Better marketing for female marketers: Gendered language in the *Forbes* CMO list

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Abstract Published in 26 languages across 68 countries, *Forbes* is one of the most-read business periodicals globally, and in 2019, its annual Top 50 World's Most Influential CMOs list highlighted 31 female CMOs and 19 male CMOs who demonstrate industry-shaping leadership. In this article, we analyze the language used to describe the male and female CMOs on the list to determine whether certain words are commonly seen as gendered characteristics, as leadership traits, or as compliments. Using this data, we find that *Forbes* presents female CMOs in a gendered way and argue for the importance of strategically choosing leadership words for female marketing leaders.
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1. Female CMOs and the *Forbes* list

According to the Center for American Progress, women comprise only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs and occupy only 10% of senior leadership positions of S&P 1,500 companies (Warner, Ellmann, & Boesch, 2018). Despite small increases in parity, women still fall behind men in their participation in the labor market owing to the influence of traditional gender roles (Mavisakalyan, 2015). In most high-powered positions, many firms fail to come close to gender equality (Spencer, Blazek, & Orr, 2019).

Yet research shows that more gender diversity in leadership is correlated with positive firm results. For example, more female leadership is correlated with greater transparency in socially responsible practices (Frias-Aceituno, Rodriguez-Ariza, & Garcia-Sanchez, 2013). Additionally, female leaders are perhaps more adept at pushing the boundaries of traditional business practices and adopting more innovative problem-solving approaches (Adams & Ferreira, 2009). Some isolated positive trends are evident, particularly for female marketing executives. For one, the recent *Forbes* ranking of World's Most Influential CMOs recognized numerous female marketing-industry leaders.

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Founded in 1917 as an American business magazine focusing on entrepreneurial capitalism, *Forbes* has grown into a global media brand with a U.S. readership of 6.3 million and an additional international magazine circulation of 1.2 million.[1] Now published in 68 countries in 26 different languages, *Forbes* is known for its business rankings. In 2019, the *Forbes* World's Most Influential CMOs list included 50 chief marketing officers (CMOs), and of those, 31 were women. In 2018, women likewise composed the majority on *Forbes*' list, albeit with a slighter margin at 26 of 50. Encouraging studies have shown that female marketing executives at top companies are paid higher than their male counterparts (Marcec, 2018). While this trend is positive, women in marketing still have a long way to go in order to achieve equity at the top. A recent study by Equilar found that only 18.4% of top marketing executives were female (Marcec, 2018).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), over 50% of graduating marketing majors in American colleges and universities are women; this statistic is similar among international business schools as well. Yet, as previously noted, less than a quarter of marketing executives are female. While *Forbes* is ahead of the curve in recognizing a representative sample of women in its CMO list, there are still some glaring gender discrepancies. For example, a preliminary phenomenon reported in the *Forbes* data is that female CMOs on the list had fewer news mentions than male CMOs, and the numbers were not even close. According to the *Forbes* report, of the top 50 CMOs, women garnered 1,050 news mentions over the previous year while men accumulated 1,959 news mentions—a significant discrepancy considering the greater number of female CMOs on the list.

This difference, coupled with the continued leadership gap in marketing executives, led us to the following question: In discourse that mentions female CMOs, are female marketing executives and male marketing executives described differently? If so, could this difference in the way people talk about or "market" female marketing executives affect the way they are perceived and potentially valued within their organizations? Ultimately, answering these questions can help organizations set their female marketing professionals up for career and performance success. But in order to answer them, we must first understand the different language used to describe female marketing leaders.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the language used to describe the CMOs in the *Forbes* list. These women are paving the way and breaking the glass ceiling for the next generation of marketing leaders. The language that is used to describe leaders, whether it be from their own firms, the media, or in their own words, shapes how they are perceived and can ultimately affect the leaders' credibility and opportunities for success. It is important that we talk about all leaders using equitable language so that the conversation will continue to improve as today's female marketing students advance through their careers. It is critical that women not feel compelled to follow traditional gender stereotypes, and, even more important, that we consider the language we use in perpetuating those stereotypes. Our primary focus is to begin to understand how female marketing leaders are described in the media as contrasted with their male marketing counterparts. Using a multimethod approach, we attempt to tease out when leaders are complimented for their personality traits versus when they are applauded for their leadership traits. We also attempt to discern how the same words are perceived differently from a gender perspective.

