

Gender and politics: The relevance of gender on judgements about the merit of candidates and the fairness of quotas

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Abstract

Drawing on the conceptualization of meritocracy as an illusion, we argue that perceptions of merit and fairness of sex quotas in politics are influenced by gender ideology, specifically gender symbolical asymmetry, which equates men with individuals and the universal reference of 'person', and women with a sexed category. A total of 311 Portuguese participants read one of eight scenarios manipulating the sex and political competence of two candidates for an electoral list where only one would be selected. According to the experimental condition, either the female or the male candidate was presented as more competent or both candidates were presented as equally competent. In the control condition no such information was provided. Participants rated the merit of the selected candidate and the fairness of quotas. Results show that men take mostly only the candidates' competence information into consideration. Reflecting gender symbolic asymmetry women were also influenced by the fact that the selected candidate was male or female. Results are discussed in the light of the gender symbolic asymmetry model.

Keywords

gender quotas

politics

merit

fairness

gender

symbolic asymmetry

Various social groups (e.g. minorities, women) systematically fail to reach certain high status positions, particularly in politics. This pattern runs counter to the normative assumption existing in Western societies, according to which merit judgements are based solely on individual competence (Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna 2002), thus being ethnic- and gender-neutral.

Through our research we aim to question the commonly assumed gender neutrality of merit by empirically showing that it actually is a gendered issue (Young 1990). For that purpose, we will address the influence of gender symbolic meanings on judgements about both the merit of male and female political candidates and the fairness of sex quotas in this domain. Specifically, we suggest that the symbolically asymmetric representations of men and women (Amâncio 1997) exert ideological influence on these judgements.

For that purpose, we conducted a study among Portuguese undergraduates who read a scenario in which two candidates – a man and a woman – competed to head a political party list. Besides manipulating the gender of the candidates, our study also

manipulated their competence. Participants then judged the merit of the candidate and the fairness of gender quotas used. We expected that gender symbolic meanings and the participants' gender would influence these judgements.

Gender discrimination and gender quotas

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU 2013), women continue to be under-represented in politics worldwide (20.4 per cent), even though various countries already show relatively high percentages of women's participation in parliament (Freidenvall, Dahlerup and Skjeie 2006; IPU 2013). In Portugal the presence of Portuguese women has increased in the European and the national parliaments, but they are still a minority in these arenas (IPU 2013). Several affirmative action measures, such as quotas, have been adopted internationally as a strategy to restore past injustices and create a more egalitarian society (Bacchi 2006; Blanchard and Crosby 1989; Clayton and Crosby 1992; Crosby, Iyer and Sincharoen 2006; Crosby and VanDeVeer 2003; Kravitz and Platania 1993). In the political context, the application of gender quotas aims at guaranteeing that women are included in electoral lists, according to a quantified target (Krook 2007; Krook, Lovenduski and Squires 2009).

Despite the effectiveness of gender quotas, they tend to be misunderstood and to generate a great deal of controversy in various countries (Dahlerup 2008; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008), including Portugal (Santos and Amâncio 2010). Such controversies generally involve an attitude polarization between opponents and proponents of quotas usually revolving around the concepts of equality, representation, citizenship, justice and rights (Bacchi 2006; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008; Krook, Lovenduski and Squires

2009). Underlying the discourses against these kinds of measures is often the argument of merit (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008; Young 1990). According to this argument, the inclusion of women in electoral lists using quotas is an unfair process that will result in a reduction in the competence and legitimacy of deputies to represent people (Amâncio and Oliveira 2006). In the following section we will show that the merit argument is a fallacy ‘contaminated’ by gender ideology that contributes to the opposition to gender quotas.

The fairness of gender quotas: The argument of merit

In politics, a numerically and symbolically male context worldwide (Vianello and Moore 2004), people do not generally question the merit of men, but is highly relevant regarding women’s recruitment (Espada, Vasconcellos and Coucello 2002; Gaspard, Servan-Schreber and Gall 1992). This phenomenon implies that men, but not women, are perceived as unquestioningly and naturally meritorious in formal political positions (Gaspard, Servan-Schreber and Gall 1992).

