

WOMEN LEADERS: Does it make a difference?

Alene Moris



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When I thought about doing this presentation, I realized I had been thinking about this idea for many, many years. This will not be an academic lecture but rather, I hope to just share my thinking for your consideration.

Before I tackle the subject of women leaders, I have to say how excited I am to see expert after expert in International studies saying recently that the best thing to do to improve a very poor country is to help the women who will help the families which will help their communities that everyone will benefit. I am so pleased to see that women are finally being credited with the values they bring to the table when they get some respect and support.

About 50 years ago, in 1970, when I began to work on behalf of women, I realized that the topic was incredibly complicated. But, I needed to know whether women as leaders would really help the country and the world. Would they really make a difference from the traditional men who have been running the country and the world since the story of mankind began?

But, this title today asks a question that is hard to answer. Yes, women are different from men but one woman can be very different from another woman. Think Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin. Both female but totally different creatures. So, it could be argued that there is no point in discussing women as different from men when there is so much difference possible between women.

And of course, it is the same thing for men: think Barack Obama and Donald Trump. They are both male but beyond that, there is little that could be called a common trait. So, again, it could be argued that there is no point in discussing the difference between men and women when there is so much difference between individual men.

But as we all know, the difference between men and women has been the most interesting topic since history began. Even if you just take the Bible as your primary source, the story of Adam and Eve sets the tone for many centuries to come. God made men and women different we have been taught for procreation purposes. To have babies for the next generation.

Anthropologists, of course, look at the situation from a different stance. They state the differences are due to the various functions of the male and female duo: the female is to nurture or look after the children and her husband and the home. The male is to be the brave hunter, the outside one who brings home the bacon, as the saying goes. It is these very different functions that cause men and women to be very different, some anthropologists say.

But today, I am not so foolish as to try and discuss the many different ways men and women are different. I am going to try to help us understand how men and women **as political leaders might behave**. Now, I use the phrase "might behave" because we don't really know how women as a group might behave as political leaders because we have almost none to examine. Since the beginning of recorded history, the leaders that have been described have all been men with the exception of a few notable queens from

long, long ago in countries far from here and a dozen or so recent prime ministers. So we have few examples of individual women in power positions to study... and no large group of women functioning as a governing body.

And furthermore, the few women who **have** been top leaders like Golda Meier of Israel and Margaret Thatcher of England and a number of women governing in South America, these women were functioning as a sole female in a congregation of men operating in a system of politics designed by male ideas. We have to remember that no women were consulted when the founding fathers designed the country.

Therefore, I propose that **the first thing that women need to fully realize is that women live in a world designed by men.** So, when a woman rises to leadership, it is as though she is working in a foreign country. She has had to learn the language and the nuances of the language and the different ways of thinking in this foreign country. As we heard this fall, there is something called locker room banter that women don't understand. When they hear it, it just sounds crude and rude and most women don't want to know that their coworkers and friends might be thinking of them in those terms.

But, when some women expressed their disgust at this locker room banter, they were told to lighten up; that's just the way men are, they were told.

Now some men I know resented that; they argued that they were NOT like that. So again, individual men are very different. But, males as a gender? Yes. They do have many common traits. And, women have to learn them if they are to succeed in this male designed world. Many women in the private sector and government have done that. A woman CEO was quoted as saying, "If you want to succeed, you have to figure out how men think, and then adapt your own thinking so you can understand each other." But the danger is that women who adapt too much can become fake men and lose their feminine perspective.

Another strange thing a woman politician encounters is the idea that your first loyalty should be to your party rather than to the good of your constituents. This idea stems from the military, an extremely male culture, in which you always, always obey your senior officer and in politics, right or wrong, you must be loyal to your party. If you don't, you can pay a very high political price. At the least, you will have trouble raising money for the next election.

Riane Eisler, a woman who writes about women in books like *The Chalice and the Blade* and *The Real Wealth of Nations* says that people's welfare must always come first. Loyalty to the community is your first loyalty. NOT loyalty to your party, she insists. It is a feminine way of thinking, she added. This difference with the male way of thinking is critical. It could change present systems that emphasize individual rights and neglect the health of the community. Many women, including some female lawyers I know, think that The Bill of Rights might need to be moderated.

