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'The idea that you could present the prospect of a woman becoming bishop of London as a "power grab" [...] is a sure sign that we need to look a lot more carefully about our cultural assumptions about women's relationship with power' (Mary Beard, *Women and Power*).

What is power? What are our cultural assumptions about women's relationship with power? What, if anything, is wrong with those assumptions?

We like to overestimate our open-mindedness. When we list 'our' cultural assumptions about women and power, we think we really mean the assumptions of others - uneducated, illiberal anti-feminists. We like to think we in fact make no assumptions at all - that while we live and work in a patriarchy, we think outside of it, and that despite being governed by gender bias in every aspect of life, since we do not *endorse* it, it does not affect our way of thinking. But it is not so black and white.

Early one Tuesday morning, my father was rushing to finish his breakfast a bit more briskly than usual. Shoving cutlery and crockery into the dishwasher, he told me he was interviewing Argentina's deputy finance minister in less than an hour, and headed for the door. "What's his name?" I asked.

He stopped in his tracks. "*Her* name is Laura Jaitman."

Why did I assume the minister to be male? Had I not just the previous evening ranted about how ridiculous it was that people still thought women are incapable of holding powerful positions? Deep down, did I think the same?

It seems no matter how progressive one consciously believes oneself to be, the unconscious is always there to reveal there is work still to be done. The implicit mind is always full of creases no matter how much we iron them out in our daily conversations. The psyche is 'not a discrete entity packed in the brain. Rather, it is a structure of psychological processes that are shaped by and thus closely attuned to the culture that surrounds them' (Kitayama & Cohen, 2007). Thus, while our psyche constantly takes in the feminist discourse in our cultural surroundings, it does not filter out more subtle cultural views on gender and power, and so it absorbs and internalises them. 'Unlike explicitly held knowledge, where you can be reflective and picky about what you believe, associative memory seems to be fairly indiscriminate in what it takes on board' (Fine, 2010). In short, place a man behind almost every podium, and associative memory will pick up the pattern and believe a politician ought to be a man.

Many of the words we use can reveal our cognitive assumptions and defaults. Eviatar Zerubavel, professor of sociology at Rutgers University, in conversation with Laurie Taylor on BBC Radio 4, talks about how language asymmetry reveals our cultural biases, and what we consider normal and abnormal. He says, 'women are the statistical majority but are spoken of with the language of a minority'. Comparing marked and unmarked terms, he comments on the term 'working mum': he argues, 'if our social reality was symmetrical', the term 'working dad' would appear with the same frequency. Much like the road-sign anticipating a curve in the road (rather than a continuously straight one), 'marked' terms indicate what we should pay attention to. Professor Zerubavel likens this to the fact that in American culture, Barack Obama is seen as a black man whose mother was white, rather than a white man whose father was black; 'whiteness', he says, 'is taken for granted... so the whiteness becomes therefore semiotically superfluous'. For the same reasons, we have terms such as 'girl power', but not 'boy power' - 'boy power' is just power.

To give a broader example, God is a 'He'. Paradoxically, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: 'God is neither a man nor a woman: He is God.' Stephen Tompkins explains, "'It" seems a bit rude, talking as if God was an impersonal force like gravity or inflation. So God has to be "He" or "She", and in a patriarchal society there's no contest.' 'He', the pronoun, is so ubiquitous it is almost gender-neutral, while 'she' will never pertain to anyone but a woman. While masculinity is the omnipresent norm, femininity is niche and exceptional. It is no surprise, therefore, that a forecast of increasing numbers of women in the church, police, and BBC is portrayed as an impending 'power grab'. The default gender of bishops, detectives, CEOs, et cetera is male, and for a woman to rise to these positions she must 'grab' the power. Power *can be* female, but it *is* male. As Mary Daly, the formidable feminist theologian, wrote in 1973: "If God is male, then the male is God".