The most common argument used against quotas is that the selection process is carried out on the basis of population demographic characteristics, and not so much on the basis of their competence and personal achievements: that is, the targets’ merit (Bobocel et al. 1998; Crosby, Iyer and Sincharoen 2006; Davey et al. 1999; Son Hing, Bobocel and Zanna 2002). This argument, however, is fallacious for various reasons. First, contrary to what opponents imply, the merit of quota targets is taken into account (Clayton and Crosby 1992). Furthermore, at least in Portugal, women have higher educational levels or qualifications than men (Almeida 2010). Also, very often the process of political recruitment actually results from non-meritocratic criteria (Vianello

and Moore 2004), such as connections to professional or union groups. Besides, although opponents of quotas implicitly assume there is an objective method of measuring merit uncontaminated by socio-demographic information ‘impartial, value-neutral, scientific measures of merit do not exist’ (Young 1990: 193; Crosby and Clayton 2001). In fact, at least in Portugal, the image of the ideal politician is essentially built around personality traits (Santos and Amâncio 2010). Furthermore, most of these traits pertain to a dimension stereotypically associated with males: that is, agency/competence (Amâncio 1989; Crawford and Unger 2000; Eagly and Mladinic 1994). Thus, the criteria to assess the quality of a politician are non-meritocratic and favour males. Finally, it has already been shown that attitudes towards quotas vary according to their target (Kravitz and Platania 1993; Santos and Amâncio 2010). People are thus not against quotas per se and the merit argument is not always used; instead, it depends on the specific target group, namely women. Attitudes against quotas for women are influenced by gender ideology and the merit argument seems to be strategically and asymmetrically used to maintain the political status quo.

Gender and symbolic asymmetry

Drawing on the Geneva model of intergroup relations (Deschamps 1982; Doise 1976; Lorenzi-Cioldi 1988) the symbolic asymmetry model argues that the differentiation between gender categories is based on male individuation and female de-individuation (Amâncio 1989; 1996; 1997; see Amâncio and Oliveira 2006 for a review). In other words, even when males are thought of as men, they see themselves and are seen as distinctive individuals. On the other hand, female individuality is often confounded with

their category: that is, females are primarily seen as women rather than as individuals. Also, in Amâncio's (1989) studies on gender stereotypes and identities, it is clear there is a strong parallel between the representation of adults and men, and the separation of women from that representation. Whereas men are the referent, women have a condition of alterity (Beauvoir 1949). Thus, images associated with the male category emerge as a universal category of distinctive individuals who are perceived as autonomous, self-determined persons and associated with the public sphere (Amâncio and Oliveira 2006). However, images associated with the female category emerge as a dependent gendered category, where individuals are perceived to fuse with the group and as being driven by specific contexts more associated with the private sphere, such as family care.

We believe that taking gender symbolic asymmetry into account is important for a better understanding of the existing controversy involving the merit argument in politics. Because merit is an individualizing criterion and men, more than women, are symbolically perceived as self-determined individuals associated with the public sphere, the merit argument favours (or 'justifies') male domination in politics. Women themselves internalize this asymmetry and tend to undervalue their work. For instance, research conducted in the United States is consistent with this notion. Specifically, women give internal reasons for their unfavourable positions (Clayton and Crosby 1992), attribute their failures to their own incompetence (Ruggiero and Taylor 1997) and consider that they deserve a lower salary than men (Major 1993). Also, they may oppose quotas by considering them to be paternalistic and 'humiliating' (Santos and Amâncio 2010). Furthermore, given the link between merit and judgements of fairness, we suggest symbolic asymmetry also exerts influence in such judgements. In fact, in Europe at least,

there is a gender gap in the way that women's under-representation in politics is explained and quotas are judged (Krook 2007; Meier 2008). In Belgium, for instance, whereas men indicate that women's under-representation derives from their lack of interest in politics, women indicate that their under-representation derives from structural factors, such as the way political parties operate, and they are more likely than men to consider quotas as being fair (Meier 2008).

