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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores how male and female leaders define effective leadership in an extreme context.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We conducted in-depth interviews with leaders working in an extreme context (a matched sample of female and male Majors and Colonels in the Canadian Armed Forces) and analyzed military training materials.

Findings: In the military, male and female leadership looks much more similar than might be expected. Further, surprisingly this is not occurring because women are leading in more masculine ways, but rather the opposite; men are leading in more feminine ways.

Practical implications: There is a need for organizations to recognize and acknowledge the role of feminine leadership behaviours. This may also give women a better opportunity to succeed in these types of leadership roles.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the leadership literature by furthering our understanding the boundary conditions around transformational leadership in relation to gender stereotypes, situational strength, and social identity.

Transformational leadership in an extreme context: examining gender, individual consideration and self-sacrifice

An ongoing debate in the leadership literature has focused on differences in the way men and women lead (Trinidad and Normore, 2005). This difference may stem, at least partially, from the fact that women need to conform to sex role stereotypes when in a leadership role, or suffer harsh penalties for failing to do so (Eagly and Carli, 2007). We use transformational leadership theory as our framework in this study. Transformational leadership has been characterized as a 'gender neutral' leadership theory of which individualized consideration is a central component (Avolio and Bass, 1995). This form of leadership has been found to have positive outcomes in a wide variety of situations including extreme (military) contexts (Bass and Riggio, 2006). In this study, we investigate gender differences in leader reported individual consideration of employees in an extreme context. To our knowledge, there have been no published studies examining sex differences in the individual consideration component of transformational leadership within an extreme context, despite the importance of this type of leadership behaviour.

In the pages to follow we will: 1) define an extreme context and present arguments as to why transformational leadership is important in an extreme context such as the military; 2) discuss previous research on sex based differences in transformational leadership in other contexts; 3) outline competing propositions as to what we would expect in an extreme context given theories of sex role stereotypes, role congruity theory and social identity theory; and finally, discuss our findings and outline suggestions for future research.

Extreme contexts and transformational leadership

We define an extreme context as one in which individuals may face uncertainty, time pressure and crises and where decisions of leaders and/or organizational members have the potential for catastrophic consequences for individuals, groups and nations (Hewitt and Luce, 2006; Hunt *et al.*, 1999). Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio & Cavarretta (2009) outline a framework that discusses five dimensions related to extreme contexts. Hannah, Campbell & Matthews (2010) use this framework to describe dangerous contexts as extreme in that they can be conceptualized along the dimensions of “time ... magnitude of consequence ... the probability that those consequences may occur ... proximity (e.g., how close one feels to the danger and those affected) ... and the form of threat” (p. S160-S161). The military epitomizes an extreme context in the sense that outcomes for individual employees in this context can be catastrophic (i.e. death and killing other human beings when in combat situations). In this way the military qualifies as a critical action organization in that they “engage in extreme events but with less frequency relative to trauma organizations” (such as emergency rooms) (Hannah et al., 2010, p.900). Individuals who aspire to leadership roles in the military typically require combat experience (Loughlin and Arnold, 2007) and many face the reality of killing or being killed as part of their job. In fact, “in no other profession... including the police and fire services, can a member be legally ordered into harm’s way” (Chief of Defence Staff, 2003, p. 9). For military leaders, combat situations are increasingly riddled with uncertainty in this new era of warfare characterized by advanced technologies and greater ambiguity in the landscape of war (Wojack, 2002). Extreme conditions are inherent in the military profession, and for reasons we will discuss shortly, this is an ideal context in which to study sex differences in transformational leadership.

Four components contribute to being seen as a transformational leader: 1) *Idealized influence* refers to a leader who does the right thing and is a role model for followers (Bass and Riggio, 2006). 2) An individual who is *inspirationally motivating* is able to develop and communicate the vision of the organization to others. 3) Next, the *intellectual stimulation* component refers to a leader who encourages followers to think ‘outside the box’ and to generate new solutions to old problems. 4) Finally, an *individually considerate* leader spends time coaching and developing each individual follower (Avolio, 1999).

