without appearing to challenge the female gender role (Dabbous & Ladley, 2010). This double bind requires women to balance their personal and professional identities to strategically navigate when to conform to masculine defaults and when to resist them (Anderson, 2002; Fox, 2010; Pfafman & McEwan, 2014).

Beyond backlash, masculine defaults pose multiple other potential barriers for women in political leadership. Women are often less likely to engage in behaviors they have been socialized against (e.g., self-promotion, Rudman, 1998). When women alter their self-presentation for the purpose of conforming to stereotypically masculine norms, they report feeling less authentic (Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2018) which predicts poorer psychological well-being and work outcomes (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018; Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014). In summary, masculine defaults create barriers for many women in political leadership.

Women of color, especially Black women, are subjected to additional biased scrutiny. The double-bind of needing to appear both assertive and likable may be even more difficult to achieve in the face of racist stereotypes (e.g., Black and Latina women as "angry" and "emotional," Jewell, 1993; Williams & Tiedens, 2016; Asian American women as "submissive," Toosi, Mor, Semnani-Azad, Phillips, & Amanatullah, 2019). Black women are also subjected to intersectional invisibility and deindividuation because they are perceived as less prototypical of the group "women" compared to White women (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2018). In some situations, stereotypes may confer certain advantages. For example, Black women can sometimes engage in stereotypically masculine behaviors (e.g., dominant leadership) with less backlash than White women because they are perceived as more masculine than White women (Hall, Galinsky, & Phillips, 2015; Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). More work is needed to understand the effects of masculine defaults at the intersection of race and gender.

Throughout this commentary, we focus on women as the gender group that is primarily disadvantaged by masculine defaults, but masculine defaults may also pose barriers for people whose genders fall under the nonbinary umbrella (e.g., gender-nonconforming, nonbinary, agender) and some men. There are still just four out nonbinary or gender-nonconforming elected officials serving in the United States, though a record-breaking 25 ran for office in 2020 compared to just six in 2018 (Victory Fund, 2021). Future work should explore to what extent nonbinary people incur backlash when they conform to masculine defaults, how they are perceived when they do not, and whether masculine defaults pose threats to nonbinary individuals' recruitment, success, and retention in political leadership. Some men may also be disadvantaged by masculine defaults in political leadership. For example, men who deviate from stereotypical masculinity face backlash (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). Addressing masculine defaults in political leadership may improve the culture for many nonbinary people and men.

Masculine Defaults in Contemporary Political Leadership

The historical construction of the political sphere to confer advantages for men and masculinity powerfully influences contemporary U.S. politics. More women, particularly women of color and/or LGBTQ+ women, ran for office in 2020 than ever before (Bleiweis & Phadke, 2021). As a result, the House broke its previous records for the overall number of women (118), Republican women (29), and women of color (51; Center for American Women and Politics, 2021b). Even so, women are still severely underrepresented in political leadership, comprising 0% of current

and former U.S. Presidents, 27% of Congress, 31% of statewide executive offices (e.g., governors), 31% of the state legislature, and 21% of mayors of U.S. cities with populations of at least 100,000 (Center for American Women and Politics, 2021a). We argue that American political leadership is replete with masculine defaults that may harm women's participation and success. We provide six examples of how masculine defaults influence women's experiences in political leadership.

Power and Competition

One central masculine default that women encounter early in their political careers is the importance of dominating one's opponents. Gaining a political position often requires winning a heated contest (i.e., election) against an adversary. Elections characterized through aggressive metaphors (e.g., campaign as a battleground) can exclude women or cast doubt on their abilities to succeed by reinforcing politics as masculine (Gerrits, Trimble, Wagner, Raphael, & Sampert, 2017). More broadly, masculine defaults related to power and competition emerge in the widely held stereotype that leadership is more congruent with the male than female gender role (Eagly & Karau, 2002). An emphasis on accruing and wielding power has been identified as an enduring masculine theme in American political leadership (Messner, 2007). Descriptions of a desirable political leader as "a military man" (N. J. G. Winter, 2010, p. 611) or as someone who "does not compromise" and "defends [his] own beliefs" (Rosenwasser & Dean, 1989, p. 81) reflect power-related masculine defaults.