Nevertheless, we should stress that although we believe this symbolic asymmetry has consequences for the way gender quotas and their targets are judged both by males and females, we are not implying that meritocratic reasoning will be completely absent in the participants' judgements. In fact, given that meritocracy is a dominant ideology in modern Western societies (Son Hing et al. 2011; Jost and Hunyady 2005; McCoy and Major 2007; Sidanius and Pratto 1999), information about the candidates' competence is expected to have an important role in participants' judgements – merit as a normative issue. Nevertheless, because meritocracy also is an illusion (Ellemers and Barreto 2009), particularly through the influence of gender ideology, we expect symbolic asymmetry to influence the participants' responses, depending on whether they are men or women and the candidate is presented as male or female – merit as a gendered issue.

Our study: Overview and hypotheses

The present study is based on work conducted in Switzerland by Lorenzi-Cioldi and Buschini (2002; 2005) who presented a case of two candidates (a female and, supposedly, a male candidate) in the process of being promoted to a decision-making position in the workplace. In their study the female candidate was always selected and the measures that

led to her choice were varied between-subjects: (1) only due to the candidate's competence; (2) first because of her competence and then her group membership; (3) first due to her group membership and then her competence; (4) her group membership was the only criterion for candidate selection. The participants provided answers to nine items, which assessed their representation of the measures and of the candidate (e.g. 'This measure is equitable', 'The candidate is qualified for the position'). Results showed that both male and female participants valued merit as the most important criterion. However, female participants were more in favour of this kind of measure than male participants, which is consistent with findings in Australia (Konrad and Hartmann 2001) and the United States (Kravitz and Platania 1993).

Although our study follows Lorenzi-Cioldi and Buschini, there are several differences worth noting that extend its scope. First, the scenarios are related to the political context; second, our study includes an additional independent variable – the gender category of the selected candidate – in order to ascertain the extent to which judgements about merit and gender quotas are affected by gender ideology. Thus, our scenarios depict not only more typical situations as with Lorenzi-Cioldi and Buschini – that is, having a member of a dominated group as the target of the quota (female candidate) – but also scenarios describing an atypical situation, absent in previous studies – that is, having a member of a dominant group as the target (male candidate). Finally, we added a control condition in which no references to the candidates' political qualities were made. In the latter case, our goal was to ascertain the default positions of individuals on the targets' merit and the fairness of gender quotas when they have no information about the candidates' competence. Thus, in our study male and female

participants judged the merit of either a male or a female candidate on the electoral list of a political party. When we presented information about the candidates' competence, participants could read that the candidates were either equally or unequally competent (in the control condition no such reference was made).

In formulating our hypotheses, we considered the following conflicting phenomena. On the one hand, there is a normative discourse, according to which merit and fairness assessments should be based on an individual's competence (normative merit and fairness). Thus, the candidates presented as more competent will be judged as having more merit. On the other hand, this meritocratic view is also an illusion (Ellemers and Barreto 2009) and gender ideology will interfere (i.e. moderate) with such judgements (gendered merit and fairness). Thus, both the gender of the quota target and that of participants will influence judgements of merit and fairness. In fact, although both men and women share gender asymmetric representations, women seem to internalize them more (Amâncio and Oliveira 2006). Thus, we expected that men's judgements, more than women's, would be based on the competence information provided. Also, we expected that women's judgements, more than men's, would be influenced by information of the gender quota target. If we take into account past research in Europe there seems to be a conflict among women towards quotas (they see quotas as relatively fair [Meier 2008] but also as humiliating [Santos and Amâncio 2010]) and we explored the direction(s) it took in our study.