We begin by doing a thoughtful literature review of gender in leadership and marketing. We then conduct a survey using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to determine whether the common words used to describe leaders, regardless of gender, are perceived as compliments or as leadership traits. We also ask participants to evaluate the perceived femininity or masculinity of the words. Next, we use qualitative analysis to look at the language used to describe both male and female CMOs throughout the *Forbes* 50 Most Influential CMOs report to identify trends across the CMO descriptions. We compare the results to the quantitative analysis to determine whether female CMOs are, according to participants, being complimented or applauded for their leadership skills. Ultimately, this research raises awareness around how we talk about female leaders, and specifically female CMOs. Additionally, this research suggests that industry leaders need to pay more attention to how female marketers are complimented and rewarded, as these descriptions carry implications for the expectations and career trajectories of new and midcareer marketing professionals. As more young women begin marketing careers, the ways in which success and leadership are defined need to change. When women support women, there is nothing we cannot do.

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[1] https://www.forbes.com/connect/print/

2. A lingering problem: Stereotypes and activation

Stereotypes are defined as group generalizations that link group members to typical attributes or behaviors (Correll, Judd, Park, & Wittenbrink, 2010). Stereotypes are a way in which people simplify the world around them and reduce the amount of time they have to spend processing new environmental cues. Group-based stereotypes are often negative but can also be positive or mixed, and they generally shape people's expectations about how a member of that group should behave. Stereotype activation is "the increased accessibility of the constellation of attributes that are believed to characterize members of a given social category" (Wheeler & Petty, 2001, p. 797). Stereotypes are typically activated by a variety of external environmental stimuli that can range from subtle to blatant and that differ from person to person.

Stereotypes can be activated in two ways. First, people can activate stereotypes about others. In other words, when someone receives certain external cues about an individual, they activate a stereotype in their head about that person. Alternatively, stereotypes can be self-activated. This is called *stereotype threat* and is very dangerous for the performance of firm leaders. Stereotype threat occurs when people begin to conform to expected behaviors associated with their social group. Stereotype threat is an uncomfortable psychological state that individuals may experience when they feel in danger of authenticating a negative stereotype associated with their social identity (Aronson, Burgess, Phelan, & Juarez, 2013). For individuals in groups with negative stereotypes, stereotype threat can often result in reduced performance, increased anxiety, and feelings of minimized self-worth (Steele, 1997). Usually when an individual's stereotype is self-activated, it leads them to act in ways that are consistent with the stereotype. When stereotype threat is triggered, a person may then redirect their energy from learning and performing to being worried and anxious. Furthermore, they need not believe the negative stereotype about their group to experience the stereotype threat; they only need to be aware that others believe it (Steele, 1997).

The research on gender stereotypes is prolific. Gender stereotypes often ascribe specific attributes to people based on gender. For example, researchers have found that stereotypical attributes of men include confidence, control, and assertiveness and are more "agentic" in nature. Conversely, the same researchers have found that stereotypical female attributes are more "communal" in nature, emphasizing nurturing and a general concern for others (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). When men deviate from these stereotypical norms, they are often considered weak or incapable. When women differ from their perceived norms, they are viewed as aggressive and combative. The negative response associated with norm deviation often activates stereotype threat for both genders. As we investigate language in this article, it is important to remember that individuals respond to stereotypes in real ways and that words are connected to actions and stereotype activation.

3. Gender equality and leadership at the top

Gender diversity in firm leadership improves a firm's financial outcomes (Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo, & Michel, 2016; Spencer et al., 2019). Firms with more female leaders achieve higher return on equity rates as well as earnings before interest and taxes (Krivkovich, Nadeau, Robinson, Starikova, & Yee, 2015). Firms with more females in leadership roles or on their boards also receive more favorable perceptions of corporate social responsibility (Boulouta, 2013), and they have high team and organizational commitment from their employees (Perryman, Fernando, & Tripathy, 2016).

Yet gender bias and discrimination hinder some female leaders' success and prevent other females from even applying for leadership roles. Gender schema theory suggests that children alter their behaviors and attitudes to reflect the gender norms of the cultures that they identify with. These behaviors are established at early stages of social development. Gender schemas influence how people process information and environmental cues, as well as how people categorize so-called gender-appropriate behaviors (Bern, 1981). Individuals develop gender schemas of themselves and others based on sex-linked associations developed at a young age.