Once political leaders are in office, militaristic masculinity can be expressed through the crafting of a "strongman" public persona characterized by strength, virility, and swagger. Throughout U.S. history, political candidates have strategically used masculine symbolism to gain the upper hand, typically paired with attempts to emasculate their opponents (Fahey, 2007). Donald Trump's 2016 campaign and subsequent presidency offered a highly visible example of the foundational relationship between political and patriarchal power (Harsin, 2020). Endorsement of hegemonic masculinity predicted support for Trump in 2016 and 2020 above and beyond sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia, as well as antiestablishment, antielitism, and nativist populism (Vescio & Schermerhorn, 2021). Trump's rhetoric linked the power of the state with the forceful dominance of men (Pascoe, 2017; Smirnova, 2018). Such language is consistent with what we would expect from environments high in masculine defaults, in which power is a zero-sum game characterized by "winners" and "losers."

Power hoarding and engaging in contests for dominance have consistently emerged as a central aspect of highly masculine environments (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018). Joe Biden wielded his own brand of the masculine contest in the runup to the 2020 election, challenging ideological opponents to pushup contests and claiming he would "beat the hell out of Trump" if they were in high school (Stracqualursi, 2018). Masculine defaults that prescribe power hoarding and hypercompetitive behavior for leaders confer an advantage on men. Men are more likely than women on average to both engage in such behaviors and to avoid gender backlash when they do (Cheryan & Markus, 2020).

Power-seeking and political use of militaristic imagery and language as described above are also deeply entrenched in White supremacy culture and may particularly benefit White men (Liu, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017). Expressions of militaristic power in political leadership are examples of White domination emerging from centuries of violence (Ondish & Stern, 2018; Tomz & Weeks, 2020), resource hoarding, exploitation (Golash-Boza, Duenas, & Xiong, 2019; Harris, 1993), and the historical and ongoing restriction of people of color's access to basic institutional rights such as voting and political representation (Harris, 1993).

Communication Patterns

Masculine defaults pervade expectations about which communication styles are most effective for political leaders. In deliberative settings at every level of government, from town hall meetings to presidential debates, women face competing cultural communication standards that preclude their full participation and authority (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). As we discuss below, assertiveness, self-promotion, interruption, and abstract speech patterns are rewarded in political leadership and confer advantages on men.

Valuing the expression of assertiveness and self-promotion is a central masculine default in the political sphere that influences women's verbal participation, perceived influence, and success. Social and cultural expectations for women generally discourage self-assertion, leading to gender disparities in settings that reward assertive behavior (e.g., negotiation on behalf of oneself, Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; face-to-face bargaining, Walters, Stuhlmacher, & Meyer, 1998). Women are also expected to engage in less self-promotion and evaluate themselves less favorably than do men even when informed about their objectively equal performance (Exley & Kessler, 2019). In the deliberative settings common in politics (i.e., public meetings), women speak less than men and are viewed as having less authority (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). When primed with power, male U.S. senators talk more, while women senators correctly assume they will face backlash if they talk more and do not show the same increase in speech (Brescoll, 2011). Prescribing assertion and self-promotion puts men at an advantage in deliberative spaces.

Intrusively interrupting others is another masculine default prevalent in political leadership (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Women face interruption at disproportionate rates across contexts, from dyadic interactions to justices' oral arguments at the Supreme Court (Blair-Loy et al., 2017; Hancock & Rubin, 2015; Jacobi & Schweers, 2017). However, a culture of interruption may disadvantage women even when men and women are interrupted with equal frequency because most women are socialized to refrain from

interrupting others (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Like other masculine defaults, a culture that values intrusive interruption has the potential to hinder women's success.