Specifically, we expected a two-way interaction between the candidates' competence and the gender category of the selected candidate (from now onwards, 'selected candidates' gender'), such that in the condition that presents the candidates as

differently competent, participants would consider the more competent candidate as (1.1) having more merit, and (1.2) quotas as being fairer. However, we also expected that a more competent male candidate would be judged as (2.1) having even more merit than a more competent female candidate, and that (2.2) quotas would be judged as even fairer for the competent male than the competent female candidate. In both the condition of equal competence and in the control condition (no information about the candidates' political competence), the selected male candidate would be judged as (2.3) having more merit than the selected female candidate, and that (2.4) quotas would be fairer when the male rather than the female candidate was selected. Finally, we expected a three-way interaction between the candidates' competence, the gender of the selected candidate and the participants' gender category (from now onwards, 'participants' gender'), in such a way that (3.1) male participants would be more likely than female participants to base their judgements mainly on the candidates' competence. On the other hand, (3.2) female participants would vary their judgements more than male participants by taking into account not only the candidates' competence but also their gender.

Method

Participants and design

The participants were 311 undergraduates (157 males, 154 females) studying management at the Lisbon University Institute. Their ages ranged from 17 to 29, $M = 19.88$, $SD = 1.99$.

This study has a between-subjects quasi-experimental design: 2 (participants' gender: female/male) X 2 (gender of selected candidate: female/male) X 4 (candidates'

competence: equal competence; female candidate more competent; male candidate more competent; no information about competence as the control condition).

Material and procedure

The participants were randomly asked to read one of eight scenarios in which we manipulated two independent variables (the selected candidates' gender and competence), to complete the dependent measures according to their stand on the scenario they read, and finally to answer a few socio-demographic questions (e.g. age, gender). An earlier pre-test showed that the scenarios were understood as intended (Santos and Amâncio 2010). On average participants took approximately fifteen minutes to complete the tasks. At the end, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Experimental manipulations

The scenarios in this study involved the decision to recruit one of two members of Party X for an electoral list: either a female candidate (Júlia) or a male candidate (António). Except for the control condition, the structure of the scenarios involved the presentation of Júlia and António's academic qualifications, professional qualities (e.g. bright, role models in their profession; well-known lawyers) and partisan militancy (e.g. involved in politics since university). The candidates' competence was manipulated by including information taken from a prior study (Santos and Amâncio 2010), specifically personality traits associated with the ideal politician (e.g. has leadership qualities, determined). In all scenarios participants read that both Júlia and António were members of Party X and were available to participate as head of the list. Finally, they read the selection criteria

and which candidate was selected. We now describe the various scenarios presented to participants.

Scenario 1: equal competence and the female (male) candidate is chosen. Júlia and António met at law school, where they studied. All their colleagues considered them very bright, and lecturers considered them very competent, and with leadership qualities and determination. Their involvement in politics started at the same time. They were both actively involved in the student movement, leading the protests for better conditions. At present, Júlia and António are very well-known lawyers, seen as role models in their profession, honest and good speakers. They are both in the county commission of Party X. By the time the party was selecting the candidates for the next national elections both were available to participate in the party lists. During the last congress, Party X adopted a strategic resolution, according to which, in case of equal competences, preference should be given to women (men). That is why the Party chose Júlia (António) as their leading candidate for the next elections.

Scenario 2: the female candidate is more competent and the female (but the male) candidate is chosen.ⁱ In this scenario participants read that ‘[...] Júlia (António) has always been known for her (his) leadership qualities and her (his) determination [...] Currently Júlia (António) is a well-known lawyer, while António (Júlia) opted for a career in public administration [...] At the last congress, Party X adopted a strategic resolution according to which when there are two candidates for a position, the preference should be given to the most competent [the choice should be made by the

county commission]. For that reason Júlia (António) was chosen as head of the list. [This commission, despite the recognition of Júlia's stronger competences, chose António as head of list]'.

Scenario 3: the male candidate is more competent and the male (female) candidate is chosen. The two versions of this scenario correspond to the text of Scenario 2, with only the candidates' names changing accordingly.

Scenario 4 (control condition): absence of information about the candidates' competence, and the female (male) candidate is chosen: Júlia and António are active members of Party X. By the time of the selection of candidates for the next national elections, both were available to take part in the lists. In the last congress, Party X adopted a strategic resolution, according to which, when there are two candidates to a place, the choice should be made by the county commission, with Júlia (António) being chosen to head the list.

