

‘Mutti’ and the Gentlemen



Media Representations of Leadership in the 2017 German General Elections

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A Case Study on the National Newspaper Reporting of the final TV Debate

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Abstract

Much scholarly literature exists on political leadership in general and female leadership in organisational structures. Nevertheless, accounts on female political leadership require new, modern input, especially because a relatively new type of politician has entered the political sphere: the established female leader. This paper is an attempt to re-evaluate the concept of political leadership for male and female politicians as manifested in the media by taking into account political personalisation theory and traditional gender expectations. A qualitative discourse analysis of 91 German newspaper articles, covering the final TV debate in the context of the 2017 German general elections between the top candidates Angela Merkel (CDU) and Martin Schulz (SPD) revealed mixed results. A total of six different modes of representation could be identified for Angela Merkel, Europe's longest-serving female head of state. Within all modes of representation, Merkel is put into contrast with her male opponent Schulz. Three less prominent main themes of leadership representation confirm the existing literature on female leadership: Merkel is represented as vulnerable and as reactive while special attention is paid to her physical appearance. The two most dominant and (from a theoretical point of view) surprising themes of Merkel's representation, however, actually fall in line with classic (male) leadership themes: Merkel as a thoughtful leader and as a symbol of continuity. A hybrid form of leadership is thus found for Angela Merkel in this case study, which places her in between gender expectations.

Keywords

Angela Merkel; female leadership; German elections; media representation; TV debate

Introduction

The German general elections of 2017 generated quite some media attention throughout Europe and the world. That is not least because Germany historically is one of the most important diplomatic nations in the Western world (Longhurst, 2004). The outcome of the elections might have been a contributing factor in generating this attention as well: the right-wing populist AfD booked a striking success and became the third strongest party winning just under 13% of the total electorate, while the two strongest parties, the conservative CDU (32,8%) and the social-democratic SPD (20,7%), took significant vote losses (Heidtmann, 2017). After the elections, followed a six-month long struggle to form a coalition government, which is the longest ever in German history (Schmidt, 2017). The above points to an exceptional disunity in the political realm during that particular election. Many votes of disapproval were given against the established parties with an increased divide of the electorate as a result. In the end, the government formation process, in which various possible constellations were tried, resulted in another ‘big’ coalition of the CDU and the SPD. The governing parties did thus not change, and most importantly, the chancellor did not change. Angela Merkel stayed in office as Germany again decided for her to keep leadership, while Martin Schulz, the SPD candidate, lost by a significant margin.

In this, in German terms, somewhat ‘unsettled’ political climate (Swidler, 1986), it is still up for debate whether that re-election was fuelled by, or happened despite a strong personalisation tendency in the political discourse surrounding these particular elections. Not up for debate is though, that said strong personalisation tendency was present in the 2017 German elections (Holtz-Bacha, 2019) and also does clearly exist in contemporary Western politics (Karvonen, 2010, Adam & Maier, 2010, Van Aalst et al., 2011). Politicians, and what their private and professional personalities suggest, are more and more at the centre of media discourse, while the parties they represent fade into the background. Throughout the 2017 campaign reporting, 72 % of the media coverage of the election was individualised, thus focussed on the candidate, which is above the average of 65% in the previous elections (Holtz-Bacha, 2019, p.224).

However, the German elections were not just personalised by the media and their reporting. One could also argue that the German electorate was theoretically predisposed to focus on leadership qualities in terms of their voting preferences- predisposed, thus, to be susceptible to personalisation in the media. All of the three conditions, which, according to Garzia (2011), increase the importance of the role of a political leader as a determinant of

individual voting behaviour, can be seen as applicable in the German elections. Based on that theory, the German people were sensitised to base their electoral decisions on their evaluation of the candidate's leadership qualities more so than they would anyhow. First of all, there was a *climate of opinion*, which determines a shared idea of what a leading figure has to offer. There was a dominant narrative in the public debate that suggested a general agreement on certain leadership qualities that are needed. Merkel's long-term service as a calm and moderating chancellor created expectations according to Zohlnhöfer & Saalfeld: "These characteristics of Merkel's leadership have been preserved and had a formative effect" (2015, p. 171). Additionally, the presence of a *systematic crisis* supports the importance of a leader's persona as well. Germany, being the European country that granted asylum to the most refugees since 2015 (Weigel, 2018), has been especially confronted with the refugee crisis that Europe is facing. The current refugee crisis can thus be seen as such a systematic crisis. Also, a *closeness of the electoral outcome*, as Grazia's third condition, is given. The polls between January and September 2017 leading up to the election saw the CDU constantly between five and ten percent ahead of the SPD in second place, with the SPD and candidate Martin Schulz even taking over the lead for some weeks in February (Guttman, 2017). The bottom line is, thus, that the electorate theoretically must have based their voting behaviour on leadership qualities, more so than they would in the first place.

Considering the above, this paper's attention goes out to the personalisation of the two leading candidates of the two main political parties in the media since people apparently were especially sensitised for the importance of political leadership and for the individual that embodies it. The media "are the major primary sources of national political information" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.185) for citizens and therefore make a good reflection of what the electorate is primarily exposed to. More specifically of interest is the representation of the candidates as leaders and the representation of their leadership qualities since these theoretically were of special importance during the 2017 campaign, as elaborated on above.

But what is leadership as a social concept? First and foremost, it is not a rigid concept. Even though a body of scholarly literature exists on it and will be discussed in the theoretical framework of this paper, "notions of leadership are strongly affected by social change" (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005, p. 65). That means that social change constantly demands refinement of the concept, especially in the Western world, which is currently undergoing social change, a.o. in terms of leadership. Theresa May, Jacinda Ardern, Erna Solberg and Angela Merkel are currently the heads of powerful Western countries after many decades of the democratic political realm being an exclusively male territory. The German

elections of 2017 are thus a real-life illustration of that social change. For the fourth time, Angela Merkel ran as a candidate and won the German chancellery- she is politically better connected than almost anybody. She belongs to the political establishment, like no one else does in Germany.