Gender difference and social role theory suggest that leadership is formed by an individual's position within the organizational hierarchy, as well as by their perceived gender roles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly and Karau, 2002). This perspective is derived from gender socialization theory, which suggests that

men and women are rewarded differently for different types of behaviors. This viewpoint is further compounded by gender stereotypes that prescribe how individuals should behave based on gender (Glick & Fiske, 1999). These stereotypes may contribute to the language barriers that occur when describing female leaders.

In the workplace, employees often have incongruent expectations for female leaders. This incongruence occurs when employees expect one thing from a *leader* of the company and another thing from a *female* (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995). This disconnect often leads to prejudice and bias. Individuals have incongruent expectations for female leaders: those based on gender stereotypes and those based on leadership roles. For example, male managers may often be evaluated more favorably than female managers, even though the employees may consider the female manager to be "successful" by most objective measures (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995; Heilman, Block, Martell, & Simon, 1989). Additional research suggests that men are seen as more competent leaders than women in a variety of contexts (Boldry, Wood, & Kashy, 2002; Carli & Eagly, 2001). Gender also affects perceptions of power. Power is defined as an individual's ability to access or control resources or outcomes (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015). When women use dominant words, their perceived power is not as great as when men use dominant words (Bailey & Kelly, 2017). In other words, a speaker's gender has a strong effect on how their words are interpreted by the listener. In many instances, these misaligned expectations are represented in the language used to describe males and females in the workplace. This can also potentially extend to how words are applied to female and male leaders in the workplace.

4. How do gender and language affect this leadership gap?

Research focusing on the effects of gendered language in professional contexts has shown that there are important real-world consequences to the words we choose, whether consciously or unconsciously. Specifically, studies that examined how we describe men and women in similar roles found that there are semantic differences in the way that people describe the work that men and women do differently and that this difference in language often reinforces gender stereotypes (e.g., Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007).

These semantic differences are significant for several reasons. Recent studies suggest that language differences that rely on or reinforce gender stereotypes inhibit the development of female leaders by contributing to negative leadership assessments (Hirschfeld & Thomas, 2011; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Even when positive, compliments that draw on existing group stereotypes—for example, women as nurturers—often have negative emotional impacts on individuals (Siy & Cheryan, 2013).

Female leaders are frequently subject to these types of positive stereotypes, with studies showing that in leadership assessments, women often receive compliments for stereotypically female traits. For example, semantic differences in recommendation letters for male and female job candidates demonstrate a difference in the way recommenders position candidates, with implications for authority and perceived competence (Trix & Psenka, 2003). Madera, Hebl, and Martin (2009) found that recommendation letters for women included more communal language to describe the candidate and men received more agentic language—a difference that was associated with a higher selection rate. Agentic language—that is, language generally associated with agency, self-directed action, and assertiveness—is frequently associated with leadership effectiveness, whereas communal language tends to be valued only once agentic traits are perceived to have been met (Vial & Napier, 2018).

Analysis of a large military data set shows that wording in performance reviews may reinforce stereotypes and affect perceived competence of candidates (Smith, Rosenstein, Nikolov, & Chaney, 2019). Women are more likely to be described using relationship-building, positive attributes, while men are generally assigned more institutionally valuable task-oriented descriptors in performance reviews (Smith, Rosenstein, & Nikolov, 2018). Research has suggested that gendered wording in job recruiting materials can sustain gender inequality in certain institutions (Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011) as women self-select out of jobs they perceive to be more male-oriented owing to the wording of the job description. While organizations do seem to be shifting away from the value placed on stereotypically male leadership traits (Duehr & Bono, 2006), individual female managers aspiring to leadership positions still face an assessment bias (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012).

Gendered language can also be problematic when used in an external context, such as when communicating with the public about female

corporate leaders, and this is an area where more research is needed. Media reporting on female executives is especially challenging and in need of further exploration. A 2016 Rockefeller Foundation report titled "Does the Media Influence how we Perceive Women in Leadership" found that articles discussing female CEOs are more likely to mention their gender or personal life. According to the report: "When discussing a female CEO's personal life 78% of the articles mentioned family" (Rockefeller Foundation, 2016, p. 3). The report also highlights the different language corporations use in announcements about female CEOs:

> While corporations' announcements around female CEOs contained much higher levels of confidence than male CEOs, the world corporations used to describe CEOs can be different. The words 'experience,' 'proven,' and 'business' are most often associated with male CEOs, whereas 'strategic,' 'knowledge,' and 'growth' are more likely to be used when describing a female CEO. (Rockefeller Foundation, 2016, p. 3)

The report also found that in times of corporate crisis, media coverage was more likely to place blame on female CEOs than on male CEOs (Rockefeller Foundation, 2016).