Finally, abstract or broad speech is a masculine default that cues status, boosting the likelihood of the speaker being selected for leadership despite abstract speakers being no more effective as leaders (Joshi, Wakslak, Appel, & Huang, 2020). Men tend to speak more abstractly, while women tend to use more concrete and specific speech (Joshi et al., 2020). Broad speech can be rewarded in grant proposals despite not predicting performance, a bias that may contribute to gender gaps in scientific funding (Kolev, Fuentes-Medel, & Murray, 2019). From assertion to self-promotion to broad speech patterns, masculine defaults influence which communication styles are rewarded in political leadership.

Rationality

Rationality is associated with the traditional male gender role (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004) and is reflected in the political belief that decision-making should be based in objective analytical reasoning rather than influenced by emotion. American political leaders face pressure to separate their emotional reactions from their work due to perceptions that emotions lead to unpredictable and irrational behavior (Shields, 2007) and could jeopardize the safety of the United States (Messner, 2007). Expressing sadness is particularly damaging to status conferral, whereas stereotypically masculine emotions such as anger may be perceived less negatively, especially when displayed by men (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Women are stereotyped as more emotional than men and are likely to be disadvantaged in spaces that reward perceived rationality (Shields, 2002). Women leaders must carefully navigate their displays of emotion to avoid being perceived either as over-emotional or as cold, another example of the double bind of the female gender role and political leadership's masculine defaults (Brescoll, 2016).

Valuing rationality also contributes to tone policing. Tone policing is a form of microaggression in which members of a dominant group respond to criticism by redirecting attention from the content of the critique to its delivery (Nuru & Arendt, 2019; Oluo, 2018). Tone policing allows the criticized party to reconsolidate power by performing victimhood and is frequently weaponized against Black women, especially by White women (Lorde, 1981; Ricketts, 2021; Saad, 2020). The masculine default of valuing rationality and its consequence of penalizing members of marginalized groups for displays of emotion is thus one particularly evocative example of the overlap between masculine defaults and White supremacy culture. While White women may be targets of tone policing or claims by men that they are irrational, they may simultaneously weaponize such claims against women of color (Nuru & Arendt, 2019; Ricketts, 2021). Women of color in political leadership may be particularly disadvantaged by masculine defaults related to rationality.

Ironically, showing emotion can be conducive to success in political leadership. Emotion-based arguments are more persuasive to affectively-oriented audience members (Mayer & Tormala, 2010). A model of emotional response outperformed multiple rational models in predicting approval of Presidents Carter and Reagan, suggesting that emotions guide perceptions of political leaders as much or more than rational evaluations of policy (Ragsdale, 1991). Social movements often rely on intense initiating emotions such as outrage, anger, or fear that are then collectively transformed into emotional experiences of solidarity and enthusiasm (Collins, 2001). Different groups may vary in which emotional appeals they find most compelling; for example, a long history of facing oppression may lead Black Americans to be more effectively politically mobilized by hope and pride, whereas White Americans may feel more entitled to agreeable political outcomes and may therefore be more activated by anger (Phoenix, 2019). Devaluing expressions of emotion in leaders may be counterproductive to political success in addition to perpetuating gender and racial gaps in who is allowed to express emotion.

Belief in Meritocracy

Belief in meritocracy is another default in political leadership that privileges men and especially White men. Belief in meritocracy posits that people get what they deserve; that the best rise naturally to the top (Rudman & Saud, 2020); and that if you work hard enough, you can get ahead without the assistance of others (Mijs, 2018). As a result, belief in meritocracy masks privilege, justifies social status inequities, and centers White masculinity as the preferred mode of being (McCoy & Major, 2007). Perceiving an organization or system as a meritocracy may be especially harmful when "merit" is characterized by stereotypically masculine behaviors and qualities (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Cech, Blair-Loy, & Rogers, 2018). In politics, meritocracy beliefs show up in the idolizing of political leaders who are "self-made" men (D. G. Winter, 2010) and in the popular narrative that America is a land of opportunity where anyone can succeed (McCoy & Major, 2007).