In the past, media representations of her did not always reflect that role. One example for that (out of many) is a discussion that Merkel caused by wearing the same dress on two different occasions. The Spiegel, a conservative quality newspaper, pointed out that ‘faux-pas’ commenting that this would be a “deadly sin for a model” (Roth, 2012). Other German female politicians experienced similar treatment: Member of Parliament, Sawsan Chebli, was criticized for wearing a luxury watch on a photo (Kruse, 2019). At first sight, that story is inherently problematic because of Chebli’s social-democratic background for obvious reasons. One can nevertheless not avoid acknowledging that such status symbols have male connotations and probably also, therefore, stay unnoticed with many other male members of the Bundestag who have a fable for luxury watches.

The question arises, whether Merkel is currently held to the same standards as other (male) leaders and whether she is actually represented differently from them in terms of leadership. Scholarly literature suggests that there are gender differences in terms of leadership representation (Holtz-Bacha & König-Reiling, 2007). Nevertheless, Merkel is the longest-serving political leader in the Western world, and representations of her might fall into different categories than traditional themes of female leadership. So, to what extent has that circumstance been adopted by the media? Are there gender differences visible in the portrayal of leadership or is leadership a more universal formula in the current German media discourse?

Problem Statement and Research Question

Adding to a rich body of literature on personalisation and leadership representation, this paper intends to find possible expansions for the contemporary conceptualisation of leadership. It will examine how the concept was represented in the case of the 2017 German elections and whether there are distinctions visible between candidates, especially in terms of gender. Thus, while personalisation and leadership representation have become so essential for contemporary politics, how, in general, are different groups, of politicians, like men and established women, personalised in the public discourse? The case of this particular election

race between the two top candidates, the social democratic male candidate Martin Schulz and the conservative female candidate Angela Merkel, lends itself well to investigate that question.

The currently prominent gender diversity debate concerning leadership in organisations and politics would benefit from a case study on one of the best-known female leaders of the Western world. In the field of organisational studies, where conceptualisations of leadership have been extensively refined and developed in the past, the importance of more studies including gender in these conceptualisations is emphasized (Collinson & Grint, 2005). Political leadership, likewise, is not extensively examined to that respect (Holtz-Bacha & König-Reiling, 2007) and scholarly refinement is needed for a new era where established long-term female leaders are part of the political realm. All in all, from a media research perspective it is interesting to take a look at the role that the German media and its representations of the two top candidates have played in the allegedly personalised elections and from a sociological perspective the potential differences, especially in terms of gender, in representation of the candidates, are of interest.

Building further on the mostly quantitative exploration of the 2017 campaign (Holtz-Bacha, 2019), this paper wants to contribute qualitative insights in the above-explained regard and investigate the following research question:

To what extent and how does the German newspaper reporting regarding the final TV debates leading up to the general election of 2017 focus on differing personal features and leadership attributes of the top candidate Angela Merkel as opposed to her opponent Martin Schulz?

Theoretical Framework

Following the introduction of the research, this chapter will go in on the theoretical background that will be necessary for the analysis, before the methodological matters are discussed in the following chapter. The main conceptualisations that lend a theoretical basis to this research are threefold. Firstly, the core concept, political personalisation is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of leadership representation in the media with a list of leadership qualities that are often stressed in political reporting. Thirdly, common gender differences in leadership representation are pointed out. The theoretical framework of this

paper will focus on the most prominent and best suiting conceptualisations with regard to the research question. Personalisation, leadership representation, and the distinct forms of male and female leadership, will be operationalized to sensitising concepts in this study.

Political personalization is a broad concept that has been used and defined in various different ways. Most to the point is a definition from Susana Salgado's book, which states that the concept "basically means that political leaders are given more prominence than political parties and organisations [and] become the main anchor of interpretation and evaluation in the political arena" (Salgado, 2018, p.11). Besides this more overarching and descriptive definition, there is no fixed set of personalisation features that are obligatory to use for all studies on the concept as those features vary vastly (Van Aelst et al., 2012, p.213). There is agreement though in scholarly literature, about political personalisation being a trend that has been unfolding on multiple levels (Van Aelst et al., 2011; Kriesi, 2012; Karvonen, 2009). Langer (2007) developed a comprehensive distinction between those levels or dimensions in which personalisation takes place. She identified three major forms of political personalisation in the printed press.

First, there is *presidentialisation of power*, which means that the politician gets attributed more influence as an individual leader, which is associated with more visibility in the public sphere and the media. The phenomenon is also known as presidentialisation of presentation. Considering that this study is concerned with media representation, the focus for this first type will be on said *presidentialisation of presentation (1)*.

Langer's second type, *politicisation of private persona (2)*, stands for a media emphasis on the private life and private character traits that present the politician as a 'human being'. Concerning this type, King (2002, p. 4) argues that media representation of a politician can have direct and indirect impact on voter attitudes: reporting on 'who' a politician is or what he or she stands for as a private person (direct effect) versus reporting on that politician's actions and what he or she 'does' in general (indirect effect).

The third type of personalization is *leadership focus (3)*. It describes a media focus on leaders' politically related personality traits, which would indicate a certain level of 'fitness' for leadership. This type might become most relevant for the research at hand, but all three types will be considered if they appear to play a role in the material. All of Langer's personalization types may show overlaps, yet that is unproblematic for this research due to them, being sensitizing concepts rather than concepts to be tested.

A focus on leadership is likely to occur in the media during an election campaign. But how is such 'fitness' for leadership usually represented? Aaldering & Vliegenthart (2015)

have collected many characteristics that illustrate the representation of leadership in the media, which they extracted from contemporary academic literature. They constructed six overarching concepts of over thirty different classic conceptualisations regarding leadership characteristics in scholarly literature between 1988 and 2011: (1) *political craftsmanship* is defined as anything that points to good education, cleverness, experience or strategic skills. In other words, it refers to political skills that are or are not attributed to the politician. (2) *Vigorousness* refers to representations of the politician regarding their power, strength, and domination in decision-making. (3) *Integrity* would be indicated when attributes such as compassion, honesty, decency, or morale are represented in the wording. A politician would “act in a way that shows concern for and beneficence to trusting individuals” (Aaldering & Vliegthart, 2015, p.1879). A (4) *responsive* leader would be framed as accessible and well informed about the needs, wishes, and struggles living in society. (5) *Communicative performance* would be evaluated in the press when a leader is presented as being able to mobilize people and formulate a clear message. Also, charm and competence in ‘handling’ the media would fall under this. Finally, (6) *consistency* is the last concept with, according to Aaldering & Vliegthart, the least scholarly attention. Due to that, this concept is especially interesting to be aware of in this case study. It is defined by consistent and continuous political action, that the politician is framed to show. The politician would be represented as reliable and somewhat ‘unchangeable’.