Researchers and practitioners have prescribed things that women should do to become more successful or better managers. For example, women are often perceived as being less confident than men and unwilling to go after big promotions. Thus, many authors claim that women should develop skills to become more confident and aspirational (e.g., Carlin, Gelb, Belinne, & Ramchand, 2018). Additionally, one study found that the ways female executives speak about their own career accomplishments vary greatly from the ways men speak about their career accomplishments. This research suggests that women should: "(1) start strong, (2) stay succinct, (3) provide context, (4) use their own voice, (5) control movement and (6) project warmth" (Grant & Taylor, 2014, p. 73). These recommendations were provided as a way for female executives to overcome some of their communication challenges, especially when touting their own accomplishments. But researchers have yet to explore the language organizations and the media use when touting female executives' accomplishments, nor how other people adopt that language when describing male versus female executive accomplishments. While female executives are charged with changing the way they talk and think,

perhaps the way organizations and the media talk and think about female executives needs to change as well.

## 5. How are female marketers being marketed?

What does this all mean for female marketers? Female executives, especially marketing executives (e.g., CMOs), can be a positive reflection for a brand and can engage consumers with female gender identities more authentically. Marketing is one of the few areas in which women are represented in leadership roles like their male counterparts. Yet even for their success in these roles, female marketing executives are often described, whether by their own firms or by media, with strongly gendered language that highlights their nurturing side or downplays their accomplishments. The *Forbes* list is as much about marketing female executives and companies as it is about providing a sense of the industry. The rankings themselves relied on quantitative analysis, but "to make the Top 50, a CMO must be in the top 20% of CMOs on at least three different indicators of personal, industry or internal influence" (Rooney, 2019). CMOs are an extension of their brands, and major brands rely on their influence.

In order to better understand how female marketing executives are described and what this means for firms, we engaged in a series of studies. In the first study, we use a brief survey to determine respondents perceive common words used to describe executives, whether as a compliment or a leadership trait. We also explored the perceived masculinity and femininity of these same words. In the second study, we did a content analysis of *Forbes*'s 50 Most Influential CMOs list. We analyzed how the female CMOs were described compared to their male counterparts and matched this to traditional gendered language as well as to power/submissive language categories. Based on these studies and results, we identify themes in the way female marketing executives are discussed, and we articulate potential opportunities for changing that language in order to set these leaders up for success.

### 5.1. Study One: Compliments versus leadership traits and feminine versus masculine terms

In the first study, we begin to understand the power of words and language. We wanted to explore how words commonly used to describe

Table 1. Leadership traits
Respondents were asked to rate (on a scale from 1—5) whether these words reflect a leadership trait
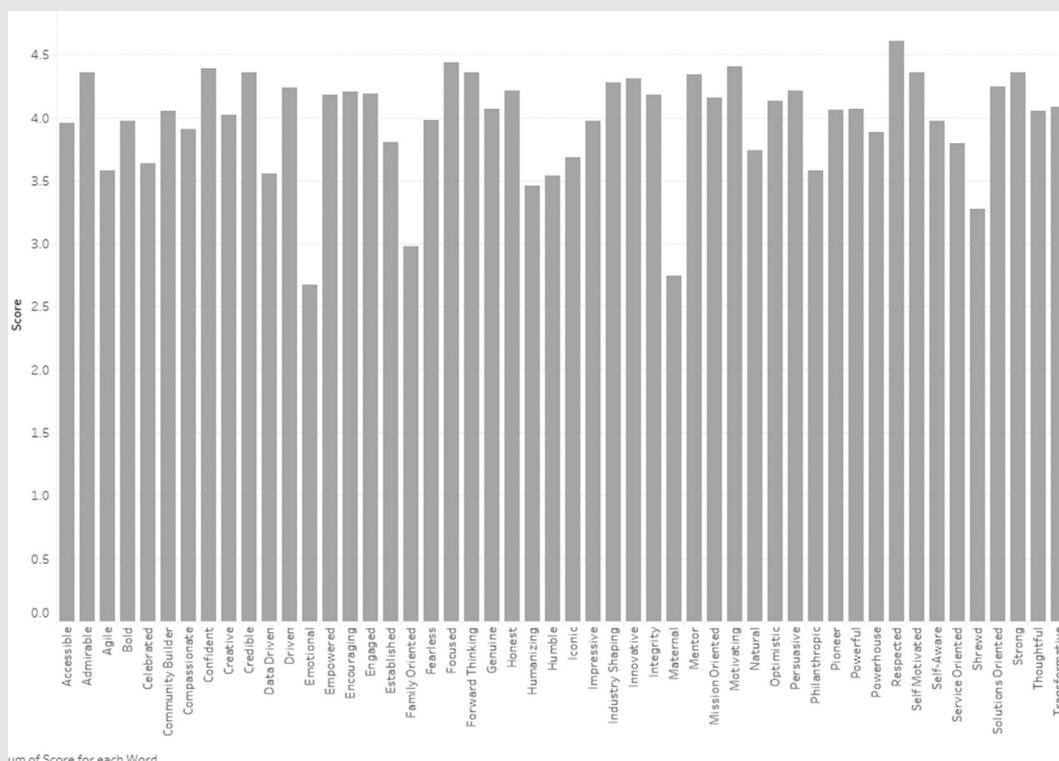
Sum of Score for each Word.