Ideal Worker Norm

The ideal worker norm, which posits that one should prioritize work above all else through long hours and extensive availability (Correll, Kelly, O'Connor, & Williams, 2014), may be particularly difficult for women to fulfill because they are traditionally tasked with home and caretaking responsibilities (e.g., "the second shift," Dugan & Barnes-Farrell, 2020). The implementation of policies such as family-friendly work schedules combats the ideal worker norm and allows both women and men to attend to their work and home responsibilities without feeling the need to sacrifice one sphere of life (Kelly, Moen, & Tranby, 2011). Improving work-family policies, permitting children at work and on the legislative floor, and explicitly allowing the use of campaign funds for child care expenses could help increase gender equity in political leadership (Bleiweis & Phadke, 2021).

When Women Participate in Masculine Defaults

Many women can and do participate in masculine defaults at times. Margaret Thatcher famously used masculine terms to describe herself, took voice lessons to lower her pitch in a bid to be taken more seriously, and fired the only woman to ever serve in her Cabinet for being too "cautious" and lacking "presence" (Leung, 1997). After the 2021 insurrection at the U.S. capitol, Nancy Pelosi commented on the traumatic nature of the event for others but reflected that she felt a responsibility to distance herself from her emotions and remain "dispassionate about how to deal with it" (Kane, 2021). In 2018, Mikie Sherrill flipped a longstanding Republican congressional district in New Jersey with a campaign in which she emphasized her military experience and connected her grandfather's World War II-based militaristic values to her political perspective (The Washington Post, 2018). Sherrill's success may be partly owed to how she balanced masculinity and femininity: one campaign video cuts from shots of fighter jets to her family picnicking as she describes her willingness to listen to constituents and the values she wants to impart to her children (The Washington Post, 2018).

There is nothing wrong with women engaging in stereotypically masculine behaviors. The problem arises when we systematically overvalue masculine defaults at the expense of other equally valid ways of being. Women are often pressured to participate in masculine defaults in order to succeed, but when they do, many face negative consequences and inadvertently reinforce masculine defaults for others (Miner et al., 2018; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). Masculine defaults that are reinforced by political leaders' behavior may lead to more difficulty recruiting and retaining women in the future.

Policy Implications

Masculine defaults are historically rooted and resistant to change, but it is possible to identify and work to remove them from collective beliefs, practices, and policies (Cheryan & Markus, 2020). Below, we discuss why it is crucial to attend to masculine defaults alongside other interventions. We then propose four strategic areas for intervention that may help to dismantle masculine defaults and foster a more equitable environment in political leadership.

Why Attending to Masculine Defaults Alongside Girls' Interest Matters

Heck et al. (this issue) acknowledge the importance of interventions that reduce gender bias in political leadership alongside those intended to increase girls' interest. We concur with their perspective and offer two reasons why it is particularly important to attend to masculine defaults.

First, increasing the number of women who enter political leadership without removing barriers to their success may make it difficult for women to remain in the field. Women are often appointed to leadership positions that are precarious without being provided the support they need to succeed. Precarious leadership positions lead to a "glass cliff" effect in which women are disadvantaged when it comes to actually succeeding in and retaining high-status roles (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Increasing initial interest without actual cultural change is unlikely to ameliorate the disadvantages women will face once they enter political leadership. For example, encouraging girls to associate political leadership with communal goals without also shifting the goals that U.S. voters and political candidates value may have limited long-term effects.

One possibility is that developmental interventions alone will eventually help shift the cultural defaults as the next generation of political leaders takes office. However, positive implications of developmental interventions for long-term culture change rely on those children successfully launching long-term, influential political careers without conforming to masculine defaults. Without shifts in the climate of political leadership, such progress seems unlikely to be broadly achievable.