Dependent variables

Judgements on the merit of the selected candidate ($r = .47, p < .001$). The participants responded to two items adapted from Lorenzi-Cioldi and Buschini (2002; 2005) on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree): 'This candidate is qualified for the position', 'This candidate is the ideal person for the position of deputy.'

Judgements on the fairness of sex quotas ($\alpha = .87$). The participants evaluated the resolution through five seven-point semantic differentiators which were reverse-scored. Three items were adapted from a measure of justice by Taylor-Carter, Doverspike and Alexander (1995) (fair–unfair; beneficial–harmful; acceptable–unacceptable) and two (totally agree–totally disagree; totally correct–totally incorrect) were used in study two by Santos and Amâncio (2010). Scores of the dependent variables could potentially range from one to seven and represent the mean values of the respective items.

Results

We conducted one 2 (participants' gender) \times 2 (selected candidates' gender) \times 4 (candidates' competence) Anovas for each dependent variable, which indicated several significant main and interaction effects. The various effects obtained can be seen in Table 1. We should note that although the three-way effect turned out as non-significant (thus, disconfirming hypotheses [3.1] and [3.2]), various hypotheses received support. Several unexpected results did not contradict our assumptions regarding the simultaneous influence of meritocratic ideology and gender symbolic asymmetry – they only showed up in different ways. We conducted contrasts to compare expected differences when the omnibus test was significant and Tukey post-hoc tests to explore the patterns of results when the effect was not expected.

Judgements on the merit of the selected candidate

As can be seen in Table 2, there were significant differences in the condition of unequal competence. In fact, as predicted by hypothesis (1.1), when the female candidate was

presented as more competent, she was judged as having more merit than the male candidate, $M_{Júlia} = 5.02$ versus $M_{António} = 4.41$, $F(1, 295) = 5.38$, $p = .02$. Also, when the male candidate was presented as more competent, he was judged as having more merit than the female candidate, $M_{António} = 4.93$ versus $M_{Júlia} = 4.27$, $F(1, 295) = 7.04$, $p = .008$. Nevertheless, contrary to hypothesis (2.1), the competent male candidate was not judged as having more merit than the competent female candidate ($F < 1$). Also, contrary to hypothesis (2.3), in both the equal competence condition, $M_{António} = 5.05$ versus $M_{Júlia} = 4.94$, and the control condition, $M_{António} = 3.64$ versus $M_{Júlia} = 3.93$, the differences of perceived merit between the candidates were non-significant ($F < 1$ for both).

There were three unpredicted yet interesting results. First, male participants attributed more merit to the selected candidate, $M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.13$, than female participants, $M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.25$. Furthermore, a two-way interaction between the participants' gender and the candidates' competence indicated that this effect was not the same across all conditions. In fact, as can be seen in Table 3, female participants attributed significantly less merit than male participants when the female candidate was presented as more competent, $M_{males} = 5.05$ versus $M_{females} = 4.38$, $p = .03$, and when no information was provided (control condition), $M_{males} = 4.09$ versus $M_{females} = 3.48$, $p = .001$. On the contrary, participants did not either significantly differ in their judgements of merit when the candidates were equally competent, $M_{males} = 5.02$ versus $M_{females} = 4.97$, $p = .99$, or when the male candidate was presented as more competent, $M_{males} = 4.46$ versus $M_{females} = 4.74$, $p = .96$. Finally, the interaction between the participants' gender and the selected candidates' gender should restrain us from thinking female participants are completely 'blind' to their in-group interests. In fact, as can be seen in Table 4 female

participants attributed less merit to the male candidate than to the female candidate, $M_s = 4.22$ versus 4.56 ; $p = .003$, while male participants did not significantly differentiate between the merit of the male and the female candidates $M_s = 4.80$ versus 4.52 , $p = .36$.