As mentioned above, leadership conceptualisations are very much subject to social change. Accordingly, some of the above-summarised conceptualisations of leadership, which are the most commonly used in academia today, “were developed around 20 years ago. Given the technological, economic, social, and political changes within this period, it may well be time for a re-evaluation of our understanding of what leadership is, and its meaning in the 21st century” (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005, p. 55). This paper aims to find nuances in how leadership is represented and possibly add to the conceptual framework.

A step in that direction is taking into consideration gender differences that exist in media representation of leadership. Various American studies have shown that the perception of female and male candidates is influenced by differences in gender representation in the media, resulting in significant disadvantages for female candidates (Kahn, 1994). Since Kahn refers to older studies, women were relatively new to political leadership positions and therefore media reporting on them focussed on the way they campaigned and how they were doing in the polls rather than their political agenda’s or leadership qualities (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). This might be connected to Hitchon et al.’s finding, that candidates who

are portrayed as 'likely to win' often benefit from this portrayal when it comes to votes (1997).

The above-mentioned dominant general conceptualisations of leadership representation in scholarly literature are presented as gender neutral and classic (Fletcher, 2004). Others do identify features of female leadership, but such features have not yet been clearly and distinctly established in research. Such literature is limited to few characteristics and provides a very "limited empirical base upon which our understanding of women's leadership is formed" (Stead & Elliott, 2009, p. 15). Nevertheless, there is reason enough to expect gender differences in terms of leadership representation. While male politicians are often profiled with hard stances on issues such as crime and national defence, female politicians are often associated with more personal features such as their warmth and compassion (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn, 1994). These perceptions might be fuelling Van Dijk's argument that "a male politician is first and foremost perceived as a politician. A female politician, however, is first and foremost seen as a woman, a wife, and a mother. Her profession is rarely separated from her gender" (van Dijk, 2002, p.2). Thus, it seems that female politicians still cannot act as a political person whose private and public life is an unquestioned unity (van Zoonen, 2005). Themes that are often linked to female political leadership in political leadership literature are *emotional engagement*, *morality*, and *decency* (Pantti, 2007, pp. 29). Given these differences with traditional political 'hardness', women in the political realm are often represented as a novelty and as the „other“ (Pantti, 2007, p. 29).

To further elaborate on the distinction between male and female leadership, a view beyond the literature on political leadership can be fruitful for this paper and support what has been found for the political realm. Specific features of female leadership are predominantly stemming from corporate organisational theory. First of all, that literature widely suggests that female leaders have an "advantage in contemporary workplaces that favour more participative and democratic organisational styles" (Stead & Elliott, 2009, p. 25). In other words, the more democratic the organisation, the better suited that organisation is for female leadership. In this paper's case, highly developed democratic political organisation is a standard in the German political realm of the present time. According to that logic, a female leader should thrive, comparably in terms of gender, under such circumstances as opposed to the context of a country with lower democratic standards. That can be derived because, like political theory, organisational literature also puts the ability to cooperate and compromise in the centre of what defines female leadership (Stead & Elliott, 2009; Fletcher, 2004). But besides the attribution of such diplomatic skills, female leaders (of organisations) are mostly associated

with predominantly emotional features. Openness (Stead & Elliott, 2009) or readiness for vulnerability (Fletcher, 2004, p.650) seem to distinct female leaders from classic themes of leadership, associated with men. They also are assigned a caring orientation that manifests itself in “empathy, [a sense of] community, and skills of inquiry” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 650).

Having established some sensitising concepts above, which relate to personalisation, representation of leadership in general and the leadership styles associated with female leaders, in the following, the research design will be introduced.

Methods & Research Design

Given the abundance of media reporting about the 2017 campaign, picking a crucial moment of reporting during the election race appeared favourable. For the sake of clear and meaningful results within the scope of this project, an exceptional moment of public attention during the campaign was picked. This study thus focused on the representations of the two top candidates in the German newspapers’ reporting of the first and only live-TV-confrontation between them. This was done with the help of qualitative discourse analysis. Qualitative discourse analysis focuses on the qualitative analysis of text, instead of wanting to measure this content (Forman & Damschroder, 2008). This study intends to explore these qualitative levels of meaning based on a relatively small dataset of 91 newspaper articles. To get presentable results in this case study, a study must take into account the underlying meanings and references in the textual data. This is necessary to understand which features are, and which features are not, specifically attributed to the candidates and especially to distinguish which attributes and frames are assigned to whom. That way, one does get into a position to make conclusions regarding any form of personalisation in the reporting and identify patterns that evolve from the data. Given the fact that this paper seeks to explore the actual leadership features that are linked to the top-candidates in German media, it would not have been sufficient to simply test concepts, as one would likely miss the specificity of this case regarding the research question.

A qualitative discourse analysis of newspaper articles was most likely to capture the representation of the two top-candidates as the debates between them are evaluated in great detail. This is especially the case in print/textual media as opposed to other forms of media such as television, other visual media or radio. Newspapers and their online outlets still remain the most influential news sources when it comes to political information in Germany

(Faas & Sack, 2016, p. 18). Even though social media platforms gained significance in recent years, which would qualify them as an alternative source of material for this study, most political information that is shared on such platforms stems originally from mass media such as online newspaper outlets (Faas & Sack, 2016). Also, a part of the German population, especially elderly citizens, is not represented on social media and is not particularly active online, if at all. This disproportionate attention for social media might distort this paper's aim to include the media representation of leadership towards the whole population. This study, therefore, relies on the primary sources of news in Germany: the most influential German newspapers and their online outlets that distribute news articles online both, on and off social media as well as in traditional paper form.