Second, some interventions at the developmental level might not challenge masculine defaults but rather encourage girls to conform to them. For example, remedying a "confidence gap" by working to increase girls' confidence in their ability to succeed as political leaders (Heck et al., this issue) may involve encouraging girls to adopt stereotypically masculine behaviors associated with confidence such as self-promotion. As we have argued, women are more likely to be penalized for those behaviors (e.g., Williams & Tiedens, 2016), less likely to be positively rewarded (Brooks, Huang, Kearney, & Murray, 2014), and more likely to feel inauthentic when they conform to aspects of the male gender role that do not feel like part of their identity (Garr-Schultz & Gardner, 2018). Furthermore, encouraging women to adopt stereotypically masculine behaviors in order to succeed reinforces a biased hierarchy in which those who participate in masculine defaults are lifted above others (Cheryan & Markus, 2020).

A more balanced approach to countering masculine defaults might involve discouraging overconfident behaviors, especially when such behaviors are counterproductive (e.g., CEO overconfidence contributing to how badly their banks were impacted by financial crises, Ho, Huang, Lin, & Yen, 2016). Considering how to alter boys' and men's behaviors in order to foster more equitable environments may be a crucial step in getting more women into political leadership.

Potential Sites of Change

Goals of Political Leadership

Reimagining the goals of political leadership may powerfully reduce masculine defaults. As Heck et al. (this issue) note, political careers are seen as fulfilling power-related goals like competition and self-promotion. In contrast, emphasizing communal goals of political leadership increases women's interest in running for office (Schneider, Holman, Diekman, & McAndrew, 2016). From a masculine defaults-informed perspective, we must not only reframe the messages girls and women outside of politics receive but also shift women's and especially men's attitudes *within* politics about the goals of political leadership. Emphasizing the communal purposes of

leadership (e.g., helping others; political careers as public service) in political spaces and rewarding leaders who prioritize communal goals could reduce masculine defaults related to wielding power and dominating rivals. Political leaders could be required to report on their progress toward goals rooted in helping others. The structure of political negotiations could be altered to require other advocacy (i.e., negotiating on behalf of an ally, Amanatullah & Morris, 2010) rather than requiring a great deal of self-advocacy for success.

Communication Patterns

Policies and norms around communication in political leadership could be altered to remove unnecessary reliance on stereotypically masculine behaviors. The physical, mental, and verbal effort required to "take the floor" could be reduced such that getting a chance to speak does not rely heavily on assertiveness and self-promotion (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Rules for debates, public forums, and meetings could penalize intrusive interruptions, ensure turn-taking, and set upper limits on speaking time. When possible, altering the decision rules of deliberative settings (i.e., majority rule vs. unanimous rule) may also help to reduce masculine defaults (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). When women are underrepresented in deliberative spaces, unanimous rule decision-making increases their verbal participation, whereas when there are many women present, majority rule decision-making is most beneficial to women (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2014). Finally, the questions posed to politicians could require specific policy responses rather than rewarding broad proclamations. Making multiple coordinated shifts to how political leaders deliver arguments, make decisions, and debate with others could radically transform the cultural defaults underlying political communication and, as a result, the culture of political leadership itself over time.

Leadership Styles

Intervention efforts could increase the extent to which stereotypically feminine norms, behaviors, and characteristics are valued and expected of political leaders of all genders. Even though Americans associate leadership with stereotypical masculinity, evidence suggests that masculine leadership styles are no more effective than feminine ones and that feminine leadership styles may be more effective in some contexts (Eagly et al., 2003). American voters value the expression of certain stereotypically feminine characteristics in leadership (e.g., resistance to corruption, Barnes, Beaulieu, & Saxton, 2018; attention to humanitarian issues, Herrnson, Lay, & Stokes, 2003), though the value conferred is generally dependent on leaders concurrently displaying stereotypically masculine traits (Messner, 2007; Shields, 2007). Interventions could build on the aspects of stereotypically feminine leadership styles that are most effective, such as increased teamwork and respect for others' contributions. Political parties and well-resourced party mechanisms could prioritize these traits when recruiting nominees, and political leaders could use them to determine which other political leaders to endorse. However, such approaches will need to account for the fact that scrutiny of such behaviors by the public (e.g., whether a candidate is perceived as respectful) may be influenced by stereotypes applied to women (e.g., that women who publicly communicate their work are bossy; McKinnon & O'Connell, 2020).