Judgements on the fairness of sex quotas

As seen in Table 2, the patterns obtained did not generally meet our expectations. Specifically, contrary to hypothesis (1.2), participants considered quotas as significantly fairer when the less competent candidate was selected. Thus, when the female candidate was presented as more competent, quotas were judged as significantly fairer when the male candidate rather than the female candidate was selected, $M_s = 4.63$ versus 3.34 , $F(1, 295) = 15.19$, $p < .001$. When the male candidate was presented as more competent, quotas were judged as being fairer when the female rather than the male candidate was selected, $M_s = 4.59$ versus 3.61 , $F(1, 295) = 22.67$, $p = .001$. Also contrary to hypothesis (2.2), quotas were not judged as fairer for the competent male than the competent female candidate ($F < 1$). Hypothesis (2.4) received partial support. In fact, as expected, in the condition of equal competence participants judged the quotas as fairer in the case of the male candidate, $M = 5.47$, than in the case of the female candidate, $M_s = 4.39$, $F(1, 296) = 19.83$, $p < .001$. Contrary to expected, however, in the control condition, quotas were judged as fairer for the female than for the male candidate, $M_s = 4.59$ versus 3.92 , $F(1, 295) = 7.59$, $p = .006$.

Finally we would like to indicate that female participants judged quotas as significantly fairer than male participants, $M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.20$ versus $M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.32$, $F(1, 295) = 4.50$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .015$. An unexpected, and yet interesting interaction

between the selected candidates' gender and the participants' gender qualified that main effect. As can be seen in Table 4, male participant judgements on fairness toward the selected male and female candidates did not differ significantly, $M_{Júlia} = 4.28$ versus $M_{António} = 4.09$, $p = .52$. On the contrary, female participants judged quotas as significantly fairer in the case of the male, $M_{António} = 4.73$, than in the case of the female candidate, $M_{Júlia} = 4.18$, $p = .04$.

Discussion

The main goal of the present article is to analyse the influence of gender on individuals' judgements about the merit of candidates and the fairness of gender quotas in politics, which is a numerically and symbolically male-dominated world (Vianello and Moore 2004). We included these two variables because merit is one criterion of justice judgements, and one of the arguments used by opponents of gender quotas is that they violate the merit principle (Bacchi 2006; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2008; Young 1990). Our starting point was that while meritocracy is a central ideology in contemporary Western societies (Jost and Hunyady 2005; McCoy and Major 2007), it is also an illusion (Ellemers and Barreto 2009; Jost and Banaji 1994), and gender ideology, in the form of symbolic asymmetry (Amâncio 1996; 1997), would influence judgements about the merit of candidates and the fairness of gender quotas in politics. In our reasoning, these judgements would be influenced not only by the information supplied about the candidates' competence: specifically in the unequal competence conditions (merit and fairness as normative) in which case our merit measure would not be more than a manipulation check. In fact, reflecting symbolic asymmetry, we also predicted that

judgements would vary in all competence conditions depending on whether participants were told that the candidate was a man or a woman (merit and fairness as gendered). Reflecting internalized symbolic asymmetry, this variation would be especially displayed by women.

Our results showed that, as expected, while participants considered the more competent candidate had more merit than the less competent one, they unexpectedly judged quotas as fairer when the less competent candidate was selected (independently of being male or female). As far as judgements of merit are concerned, contrary to what we expected, there were no significant differences for the male and the female candidates. Nevertheless, in these conditions, the fairness of quotas was considered to be different depending on whether they concerned the female or the male candidate. On the one hand, when no information about the candidates' competence was provided, quotas were judged fairer when the female candidate was selected. On the other hand when the candidates were presented as having equal competence, quotas were judged fairer when the male candidate was selected.

These patterns seem to point to two systems of justice: one based on merit (generally more associated with men) and another aimed at helping incompetent people (generally more associated with women). The latter system of justice is very similar to the common argument that these measures are aimed at incompetent and/or less qualified targets (Heilman 1996; Pratkanis and Turner 1996). Our study, however, also shows this matter is even more complex than that. In fact, the aforementioned pattern coexists with higher judgements of fairness of quotas when the male candidate is selected in situations of equal competence.

