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## The Reluctant Feminist: Angela Merkel's Cautious Leadership

LS Gaiek

Pepperdine University, lgaiek@pepperdine.edu

Marlyn Garcia

Pepperdine University, marlyn.garcia@pepperdine.edu

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### Cover Page Footnote

Corresponding Author Bio: L. S. Gaiek has a Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University and is pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change at Pepperdine University. Special interest in politics and women leaders. Previous conference presentations and publications on quantitative analysis, leadership, women leaders, leadership language, education, and social justice. lgaiek@pepperdine.edu Author Bio: Marlyn Garcia has a Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership from Pepperdine University and is pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in Global Leadership and Change at Pepperdine University. Marlyn Garcia's professional background is in marketing and corporate communications specializing in taking complex concepts to action and delivering positive results for Fortune500 media brands. Marlyn thrives in motivating and mentoring high performance teams. She has led marketing and communications functions as well as served as corporate spokesperson to achieve organizational objectives for global media brands. Marlyn's doctoral research focuses on diversity and inclusion organizational practices and ethnic representation in senior leadership roles.

## **The Reluctant Feminist: Angela Merkel's Cautious Leadership**

### **Introduction**

While global leadership research is in a relatively nascent stage, research focusing on females in the field remains less common (Adler, 2002; Adler & Osland, 2016; Amaechi, 2018; Ngunjiri & Madsen, 2015). Historically, few females in the world have been head of state (Adler, 1996, 1997; Beckwith, 2015; Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). However, the 21st century has seen a sharp increase, as eight nations have females as heads of state for the first time in history (Geiger & Kent, 2017; Keohane, 2020). While leadership by men in high-profile global leadership roles is well studied, there is less research on females (Adler, 1996, 1997; Adler & Osland, 2016; Schwanke, 2013; Werhane, 2007). For example, Adler and Osland (2016) implore, "Research is urgently needed to consolidate the patterns being established by the initial senior global leaders who are women and to begin to be able to better predict their impact on the future governance of organizations and society" (p. 42). Therefore, understanding how females in global leadership roles rose to power and how they lead is important, because females are, "Increasingly important as global leaders" (Adler et al., 2000, p. 210).

To gain insight and understanding of these overarching issues, in relation to how the 21st century has had an increase of female global leaders as heads of state, and subsequently a modern female global leader, this article examines Angela Merkel, the first female to hold Germany's highest elective office. Merkel is serving her fourth term as chancellor, and holds the record as the world's most powerful female eleven times over (Mushaben, 2019). The purpose of this article is to explore barriers and challenges to Merkel's rise as a global leader, how crisis forged and facilitated political opportunities for her, and subsequently how she navigated two distinct times of crisis. Next, this article considers an analysis of Merkel's leadership, which

outlines her leadership identity to deconstruct her reluctance concerning discussions on or about feminism. Finally, this article reflects upon feminist leadership, and discusses alternative perspectives for future consideration. This article offers a brief insight into the obfuscated machinations behind the construction of a modern female global leader, Angela Merkel.

### **Rise to Leadership: Barriers and Challenges**

Thus far, females that have risen to the top as heads of state do not hold on to that leadership position for long (Adler & Osland, 2016; Geiger & Kent, 2017; Madsen & Andrade, 2018). For example, as Geiger and Kent (2017) elucidate:

Fifty-six of the 146 nations (38%) studied by the World Economic Forum in 2014 and 2016 have had a female head of government or state for at least one year in the past half-century. In 31 of these countries, women have led for five years or less; in 10 nations, they have led for only a year. The Marshall Islands, which is not included on the WEF list of countries, has also had a female leader for one year. (para. 2).

Moreover, Atske et al. (2019) note that analyzation of data from the International Parliamentary Union unearths female members representing 24% of national legislative bodies globally, but while this percentage has grown marginally over the past decade, it remains significantly smaller than the fair share that would represent females in relation to the overall global population. These types of female leaders face challenging obstacles such as how to balance work, family, and caregiving (American Association of University Women (AAUW), 2016; Chin et al., 2018; Keohane, 2020; Sandberg, 2013). Moreover, leadership roles contain bifurcated outcomes for males and females in relation to systemic bias, sex discrimination, access to existing structural networks that contain similar role models and mentors, support systems, cultural expectations, and divergent financial income denouements (AAUW, 2016; Chin et al., 2018; Keohane, 2020; Sandberg, 2013). However, Angela Merkel defied these barriers and traditional odds, and is currently serving as Germany's Chancellor.