Schreier (2013) developed a systematic method to extract 'redundant' information from the data and conduct what she calls a 'qualitative content analysis'. It consists of eight steps and is well applicable to this case study as it allows an explicitly data-driven approach. This specific method works with the concept of inductive coding (e.g., Gibbs, 2007) while giving the coding process a more structured corset of orientation. It has proven to be helpful for rather inexperienced researchers for that reason and indeed did provide a useful scaffold during the analysis process. While being quite similar to the grounded theory approach of Strauss and Glaser (1967) and later Strauss and Corbin (1994), it complements that approach only in the sense that Schreier suggests more than the classic three steps open, axial and selective coding. That classic analysis process is divided up into smaller, more concrete steps of analysis.

Within Schreier's eight steps, there are opportunities for adjusting the process at every stage (*constant comparison*) and that facilitates the focus on what the data actually says. Nevertheless, the analytic process will be (partly) informed by the above-formulated sensitising theoretical concepts. Schreier's first step has already been covered above: the development of a research question. Secondly, the material was selected. On September 3rd, 2017, the one and only TV-debate-show between the two top candidates, Merkel and Schulz, was broadcasted on four German free TV channels. A total dataset of 91 newspaper articles that cover or are related to this TV debate served as empirical material. The newspaper articles were retrieved from thirteen of the highest-circulation national daily and weekly newspapers in Germany. Depending on availability, between three and twelve articles were used out of each newspaper outlet, also including opinion articles, as these are a crucial part of the reporting that newspapers do for their readers and therefore are of great importance to public opinion formation. The political spectrum was also covered as completely as possible

by including newspapers with various different ideological orientations. Additionally, quality news outlets were included as well as tabloid papers. By doing so, it was attempted to construct a comprehensive summary of the nationwide newspaper representations of the two candidates regarding the TV debate. The quality daily newspapers that were included in this study are the bourgeois-conservative *'Die Welt'*, the left-wing liberal *'Frankfurter Rundschau'*, the traditionally liberal-conservative *'Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung'*, the liberal *'Süddeutschen Zeitung'* and the alternative and critical *'tageszeitung'* (aka. *TAZ*). With the liberal *'Die Zeit'* and the left-liberal *'Der Spiegel'*, the two most influential weekly news magazines were included as well. Additionally, local newspapers with supra-regional, partly national importance like the *'Stuttgarter Zeitung'* (Stuttgart), the *'Tagesspiegel'* (Berlin), the *'Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger'* (Köln) and the *'Rheinische Post'* (Düsseldorf) provided material. To complete the set of outlets, the *'Die Bild'* and *'Hamburger Morgenpost'* were included to cover the tabloid market¹.

The online-archives of these newspapers were searched with the following two similar search terms: “TV Duell AND Merkel OR Schultz” and “TV Debatte AND Merkel OR Schultz”. The terms are based on the candidates’ names, and each contains a synonym of ‘TV debate’. The one term of the two that scored the most search results in a particular news archive was used to find material in this archive. Additionally, the overarching newspaper archive Lexis Nexis was searched with the same search terms to gather relevant articles that initially were behind paywalls in their newspaper’s open archives. After all archives were searched, the sample was selected based on the upcoming search results’ length and relevance for the research question. Thus, within the search results, usually the first four to ten articles with between 300 and 5500 words and direct relation to the September-debate were chosen and included as material.

Following Schreier’s method, the third step, called segmentation, highlighted the relevant passages (units) from the text in order to construct main categories and subcategories on the basis of these units. The smaller subcategories are, so to speak, the foundation, that the broader main categories/themes would stand on later (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All units that refer directly or indirectly to one of the candidates or in which they are mentioned were initially considered relevant for the research question. This process significantly reduced the total of material. The fourth step was the development of a provisional coding frame. This was done based on a random selection of fifteen articles from the whole dataset. When the provisional coding frame was developed, the next and fifth step was a trial coding based on

¹ For a detailed distribution of articles see Appendix A

this first raw coding frame. The trial was executed on another ten randomly selected articles from the dataset. After this trial, as a sixth step, the provisional coding frame was re-evaluated and the naming of the categories was modified again in regards to new insights gained from the trial. In a seventh step, these modifications were implemented in a final coding frame so that all relevant modes of representation of the candidates were present. The final coding frame was then used for the eighth and final step: the primary analysis of the whole remaining dataset until conceptual saturation was reached. A relative point of saturation was reached after the analysis of approximately 60 to 65 articles. Nevertheless, all 91 articles were segmented and used in the analysis. The results of this analysis will be interpreted and presented in the following result section of the paper and will be followed by an overall conclusion and theoretical discussion of the findings.

Results

The data collection from many different archives provided an abundance of material, which enabled the analysis to identify a rich set of themes. Leadership is thus represented in various ways, sometimes in line with certain gender expectations as outlined in the theoretical framework and sometimes in alternative, rather unexpected ways. In total, twelve main categories of different ways of leadership representation for both candidates were found. The main categories each hold up to four subcategories. Since the representation of Angela Merkel's persona, as opposed to her male opponent, is in the focus of this study, the core of the findings consists of six main themes of representation that the newspapers applied to her in the reporting around the TV debate. These six main categories will structure the outline of this chapter and form five subsections. Along with the presentation of the six core findings, these will be contrasted with other relevant categories concerning her opponent Martin Schulz.

Interestingly, no crucial differences in terms of representation were found between the different types and ideological orientations of all newspapers. Relatively coherent differences in representation appeared to be at hand across all newspapers. It was, therefore, decided not to take into account the differences in source type in the structure of this chapter. Nevertheless, if any type or ideological positioning of a newspaper was of importance to a category, the respective newspaper would find mentioning. Thus, in the course of presenting

the main themes, it is the intention to carve out differences in representation between the candidates that were created by the newspapers and to give a first interpretation of those against the background of typical gender expectations. These insights will later be put into more detailed theoretical perspective in the discussion section.

To stay as close to the material as possible, segments from the articles will serve as an illustration for all particular themes in the form of direct quotes. All quotes were translated from German, which was the original language of all articles.

A Reactive Eminence

A first central theme in the picture that the press painted of Merkel is her reactivity. Some news outlets see that the chancellor is in a passive disposition to new developments and confrontation. Instead of being proactive in debates and other exchanges, it is implied that Merkel waits for things to unfold. That image could be a byproduct of her political realism that does not match well with the requirements of the classic political campaigner making promises and going after opponents.