Transformational leadership is necessary in an extreme military context. Bass (1998) refers to the distinction made between commitment and compliance in the military. Compliance and obedience can be achieved through transactional leadership but this will not provide the same bond or willingness to die for the cause that transformational leadership will (Bass, 1998). The necessity for directive leadership will arise in an extreme situation (i.e. combat setting), but this directive behaviour must co-occur with transformational behaviour as a foundation for optimal results. In fact, without the transformational day-to-day style, the directive behaviour in the proximal/extreme situation will not be as successful (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Past research overwhelmingly confirms that people are more likely to go above and beyond for transformational than other types of leaders (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Further, charisma likely needs to be in place before a crisis, if the effort of going ‘above and beyond’ is to be sustained (Hunt *et al.*, 1999).

In particular, there are arguments to suggest that the transformational dimension of individual consideration figures prominently in extreme contexts such as the military

(Bass and Riggio, 2006). In combat situations “the three elements inspiring confidence in the commander according to Kalay (1983) were belief in the commander’s professional competence, belief in the commander’s credibility, and perception of how caring he was” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. 68). In terms of crisis situations in organizations, individual consideration creates the relationships which allow trust to be built; it is trust which allows the organization to better handle crises (Bass and Riggio, 2006). When thinking about the process of transformation, the individual consideration component is the linchpin that shifts individual focus from self-interest to group interest (Avolio and Bass, 1995).

Bass (1985) originally defined individual consideration as consisting of both development of followers and treating each follower as an individual. The *developmental aspect* focuses on activities that encourage employees to develop job related skills (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). The *supportive aspect* entails expressing concern for followers and responding to situations or making decisions with their needs in mind (Rafferty and Griffin, 2006). We follow these studies of individual consideration in terms of our definition by separating the supportive and developmental aspects.

For a leader to enact the supportive and developmental aspects of individual consideration, it may be necessary to sacrifice one’s own needs for followers’ best interests. Self-sacrifice in an organizational setting can be defined as “the total/partial abandonment, and/or permanent/temporary postponement of personal interests, privileges, or welfare in the a) division of labor, b) distribution of rewards, and/or c) exercise of power” (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999, p. 399). Self-sacrifice is of significance in the military since crises may arise often in this context. For instance, it was found that

positive perceptions of a leader were moderated by crisis situations; in situations of high uncertainty, a self-sacrificial leader was rated particularly well (Halverson *et al.*, 2004). In summary, there is strong support that transformational leadership, individual consideration, and self-sacrifice will be effective in a military context. We turn now to a discussion of military expectations, gender and transformational leadership.

Gender, stereotypes, and transformational leadership

In the military context, gender and leadership research has tended to focus on the significant challenges faced by women in gaining leadership positions in this highly masculine environment. Eagly *et al.* (1995) found that military roles were judged to be highly congenial for men; males rated themselves as more competent and interested in this role and all respondents rated military roles as requiring “less interpersonal ability and more task ability than the other leadership roles” (Eagly, *et al.*, 1995, p. 136). In contrast, however, our focus is on the transformational leadership behaviours of male and female leaders who have already achieved positions of formal authority. We are specifically interested in examining gender differences in the way transformational leadership is *enacted* in this extreme context. Should we expect that women and men would exhibit similar or different transformational leadership behaviours in this context?

In general, the literature on gender stereotypes and leadership supports the idea that while the differences may be small, women and men do exhibit some leadership differences and these fall along gender stereotypical lines (Eagly and Carli, 2007). A theme throughout much of the literature on gender differences in behaviour is that women have a greater focus on relationships with others, engage in more participative leadership styles than men do, and are more transformational than men overall (with the

largest difference being found on the individual consideration dimension; Eagly *et al.*, 2003). The supportive and developmental aspects of individual consideration are highly congruent with female gender stereotypes (Hackman *et al.*, 1992), and past research on self-sacrifice has also shown that female leaders in private and public sectors are more likely than men to report self-sacrifice as part of their individually considerate behaviour (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010).