### *Stereotypes*

Merkel's success navigating stereotypes contradicts norms, considering that a meta-analysis encompassing 69 studies on leadership and stereotypes deduced that stereotypes regarding leadership are indubitably masculine (AAUW, 2016; Chin et al., 2018; Koenig et al., 2011). Females, in contrast to males, experience more societal and judgmental stereotypes (Adler & Osland, 2016; Chin et al., 2018; Eagly, 2018; Eagly & Diekmann, 2005; Keohane, 2020; Madsen & Andrade, 2018; Mushaben, 2018a, 2018b; Phillips, 2016; Ridge, 2015; Thompson & Lennartz, 2006). One such stereotype females encounter is the belief that females are less likely to be associated with leadership in comparison to men (Latu et al., 2013; Liu, 2019). Huddy and Terkildsen (1993) investigated such gender stereotypes, which led to the groundbreaking revelation that voters prefer masculine rather than feminine traits and characteristics when selecting a candidate for high office. Conversely, Chin et al. (2018) surmise, "The issue of being a woman" (p. 572) proffers advantageous unique leadership opportunities, which manifest in the form of a nickname, *Mutti*, signifying motherhood, and therefore, highlight female leadership. For Merkel, the nickname *Mutti* inculcates that, "Despite being childless, she is revered for her soft, caring image" (p. 573).

When cultural stereotypes and social expectations concerning what the role of the leader should embody contrasts with prospective role occupants, the juxtaposition creates a disadvantage concerning attainment and enactment of that role. For example, the common belief that leaders possess more agentic qualities, like self-sufficiency, ambition, dominance, and confidence, and do not possess communal qualities, like compassion and consideration (AAUW, 2016; Eagly, 2018; Koenig et al., 2011). Merkel embodies expectations for this agentic leader stereotype via the agentic quality of confidence (AAUW, 2016; Eagly, 2018; Koenig et al.,

2011). Merkel's leadership is, "Facilitated by membership in a demographic group whose cultural stereotype matches the leader stereotype" (Eagly, 2018, p. 188). However, even though Merkel overcame gender stereotypes, and fulfilled cultural and societal expectations for her role as a leader, additional barriers remained.

### ***The Labyrinth: Navigating Structural Systemic Oppression***

Perceptions of leadership irrefutably restrict female's advancement; namely, hidden gender-based biases, elusive imperceptible obstacles, persistent patriarchal social systems, and structural systemic societal oppression, or, what researchers refer to as the labyrinth (Eagly, 2018; Guerrero, 2011; Koenig et al., 2011; Keohane, 2020; Latu et al., 2013; Mushaben, 2018a, 2018b; Schwanke, 2013). Eagly (2018) explains that the common metaphor, "the glass ceiling," lacks accuracy, since it refers to a blockage, and implores replacement of this comparison, with the more accurate metaphor, "the labyrinth." Eagly explains ultimately one may find the center of the labyrinth via remarkable determination and vigilant maneuvering because it does not exist as a singular blockage, but rather as a maze which requires tenacious temerity. Nonetheless, successful navigation through this ostensible labyrinth, entailed myriad obstacles for Merkel, such as implicit or unconscious bias. According to the AAUW (2016), this type of bias occurs when one deliberately spurns stereotypes, but unconsciously continues to make evaluations based on stereotypes. Ross (2014) contends that people that consider themselves progressive, and not gender biased, harbor hidden gender-based biases, which exemplifies another challenge Merkel faced. Further beleaguered by this labyrinth, Merkel combatted nebulous entrenched gendered beliefs to her leadership, such as the fact that the definitions for both vision and charisma, "Are themselves rooted in gendered expectations" (Mushaben, 2018a, p. 38).