Merkel's reactivity manifests itself in the material in three ways: The press indicates a lack of initiative, a defensive style, and weaknesses in direct confrontation. Somewhat conflicting with Merkel's alleged opportunism that will be discussed later, the *Tagesspiegel*, for example, concludes that Merkel missed opportunities by not taking the initiative in the debate:

"Merkel should have taken moderation into her own hands and lead the room over to her strong points." (Birnbaum, 2017; MC: *TAGESSPIEGEL 1*)

Similarly, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* portrays Merkel as not consequently leading the debate and not using her advantages actively:

"The impression that remains from this debate: The chancellor, who would actually have to score with her real power of a stateswoman, is shilly-shallying." ("Der Herausforderer", 2017; MC: *FRA.RUND 1*)

In addition to a lack of initiative, defensive behaviour is frequently associated with Merkel. Not least, due to the contrasting aggressive style of her opponent, the media reserve a defensive role for her like in the Welt newspaper:

"Angela Merkel argues very defensively."(Sturm, 2017; MC: *WELT 10*)

So does the Bild Zeitung, which also sees Merkel as being pressured into defence:

"Merkel is in explanation and defense mode. She tries to justify the loss of control at EU borders in 2015." (Blome, 2017; MC: *BILD 1*)

Merkel's defensive strategy is not assessed the same by all outlets, however. Some picture a defensive style as the way to go for Merkel, given her personality and individual strengths:

"Angela Merkel must not attack. She can not, will not, and she should not." (Dreves, 2017; MC: *MOPO 1*)

The overall impression remains, however, that Merkel is uncomfortable in confrontational situations such as public exchanges with the press or with her political opponent:

"In terms of body language, she initially looks like a good student in the debate show, who does not really know why she was called to the principles office." (Maier et al., 2017; MC: *TAZ 3*)

While Merkel is said to be out of her comfort zone during such public exchanges, Schulz' image is often put in contrast to Merkel. He is represented as an approachable politician with the better social skillset. In the general accounts of him, the challenger is commonly depicted as a likable (Westphalian) next-door neighbour:

"Jovial, approachable, humorous. No one is safe from Schulz little jokes, not even himself." (Schulte & Reinecke, 2017; MC: *TAZ 2*)

In a later subsection of this paper, it will become clear that significant parts of the material also represent Schulz as impulsive and impatient. Nevertheless, he is consistently perceived as the better communicator by the press:

"There is the communicative superiority of Schulz, who can articulate more empathetic, people-oriented." (Maron, 2017; MC: *STUTT. 1*)

Merkel's lack of comfort in confrontation and public exchange as well as her defensive behaviour go against the classic leadership theme that favours a leader who takes initiative, who has the ability to take matters into their own hands. Schulz, on the other hand, fulfils that picture by being represented as a people's man. This contrast in themes thus comes as no surprise since a passive style of leadership is also typically assigned to female leaders.

An Assailable Leader

The next main category paints the general picture of a vulnerable Merkel. It will be confirmed by other upcoming main themes, that newspapers identify weak spots in Merkel's style of leadership, which leave her open to verbal strikes, especially during a campaign trail.

Even though, in later sections, it will also be established that Merkel's experience is mostly seen as a strength, some outlets resume an inevitable tiredness that goes along with her lengthy political career:

"It is fair to say that the past four years of government have left a clear mark on Merkel's face- she seems exhausted like never before." (Hagen, 2017; MC: *SPIEGEL 4*)

Some newspapers thus describe the chancellor with low energy and little dynamic, which is more than inconvenient during an election campaign, let alone a TV debate. That turns out to be a rather subjective observation by some newspapers, however, since a few other articles also indicate that Merkel copes well with the stress of the campaign trail (e.g., Schuler, 2017; MC: *ZEIT 2*).

Another indication for a vulnerability-theme is a notable amount of articles that frame certain situations in the debate in such a way that they suggest that Merkel got caught off-guard by questions or statements. Mostly unrelated to the framing of Merkel as tired, such segments imply that Merkel was not sufficiently prepared for the debate, like:

"Schulz and the moderators managed to catch Merkel off guard a couple of times." (Caspari & Schuler, 2017; MC: *ZEIT 7*)

And

"(...) Merkel proved by no means to be inviolable." (Birnbäum, 2017; MC: *TAGESPIEGEL 1*)

The segments create the impression that Merkel was exposed throughout the debate, even though she stuck to her strategy. Verbal Strikes against her were framed as significant, and it was suggested that Merkel had nothing in store to respond or counter them:

"That question forces even her to pause and clear her throat. The otherwise so controlled chancellor was having a hard time with the situation." ("Als Merkel emotional wurde", 2017; MC: *KÖSA 6*)

A vulnerable image for the chancellor is, just like her representation as a reactive and passive politician, hardly astonishing. Female leadership is often associated with more willingness to show weakness, on the one hand, and a higher probability of being characterised as vulnerable by others, on the other hand. Besides a few statements on Schulz being nervous about poll results, he is not framed as being equally vulnerable in public exchanges. In that sense, this central theme is also in line with general gender expectations.

Physical Appearance and the Mother Metaphor

The third section of this chapter will discuss the two smallest main categories of leadership representation that emerged from the data. Their relatively small size (measured in segments collected under them) compared to the other four main themes, do not automatically determine a hierarchy of interest for the research question, however. Superficial depictions of Merkel and the use of mother metaphors for her, hold relevant meaning, especially with respect to theory on female leader's association with the private sphere, which will, amongst other things, be addressed in the discussion chapter.