Again, what is needed is both men and women leaders in a rough balance to have the strength and wisdom of both that is badly needed. But at this time, we in America (and in all but a few countries) do not have anything even resembling a balance.

In 2015, we have only about 19% of our House and 20% female in our Senate at a national level. So females are far from the 35% critical mass needed to be truly influential. In state and local government, women are much better represented but I have not seen any studies regarding the differences that women have made in those cities and counties. Those of you who have children or grandchildren might suggest they tackle this topic.

But for now, I am going to go out on a limb and propose some traits which might be considered a strength of women if they came into political leadership. These are traits that many experts have noticed consistently in women. But I know from experience that once I name a trait of women or men, someone will speak up and say, "But I know a women who isn't like that!" or "My brother is not like that." So these traits are very common for a gender but not for everyone of that gender.

The first trait I will suggest is the willingness of most women to **compromise**, to find ways to cooperate with others to get something done. I remember when Senator Patty Murray was asked once what helped her to be successful and her answer came quickly, "I can compromise and that is quite rare in a male Senate." In the discussion that followed, it was agreed that men have been raised to think that it is manly to stick to your guns and NOT compromise. It becomes an issue of masculinity to NOT compromise.

Another trait that is mentioned by many scholars and political observers is that women tend to be **pragmatic**. They are seldom dominated by some political theory that must be honored as their party demands. But rather, most women politicians are more interested in getting a practical solution even if it isn't perfect and even if it can't be claimed as consistent with some economic or political theory. Maybe you remember when the big theory was the trickle-down theory which said that if you let rich people get richer, the money will come down to everyone else in one way or the other. That, of course, was a disaster based on a bad theory. And, uncounted numbers of people were badly harmed in the process.

We also see this when politicians insist that, except for the military, small government and a strong private sector is always better even if very necessary things can't be provided for the citizens without substantial government action. We have seen this problem in our healthcare struggles and our need for infrastructure maintenance. When there is no compromising, and delegates stick to their theories of government and stay loyal to their party leaders very, very little gets done.

In polls, women overwhelmingly support single payer health care, a Medicare for all, but they don't have the clout needed as I found out when I attended a single payer national conference which had over 85% of the attendees female. But today, with too few pragmatic women in power, the quarrels over health care philosophy will continue to everyone's detriment. And we are the only developed country that doesn't have a single payer system of some kind. Once again, we are way behind in looking after our citizens.

Third Trait: observers of political women say that women are more likely to look at things **long term**. Quick action is not seen as always a good thing. **Maybe it because women have had to learn that some things, like babies, take a while before they are born.**

Certainly, getting a whole lot of things done in a hurry is seldom their style. While women are usually good at multi-tasking, the kind of hurried up decision-making is a very masculine trait. Many men like to be seen as decisive. Just look at Trump making quick decisions that are very harmful and have caused a huge amount of disruption. But, recent polls have shown that while the results are very bad, 40% of voters, including women, said they like his decisive masculine style.

Fourth Trait: **The difference in men and women's concept of authority is another factor.** Most men have been raised to recognize and accept authority. This can be inculcated on the football field and in boot camp in the military and in the hierarchal societies, men were always in authority whether in the military,

in the city or in the home. Male authority was assumed at every social level. So, most conservative religions insist that the man is the head of the family and must be obeyed.

But a few countries have changed this way of thinking. In Scandinavian countries, this obeying authority without thinking is called "groupthink." They think this "groupthink" habit is very dangerous. If the authority is wrong, but people follow anyway, much damage can be done (I will detour here to remember when I saw some ordinary good German men who had done terrible things to Jews and others in the 1930's and 40's. As they were being interviewed, they looked genuinely confused and said, "I was only following orders. I was always taught to follow orders!").

Today, in most organizations including the Congress and state legislatures, following your leader's authority is expected, even when there are many genuine differences of opinion. One man in politics told me, "Women have to learn to go along to get along with their colleagues. Without loyalty, the whole party system is almost useless!" I argued that could be a disaster, as I thought about all the good politicians who made bad decisions about Vietnam and all the good soldiers following their officer's authority who did things that haunt them today. Late in that Vietnam ordeal, I recently learned, soldiers DID defy their officers and some politicians went against their party's leaders, but it was too little and too late.