Merkel encountered yet another obstacle in this labyrinth, cultural tightness, or a culture's

power of norms and social sanctions, which, as Toh and Leonardelli (2012) explain, “Can provoke a resistance to change practices that historically placed men in leadership positions. Tighter cultures will yield fewer female represented among top leadership positions” (p. 604). Moreover, cultural tightness regulates egalitarian practices, for example, determining if people from both genders receive equal treatment, which can lead to the emergence of females as leaders (Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). Tight versus loose cultures, according to Gelfand et al. (2011), “Have strong norms and a low tolerance of deviant behavior—and those that are ‘loose’—have weak norms and a high tolerance of deviant behavior” (p. 1100). Distinguished as a tight culture, German culture itself contained myriad barriers for Merkel because competent German females do not:

See executive life as compatible with family life, fear that their styles of management would not be accepted by the majority, and that being a minority in a male domain would require them to battle against deeply entrenched ‘male rituals.’ (Toh & Leonardelli, 2013, p. 192).

Conversely, Germany’s tight culture may provide a benefit, instead of a challenge, for Merkel in the right circumstances. Merkel has a profound bond with the people of Germany, which, as Van Esch (2017) emphasizes, is, “Rooted in the vector of social identification” (p. 227). Accordingly, cultural forces initiated in crisis produced political opportunity, and thus two major political crises in Germany, in 1998 and 1999, created the right circumstances for the rise and election of Merkel (Beckwith, 2015).

### **Leadership During Crisis**

Unforeseen or unplanned change that involves leaders and their organization significantly misjudging their environment and thus rendered fundamentally unprepared for incidents they could not have anticipated results in a crisis (Nahavandi, 2012, p. 286). To understand Merkel’s rise, and the two crises Merkel subsequently faced, it is necessary to briefly examine the political

and economic infrastructure of post-World War II Germany. After World War II, the German Federal Republic organized both industry and business as a social market economy involving intimate relations between managers and unions, which, in 1946, Alfred Müller-Armack, who was the economic advisor to Ludwig Erhard, termed the “German model” (Engelen, 2020, p. 50). As the first economic minister, Ludwig Erhard cultivated the political underpinnings for the conservative Christian Democratic Union; namely, prosperity for all Germans, market economy regulation minimization, less government micromanagement, supply and demand determination for goods, services, prices and wages, private property rights, rigorous antitrust laws, and codetermination, “Putting worker representatives on company boards in the hope of reaching consensus on wages, benefits, and working conditions” (Engelen, 2020, p. 51).

The first crisis occurred when Chancellor Helmut Kohl, party leader of the long dominating Christian Democratic Union, and Germany’s Chancellor from 1982-1998, lost Germany’s 1998 elections to the leader of the Social Democratic Party, Gerhard Schröder, and subsequently resigned due to the loss (Beckwith, 2015; Engelen, 2020). From 1998-2005 Chancellor Gerhard Schröder radically changed the German economic model, and enacted draconian reforms for Germany’s welfare system and labor relations, which precipitated a long-term wage depression, and hastened upheaval not only amongst the Social Democrats, but also amongst Germany’s union organizations. This crisis ostensibly directed the Christian Democratic Union toward selection of Merkel for a leadership position (Beckwith, 2015; Chin et al., 2018; Engelen, 2020; Thompson & Lennartz, 2006). It is interesting to note that Thompson and Lennartz (2006) prognosticated that, “During the crisis, gender seemed to work for Merkel, not against her” (p. 106). Moreover, Thompson and Lennartz (2006) note the considerable conundrum males uniquely encounter; that is, that males are roughly but not precisely perceived



as more Machiavellian than females.

However, Eagly (2018) scrutinizes such a false dichotomy, between gender and advantage or disadvantage, and mitigates such a perspective via reiterating that role congruity theory invariably dictates, “Women are more vulnerable than men to failure when vying for leader roles” (p. 189). Role congruity theory, according to Eagly juxtaposes a society’s assumptions and suppositions about an anticipated role with those about prospective role occupants. Thompson and Lennartz (2006) argue that these abovementioned circumstances, such as Merkle appearing less Machiavellian, essentially benefited Merkel due to structural political underpinnings predetermining who attains power, and under what circumstances. In this case, Merkle benefitted and therefore rose in power because current male political leaders in Germany became tainted by scandal, and, consequently, the German public desired a cleaner, softer, feminine political leader.