Political Selection

The system by which we select political leaders may be another site for positive change. The United States may be able to take cues from electoral systems in countries that have more successfully increased gender equity in political leadership. For example, several European parliaments use ranked-choice voting, a system that may contribute to gender equity by reducing incentives for negative campaigning (Brechenmacher, 2018). Gender parity targets, public campaign financing, and proportional representation systems, in which seats are allocated to parties in proportion to their share of the vote, are other policies present in many European democracies that could increase women's representation in U.S. political leadership (Brechenmacher, 2018). Testing changes to the electoral system at a local level and subsequently expanding them could help to scaffold change.

The Role of Voters and the Media

Remedying masculine defaults in political leadership will require a coordinated effort not just among leaders but also among voters. Unlike other male-dominated occupations (e.g., STEM) in which success is not necessarily dependent on broad public appeal, the essential measure of a political leader's success is election or reelection. Reimagining the values associated with political leadership will be a project for the public, and the media could play an important role. News outlets could hold candidates of all genders accountable to communal goals and stereotypically feminine behaviors that have been identified as conducive to positive outcomes (e.g., consensus building, collaboration). The media could also help counteract inaccurate stereotypes that portray White, hypermasculine leadership styles as typical and preferable. Finally, framing diversity efforts as important primarily because they are profitable is an appealing message for dominant group members but is associated with worse outcomes for members of marginalized groups (Starck, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2021). Voters and the media could help to center the narrative that, while increasing gender equity in political leadership may be broadly beneficial, it is a moral priority and not just an instrumental one.

Encountering Resistance to Change

Attempts to dismantle masculine defaults will likely elicit resistance. Social progress for marginalized groups in the United States often provokes a perceived threat to safety and predictability for members of privileged groups (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Craig, Rucker, & Richeson, 2018; Wilkins &

Kaiser, 2014). Dismantling masculine defaults may be met with resistance because doing so directly challenges the current status quo.

Providing positive counterexamples of political leadership not based on masculine defaults may help address resistance to change. For example, Jacinda Ardern (Prime Minister of New Zealand) has been widely acclaimed for her implementation of stereotypically feminine characteristics (e.g., openly showing care and compassion) in her leadership (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020). Instead of downplaying femininity, Jacinda Ardern embraced it to exemplify a different and equally valid form of leadership (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020).

Addressing misconceptions about the objectives of reducing masculine defaults may also minimize resistance from majority group members (Dover, Kaiser, & Major, 2020). Framing proposed changes as broadly beneficial and not meant to exclude advantaged groups may ameliorate feelings of threat and increase support (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Pairing positive examples of what political leadership not based on masculine defaults can look like with messages aimed at reducing perceived threat in majority group members could help reduce resistance to changing the culture of political leadership.

Conclusion

The gender gap in American political leadership is no accident: behaviors and characteristics considered antecedents for success are rooted in a historical and durable tradition of privileging masculinity. Masculine defaults reinforce the supremacy of men, especially White men, on the political stage. While developmental interventions such as providing girls with positive leadership opportunities or exposing them to counter-stereotypic political role models may be effective in increasing girls' interest in political leadership, they will likely fail to ensure women's long-term retention and success without substantial shifts in the current culture of political leadership. By dismantling and rebuilding the cultural foundations of a system designed to oppress, we can ensure that girls who find their interest sparked by political leadership will step onto even ground and into careers in which they have a fair chance to succeed.

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