I remember with great clarity an experience I had when consulting in a big company which was under affirmative action pressure to put more women into management. I was at a table with 5 male senior executives discussing the problem and I finally asked why they were having such trouble putting their very competent women into management. The men looked at each other and one finally said, "They don't just accept the authority of their supervisor. They ask too many questions instead of just doing what their supervisor says to do without questioning everything." I looked around and heads were nodding. One man added, "My wife has that habit, too. She is always asking, 'why?' It drives me crazy!"

Then the CEO stepped into the discussion and said, "Maybe we need more questioning. We have had some hard times this year when we didn't ask enough questions early on." I agreed with him that unquestioned obedience to authority can lead to many mistakes.

In the next six months, to my delight, three long time female employees in that company were promoted into management one even became the Chief Financial Officer, a perfect job for someone who likes to ask a lot of questions!

But, now I am going to propose some controversial ideas.

I believe that a group of women leaders would be far more likely to do everything, *everything* to avoid war. Yes, I know all the objections you could raise against this idea. But, I am convinced that if there is ever to be peace in the world, it will have to be because women have come into sharing the decision making power.

As some of you know, I became an ardent feminist when I was living in South East Asia during the Vietnam War. I was horrified by the bad decision making of the men in the military and the diplomatic corps of the United States. These good men made terrible decisions and the American people were lied to in every way possible. And, the net result was our loss of 60,000 men (try to see that number of men in your mind's eye) and, also, the killing of over 1.5 Million men and women and children in Vietnam and Cambodia.

Living in British North Borneo, just south of the Philippines, I was reading the newspapers from Singapore and Hong Kong and the British Manchester Guardian and Time and Newsweek sent to me by my mother. These two American news magazines were telling a totally different story than the other papers who were reporting what was really happening. The Americans were being lied to and we finally found that out in books that were published in the years following our getting out of Vietnam. I have never gotten over my shock of realizing what our country had done and the fact that I was amazed to discover that all this terrible decision-making had been done by good, intelligent men. No woman was involved. It was strictly a male decision making process. But, the next question that has haunted me is, "What kind of thinking made it seem reasonable for these good men to lie and to kill?"

So, in the 70's and 80's, I read all I could get my hands on regarding the psychology of men. I read all the obvious authorities like Freud and Jung but the most helpful thing I read was the long, long book called *The Fire in the Belly* by Sam Keen. The subtitle of the book is *On Becoming a Man*. But, there was very little other good writing about this very important subject. There was a lot of writing about men and sex. But, all this concentration on men's strong sexual drive did not answer my question. My mind kept asking, what kind of thinking would make it reasonable for our good men to make such terrible decisions?

Finally, after all my reading, I realized that the underlying theme was that men were being raised to accept the notion that violence is inevitable and a truly masculine man had to be willing to do combat to protect his country and his family. It was at this point that I finally realized that the women's movement had not only to address important things like unfair work practices and lack of leadership roles for women but... what was really necessary was a massive shift in our culture. We have to start asking different questions: Is violence inevitable? Is that version of maleness really true? Is it inherent in men's genes or is it very powerful cultural conditioning? Why is it that very violent movies are so popular? Why have police largely ignored trafficking of women for sexual slavery in the USA? A friend of mine found that games young men play on their hand held devices are often involving violence and some of that violence is against women.

Another question: why is our country so gun crazy? The NRA and makers of guns and other weapons have never been as successful as they are now. Not just here but all around the world. We are the world's greatest source for all kinds of military equipment including the American made guns used by terrorists.

Now these questions have been asked many times over the years but it is a crucial question. Again, it boils down to the kind of thinking that says you must meet violence with more violence. But, I am sure that women would outlaw guns if they had the political clout to get rid of the NRA. America is known for its allowance of guns, guns, guns. Everyone needs a gun, we are told, and some crazy women and men believe it.

I ache for our policemen who face a community full of gun owners. If I were a wife of a policeman, I would beg him to resign. But, I also would certainly expect a system where every NRA member would be expected to do one volunteer shift a month with a policeman working in the most dangerous part of their city. I am sure NRA members would be happy to do that.

To go back to the major topic, I will talk a bit about other policies in which different kinds of violence is a factor. I can't address the various forms of violence like emotional violence and financial violence. I am thinking here only of physical violence and sexual violence in different settings.