The next crisis occurred in 1999, when Helmut Kohl admitted to illegal Swiss bank accounts and a corruption scandal involving, “Violation of campaign finance regulations, allegations of conflict of interest and interest-peddling” (Beckwith, 2015, p. 736). As such, Kohl triggered a crisis which ensnared the Christian Democratic Union once again, and the party’s regional sister, the Christian Social Union. Consequently, the amalgamation of these two crises generated cultural forces which would facilitate the political opportunity for the emergence of a female leader, Merkel, in Germany (Beckwith, 2015; Keohane, 2020; Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). Subsequently, in 2000, Merkel became the elected leader of the Christian Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Union, and the elected German Chancellor in 2005. As Chancellor, Merkel continued to navigate crises, first, the financial crisis of 2008, and second, the migration crisis in the fall of 2015 (Beckwith, 2015; Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017).

### *The Financial Crisis*

The collapse of sub-prime mortgages, and subsequent banking meltdown in the United States, created a global economic recession which ultimately led to what started as the Greek budgetary debacle, and rapidly became an unobstructed Greek sovereign debt crisis (Crawford & Czuczka, 2013; Matthijs, 2016). Thus, Merkel faced the Euro crisis, and the monumental decision to save the euro, which epitomizes post-war European harmony (Crawford & Czuczka, 2013; Matthijs, 2016). However, Merkel initially hesitated to provide fiscal support to Greece, given that doing so would violate not only her own fiscal economic morals, but also the quintessential German public's ethical beliefs concerning pragmatic budgetary austerity for personal and private actors (Matthijs, 2016). Therefore, Merkel's preliminary stalling and equivocation, concerning how to proceed during the crisis, resulted in an escalation of the crisis (Helms et al., 2019; Matthijs, 2016). It is not surprising then, that from an international perception, Merkel's leadership during the Euro crisis may appear as inefficient or even incompetent because it took an inordinate amount of time for her to comprehend the urgency of the crisis (Helms et al., 2019; Meiers, 2015; Van Esch, 2017).

Merkel's pragmatism and authenticity has successfully fostered trust amongst Germans, as is evident by, "the nickname of Mutti, or Mommy, that Germans have bestowed on her" (Eagly, 2018, p. 185). Merkel keenly navigated the Euro crisis without losing public approval by unintentionally invoking a female German stereotype early on during the crisis, the now infamous metaphor of the Swabian housewife (Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017). Merkel's Swabian housewife narrative entailed the moral hazards of living beyond one's means, and squarely placed the blame on market actors and governments that had lived beyond their means as the root cause of the crisis (Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017). The Swabian housewife hates

debt, and is infamously frugal, and serves as a vivid representation of Merkel's underpinning fiscal austerity beliefs.

Merkel hesitated to fiscally help Greece until she abruptly deduced that Greece's debacle endangered the entire European Union (Helms et al., 2019). Germany did eventually provide a bailout, but not before enumerating draconian fiscal rules (Helms et al., 2019; Matthijs, 2016). Moreover, it is worth noting that Merkel deferred to the German Minister of Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, during the Euro crisis negotiations (Van Esch, 2017). Additionally, Thompson and Lennartz (2006) surmise that the financial crisis not only galvanized Merkel's rise, but also buttressed it. Nevertheless, Merkel's leadership did not face earnest opposition during the Euro crisis, but the migration crisis conferred serious challenges for Merkel to overcome to maintain her leadership position (Helms & Van Esch, 2017; Van Esch, 2017).

### ***The Migration Crisis***

After the financial crisis, the European Union faced a humanitarian crisis, the migration crisis, which scholars have deduced originated with the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2011 (Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). Then in 2013, multitudinous refugees from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria sought asylum in Europe (Helms et al., 2019). This unique migration crisis for the European Union tested Merkel's leadership in a different way as compared to the previous financial crisis. The migration crisis was different for Merkel because over one million people entered Germany in search of asylum, and because Merkel viewed this as a humanitarian emergency (Helms et al., 2019; Leonard, 2016; Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). Merkel's unprecedented policy that allowed for the opening of Germany's borders created this mass influx of refugees and migrants (Dostal, 2017; Leonard, 2016; Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). European Union member states responded to the crisis divergently, but Merkel

was the only European leader, “to stand up and suggest a common EU action to face the migration crisis” (Toygür and Benvenuti, 2016, p. 2).