Women in leadership roles often walk a fine line between appearing too masculine (conforming to the leader role stereotypes and therefore not being liked) and appearing too feminine (conforming to feminine gender role stereotypes and therefore not being perceived as an effective leader) (e.g., Binns, 2008). Role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) suggests that women need to exhibit a more balanced style than men with a greater focus on feminine behaviours in addition to ‘leader’/male behaviours in order to conform to both female and leader stereotypes and to succeed in a masculine environment. In contrast, male leaders would not be subject to similar constraints; they would be free to act in predominantly masculine ways consistent with the environment. Using this framework, we would expect to find that women would be more likely than men to describe individually considerate, self-sacrificial behaviour given its feminine connotations, despite the highly ‘masculine’ context of this extreme environment.

Situational strength and leader identity

A competing perspective highlights the possibility that situational influences and group identities may override gender stereotypic expectations. Strong situations are characterized by “obvious norms and rigid roles [and they] tend to constrain the expression of individual differences ... [whereas weak situations] permit more latitude or

opportunity for the expressions of such differences” (Johns, 2006, p. 387). Gender could be considered an individual difference, which is affected by situational strength. In a ‘weak’ situation, where there are fewer rules governing leadership behaviour, it would be expected that men and women would enact different leadership styles. However, the military context would be considered a strong situation, since the rank structure provides clear roles and responsibilities as well as reporting relationships.

In addition, the influence of situational variables depends on the extent to which an individual identifies with a group or work culture. Social identity theory argues that individuals typically identify with particular groups based on salient characteristics such as sex or profession (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This theory also explains leadership as “a group process generated by social categorization and prototype-based depersonalization processes associated with social identity” (Hogg, 2001, p.184). Within this theoretical framework, leadership is viewed as a relational aspect within a group, such that being viewed as exhibiting behaviours prototypical within the in-group is important in determining who is viewed as a leader (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Kippenberg, 2003). In other words, those individuals who fit the prototype within a particular in-group will emerge as leaders. In the extreme military context, it has been found that soldiers value their professional identity above other social identities (Griffith, 2009), and in “salient groups, people are highly sensitive to prototypicality” (Hogg, 2001, 189). Considering that the military is characterized by masculinity overall, we expect that the professional identity (and therefore prototypical behaviour) which both male and female leaders subscribe may fall along *male* leadership stereotypes. Thus, when considering our investigation from this theoretical lens we would expect that male and female leaders in

this context might be more similar in their individually considerate behaviour. We investigated this research question using qualitative interview data and content analysis of military training documents.

Method

Using a semi-structured interview methodology, specific questions were asked of 14 (7 males and 7 females) Majors and Colonels in the Canadian Forces, but had no specific format for responses to allow for in-depth discussion (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Because this was exploratory research interviews enabled an illumination of new theoretical issues that would not be apparent using a survey methodology. All interviews were conducted via telephone and were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Sampling was completed once the point of saturation was reached (i.e. no new information was being brought out in subsequent interviews). The average age for the women was 44.4 years and for the men it was 43.8 years. All participants had been with the Armed Forces for the majority of their careers (20 plus years).

We employed multiple methods by administering the MLQ (Bass and Avolio, 2000) as a self-report comparison. The analysis of the survey data showed no significant differences between how women and men rated themselves on transformational leadership (all four components aggregated) or the individual consideration component. Second, we gathered written material from the Canadian Forces related to their leadership training and development programs. This archival material allowed us to compare the training materials provided to leaders in the organization with the transcript data from the interviews. We performed a content analysis on this material that substantiated the interview findings. Third, we developed relationships with key informants (Miles and

Huberman, 1994) who were a source of information with respect to the issues female leaders were facing in this organization.

Analytic strategy

In regards to the interview data, the transcripts from three interview questions (see Appendix A) from each interview were input into NVivo 7.0. Content analysis steps (Weber, 1990) widely referenced in the literature were used (e.g., Duriau *et al.*, 2007). Initially, the authors read these portions of the transcripts comparing these to the transformational leadership literature focused on individual consideration and gender. From this process we created coding categories as follows: developmental individual consideration, supportive individual consideration, and self-sacrifice (as a subset of both developmental and supportive individual consideration). *Developmental leadership* was defined as behaviour the leader engaged in to improve job performance and/or an employee's skills or future career progression. *Supportive leadership* was defined as getting to know an employee on both a personal and professional level and/or helping an employee deal with issues and/or problems in their lives or work; treating each employee as an individual with unique needs. *Self-sacrifice* was defined as the leader giving up on a permanent or temporary basis their own personal interests in the division of labor, distribution of rewards or the exercise of power (as defined by: Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999).