In the few countries where there is a critical mass of women leaders, we do know that many policies reflect the female way of doing things. In the 5 Scandinavian countries, where they all have at least 44% female in their governing bodies, the first thing that happens when someone is brought into jail is that a social worker or teacher sits down and assesses what they need to correct. Anger management is the first plan for abusive men, and job skill training is available if they have not been able to make a living. In other words, jail is for rehabilitation instead of just punishment. Stop the overt violence, with new thinking and work skills.

However, if the prisoner doesn't take advantage of these attempts to help him, he is moved to a traditional prison program but the first approach is always to help rather than punish. We were told that very few come back to jail after having been helped so they claimed it was cost efficient to treat a prisoner with compassion.

Traditional ways of incarceration were established by men long, long ago and were based on fear of jail as a deterrent. But, they have had very mixed results. Many attempts to be effective but the recidivism rate in our country is very high. Many men come back again and again because they had not been enabled to survive in the outside world. In the Seattle Times a couple of weeks ago, I read that of the 700 people let out of our jails each month, one third wind up back in prison within three years. So, the cost of our correctional system is extremely expensive.

I am going to detour here for a moment to say we have the most people in prison, more than any other country in the world. We have 715 prisoners per 100,000 citizens while the country with the second highest number of people in prison is Russia with 584 per 100,000 citizens. These numbers were collected in 2003.

They are basically the same today. Given my Canadian background and biases, I have to tell you that Canada, with a larger percentage of immigrants in their population than the United States, has only 116 prisoners per 100,000 population. However, we do need to be alert to the violence in some other countries. Religious violence that is condoned, even encouraged, and is common in many countries. Especially in those countries which put women in a very low social position. The general violence within those countries has to be addressed by those people themselves. We can't do it. But we need to speak out loudly against their violence against women just because they happen to be born female. These are countries where no women (or only one or two) are in powerful positions.

I know women leaders would make different decisions regarding our attitude toward these countries. We cannot unilaterally refuse to consider war when we are faced with hostile forces who believe in using any kind of violence available. And this is certainly true now, when we are faced with many different religious ideas about violence, violence in the name of religion is incredibly difficult to remedy.

But, once again, I think women leaders would try very, very hard to avoid war and instead, emphasize creating alliances and networks of countries to support each other with sanctions and other nonviolent but powerful deterrents. But, when absolutely necessary, quick military action in time to stop further violence might be the best course of action.

So, once again, both ways of working in the world have to be used judiciously. But, it should become the usual way of thinking, and working as an adjunct to a strong "diplomacy first and foremost" philosophy.

I am no expert on the military, of course, but I do have a knowledge of the male way of thinking about leadership. When I was in a long contract with a company who sent all their leaders to a special leadership program back East, the CEO of the company suggested that maybe I should go and see how they were being taught about women as leaders and how females should be supervised by men. So, I went and I was the only woman in a class of about 40 men from many different companies. I discovered that women were never mentioned one way or another in the five day program.

So on Friday afternoon, about an hour before the end of the program spoke up and commented on the fact that women had not been mentioned in anyway. The teacher, a retired military man, looked at me surprise and the room became very quiet. He replied, "We have never thought about women in this leadership program. I suppose we should look into it now with all this affirmative action stuff going on."

Now, this was in 1978 so I assume it is very different now but the core military thinking about leadership might not have changed very much. And the core belief I heard at that program was that violence is inevitable. Leaders need to accept that fact. Therefore, we need a strong military at all times.

Our teacher, a retired Marine, made it clear that the military was all we had to keep our country safe. The assumption seemed to be that we were all alone in a hostile world so while the unfortunate fact that military costs are enormous and wasteful, he said more than once that a big and powerful military is still absolutely necessary. It is the only thing that we have to stay safe, he said.

I questioned that assumption in the evenings when we had casual conversation. Being respected and liked by other countries of the world is better protection than bombs, I said. Even teenage girls know that having friends is the best thing to have when faced with a bully. A country that has alienated other countries is downright stupid, I argued. A couple of the men spoke up to agree with me.