Merkel’s actions during this crisis provoked strong responses of disapproval both in Germany, and in the European Union leadership. Merkel felt strongly that it was Europe’s duty to help refugees, and said as much publicly (Dostal, 2017; Helms et al., 2019; Leonard, 2016; Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). However, Merkel’s hardline position, that Germany should have open borders from September 2015 to March 2016, created a common public fear in Germany that the policy would inevitably destabilize German society (Dostal, 2017). Furthermore, this uncompromising stance cost Merkel politically, which created a wedge issue in German politics (Dostal, 2017; Larres, 2018; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). However, understanding how Merkel navigated the migration crisis reveals the lengths to which Merkel would go to achieve goals and adhere to principles (Helms et al., 2019).

Throughout the migration crisis, Merkel repeatedly searched for methodologies which would allow European Union leadership, or other leaders outside the EU, to share the responsibility for solving the crisis (Helms et al., 2019; Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). However, this tactic resulted in harsh criticism, particularly from Eastern European countries, and subsequently led to derogatory perspectives concerning Merkel’s so-called moral imperialism (Helms et al., 2019; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016). Nevertheless, Merkel pursued a comprehensive common response for the migration crisis via the European Commission (Mushaben, 2017; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016).

Merkel consistently searched for potential allies and partners during the crisis to create a workable plan of action. For example, Merkel treated Turkey as a prospective colleague, and, “Took a leading role in Turkey’s negotiations with the EU” (Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016, p. 3).

Additionally, Merkel repeatedly gave other leaders credit for the creation and proposal of myriad plans aimed at resolving the crisis, revealing a pattern of a shared but dogged style of leadership (Beckwith, 2015; Chin et al., 2018; Eagly, 2018; Engelen, 2020; Helms et al., 2019; Larres, 2018; Mushaben, 2017, 2018a; Toygür & Benvenuti, 2016; Van Esch, 2017). Merkel's actions during the crisis revealed a fundamental belief in universal human rights, and in the importance of European solidarity, which provided approval of Merkel's leadership in the court of public opinion in Germany and internationally (Helms et al., 2019).

### **Leadership Analysis**

Nicknamed as The Iron Lady, or the de-facto leader of the free world, Merkel leads one of the most affluent nations in the European Union with a firm but caring disposition (Chin et al., 2018; Crawford & Czuczka, 2013; Hundal, 2017; Larres, 2018). While the term Iron Lady has been associated with Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Dilma Vana Rousseff, it conveys a negative antifeminist connotation denigrating to female leaders via, "Reflecting portrayals of strong leadership as 'uncharacteristic' of women" (Chin et al., 2018, p. 572). Merkel responded to the financial crisis and the migration crisis slowly, without pretentiousness, and carefully, but once Merkel determined the urgency of the given crisis, Merkel created a pragmatic plan of action and did not waver from it (Dostal, 2017; Eagly, 2018; Helms et al., 2019; Helms & Van Esch, 2017; Leonard, 2016; Matthijs, 2016; Mushaben, 2017). Girded by pragmatism, Merkel remains a powerful national leader for Germany, and for the European Union (Mushaben, 2018a, 2018b; Phillips, 2016; Van Esch, 2017; Wendler, 2017). Merkel distinguishes herself as a genuine leader, irrespective of her gender, against the current calamitous global leadership stage because Merkel has unflinchingly, "Looked like, spoken like, and acted like a proper national leader" (Versi, 2019, p. 15).