This was not always so. Never were gender roles more inverted than in Ancient Greek times. 'Queendoms', claims Robert Graves in his introduction to *The Greek Myths: 1*, 'preceded kingdoms throughout the Greek-speaking era'. The heavens, the earth and the underworld were feminised. From the twenty-eight day moon cycle, mirroring the 'sacred' menstrual cycle, to the vegetative year, mirroring the matriarch's three phases of 'maiden, nymph (nubile woman) and crone', every aspect of natural life seemed to be governed by the ethereal female force. The Great Goddess was 'immortal, changeless, and omnipotent', and men 'feared, adored, and obeyed' the matriarch. Men were, of course, entitled to some power, but only 'so long as they did not transgress matriarchal law'.

One imagines the overwhelming female presence had the same crushing effect on men as the opposite does to women today. 'It may well be that [men] adopted many

of the 'weaker-sex' characteristics hitherto thought functionally peculiar to man', writes Graves. Having resigned to a fate of inferiority, the modern submissive 'female' traits were instead shown in men. Of course, for a complete reversal of matriarchy to patriarchy, our ideas of either masculinity or power had to radically change. But which one was it?

In other words, does the definition of womanhood need to change to fit the ideal of power or does the way we define power need to lose its masculine connotations? The Oxford English Dictionary defines power as: '1. strength or energy 2. the ability to do something 3. political authority or control'. Power is therefore most recognised in those with strength, autonomy and authority. A website listed '8 feminine traits we love' as part of a Women's Day celebration: 'thoughtfulness, beauty, empathy, vulnerability, intuition, patience, sensuality, radiance'. Meanwhile, another website, aiming to conglomerate 'the top 10 traits of the alpha male', lists, 'he is courageous; he can control his emotions; he has a purpose; he is not afraid to make decisions; he's not afraid to say what's on his mind; he doesn't let any one thing rule his life; he maintains his physical health; he's not afraid to say "no"; he acknowledges his weaknesses; he holds himself with a strong posture'. Which one sounds more presidential? And if a woman wants to look presidential, does she have to adopt a 'masculine' persona in order to be deserving of respect? Observing children in a kindergarten, sociologist Bronwyn Davies noted how a little girl, Catherine, who usually 'dressed in a very feminine way' responded to her doll being snatched away by a little boy. Having failed to retrieve it once, Catherine dug a man's waistcoat out of the dress-up cupboard, put it on and 'marched out. This time she returned victoriously with the dolly under her arm. She immediately took off the waistcoat and dropped it on the floor.' In a way, women in male-dominated power positions have to put on their 'mental waistcoats': away go female displays of 'vulnerability', 'radiance' and 'thoughtfulness', and in come male displays of courage, control over emotions and a strong posture.

Since it is culturally assumed that women are 'hard-wired' to have characteristics which are almost polar opposite to those which constitute good leadership, it seems we have to sacrifice either our power or our womanhood in order not to be crushed. Women should not have to choose between adhering to the female ideal in order to be respected socially, and exerting authority, in order to be respected in the course of their profession. The most crucial thing one must understand is that, rather than femininity being culturally defined to inhibit power, it is power that is culturally defined to exclude femininity. If we think a powerful woman has to dress conservatively, wear minimal makeup and display little empathy, we are saying that women have to be manly to be powerful, and therefore that power *really* is for men. Women in power should not have to be pretenders to the male throne.

Instead, women must do for politics what Jane Austen did for literature, at least in the eyes of Virginia Woolf. Austen lived in a literary world where only the 'man's sentence' could be found, but, rather than adopting it, she 'looked at it and laughed at it, and devised a perfectly natural, shapely sentence, proper for her own use and never departed from it'. To find a our place in politics, we do not need to change ourselves, but instead propose what we will change around us. We must look at the patriarchal view of power, laugh at it, and design our own style of leadership. Take Emma Gonzales, for instance. This is a girl who displays utmost vulnerability, crying behind her podium in front of millions of spectators. She is a girl, nothing less and nothing more, but she exudes power.

Thus, unless we want a continued gender imbalance in power, we must stop apologising for, and concealing the fact we are women. We are not any less 'hard-wired' for power than men, nor any less capable of pursuing it. All it takes is practice.

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