What I do know for sure is that women leaders would bring some fresh ideas and a new perspective on the old military ideas and, if we don't demand that they be changed, these old ideas are absolutely certain to lead to more war and a more deadly war given the terrible military options available to many countries now. And in today's war, women and children are often the worst casualties, especially when the war is fought with bombs and planes and drones and the towns and cities are devastated. All the refugees streaming out of these countries is both heartbreaking and impossible to manage properly in spite of all the wonderful volunteers who risk their lives to help.

I am going to mention one last trait that is seen as common to females. It is sometimes called "trying to mend and patch." I remember a situation in Minnesota where a bridge crashed and cars were thrown into the river below. The newspapers said that it had been known for a long time that the bridge needed to be fixed or replaced. One of the female members of the legislature there had argued for this bridge to be fixed but had been ignored.

Two other female members had supported her, but the three of them did not have the clout to make it happen. One of the women was quoted in the paper as saying, "The men in the legislature wanted things that made their work visible. Maintenance is boring, not exciting, mostly invisible. But, a brand new bridge was too expensive for the state budget. So nothing was done."

Women's work of mending and patching through the ages has tended to be invisible. What that means is that the only time cleaning the house is noticed is when it doesn't get done. The only that the work of

washing the clothes is noticed is when there are no clean clothes to wear. So fixing a bridge is not noticed, but building a brand new one is certainly noticed and is a time for ribbon cutting and picture taking.

Yet, patching up relationships, personally or nationally and internationally, is a constant responsibility if you want to avoid war. Avoiding war usually means the ability to apologize when necessary, to show humility when appropriate, to suggest compromises, and to recognize and praise other people's or other countries' accomplishments. It means not allowing male egos to go into battle instead of resolving it with diplomacy. And, especially, it means not acting like a bully when relating to other countries.

In recent years, both men and women have shared the work of raising children much more than they did in my generation. But even today, any discussion of women's strengths always brings up this trait of caring for others: a married woman usually thinks of herself in context of the family's welfare. She is more likely to step out of an exciting career job to look after the children and again and again she is likely to try and patch up family disagreements, always a tricky job requiring real skill. And, such a skill is essential in political circles and in international affairs: the willingness to apologize, to make concessions, to think of options and to forgive and forget. Most male leaders find these skills very difficult.

Now: I have said "most" and "usually" for both male and female traits. As, I said at the beginning of this talk, there are huge variations between two people of the same sex. So I have been talking about "probability" rather than with "certainty."

But one thing I do know for sure, the present system, which has been in place, since the beginning of history, has ALWAYS led to war after war after war. I am proposing that the only group in the world big enough to challenge this system is the other 50% of the world which is female. I am proposing something that has NEVER been tried in the world's power structure. Impossible, I have been told numerous times and I have been called naive even more times but nobody gives me better ideas.

I am convinced it is our best chance for a more peaceful way of living in the world. We have to give real power to the United Nations, which has had the mandate since 1920 to try and avoid war. But it will be difficult to get the respect it needs. Any attempt to do so would be blocked by a Congress that specializes in making sure nothing good happens. We might have to get rid of the Congressmen who don't earn their pay by doing nothing. We should say loudly, like they do on TV, "You're fired!!!!!!!"

Then, we will replace them with 50% fabulous females and 50% wonderful men who know that women can help them to be better at the task of governing. The Congress might actually become an honorable and productive body.

Of course, women are not the only ones who believe in nonviolence. We all remember Mahatma Gandhi and his belief in nonviolent resistance to British rule in India. And Martin Luther King and his belief in nonviolent marches for Black civil rights. Also South Africa with Bishop Tutu and their largely successful reconciliation efforts instead of understandable vengeance. So removal of violence in different situations is possible but it has taken a great deal of physical and moral courage for these few leaders to insist on nonviolent resistance. So, refusal to sanction violence in society is not only a female goal. Many men also devoutly wish to abolish this age-old belief that violence is inevitable and must be countered by more violence.

I do wish I weren't 89 years old because I had hoped to see progress in having women sharing top authority and starting a new way of thinking and living in the world. But, too many men and women still have little

confidence in women leaders. While the world has changed radically, their belief systems have stayed the same, and for many people, what they believe is SO powerful that they are likely to act on an emotional response to issues that certain leaders like to use to generate fear for political purposes. So, while sexism is still alive and well in some areas of our country I would suggest that our huge economic disparity is another huge problem. I feel as though we are back in the early 70's when all this economic disparity really took off, a time when women were nowhere to be seen in top leadership roles. What was really happening, the richer getting much richer and the other workers' income becoming stagnant was almost never discussed by the men in power.