In sum, although the merit criterion influences participants' judgements about quotas, the gender of the target also plays an important role. Our results indicate that people perceive quotas as a way of helping people who are objectively or symbolically incompetent, and it is in this sense that they are judged as fair. Even though unexpected, these results are extremely interesting and politically important and may explain why women find quotas humiliating (Santos and Amâncio 2010), even though they are the group most likely to say they are fair (Meier 2008). This matter may indicate that women are experiencing an internal conflict in respect to quotas, and that may explain not only why they gendered the merit and the fairness of quotas, but also why they do it in apparently contradictory ways.

Consistent with our reasoning, while women gendered merit and fairness, men viewed these issues normatively (i.e. their judgements depended mostly on the candidate's competence). In fact, women seemed to expect merit by default in the case of the male candidate, but not in the case of the female candidate, even when the opposite information about the candidates' competence is provided. Their expectation seems so strong that when participants are informed the female candidate is more competent, women's judgements on the merit of the selected candidate (male or the female) are lower than those made by men. This pattern is consistent with the notion women tend to undervalue their merit and performance (Clayton and Crosby 1992; Ellemers and Barreto 2009; Major 1993; Ruggiero and Taylor 1997). Thus, the influence of gender ideology, in the form of symbolic asymmetry (Amâncio 1997), is especially noticeable in the case of women who apparently are excluding themselves from the political world. As we will see

below, a similar pattern can also be found in judgements about the fairness of gender quotas.

In fact, women judge quotas as being significantly fairer if they are directed at the male candidate, whereas there is no difference in the judgements of men. Hence, just as women are more likely to contribute to the gendering of merit, they also contribute to the gendering of justice, by considering quotas to be fairer when a man is the target. This gendering may also indicate that they do not yet perceive the under-representation of women in politics as a disadvantage or discrimination, as has already been showed in other contexts (Clayton and Crosby 1992). We should stress, however, that a contradictory process seems to coexist among women. As noted, when they read that the female candidate is more competent they tend to lower their judgements about the merit of both candidates. An equivalent pattern was absent among men. Nevertheless, when women read which candidate was selected, they indicate that the male candidate had less merit than the female candidate. On the contrary, men did not significantly distinguish between the male and the female candidate. This result reinforces the notion that merit is especially gendered by women. Nevertheless, when they do not undervalue their merit, they appear not to promote it either; instead, they downplay the merit of men. This state of affairs may have unwanted consequences for women, such as a backlash from men who may perceive them to be promoting reverse domination, not equality. This threatening perception to men's position may give them a legitimizing argument (in their view at least) to perpetuate women's disadvantageous situation. If we are right in our reasoning, an important message is that women ought to engage in self-promotion by emphasizing their own competence (despite the 'norm of modesty' expected from them),

rather than by downplaying that of men. This reading of the results, however, should be considered with caution, since the predicted three-way interaction (which would have shown the pattern directly) was non-significant and our argument is based on our 'joining' of the various two-way interactions.

We would like to note some of the limitations of our study that should be addressed in the future. Our argument that women gender merit and justice more than men seems to imply that this is applicable to all or most women, when this is probably not the case. Future studies should replicate ours, but with a measure of adherence to sexist beliefs (Glick and Fiske 1996). Also, the fact that participants in our study were a convenient sample of university students in the management field may limit our conclusions. Yet, this apparent limitation is more informative than it may seem at first sight. In fact, our participants, as management students, should be especially socialized in meritocracy. Moreover, they are more likely than other sectors of society to be part of the economic elite, or at least to occupy positions involving formal decision-making in organizations. The fact that these women generally played the 'gender game' is disquieting because the more informed elements of society should supposedly be those which question social constructions, especially when these harm their interests. As it stands, there seems to be a measure of false consciousness (Jost and Banaji 1994) among women.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, we believe we have shown that complex – even apparently contradictory – processes are involved in judgements on merit and the fairness of gender quotas. We believe the methodology we followed has allowed us to show merit is mainly normative to men and gendered to women. It has also rendered

evident that women are expected to have less merit than men, which serves as a legitimizing mechanism for the greater presence of men in politics. Hence, we expect our study to shed some light on the social-psychological processes underlying the controversy on gender quotas.