The next step in the process involved two graduate students blind to the gender of the participants and the overall purpose of the study. These assistants were given the definitions of our coding categories (as above) and asked to code by comment/idea. Any specific example could be coded as both developmental and self-sacrificial, or supportive

and self-sacrificial. These individuals coded 25% of the data in an initial training period. They then met with the first author to discuss their coding and rectify any differences. Agreement during this training phase was 75%. Next, they coded another 25% of this data and the agreement was 80%. This was deemed acceptable inter-coder reliability (Dyke and Murphy, 2006), and the remainder of the data was coded by one coder and the first author. In the final coding document there were two cases of disagreement. These were discussed and a consensus reached between coders.

In regards to the content analysis of the leadership training materials, we employed a third coder (graduate student) to conduct this analysis. This person read two books and two manuals used in leadership training at the Canadian Military Leadership Institute (National Defence, 2003, 2005a, 2005b). The categories used for this content analysis included the same category of self-sacrifice regarding both supportive and developmental leadership (as defined in our interview coding). The content analysis was conducted after the interviews. Our interviews suggested three additional categories should be explored: We defined 1) *'service before self'* as the notion that service to the military came before self-interest, 2) *Professional soldier identity* was defined as the essential meaning of what it is to be a soldier for an individual within in the Canadian Forces, and 3) *organizational identity* was defined as the essential meaning and purpose of the military as a whole.

Findings

Leadership style

Overall, both male and female leaders in an extreme context labeled their leadership styles as conforming to feminine stereotypes. However, there was also emphasis (similar for both male and female leaders) that they could be directive when

necessary. Military male and female leaders described their leadership style as participative, empowering, and delegating. Several quotes illustrate this similarity: “I tend not to be overly directive. I tend to work collegially as, as much as I can. I’m very much a consensus builder” (Female Major 5¹); “I very much default to the participant, participative style of leadership” (Male Colonel 3). With one exception, leaders spoke about participative styles of leadership being their natural style. They also typically said they could make the hard decisions (i.e. be directive) if need be.

Importance of individual consideration

The interview data illustrated that all leaders described individually considerate leadership behaviours (both developmental and supportive) with 44 examples in total between both male and female leaders. In fact, the leaders (both female and male) were in agreement that without ‘knowing your troops’ (developmental individual consideration) a leader would be in serious trouble in this extreme context. For example:

I’ll analyze any individual’s capabilities before assigning things to them and then I let them run with it within the limits of their own capability. If they require guidance I’ll give it to them (Male Major 3)

I spend a lot of time sitting and talking with my direct reports... there are a number of officers out there who check in with me once a year or so and we just kind of discuss where they’re going with their careers (Female Colonel 4)

Supportive versus developmental individual consideration

The interview data showed an equivalent number of examples of supportive and developmental individual consideration from both female and male leaders in the sample (See Table 1 for percentages). When these behaviours were disaggregated by sex of the leader there was similarity: 55% of the supportive examples were from female leaders and 45% from male leaders; 45% of the developmental examples were from female

leaders and 55% from male leaders. The following are illustrative quotes of how male and female military leaders described supportive and developmental individual consideration:

Developmental As a commanding officer of a unit, I spend a lot of time... providing advice to my direct subordinates, my young majors who are just developing and once a month or every six weeks, I'd sit with them one on one (Female Colonel 1)

Developmental [I] tend to sit down with them, talk with them and allow them to figure out that there's a problem and how are they going to address it. And where necessary, I happily offer any assistance I can (Male Major 3)

Supportive I believe in getting to know the people in the family of the military... One of the things about leadership is you have to be able to understand where these people are coming from and so when you do have to deploy them or make a hard decision on something... you have to know whether or not they can do it and that means you need to understand their physical, psychological and family issue (Female Colonel 2)

Supportive On many occasions [I have allowed them] time to look after personal issues at home, and I've taken up duties that were theirs... (Male Colonel 2)