In the late 70's, when I told my audiences that, nationally, the CEO's pay was now 20 times more than the company's average pay for its workers people were shocked. Today, CEO's pay averages approximately 325 to 1.

Corporate board members, of which only 11% are female, vote to give these ridiculous salaries and bonuses to these CEO's. These guys sit on each other's boards, making a lot of money for just showing up and backing the idea of huge salaries and bonuses for their buddies. However, in many European countries, BY LAW, corporate boards must be at least 40% female but not in the USA.

One of the big surprises of my consultant life was meeting many of these CEO's who are a big part of this dangerous situation. They were surprisingly ordinary men; the success of their companies had much more to do with the caliber of their workers. Again and again, I was surprised at how unaware of their workers' thinking they were so if workers do rebel I am not confident that these CEO's have the smarts to negotiate and avoid outright violence.

According to the magazines I read, it is not just in America that workers are angry and the only question seems to be whether the revolution will come from the left or the right of the political spectrum. The female authors point out that with the social media so powerful, violent actions could be organized rather quickly.

Just yesterday, another one of my long time struggles, the struggle to get domestic violence and rape seen as serious crimes, I received the latest news on violence against women in the United States. It is not getting better and on campuses, it has become worse. I asked my friends at the University of Washington about this problem and they said it was true. Many young women, especially women of color, are truly afraid to walk on campus, I was told, especially in the evening.

So while male gangs and criminals are now less violent, according to the press, violence against women is getting worse. A statistic that I read this week is that the national average of American women being killed by intimate partners averages 3 women a day or 1100 a year. And that is just in the USA.

So, now, almost 50 years later, I have to lean into my long time way of thinking: I have to remember that I am in relay race, a very, very long relay race, to bring women into effective top leadership positions. I have to realize that this discrimination has been with us for many thousands of years and might take another century to get markedly better.

As I was cleaning out my files last week, I came across a church periodical that had an article about me. It was from August 1999 and the headline was *Women are the Peacemakers*. At the end of the article, there was a short paragraph that caught my eye: I will read it to remind myself what I need to remember:

Moris says that women are the key to reaching peace in the world. In her acceptance speech at the luncheon where first lady Hillary Clinton was the speaker, Moris said: **"I have seen mothers in the news all my life. Mothers weeping over their dead sons and daughters, or dying husbands and fathers. Whether it is in Seattle or Bosnia, pictures of weeping women are standard fare for the media. But, today I say to you, I am truly tired of seeing weeping women. I want to see women standing up and saying "Enough. Enough! This violence must end!"**

Reading what I had said almost twenty years ago, my first reaction was grief. The violence certainly has NOT ended.

But then I thought about recent events, about the incredible number of women marching in our country and all around the world. Women might be, once again, realizing their power to bring about change. Maybe Trump was a catalyst for women to become wide-awake to the fact that they are badly needed in the seats of power.

As you think about the traits common to women, you know that these traits would be very valuable in all sorts of leaders, in senior officers of companies, executive directors of nonprofits, presidents of hospitals and universities, as bishops and especially in all kinds of political positions. Women in power positions would make it much more likely, that people would benefit greatly by women leaders who believe in caring for others in the human family.

So, I ask you to think of all the young people you know and find ways to talk about this critical matter. Violence in the future is likely to be even worse in its consequences and the generations coming after us will be in great danger. So, they must become believers in women leaders, both your sons and daughters and your grandchildren working to get more women into top leadership. I invite you to visualize yourself passing the baton on to the next generation.

To answer the title of this speech, indeed, women leaders WILL make a big difference IF, IF they keep their feminine priorities and IF they keep women's traditional way of thinking about looking after people and nurturing the environment 50% of the population, if standing together, could bring a never before situation into reality. They could change the ever present violence we have had all through history and maybe, maybe, maybe men and women together would have enough wisdom to build a new culture that uses everyone's intelligence and talents in public decision-making. Maybe, maybe, maybe we could even live together in a country here people practice truth and decency and experience very little violence. And I know in my gut, if that were to happen: The angels will celebrate!