Table 2. Compliments
Respondents were asked to rate (on a scale from 1—5) whether these words reflect a compliment
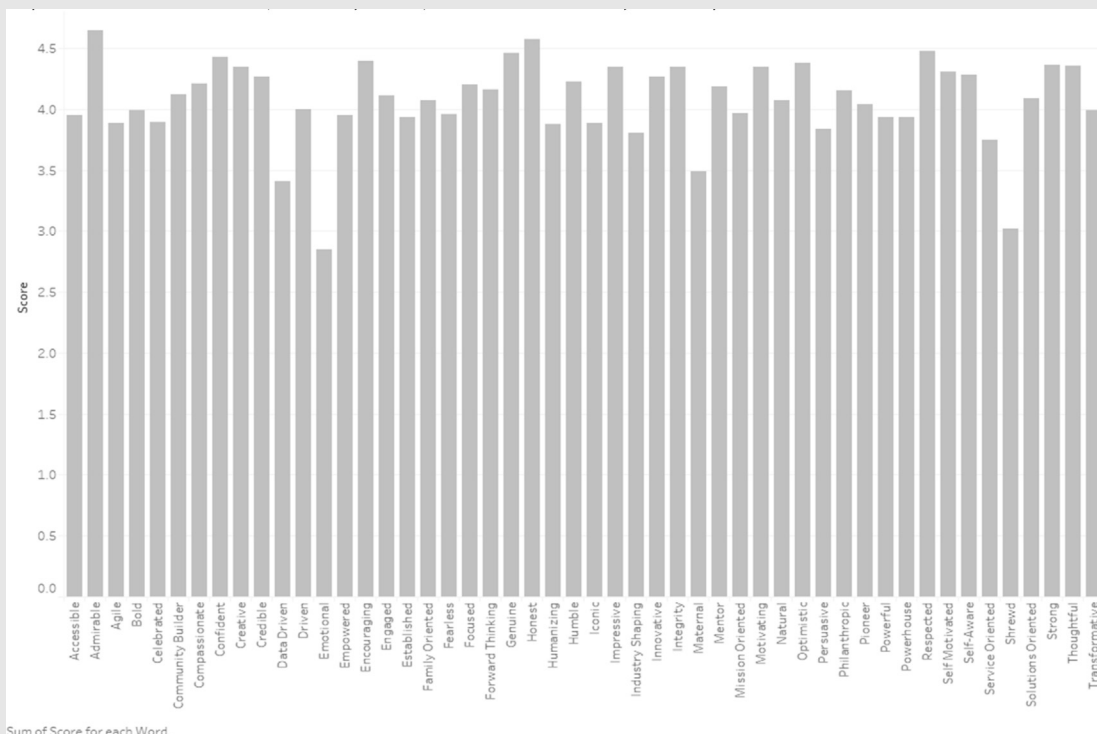
Sum of Score for each Word.

leaders are perceived by a broad, general audience. Leaders, and especially female leaders, are often described with words that are seen as compliments, while male leaders are described more frequently with words that are seen as leadership traits. Compliments are expressions of praise or approval, and they may lead to feelings of social approval (DeBono & Krim, 1997). But research has suggested that female marketing leaders are often complimented for gender-based attributes, like being nurturing or family-oriented, rather than for their leadership prowess. To extend this thought beyond anecdotal, we employed a survey using a random sample to evaluate whether certain words were perceived as compliments or leadership traits or both. We also asked respondents to evaluate whether they perceived those same words as being more feminine or more masculine.

