
GENDER AND LEADERSHIP: NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY'S FEMALE ROTU AND CADETS' PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND MILITARY LEADERSHIP.

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Abstract: Gender continues to be a barrier for women in the military institution especially in holding leadership positions, particularly among Reserve Officers' Training Unit (ROTU) and military cadet officers in higher education. This study examines the social construction of gender and leadership by female cadets and reserve officers in a predominately male environment. Achieving a balance between femininity and masculinity is a common discussion among researchers on women's military leadership. This article is supported by gender schema theory and role congruity theory. The survey was administered to 40 respondents from the Military and ROTU using Google Form. The results showed that the respondents face gender discrimination on the basis of leadership and gender. The female respondents are not provided equal opportunities as their male cadets/ROTU even though the respondents feel they are equally capable to hold their ground in the military.

Key words: *Gender, Military, ROTU, Leadership.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender continues to be a barrier for females in the military institution especially in holding leadership positions, particularly among Reserve Officers' Training Unit (ROTU) and military cadet officers in higher education. The military have predominantly viewed females as less efficient physically, emotionally and mentally than their male officers despite efforts to gain equal opportunities in all professional avenues [1]. The Malaysian military setting provides a significant research area to evaluate gender and leadership roles as it has always been a traditionally male dominated profession worked to eliminate formal gender segregation and discrimination. Surprisingly, females make up 10% of the overall requirement in the Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) – a 4% hike from 2003 [2]. In this country, women have been involved in the military since the 1960s and presently there are

6,743 women in the army [2]. Apart from holding positions in combat support, the women in MAF also serve as military doctors and nurses.

However, women still face stereotypes about their capability in performing their duties in the military. Gender stereotypes within the military comes as no surprise to researchers, least of all, women in the military. No matter how much researchers push for gender equity, women are likely to be picked apart for their physical appearance in trying to fit the impossible beauty standards set by society. The impacts of sexism has long been felt since Western civilization and was first popularized by Susan Fiske in 1996.

Reference [3] broke down the meaning of sexism into two main categories, namely hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is seen to be blatantly negative towards women, while benevolent sexism is seen as being positive, representing women as being needy and deserve

care and protection. Both forms deem women as less capable and competent, justifying lower expectations of them and limiting their roles. These beliefs are apparent in a variety of male-dominated professions, including science, technology, engineering as well as the military.

Leadership on the other hand, is a process which influences people to attain necessary goals. Without proper leadership, an organisation will collapse as there will be no one to guide and lead the organisation to achieve certain goals while working its way out of a depression. Regardless of a person's point in life, he or she is directly or indirectly be affected by leadership. This study used Gender Schema Theory and Role Congruity Theory to further comprehend the idea of gender and leadership among the different genders.

Gender Schema Theory (GST) introduced by Sandra Bem in 1981 posits how people comprehend stereotypical ideals of masculine and feminine traits, and how they conform to fit within these roles. Masculine traits for men includes the protector role, while women are more inclined to be nurturing and being expressive. These preconceived notions of gender are from the earliest stages of development; home, school and work places. GST not only conforms to how people process information but also on attitudes and beliefs about gender appropriate behaviour.

For instance, a child raised in a male dominant background may grow up to believe he has to be in power as opposed to being liberal with the other gender. Similarly, a child raised in a more progressive culture, may grow up to respect both genders as being able to achieve equally. Similarly, many of these influences are overt, while others are seen as more subtle. The media also plays a role in cultivating GST by presenting women in a secondary position- be it in advertisements, movies, magazines to name a few. All these representations add up to the formation of GST.

Role congruity theory, on the other hand, introduced by [4] looks beyond the social role theory to consider the congruity between gender

roles, especially leadership roles, as well as the processes that influence congruity perceptions.

Perception of the female gender is seen as one of the causes of prejudice preventing women from achieving high status positions. "A potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles" [4]. Evidence from various research [5, 6] proves that these prejudices occur, especially in institutions that boost perspicacity of incongruity in the female gender role and leadership roles. This paper therefore examines the perception of gender and leadership roles among selected ROTU and female cadets in NDUM.