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Table 1 Main and interaction effects of candidates' competence, the participants' sex and the selected candidates' sex on judgements of merit and fairness of sex quotas

Judgements on the merit of the selected candidate	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Candidates' competence	19.61	.001	.17
selected candidates' sex	0.07	.79	.001
participants' sex	4.85	.028	.02
candidates' competence * selected candidates' sex	4.72	.003	.05
candidates' competence * participants' sex	3.41	.018	.03
participants' sex * selected candidates' sex	6.51	.01	.02
candidates' competence * candidates' sex* participants' sex	0.65	.59	.007
Judgements on the fairness of sex quotas	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Candidates' competence	11.53	.001	.11
selected candidates' sex	1.89	.17	.006
participants' sex	4.50	.035	.015
candidates' competence * selected candidates' sex	21.28	.001	.18
candidates' competence * participants' sex	0.14	.94	.001
participants' sex * selected candidates' sex	8.50	.004	.03
candidates' competence * candidates' sex* participants' sex	0.59	.62	.006

Source: Authors' own data.

Note: Degrees of freedom of effects including candidates' competence are 3.295. Degrees of freedom of effects not including candidates' competence are 1.295.

Table 2 Interaction effect between the selected candidates' sex and candidates' competence by dependent variable

Dependent variable	Selected candidate	Candidate competence			Control condition
		Equal competence	Female more competent	Male more competent	
Judgements on the merit of the selected candidate	Male	5.05 ^a	4.41 ^a	4.93 ^a	3.64 ^a
	(António)	(1.05)	(1.33)	(1.20)	(1.06)
	Female	4.94 ^a	5.02 ^b	4.29 ^b	3.93 ^a
	(Júlia)	(0.86)	(1.01)	(1.26)	(0.94)
Judgements on the fairness of sex quotas	Male	5.47 ^a	4.63 ^a	3.61 ^a	3.92 ^a
	(António)	(1.11)	(0.85)	(1.27)	(1.15)
	Female	4.39 ^b	3.34 ^b	4.59 ^b	4.59 ^b
	(Júlia)	(1.42)	(0.99)	(0.86)	(1.12)

Source: Authors' own data.

Note: All scales varied between 1 and 7, with higher values meaning higher judgements of merit and fairness. Values in brackets represent standard deviations. Judgements were always made towards the selected candidate. Values with different superscripts in the column of each dependent variable are different at $p < .05$ or less.

Table 3 Interaction effect between candidates' competence and participants' sex regarding the merit of the selected candidate

Participants	Candidate competence			
	Equal competence	Female more competent	Male more competent	Control condition
Male	5.02 ^a (0.92)	5.05 ^a (0.88)	4.46 ^a (1.35)	4.09 ^a (0.96)
Female	4.97 ^a (0.92)	4.38 ^b (1.39)	4.74 ^a (1.17)	3.48 ^b (0.96)

Source: Authors' own data.

Note: All scales varied between 1 and 7, with higher values meaning higher judgements of merit. Values in brackets represent standard deviations. Judgements were always made towards the selected candidate. Values with different superscripts in the columns are different at $p < .05$ or less.

Table 4 **Interaction effect between the selected candidates' sex and participants' sex by dependent variable**

		Selected candidate	
		Male candidate (António)	Female candidate (Júlia)
Participants			
Judgements on the merit of the selected candidate	Male	4.80 ^a (1.21)	4.52 ^a (1.05)
	Female	4.22 ^b (1.29)	4.56 ^a (1.18)
	Male	4.09 ^a (1.33)	4.28 ^a (1.32)
	Female	4.73 ^b (1.23)	4.18 ^b (1.12)

Source: Authors' own data.

Note: All scales varied between 1 and 7, with higher values meaning higher judgements of merit and fairness. Values in brackets represent standard deviations. Judgements were always made towards the selected candidate. Values with different superscripts on each dependent variable are different at $p < .05$ or less.

Note

ⁱ We only quote the information that differs from Scenario 1.