We used MTurk to collect data. MTurk is an appropriate tool for convenience sampling, and MTurk respondents have proven to be more attentive than students (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016). We set no parameters on the respondents, as we wanted to collect a random sample of the general public. We collected data from 102 respondents, with two responses removed due to incompletion. Of the respondents, 45% percent identified as male and 55% as female; 86% identified as white/

Caucasian, 3% identified as African American, 8% identified as Hispanic, and 3% identified as "other." The average age of the participants was 35 years old.

We created a list of 50 words commonly used to describe leaders or executives. We developed the list by reviewing academic literature on common leadership characteristics as well as articles in popular press and books discussing important leadership characteristics. We also queried students and colleagues to determine what words or traits they looked for in "good leaders." While this list is not meant to be exhaustive, it is comprehensive and a good starting point for a meaningful discussion. Some of the words included in this list of leadership words were "strong," "forward-thinking," "admirable," and "respected."

We asked respondents to rank on a 5-point Likert Scale whether the word was considered a compliment (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree), as well as whether the word was considered a leadership trait (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Table 1 shows the averages by word for compliments and leadership traits. Interestingly, the words that are perceived as most complimentary are "honest," "respected," "genuine," "confident," and "encouraging." However, the words that are

Table 3. Gender orientation
Respondents were asked to use a sliding scale (feminine to masculine, 0—100) to identify whether the words were more feminine or more masculine
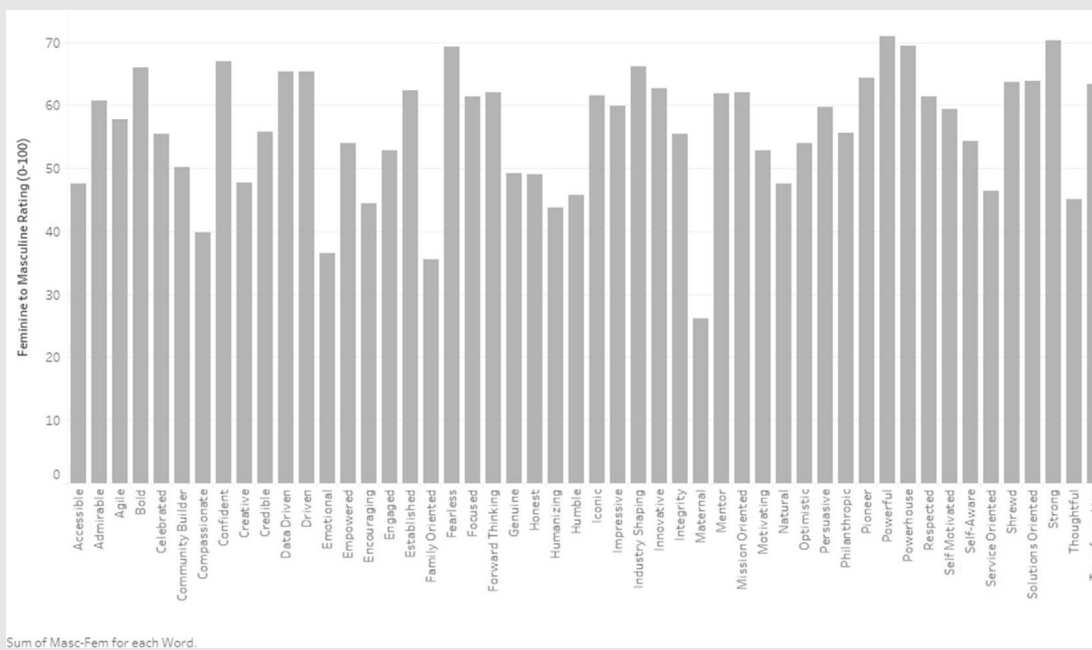
Sum of Masc-Fem for each Word.

perceived most as leadership traits are "respected," "focused," "motivating," "confident," and both "credible" and "strong" (which were tied). The only word that ranks in the top five for both is "confident."

Table 1 shows the results of the ranking of leadership traits. As noted, strength words like "confident" and "respected" are mentioned as leadership traits. However, words traditionally associated with femininity, like "maternal" and "family-oriented," ranked the lowest and were not perceived to be leadership traits. Table 2 ranks the same words as compliments. The word "honest" is seen as a compliment but not as a leadership trait. Interestingly, so are the words "family-oriented" and "maternal." These are nice things to say about someone but not words that lead to perceptions of leadership.

