Introduction

To be liked as a woman or to be respected as a leader?

When reflecting on micro and meso personal experiences as a strong, passionate female leader in positions of power, the above question significantly resonates with me. As a nonconformist to gender stereotypes, it always confused me why being empathetic and kind made me truly 'ladylike,' yet to be assertive and confident were masculine traits. Ideological conflict occurred as I realised that success and likeability were positively correlated for my male counterparts, yet according to gender bias and stereotypes recognised in my personal experiences, they were not for me. It wasn't until I represented my school at a Young Women's Leadership Seminar at NSW Parliament, that I understood this gender-based double standard had a legitimate title; the Likeability Dilemma – the focus of my Personal Interest Project (PIP).

Balancing likeability according to gender stereotypical traits and gaining respect from demonstrating successful leadership traits has implications for all three levels of society, especially the macro sphere, with conformity from socialisation in micro society and meso communities affecting macro institutions and conversely, the authority of powerful institutions influencing wider social attitudes. Thus, my central hypothesis is: An investigation into the socially constructed Likeability Dilemma and the extent to which it inhibits female leaders from breaking through the glass ceiling and creates implications for conformity at the macro level. Through my investigation, I intend to assess the extent to which female leaders have been impacted by the Likeability Dilemma as a continuity and the implications of and changes to this trend for future female leaders and society at large.

To deepen my understanding of the complexity of the Likeability Dilemma, I intend on utilising interviews, a questionnaire, statistical analysis, content analysis and personal reflection, with a cross-cultural focus on gender and Generations Z, Y and Baby Boomers. I will ethically interview powerful female leaders to assess the extent to which the Likeability Dilemma prevents women from different generations in breaking through the glass ceiling in macro institutions. Furthermore, I intend to administer a questionnaire to collect quantitative and qualitative data from anonymous respondents to uncover social conflict from the Likeability Dilemma across macro society through effective and clear communication. In addition, I plan to examine pre-existing statistics through statistical analysis to objectively extrapolate intergenerational trends of the dilemma regarding continuity and change. I also intend to ethically utilise content analysis to aid my exploration of the media's perpetuation of the dilemma. Furthermore, I will embed personal reflection of female leadership adversities, but will utilise triangulation to combat bias and promote objectivity.

By critically discerning and ethically conducting research from numerous perspectives and considering the intersectional factors contributing to the Likeability Dilemma, I aspire to improve my social and cultural literacy and determine the macro implications of gender-based conformity and discrimination. Thus, at the completion of this PIP, I aspire to have questioned my own prejudice and implicit gender bias to further my 'not-very-ladylike' keen sense of social justice.