Unsurprisingly, the mother metaphor is thus part of some articles as Merkel is frequently associated with that image, even internationally. In most cases, that image is used ironically, to, for example, mock the familiar calmness of the chancellor like in this segment from the *Frankfurter Rundschau*:

"Merkel motherly smiles down to us from the campaign poster. Mama Merkel is there for everyone." ("Es ist Wahlkampf", 2017; MC: *FRA.RUND 4*)

Other articles, like the following example from the Spiegel, assign her a caring and soothing tone, which is also used in a somewhat cynical manner:

"The "everything will be fine" sound of the chancellor keeps convincing." (Hagen, 2017; MC: *SPIEGEL 4*)

Besides references to Merkel's motherly features, her outer appearance is a reoccurring theme. These observations are either neutral or positively commented and thus not intended to depict Merkel ironically or badly. The Bild Zeitung, for example, describes Merkel's outfit and its effect at the TV debate thoroughly:

"Merkel chose a flowing blouse with large pockets, not a strict outfit as she often does. That gives her something flattering and easy." (Jauch, 2017; MC: *BILD 2*)

Another article talks about close advisors that the two candidates have had throughout the campaign. Interestingly, only for Merkel's advisor, it is mentioned that she is also advised on her fashion choices, whereas it can be assumed that Schulz' outfits were just as planned out. This segment from the Rheinische Post talks about Eva Christiansen, who is a media consultant to Merkel:

"Eva Christiansen advises Merkel comprehensively on her external appearance, shifts in public opinion, and assessments of current political issues."(Bröckner & Quadbeck, 2017; MC: *RHPO 2*)

In line with Merkel's representation as a reactive and vulnerable leader, these two smaller themes confirm general gender expectations as well. The motherly image that is given to Merkel positions her as a caretaker to the German people rather than a determined guide through times of crisis. Similarly, addressing Merkel's fashion choices is transporting traditional gender roles, especially because Schulz' planning of his physical appearance is not mentioned once in the material.

A Thoughtful Leader

An almost standard mode of representation for Angela Merkel as a leader proved to be her portrayal as a thoughtful political actor. Out of all themes, this theme is most prominent in the material. Overall, the chancellor is thus often represented as making well thought-out and intelligent opportunistic moves in the political realm. That portrayal becomes visible in three features that are regularly assigned to her in the material and which make up the three subcategories of this central theme: Merkel's professional and political versatility, her even-temperedness and her diplomatic and tactical skills.

The meaning of Merkel being presented as versatile is to be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, her professional versatility is highlighted in some outlets, which present her as being able to respond to a wide variety of topics in an instant and professional way like this segment, describing the TV debate, illustrates:

"Merkel actually presents a satisfactory answer to everything that comes up." (Von Fried, N. (2017); Material Code (MC): *SUEDD. 1*)

In line with that, it is often referred to her as being able to choose very different approaches to different issues that do not necessarily have to match her ideological or partisan position:

"She is known as an "all-inclusive chancellor" who tackles different challenges in a variety of ways." ("Schlagabtausch ohne echte Treffer", 2017; MC: *KÖSA 1*)

On the other hand, Merkel is presented as politically versatile in the sense of being pragmatic. More general descriptions of her in the material, indicate that she is ready to switch stances very quickly when she feels that a situation requires her to do so:

"Merkel's opportunism and flexibility stand out." (Siepen, J., 2017; MC: *WELT 3*)

It is even claimed, that that feature of hers has reached legendary status:

"Her political pragmatism is legendary: she always stands wherever she currently locates the majority." (Maier et al., 2017; MC: *TAZ 3*)

Besides a general pragmatism, also, during the TV debate, some outlets see Merkel operating pragmatically in particular situations. The Welt states that Merkel's strategy was not to be left behind by Schulz' new ideas:

"Merkel sees that she can not allow Schulz to overtake her at this point. Therefore, she takes over his demand with regards to Turkey within a few minutes." (Sturm, 2017; MC: *WELT 10*)

She is thus characterised as a versatile „all-inclusive chancellor" that can hardly be pinned down to an approach or a position. It should be noted though that Merkel's versatility is not always interpreted as a positive characteristic of her leadership as it is occasionally mentioned in an ironic context as well. Nevertheless, her versatility is mostly framed neutrally or as a strong point.

Besides highlighting her versatility, Merkel is remarkably often depicted as even-tempered and balanced. Her relaxed style is represented as such in a majority of the articles. The Sueddeutsche Zeitung suggests, for example, that Merkel restrains from attacks when she is challenged:

"Merkel - acting as the stateswoman that she is - holds back a side blow and responds calmly to the provocation (...)." (Kolb, 2017; MC: *SUEDD. 9*)

Some articles make it seem as if Merkel is not quickly thrown off and as if she has found strategies to deal with direct attacks during debates:

"The chancellor acts relatively cool on television as she often does; her sentences are dense and convoluted. Her advisors have made a virtue out of it by now. The chancellor cannot be easily disturbed." (Caspari, 2017; MC: *ZEIT 3*)

Such attacks and disturbances, which Merkel regularly had to face throughout the campaign, mostly came from her opponent. Schulz is, therefore, clearly associated with an aggressive style. Other than Merkel, Schulz is usually put in the position of the attacker as in the following two segments:

"Schulz played aggressively, attacked Merkel in the Turkey question and when it came to pensions." ("Kuschelkurs statt Rede-Schlacht", 2017; MC: *MOPO 4*)

And

"It stayed like that for the whole evening: Schulz was on the attack." (Kolb, 2017; MC: *SUEDD.* 9)

Statements on his temperament often support that picture of Schulz, which stands in direct contrast to Merkel. Schulz is characterized as quick-tempered and hot-headed:

"Schulz is sufficiently quick-witted, but also beastly." (Maier et al., 2017; MC: *TAZ* 3)

His style of political discourse is far from balanced. The media suggest that Schulz has a hard time staying in control of his emotions:

"The candidate can be (...) impatient and gruff when he does not like a situation." (Caspari, 2017; MC: *ZEIT* 3)

Following emotional impulses has helped Schulz during the first weeks of his campaign and enabled him to distance himself from Merkel, who is seen as anything but an emotional leader. In the final stage of the campaign, the weeks around the final TV debate, the media have mostly identified that feature of Schulz as a disadvantage though:

"Campaign Advisor Peichl must be careful that the impulsive SPD chief does not seem too aggressive." (Bröckner & Quadbeck, 2017; MC: *RHPO* 2)

The last part of this central theme of Merkel as a thoughtful leader concerns her diplomatic and tactical skills. She is portrayed as having a particular mode of responding, which means that she leans out of the metaphorical window just as far as necessary on all issues. A diplomatic skill that some news outlets partly devote her long-standing success to:

"Merkel leads exactly the election campaign that she has always led: she polarizes as little as possible, chooses her words carefully." (Schuler, 2017; MC: *ZEIT* 2)

Along with that, Merkel is credited for her tactical feel multiple times. No outlet denies that as a crucial part of her skill set:

"(...) Merkel is utilizing her bonus as acting chancellor smartly, something she is relying on in this debate as well." (Bröckner & Quadbeck, 2017; MC: *RHPO 2*)

This most prominent main theme of representation re-organizes the picture that the proceeding themes suggested. In sum, interestingly, this central theme seems to reverse the classic gender expectations of leadership. Merkel is represented as flexible in her approaches, very even-tempered, diplomatic and tactically schooled. All these features fit into the classic (male-typical) idea of what leadership requires. At the same time, typically female attributes are paradoxically assigned to Schulz. Even though he is the aggressor, a traditionally male role, Schulz is the emotional candidate between the two. Little control over emotions is typically associated with women rather than men and Merkel's diplomatic skills stand in grave contrast with that picture of Schulz.

A Symbol of Continuity

The last very significant pattern of leadership representation that became visible in the material shows the German chancellor as a solid figure that stands for continuity. In that respect, experience and sovereignty are assigned to her but also a certain stubbornness.

Journalists often mentioned Merkel's twelve-year chancellery and her network of international leaders and politicians. Along with the experience she has, often goes the suggestion that Merkel is not known as a symbol of change. Some articles go as far as calling her the embodiment of a rigid status quo:

"Merkel stands for: things stay as they are. After twelve years of chancellery, Merkel embodies this like hardly anyone else." (Hummel, 2017; MC: *SUEDD. 14*)

The chancellor being presented as experienced comes as no surprise, considering the fact that she is Europe's longest-serving head of state. However, in the reporting on her, that is taken a step further. She appears to be seen as the opposite of a driving force for change. She is instead profiled as the conservative prototype. Interestingly, that is inconsistent with her representation as versatile in terms of political stances that was discussed earlier.

When Merkel's experience finds mentioning, some sign of sovereignty is often added to her representation. For example, the Spiegel assigns media competence to her:

"What should the media consultants teach her after all these years?" (Gathmann, 2017; MC: *SPIEGEL 2*)

Meanwhile, the Tagesszeitung assigns her sovereignty in the management of the 2015 refugee crisis and:

"In a crucial moment, she has demonstrated some backbone, and many Germans admire her for it." (Eisvogel, 2017; MC: *TAZ 1*)

It is suggested that Merkel is a constant factor in an ever-changing political environment. Her hands-on style, combined with her experience, seems to have established a reputation of solidity for her. The material indicates that People know what to expect from Angela Merkel and that security is framed as comforting more often than not.

Keeping the status quo, which Merkel apparently stands for, requires insisting on existing patterns. In that regard, occasionally a stubborn side of the chancellor is put forward. An excellent example of that is the framing of her reaction to Martin Schulz asking for a second TV debate:

"Merkel stays hard. End of the announcement; She does not allow a second TV debate with Schulz." ("Ende der Durchsage", 2017; MC: *TAGESSPIEGEL 5*)

But not only in that particular case, is Merkel depicted as hard-headed. The Bild Zeitung makes stubbornness into a general mode of response from Merkel to innovation or change that she feels, works in her disadvantage:

"Angela Merkel does what she does best: Everything bounces off her." (Jauch, 2017; MC: *BILD 2*)

This last main theme joins in with the representation of Merkel as a thoughtful leader in terms of being unexpected. Solid as a rock, Merkel seems to impress the media with sovereignty and continuity in office- a classic feature of (male) leadership as defined and established long ago. This theme thus also suggests that, as Europe's longest-serving leader, Merkel managed to overcome gendered representations in the media to a remarkable degree.

Discussion

This case study shines a light on leadership and gender in relation to a circumstance that up until this point in time could not often be observed in the political realm: an established female leader in the position of the clear favourite in an election race against a male opponent. Fitting the specificity of this case is the information that emerged from the material during the analysis. The results of the analysis, as presented above, give a mixed impression of how German newspapers represent Merkel's style of leadership. On the one hand, there is evidence for Merkel being framed in the way that literature on female leadership suggests. On the other hand, the more dominant part of her representation is consistent with classic leadership themes that were derived from male leadership ideals. To illustrate that paradox, the literature that was discussed in the theoretical framework of this paper, will be linked to the themes that were presented above.

Theoretical expectations about female leadership were thus confirmed for Merkel in the material by the smaller main themes of her as a reactive eminence, as an assailable leader, and her physical appearance as well as the usage of the mother metaphor for her.

Positioning Merkel as behaving reactive and defensive instead of wanting to take initiative is conforming to features that Fletcher (2004) identified about female leadership: An ability to listen and not to push through or loudly articulate ones own (absolute) ideas. Representation of female leadership is thus more defined by “skills of inquiry” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 650) rather than by powerful proactive statements.

By painting an assailable picture of Merkel, a certain emotional openness (Stead & Elliott, 2009) or readiness for vulnerability (Fletcher, 2004, p.650) is assigned to her, which confirms gender expectations of her leadership style. Since Merkel is shown in various open and vulnerable positions, while her opponent Schulz is not framed that way, her image indicates a traditionally feminine style.

Also, the well-known mother metaphors that are used for Merkel were to be expected not only because that is a common practice in general. In leadership theory, “a male politician is first and foremost perceived as a politician. A female politician however is first and foremost seen as a woman, a wife and a mother. Her profession is rarely separated from her gender” (van Dijck, 2002, p.2). The use of this metaphor is interesting for this case because another contrast can be made: No other male politician, that is a public figure in the Western world, gets associated with the private sphere of the home and the family like that through a massively used father metaphor.

Equally suggestive of a feminine style of leadership, is a focus on Merkel's physical appearance, while her opponent's appearance is not commented. Even though the segments, commenting on Merkel's outer appearance are never negative, the mere fact that these comments are made has analytical value. Such a focus is one of, if not, the central feminine theme of representation (Sieverding, 1993).