In this survey, we also asked respondents to rate the femininity or masculinity of the same words. We used a slider scale from 0 to 100, with feminine being on the far left (0) and masculine being on the far right (100). The higher the score for the word, the more the word is perceived as masculine. Words with scores around 50 may be considered gender-neutral by the respondents. The words considered the most masculine are "powerful," "strong," "powerhouse," "fearless," and "confident." The words considered most feminine are "maternal," "family-oriented," "emotional," "compassionate," and "humanizing." Interestingly, the word "confident" is considered both a leadership trait and a compliment, and respondents ranked it as one of the most masculine words (see Table 3).

5.2. Study Two: Gendered language and the *Forbes* CMO list

Once we considered the perceived gender associations of the descriptors, we applied our findings to the *Forbes* CMO list to determine how these words were used to "market" these executives. As we have described, often what we perceive as a compliment can have other, less positive associations. Using the quantitative data, we conducted a qualitative analysis of the CMO descriptions by coding for reported female and male words in the *Forbes* report. Our code for female used six words that scored more feminine on the scale (below 45%): "maternal," "family-oriented," "emotional," "compassionate," "humanizing," and "encouraging." In addition to these words, the words "women," "woman," "mama," "mother," and "female" were coded as female. Our code for male used words that scored more masculine in our

study (over 65%): "powerful," "strong," "powerhouse," "fearless," "confident," "industry-shaping," "bold," "driven," and "data-driven."

We searched for these words in all of the descriptions of CMOs on the list. The total number of female words in the CMO descriptions was 29, and the total number of male words was 14. Of the 50 CMOs on the list with words from our lists from Study One, only two females scored more male than female words, and only two male CMOs scored more female than male words, meaning both female and male CMOs were largely described using words that our participants associated with their respective genders.

When it came to leadership language, males scored higher than women on an average number of leadership descriptors. Coding for the top 15 words on our leadership study (including "respected," "focused," "motivating," "confident," "credible," "strong," and "self-motivated"), male CMOs averaged one leadership word per CMO, and females averaged 0.93. The difference between males and females when coding for the top 15 compliments (which included "honest," "respected," "genuine," "confident," "encouraging," "optimistic," and "strong") was much smaller, with males averaging 0.89 compliments per CMO and females averaging 0.87 compliments. Basically, our research finds that male marketing executives are more likely to be described using leadership-oriented words, whereas female marketing executives are more likely to be described using complimentary words with more feminine undertones.

6. Managerial implications: Setting female marketers up for success

This study effectively demonstrates the need for a better conversation about how organizations and the media market leaders, and especially female marketing executives. With more female students majoring in marketing, firms should consider the precedent they are setting for them and think about ways to minimize negative stereotype activation. The *Forbes* Top 50 CMO List is a great resource for recognizing the top marketing executives at major international companies, and *Forbes* has provided a wide-reaching platform to acknowledge the work of male and female executives. The ranking includes many impressive female marketing executives, but we still felt compelled to examine how *Forbes* described those executives in terms of success and contributions to marketing. As noted, language is critical not only

for building brands and presence but also for properly showcasing women in leadership, especially as they overcome longstanding gender stereotypes.

As female marketing professionals gain external recognition for their work, there is a greater need for focused research on how firms are promoting, complimenting, and rewarding them, and on the effects of these commendations. Gender diversity among organizational leadership is important not only because it sets an example for other young women but also because it can bring financial and societal benefits for the firm. For organizations to develop this critical talent base of female leaders, they must begin by carefully reflecting on how they talk about them. Based on our research, we offer the following recommendations for individuals, organizations, and media professionals to consider when communicating about the work of female marketers.

6.1. Want leadership? Use leadership language for female marketers

Our study showed that women on the *Forbes* CMO list were frequently referred to with feminine descriptors. Additionally, fewer traditional leadership words were used to describe women than men. This adds to the large body of literature that supports the notion that organizations compliment women in a gendered way. As gendered compliments may hinder others' assessments of their leadership abilities and can prevent female success in the workplace, carefully choosing vocabulary to describe women in marketing leadership positions is critical. Through our analysis of the *Forbes* list, we found that even when masculine words, such as "powerful," were used to describe women and their work, often they appeared in combination with feminine words that highlighted the powerful work CMOs do to support women.