Self-sacrificial behaviour and individual consideration

When the supportive and developmental examples were disaggregated further to show what percentage of these were deemed self-sacrificial, once again there was similarity between male and female leaders. Of the female leaders' supportive leadership examples, 67% were self-sacrificial; of the male leaders' supportive leadership examples, 60% were self-sacrificial. Leaders described sacrificing personal time for employee needs:

[I came to work] yesterday [weekend] to work on ... annual assessments so that they're well written and so that my individuals get the recognition they deserve (Female Colonel 1)

I'd never think twice about that [putting employee needs before my own]. I have an engagement or something that I was supposed to go on a specific evening but I also have to write a performance evaluation or sort someone out with leave or meet with

somebody about some other issues and I wouldn't think twice about bailing on my own personal stuff (Male Major 1)

Furthermore, leaders described doing employees' work or making sure that this was covered if employees needed time off for personal reasons or for extenuating circumstances:

On many occasions [I put employees before myself]. Allowing them time to look after personal issues at home, and I've taken up duties that were theirs. I take it as a team approach (Male Colonel 1)

I have one captain female working for me ... going through many hardships... and I needed to let her know, and I needed to let our boss know, that this person had to look after herself and we will find someone to go in there and look after the job. So in this case, I would say her needs, by and large, outweighed some of the things that needed to be done (Female Major 3)

Of the female developmental examples, 20% were self-sacrificial; of the male leaders' developmental leadership examples, 17% were self-sacrificial. The few developmental examples that were self-sacrificial often focused on developing key employees despite possible hardships it might cause:

Yes I have [put employee needs before my own]. Last job, I groomed someone who would be my successor. And eventually succeeded me early by getting promoted early (Male Major 3)

Certainly there's been several occasions ... if one of your subordinates can get sort of a better job somewhere else (Female Major 2)

There was also unanimous agreement that putting your employees before yourself was at the core of what leadership was all about. Illustrative quotes are as follows:

Well, I would hope so [hope that she puts employee needs before her own]. Boy, I mean, to me that's at the heart of leadership. Its organization before self and its subordinates, you know, soldier first, is what we talk about (Female Colonel 4)

I think that's a function of leadership. I think that as an effective leader you've always gotta do that ... I think the rule that you really live by is that never ask a subordinate to do something that you wouldn't do yourself. And that sort of sums it up (Male Major 2)

Content analysis of training materials

The content analysis of the training materials showed that both self-sacrifice and the soldier identity were key themes that were important for trainees to comprehend. In Table 2 the number of citations in the documents to each is summarized by category and theme. As this data illustrates, there is a focus on both the notion of self-sacrifice as an imperative for leaders in the military, and describing the soldier identity. The focus on self-sacrifice in terms of the role of the leader was very clear in these documents. The following quotations are illustrative of the message of self-sacrifice given to military leadership trainees:

A turning point in an unfolding scenario when success is on the line and the safety or lives of others may depend on the actions of appointed or emergent leaders. When danger is also involved and the leader is obliged to assume or share a high level of risk to catalyze or sustain group effort, we tend to classify this kind of leadership as 'heroic' (Leadership in the CF, p. 77)

All members accept and understand that they are subject to being lawfully ordered into harm's way under conditions that could lead to the loss of their lives. It is this concept that underpins the professional precept of mission, own troops and self, in that order, and without which the military professional commitment to mission accomplishment would be fatally undermined. (Duty with Honour, p. 26)

The soldier identity is illustrated by the following quotations. These quotations also demonstrate how the soldier identity is tied to the notion of self-sacrifice:

The profession of arms is distinguished by the concept to service, before self, the lawful, ordered application of military force and the acceptance of the concept of unlimited liability. (Duty with Honour, p. 10)

Canadian Forces personnel derive a collective unity and identity from the unique function they perform. In the Canadian case, the core of this function revolves around three concepts with which all members identify: voluntary military service, unlimited liability and service before self. (Duty with Honour, p. 20)

Discussion

Analysis of military leaders' perceptions of what leadership behaviour has been effective in extreme contexts suggest that transformational leadership, epitomized by individual consideration, is a foundation upon which effective functioning in extreme combat situation can rest. Content analysis of training materials showed that a collective, soldier identity based on self-sacrifice is prominent in the military context, especially for leaders. The notion of self-sacrifice defined a prototypical leader. Although the necessity of directive leadership in an actual extreme situation was clear, it was also clear that it would not be as effective without the transformational foundation. This underlines the possibility that in certain contexts transformational leadership may be more directive and equally effective to more participative enactment of transformational behaviour. In other words, an androgynous style that incorporates both masculine and feminine behaviours may be more effective in extreme contexts.