Merkel's successes as a leader stem from not only keen emotional and analytical intelligence, but also from a diligent, calculated, values based decision-making methodology (Chin et al., 2018; Beckwith, 2015; Eagly, 2018; Helms et al., 2019; Matthijs, 2016; Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017; Wendler, 2017). This type of decisive leadership founded upon humanitarian values and strong ethical underpinnings represents conviction leadership (Helms et al., 2019). Conviction leadership, according to Helms et al. incorporates, "A special affinity to James McGregor Burns' famous conception of transforming or transformational leadership" (p. 352). Conviction leadership differs from transforming or transformational leadership in that it requires the leader to possess motivation via their own principled beliefs, in lieu of political strategy or self-interest, and that the leader's, "deep belief in the righteousness of their viewpoints, is likely to show a particular tenacity in pursuing those beliefs even in the face of protracted controversy and powerful dissent" (Helms et al., 2019, p. 353).

Merkel demonstrated conviction leadership consistently throughout chancellorship; namely, during the financial crisis and the migration crisis (Beckwith, 2015; Chin et al., 2018; Eagly, 2018; Helms et al., 2019; Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017; Wendler, 2017). However, Mushaben (2019) concludes Merkel is indeed classifiable as transformational leader due to Merkel's, "Calm demeanor and principled responses to the Fukushima meltdown, the Euro-crisis, Putin's annexation of the Crimea, and the refugee crisis" (p. 326). As such, leadership analysis concerning Merkel's leadership style remains an enigma for future studies to dissect, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

### ***Leadership Identity***

Throughout Merkel's long career, Merkel has, for the most part, avoided disclosing beliefs concerning feminism, or if Merkel identifies as a feminist (Burke, 2019; Mushaben,

2018a, 2018b; Ridge, 2015; Schultheis, 2019). Merkel's identity as a leader intrinsically intertwined with the proto-typical domestic German, which Merkel judiciously curated by keeping private life private, and therefore manufactured an easily relatable public image (Chin et al., 2018; Eagly, 2018; Helms et al., 2019; Phillips, 2016; Thompson & Lennartz, 2006; Van Esch, 2017). Subsequently, in keeping with Merkel's dogged taciturnity, from 1991-1994, while Merkel was Kohl's Women's Minister, Merkel asserted that she did not identify with feminism (Mushaben 2018a). Additionally, in 2013, when presented with the question of whether Merkel considered herself to be a feminist, Merkel answered no. Merkel went on to qualify this response, adding, "Perhaps an interesting case of a woman in power, but no feminist. Real feminists would be offended if I described myself as one" (Ridge, 2015, para. 5).

Merkel's reluctance toward labialization as a feminist, according to Mushaben (2018b), encompasses three factors, "A desire to position herself between the antithetical nature of eastern and western gender regimes from 1949 to 1989; her time-tested method of 'learning by doing;' and her preference for pragmatic problem-solving over ideological party-principles" (p. 85). For Merkel, identifying as a feminist conflicted with Merkel's conviction leadership identity, because Merkel views feminists as females that have fought their entire lives for gender parity (Burke, 2019; Ridge, 2015; Mushaben, 2018b; Schultheis, 2019). Regarding feminism, Merkel essentially identifies with the definition that Queen Máxima, of the Netherlands, heralded; namely, "It's feminism if I am in favor of men and women having the same life opportunities" (Burke, 2019, para. 5). Merkel's resplendent candor came as a welcome surprise, because, "It was her first time broaching the topic at such length in more than 13 years as chancellor" (Schultheis, 2019, para. 2).

What is intriguing to note, is that on the same day Merkel announced stepping down as chancellor, in 2021, Merkel was forthcoming in sharing a personal perspective concerning the gender pay gap (Schultheis, 2019; Stone, 2018). Perhaps Merkel's imminent retirement from public office bestowed a newfound frankness (Burke, 2019; Schultheis, 2019). For example, while attending an Israeli tech summit and roundtable, Merkel discussed gender parity. Asked about being the only female that attended the roundtable, Merkel responded, "It would be better if next time, there was a woman among all those hopeful pioneers of the future" (Lachmi, 2018, para. 2). Moreover, Merkel divulged, in a different interview, the belief that females indubitably endure hinderances, substantiating females indeed do have a more difficult time than males, and that, "Women have a harder time because they first have to shape new paradigms" (Burke, 2019, para. 6).