Important implications can be drawn for organizations looking to develop and promote future leaders, as these types of descriptions can set expectations for new marketing professionals. Externally, as firms begin to better market their female marketers, they should consider using language that is gender neutral, as this may contribute to equality in the workplace (Mavisakalyan, 2015) as well as improve perceptions of female marketing executives from internal and external stakeholders. In other words, let us compliment female marketing executives not just for their ability to "nurture" or with traditional feminine terms; rather, let's compliment women the same way we compliment men: for their

accomplishments as leaders and their contributions to the success of the organization. Our research identifies the following words as compelling compliments for leaders that are typically associated with men: "strong," "powerful," "industry shaping," "fearless," and "confident." Words like these need to be used to describe female leaders in both internal (e.g., emails, blog posts, internal websites, newsletters) and external (e.g., press releases, external websites, marketing collateral) communications.

6.2. Don't compliment women just because they're women

During the coding, another phenomenon became evident. A great number of the words coded as female were "woman" or "women." We found that a number of the descriptions for female CMOs were dominated by discussion of the work that the CMOs had done with women, whether through support for women's representation in business (see the *Forbes* report descriptions of Noe, Tillman, Peluso, and Saller) or through their branding campaigns (see the *Forbes* report descriptions of Lemkau and Twohill). Of the 31 female CMOs on the list, 7 had descriptions that focused primarily on their work related to women. Of the 19 men, only one description, that of Prichard of Proctor & Gamble, mentioned his work with men (2018's controversial Gillette campaign). In other words, the *Forbes* list compliments women for their support of other women or for perceived "women's issues."

While we are not discounting the power of women helping women, the question becomes: What message does this send about what we value in female marketing executives? How does this change expectations of female marketing professionals (including their expectations of themselves)? Does this signal that in order for a woman to be perceived as a good leader, she must support women? We do not hold that same expectation of men, nor do we encourage men to be involved in "men's causes." Rather, we typically celebrate all types of philanthropic activity from male executives. This consistent reinforcement of women participating in "women's causes" may activate and perpetuate gendered stereotypes of female leaders.

6.3. Develop strategy to extend female marketing executives' influence

Social media has expanded the role and influence of female marketers, and CMOs are now tasked

with establishing and maintaining influence in a networked world. Jessica Spence, chief commercial officer at Carlsberg Group, notes that when it comes to marketers, "communication and influencing skills become in some way perhaps even more important than the more traditional, technical marketing skills that we relied on a lot in the past" (AESC, n.d.). As our research shows, this influence can potentially be undercut by gendered associations and intended compliments that carry gendered baggage. To minimize this potentially destructive practice, firms could do the following:

- Address the specific challenges that female leaders face and that their male counterparts do not. In order to do this, organizations must have cultures that support open and honest discussions.

- Be clear about the necessary skills and competencies for the various leadership roles within the organization. It is important that executives of all genders recognize unconscious bias and the role that it plays in both professional interactions and career advancement. Executives can identify unconscious bias through thoughtful training programs and reflection.

- Promote opportunities for internal and external mentoring and professional development for all leaders. As part of this mentoring process, discuss the importance of language and descriptors. While organizations cannot entirely control the way female marketers are written and spoken about in the media, they can pay attention to the language they use to describe their female marketers when interacting with the press, and they can ask media outlets to avoid gendered language when writing about all their marketers, whether female or male. It is essential for organizations to ask themselves: Are we setting up our female marketers to maximize their influence?

6.4. Be aware of the effects of stereotypes

Stereotype activation can have negative consequences for individuals. As noted earlier, certain traditional schemas and stereotypes are associated with gender. When women feel threatened, they might self-activate these gender stereotypes and behave in ways that are perceived to be more "feminine." As our study points out, feminine

characteristics like "maternal" or "family-oriented" are not considered leadership characteristics. When women behave this way because they feel that they are supposed to, they might be sabotaging their managerial opportunities in the workplace. It is critical that firms examine how they talk about female marketing leaders in order to promote their success as leaders and individuals. And more importantly, they need to be mindful of their language to avoid activating stereotypes that might sabotage their leaders' success.

In today's competitive landscape, words and language are very powerful. Language can send signals to audiences both internal and external. It is important that firms begin to think about their language as they champion female marketing leaders. Marketers have a responsibility to use communication as a force for good. One way to do that is to champion female leaders for their accomplishments as leaders, not just as women.

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