Social identity theory and the notion of situational strength led us to suggest that women and men would be more similar than different in their enactment of individual consideration in this extreme context. In our military sample, where the environment is the prototype of 'masculinity' and where the command and control nature of the organization puts tight constraints on everyone's behaviour (e.g., Zimbardo, 2008), we had anticipated an emphasis on masculine behaviour with fewer differences in male and female leadership styles. In this regard, we were only partly correct. With military participants, the differences between male and female leaders did fade away, but it was not because the women reported behaving in masculine ways, but because the opposite

was occurring: male leaders reported feminine behaviours (i.e. self-sacrifice and individual consideration) equivalent to the female leaders.

What appeared to be more important than gender in the military was the identity of soldier that was embedded in this extreme context. Indeed, the conditions of this extreme context may be responsible for the development of the soldier identity and the subsequent similarities between the male and female leaders we interviewed. Jennings & Hannah (2011) discuss the moral motivation within the military along two lines: rule following and identity conferring. They argue that the identity conferring moral motivation (the morality of aspiration) is essentially the morality of the “ ... ‘good soldier’, of excellence of character, of the fullest realization of martial virtue in the military context – honor, courage, sacrifice and so on ... ” (p.556). In essence, prototypical in-group military members espouse this moral motivation and acting in line with this aspiration “may become visceral – a felt requirement” (p. 556). It is the foundation that compels individuals in the military to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives with little extrinsic reward (Jennings & Hannah, 2011). Therefore, while we suspect that extreme contexts enable the development of the strong identity, and indeed the military appears to deliberately socialize leaders to embrace the soldier identity including the notion of ‘service before self’, we note that our data cannot speak to issues of causation. The two issues of the extreme context and the strong identity are confounded, and our data would need to be longitudinal in order to untangle this question.

A theoretical implication of this finding is that researchers should not assume that the behaviour of the prototypical leader in a traditionally masculine organization is masculine by default. Prototypicality may not ‘look’ like we assume based on traditional

gender roles. Since supportive/developmental behaviour and the underlying mechanism of self-sacrifice have been linked with feminine leadership stereotypes, our study shows that in an extreme context such as the military, traditionally feminine approaches to leadership may be quite effective in supporting people amidst danger, uncertainty, and strong situational influences; the positive image of the soldier identity is one who leads with what are considered elsewhere (Hackman et al., 1992) as feminine qualities. Indeed, it appears that the prototypical leader exhibits what is perceived as stereotypical feminine leadership behaviour in this context whether they are male or female.

Another implication specifically related to transformational leadership is that some aspects of this leadership style may be more relevant in certain extreme contexts. Individual consideration (a stereotypically feminine aspect) stands out clearly in this study. The warrior/soldier identity is paramount here, soldiers ideally are supposed to engage in war but not to like war, to engage in war in an honourable way (Jennings & Hannah, 2011); doing the honourable thing may be embedded in the individual consideration dimension. There may be other aspects of transformational leadership that are more important in other types of extreme contexts. For example, perhaps intellectual stimulation is more important in the context of emergency room physicians, where complex reasoning allows a physician to mentor others in highly creative ways to ensure their development while maintaining patient outcomes.

Another implication is that as researchers interested in gender and leadership we should not assume there is more variance between genders than within genders. The intersection of gender with occupation/profession may be an important way forward in our work. Occupational identity may be potentially a stronger driver of leadership

behaviour than gender within certain extreme contexts. For example, female police officers may think and act more similarly to male police officers than to females across different occupations (the same might be expected for men across occupations).