However, true to identifying with conviction leadership as an identity, Merkel has shied away from labialization as an important female role model, and has deferred to Hillary Clinton, Margaret Thatcher, and Theresa May, as being far more significant examples (Burke, 2019). Fundamentally, this is emblematic of Merkel's conviction leadership identity; that is, that Merkel is collaborative, inclusive, noncontroversial, and deferential by nature (Chin et al., 2018; Beckwith, 2015; Eagly, 2018; Helms et al., 2019; Matthijs, 2016; Pühringer, 2015; Van Esch, 2017; Wendler, 2017). Thus, Merkel's reluctance concerning discussions on or about feminism is deconstructed via examination of not only her utilization and application of conviction leadership, but also how Merkel adroitly navigated the notorious obfuscated machinations of the labyrinth chock full of acuties concerning leadership that unquestionably restrict female advancement; specifically, clandestine gender-based biases, cagey undetectable barriers, obstreperous patriarchal social systems, and structural systemic societal oppression (Eagly, 2018;



Guerrero, 2011; Koenig et al., 2011; Keohane, 2020; Latu et al., 2013; Mushaben, 2018a, 2018b; Schwanke, 2013).

### ***Feminist Leadership***

A definition for feminist leadership, “Has not been fully explored or developed as a feminist construct” (Batliwala, 2011, p. 20). Fundamentally, imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal Western culture-based neocolonialism has dominated feminist leadership research literature (Batliwala, 2011; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020). Decolonization of this construct, as well as inclusion of historically oppressed peoples, helps deconstruct feminist leadership so that female leaders may utilize their power in a way which not only promotes social justice, but also inspires inclusivity and social transformation (Batliwala, 2011; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020). Historically, the feminization of female leaders surreptitiously negates the legitimacy of their leadership (AAUW, 2016; Chin et al., 2018; Keohane, 2020; Sandberg, 2013). Thus, this power struggle galvanizes a Herculean force, which relentlessly dissects feminist leadership, thereby depriving female leaders’ legitimacy via, “Systemic discrimination in theory and practice” (Pullen & Vachhani, 2020, p. 1). For example, Bell and Sinclair (2016) unearthed males benefit from an inordinate amount of visibility, buttressed by structural systemic gender biases, and females significantly lack such visibility. How then, can a definition for feminist leadership encompass this nebulous epoch in a meaningful way? Thus, scholars still struggle to clearly define feminist leadership.

The feminist leadership diamond, created by Batliwala (2011), advocates a definition for feminist leadership that includes four sections for social transformation; namely, power, principles and values, politics and purpose, and practices. Power, according to Batliwala (2011) delineates utilization of power intentionally and conscientiously so that all people within the

power structure may wield it and share it concerning the three dimensions in which power operates; namely, public, private, and intimate power realms, and visible, hidden, invisible, direct, indirect, and agenda-setting power. Values and principles entail feminist leadership which is comprised of equality, equity, inclusion, universal human rights, physical integrity and security, freedom from coercion or violence, peace, a healthy planet, honor of diversity and difference, democracy, transparency, accountability, collaborative use, and practice of power, and reproductive rights (Batliwala, 2011). Politics and purpose call for transformative transgressive feminist leadership. Finally, practice necessitates visioning work, political work, strategic work, relationship work, communication work, resourcing work, and managerial work concerning feminist leadership that conscientiously avoids deconstruction from the feminist leadership diamond.

Likewise, Alonso and Langle De Paz (2019) promulgate a definition for feminist leadership in the form of inclusivity, empowerment, and union. Similarly, Michna's (2019) interpretation surmises feminist leadership which may, "Adopt a feminist perspective and present feminism as a critical theory, which refers to traditional philosophical concepts with distrust, pointing to their main weaknesses: exclusivity, gender-based characterization, and uniformization of phenomena and experiences" (p. 181). Yet, The Global Gender Gap Report (2020) concludes that gender parity remains unobtainable for the next 99.5 years on average globally, and further entails that for North America gender parity remains out of reach for 151 years, compared to 54 years in Western Europe. Moreover, The World Economic Forum (2019) implores gender parity's attainment since gender parity underpins whether societies and economies prosper.