2.METHOD

This study administered a survey using Google Form to 40 selected respondents to gather feedback on how gender is viewed in a male dominated environment together with possible leadership roles held by the respondents. The reason for using Google Form is because it is relevant, quick and can reach intended respondents fast using social media and communication media. The specific link is sent to the recipients, and upon answering the questions, Google Form will update the relevant data respectively.

The items used in the questionnaire are divided into two parts namely background information, gender and leadership discrimination in the selected environment and gender in the military. A pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents to test the reliability of the questions, after which certain changes were made to suit the respondents.

For this research, snowball sampling is used to recruit respondents for the study. Snowball sampling is used where potential participants are hard to find due to time constraint faced by the respondents. It is called snowball sampling because (in theory) once a ball is rolling, it picks

up more snow along the way and becomes larger and larger [7].

3.FINDINGS

The data from the survey consisted of 18 female ROTU's and 22 female cadet officers. The survey could not be administered to all students in NDUM due to their various training schedules. The respondents were asked 13 questions in regards to gender, leadership and the MAF. Table 1 below puts forward 11 questions that required the respondents to answer 'Yes' or 'No'.

Table 1: Respondents Feedback

QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1. Do you ever feel a conflict between being a woman and being in the military?	87.5%	12.5%
2. Do you feel your male colleagues think you do your job as well as they do?	47.5%	52.5%
3. Do you hold any positions in the military/ ROTU?	25%	75%
4. Do you think female cadets/ROTU are not given enough opportunity to be leaders?	77.5%	22.5%
5. Do you feel the male cadets continuously look down on female cadets/ ROTU	92.5%	7.5%
6. Do you think that women can exercise power and authority while retaining their femininity?	70%	30%
7. Do you think that women are physically and emotionally fit enough to fight in combat?	52.5%	47.5%

8. Have you ever been objectified due to your sex?	80%	20%
9. Do you believe that putting women in combat roles will cause a threat to the military?	70%	30%
10. Do you think women can be good military leaders?	77.5%	22.5%
11. Do you think that the Army will allow women to hold high positions?	25%	75%

The respondents were asked if they felt a conflict between being a woman and being in the military and majority (87.5%) agreed that they did have a conflict being a women in a male dominated environment. To add to that, (75%) of the respondents do not hold any high ranking positions in the company/battalion as opposed to their male cadets/ROTU. These ranks range from Senior Under Officer to Corporals. Apart from being looked down by their male counterparts (92.5%) due to their gender, the respondents (80%) also agreed that they have been objectified due to their gender. Subsequently, [8] in their study agreed that female soldiers reported feeling unfairly judged by the male cadets and doubted their abilities. The researchers also noted that men were merely policing the boundaries of gender in the military and since most of the leadership positions are held by men, it furthers reinforces gender inequality in the military. Objections to women in the military also includes the effectiveness of the armed forces whereby women are deemed not physically and mentally capable of bridging the standards of military occupations [9].

In line with role congruity theory, since women are faced with gender inequality in the military, they do not view themselves fit for combat roles as (70%) agreed that putting women in combat roles will cause a threat to the military. This could be due to their male colleagues remaining

oblivious to the nature of gender identity while maintaining their masculinity and authority. That said, (77.5%) respondents do agree that women can be good military leaders if provided the opportunity while when asked if the army will allow women to hold high ranking positions, (75%) respondents did not agree. It is evident therefore that women are capable of holding high ranking positions in the military, but due to how their gender are viewed by their male colleagues, they have come to terms that leadership skills are seen as obsolete in them. Reference [10] on the other hand notes that placing women in combat roles can improve military capabilities, making the institution less gender bias and assist in reducing sexual harassment issues. She further states that it is too early to draw a definite conclusion on this policy. In 2002, Geoff Hoon also mentioned that a women's presence in the military was seen as a mere distraction due to their need for protection or merely sexual attraction.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings therefore concludes that women do see themselves fit for the military; physically and mentally, but due to how their gender has been viewed by the alpha male, women have been taking a back seat on leadership roles in the military. Physiological differences between the genders should not be seen as a setback rather it should be used to create a more versatile army, and not disregard a good soldier from serving merely because one is a female.

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