Past research on gender and individual consideration in the private/government and public/business sectors found that female leaders in those contexts enacted self-sacrifice more often than male leaders (Arnold and Loughlin, 2010). This aligns with both role congruity theory (i.e. women will need to enact a balanced style in terms of masculinity and femininity) and the need for non-prototypical leaders (women) to use self-sacrifice in order to conform to gender role stereotypes. But what happens when ‘serving the collective’ becomes the prototypical behaviour expected of all members of the group such as in the military? What happens when self-sacrifice is part of the ‘ethos’ of the warrior; “connected with what a military member is and aspires to be” (Jennings & Hannah, 2011, p.559)? With these military participants, the male leaders were just as likely to describe putting their followers’ needs above their own in self-sacrificing ways as were the female leaders. We posit that this was the case because this behaviour is expected of all members of the organization. The social identity of ‘soldier’ which incorporates putting oneself after one’s troops (motto is service before self) supersedes gender identity once leaders have reached certain positions in the hierarchy in this extreme context. Indeed we might hypothesize that in other types of organizations where the extreme situations/contexts faced differ along the lines of the five dimensions outlined in the introduction (Hannah et al., 2009; Hannah et al., 2010) our findings would be different. For example, within a trauma organization (e.g., emergency room physicians, paramedics) where the individuals whose lives are at risk are not the

employees but the patients, and where extreme events are more frequent, there may be different prototypical in-group members and therefore different qualities in those who emerge as leaders. Different characteristics again may emerge in ‘high reliability organizations’ such as police and firefighters (Hannah et al., 2009) where the goal is to actually avoid extreme events to begin with. Van Knippenberg and Van Knippenberg (2005) call for more research investigating the boundary conditions around the construct of self-sacrifice, and taking a broader range of leadership characteristics, situational and task contingencies into account. Future work can expand this study and compare different types of organizations that operate under extreme conditions, but vary in the potential risks, outcomes, and foci of their actions. Our study contributes to this nascent line of research.

This study also has practical implications. Our findings suggest that there is a need to look beyond the stereotypes associated with successful leadership in extreme contexts (i.e., masculine behaviour) toward a wider range of behaviours needed of leaders in such contexts. We found that although directive leadership is needed in this extreme context, this is balanced by behaviours typically associated with feminine stereotypes. There is a need for organizations to recognize and acknowledge the role of these feminine behaviours. This may give women a better chance of succeeding in these types of leadership roles. Recognizing the value of ‘feminine’ behaviour in such a ‘masculine’ context should also encourage leadership that carries the balance that we have found to be important to the leaders in our study.

Limitations

As with any research study, this one has limitations. The sample for the interviews was small and the interview data are self-report. We did find that we were not gaining any new information with the interviews at the point that we decided to conclude our data collection, but such a study could certainly be enhanced through incorporating a larger sample.

Conclusion

We propose that in a context where feminine attributes are deeply embedded in the identity of leaders within an organizational context, all leaders (male and female) will need to engage in these behaviours to be effective. Further, we cannot assume that in a masculine environment (i.e. male dominated) the identities of leaders will not include feminine attributes. Paradoxically, in a highly masculine environment filled with extreme danger, individual consideration, the most stereotypically feminine dimension of transformational leadership, appears to be a key driver of a leader's repertoire as well as his/her success, whether male or female.

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Table 1

Percentage and number of comments by category and leader sex

Category	Total number of comments	Female (% of total for female leaders)	Male (% of total for male leaders)
Supportive individual consideration	22	55	45
Subset coded as self sacrificial	16	75	70
Developmental individual consideration	22	45	55
Subset coded as self sacrificial	4	20	17

Table 2: Number of citations in documents by category

Category	Number of citations
Self- sacrifice	17
- Sub category - service before self	3
Soldier identity	12
- Sub category - organizational identity	1
Total number of citations (note that some citations are counted as falling within more than one category)	25

Appendix

Individual Consideration Interview Questions:

- 1) Can you describe your leadership style?
 - a. Has it been of benefit to you in your career?

- 2) Spending time coaching employees can be an important role for a leader depending on the context.
 - a. Is this important for you in your role?
 - b. [If yes] Can you estimate how much time you spend coaching and developing your employees?
 - c. Can you tell me a story about how you have dealt with a 'problem' employee in the past?

- 3) Has there ever been a time that you have put your employees' needs before your own?
 - a. [If yes] Is this something you do frequently?
 - b. Can you give me an example?

Footnotes

1. References in this format refer to quotes from our interview participants and are distinguished by sex, rank and number.