Nonetheless, it is essential that feminist leadership entails not only gender parity, but also inclusion regardless of race, class, sexual orientation, or other historical forms of systemic oppression (Alonso & Langle De Paz, 2019; AAUW, 2016; Batliwala, 2011; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020). Reflexivity helps to negate the historical exclusive undertow feminist research draw, by helping researchers identify positionality and power inherent in studies' construction (Hamilton, 2020). Unfortunately, not all research utilizes reflexivity as a tool for overcoming historic systemic currents concerning feminist leadership research. At its best, feminist leadership resembles a resplendent quilt, woven together via collaboration over rivalry, by females of all races, classes, sexual orientations or gender identifications, and historically oppressed peoples, but, just like a quilt, it has another side.

### *Alternative Perspectives*

At its worst, feminist leadership is myopic and exclusive, and only benefits or includes white privileged-class females (Atkinson et al., 2019; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; Hamilton, 2020; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020). Research concerning feminist leadership contains myriad shortcomings, such as stagnation and alienation (Atkinson et al., 2019; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020). For example, Michna (2019) notes trends in feminist epistemological research, such as feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint theories, and feminist postmodernism which present an issue concerning objectivity because, "In Western European culture, from antiquity to modern times, the pursuit of objectivity has dominated all scientific and philosophical inquiries, while leading to the formation of a specific patriarchal and androcentric system of socio-political and cultural forces" (p. 180). However, hooks (2015), through utilization of her own critical race theory lens, envisions a goal for global inclusive feminism, from a decolonialized feminist perspective, explaining that feminism should, "Reach out and join

global struggles to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (p. 47). In other words, the pursuit of feminist research requires cognizance of systemic oppression and unintentional exclusion of female minorities.

Conversely, Western feminist leadership research thus far has excluded people from divergent nonwhite backgrounds, and is still colonial concerning discourse and edification dissemination (Atkinson et al., 2019; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; Hamilton, 2020; hooks, 2015; Kim, 2020). Third world countries’ exclusion from feminist leadership research creates an echo chamber for confirmation bias to manifest and metastasize, which results in the creation of more research that is Western culture-based, such as neocolonial feminist orthodoxies promoting heteronormative, patriarchal, imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, and patriarchal paradigms (Alonso & Langle De Paz, 2019; AAUW, 2016; Batliwala, 2011; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; hooks, 2015; Lewis, 2005; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020).

Contrariwise, old guard antiquated stereotypes concerning feminist leadership, and feminism, that challenge the status quo, thereby disrupting deep-seated stereotypes, provide hope for the future of feminist leadership, research, and female leaders (Atkinson et al., 2019; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; hooks, 2015; Lewis, 2005). For example, new feminist research explores makeup application YouTube tutorials which promote beauty routines as a form of feminism, and propagate makeup application as a methodology for fighting the patriarchy and attaining social justice (Kennedy, 2016; Maguire, 2015; March, 2013; White, 2018). However, it is worth noting that ineradicable negative perspectives of feminism may play a role in global female leaders’ trepidation and aversion of embracing the feminist leader label; nonetheless, this inquiry is beyond the scope of this article, but this distinct gap in the literature deserves consideration in future feminist leadership research (Atkinson et al., 2019; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; hooks, 2015;

Lewis, 2005). Future feminist leadership research may find it advantageous to progress in a manner that promotes a postcolonial analytic paradigm which incorporates consideration of past research's exclusions, and instead promotes inclusion (Alonso & Langle De Paz, 2019; AAUW, 2016; Batliwala, 2011; Chin et al., 2018; De Jong & Kimm, 2017; hooks, 2015; Keohane, 2020; Lewis, 2005; Pullen & Vachhani, 2020; Sandberg, 2013; The Global Gender Gap Report, 2020).

### **Summary**

This article considered Angela Merkel as a female global leader. Barriers and challenges to Angela Merkel's rise as a global leader, how crisis forged and facilitated political opportunities, and subsequently examined how Merkel navigated two distinct times of crisis. Next, this article considered an analysis of Angela Merkel's leadership, which outlined Merkel's leadership identity, to deconstruct Merkel's reluctance concerning discussions on or about feminism. Finally, this article reflected upon feminist leadership, and discussed alternative perspectives for future consideration. This article offered a brief insight into the obfuscated machinations behind the construction of a modern female global leader, Angela Merkel.

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