Even though, this will be contradicted by the upcoming two main themes, through the use of the mother metaphors, Merkel represents emotional engagement in the sense of warmth and compassion (Kahn & Goldenberg 1991; Kahn, 1994). Nevertheless, Martin Schulz was paradoxically represented as the much more emotionally engaged candidate. His emotions are not compassion and warmth but impulsiveness and aggression, however. Schulz is the emotional candidate of the two and seemingly has to be careful not to be overwhelmed by his emotions- a struggle that is traditionally associated with women in the public eye. At the same time, however, his aggression also falls under a typically male theme of leadership.

Similarly, the two most significant and more unusual core themes of this study are a theoretical contradiction. The German chancellor is characterised as a thoughtful leader and a symbol of continuity. These themes are interesting, not because they are surprising per se- Merkel has established a reputation for her self as reasonable political player all over the world. In fact, these qualities rather do not match the scholarly accounts on female leadership. The six features of leadership by Aaldering and Vliegenthart (2015) that were introduced in the theoretical framework are based on a classic, masculine style of leadership. Merkel's representation as experienced (a subcategory of 'symbol of continuity' theme) and tactically schooled (a subcategory of 'thoughtful leader' theme) match with Aaldering and Vliegenthart's feature of *political craftsmanship*, which entails experience and strategic skills. Besides that, also their feature of *consistency* is found in the reporting on Merkel. Just like this feature of leadership is defined, Merkel is a somewhat 'unchangeable' leader- She is seen as the embodiment of consistent and continuous politics.

More insight on the identified paradox can be gained, when we look at what can be concluded with regard to the personalisation of Merkel and her opponent by the media. Out of Langer's (2007) three types of personalisation, two types are prominently visible and one type informs this discussion by its absence.

Given the abundance of indications for various different leadership attributes, made in the data, a leadership focus (1) by the media is clearly at hand. More interestingly for this study, a presidentialisation of power (2) is also visible in a specific form. Merkel's continuity and experience as a leader seem to give her an advantage against Schulz in terms of public

representation. Her long-term service almost naturalises her hegemonic position and perhaps, therefore, qualifies her for an image that is partly that of a traditionally masculine leader.

As stated above, Merkel has her emotions under control, which goes against the classic picture of femininity. It has also been made clear that Schulz is emotional and sometimes exaggerating in his aggressive style. This theoretical paradox could be due to the actual core tension between Schulz and Merkel: Merkel's hegemonic position as an established leader and thus the presidentialisation of her power. Her even-temperedness is a sign of domination in this relationship. Merkel can afford to react and is, other than Schulz, not under pressure to take over.

Langer's third type, interestingly, does not occur prominently in the material: The politicisation of private persona (3). This is another indication of Merkel's position in between gender expectations. The political personalisation seems to be limited to the professional sphere, and the private lives of the candidates seem to find relatively little mentioning. Even though that fits into the German media realm and political sphere, which traditionally are not sensationalist at all, this type of personalisation could have been theoretically expected for Merkel's private persona. Following Van Zoonen's argument (2005), which found mentioning above, Merkel's private sphere should have been addressed much more, given the fact that she is a female leader. In that respect, only the two smallest categories, the mother metaphor and superficial depictions of Merkel, lend themselves to conclude a mixing of private and political or professional life in the press. A special interest by the press in Merkel's private life might very well be muted due to her role as an established leader.

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate differences in personalisation between different groups of politicians, specifically men and women. By focussing on the female candidate, Angela Merkel, it was found that this case does not see a clear distinction between the two, but rather portrays Merkel as somewhat of a hybrid politician in that sense.

Obviously, there are contradictions in the material and between the themes and subthemes. For example: Merkel as a symbol of a ridged status quo contradicts her versatility, her opportunism contradicts her lack of initiative, her vulnerability contradicts her sovereignty.

However, the results of the analysis boil down to three less prominent, rather feminine themes that are in line with traditional expectations and two very dominant, rather masculine themes. This is an illustration of Merkel's paradoxical situation: As a female leader, she has to adopt certain traditional male norms of leadership while also not neglecting unconventional features of leadership that distinct her such as showing compassion and weakness. Merkel is thus neither the classic male nor the classic female leader. She seems to be performing an interesting act of balance that is probably reality for many others as well. At least there is some indication, that Merkel has overcome the classic role of a female leader and the gender expectations associated with that to a remarkable degree by acquiring a stable place in the political establishment.

The following can thus be stated with regards to the research question: There are certain leadership features of both candidates that are in line with traditional gender expectations but the established position of Merkel causes those features to be much less rigidly assigned to her in accordance with her gender. The biggest themes of representation for Merkel's style of leadership are traditionally masculine features. A finding that challenges and hopefully inspires scholarly literature on leadership and its rather rigid distribution of features between genders.

Having answered the research question, a few limitations of this study deserve mentioning. The representations of the candidates were not retrieved from the whole German media landscape so only statements on the newspaper sector are possible for this study.

It is also important to say that, of course, this paper dealt with a specific case within which there is a specific dynamic of political roles of two different individual politicians that are not solely the way they are because of gender. It would therefore be interesting to examine other cases of established female leaders.

Furthermore, one might argue Schulz' aggressive style that was identified in this paper might in some cases be connected to his problematic situation at the point of the campaign that the TV debate took place, rather than being a result of his representation as a more typically male leader. Nevertheless, the majority of segments that frame Schulz as an aggressive leader do not reference his precarious situation at that point of the campaign. Moreover, Schulz is widely known in Germany and throughout Europe as an aggressive and pro-active leader since the term he served as president of the European Parliament (2014-2017).

Future research could go into actual media effects of media reporting on political candidates to find out the influence that such representations have on individual voting

behaviour. In doing so, more conclusive insights could be attained concerning the representation of long-term female leaders and whether those are confirmed or disconfirmed by the media consumer. Also, future quantitative studies could test the identified mixed representation of Merkel in the media and, in doing so, could provide a more solid ground for these new findings.

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Appendix A

Quality Daily Newspapers

Die Welt	Frankfurter Rundschau	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Die Tageszeitung
19	5	2	15	3

Regional (High Circulation) Daily Newspapers

Stuttgarter Zeitung	Der Tagesspiegel	Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger	Rheinische Post
3	7	7	2

Quality Weekly Newspapers

Die Zeit	Der Spiegel
12	10

Tabloid Newspapers

Bild Zeitung	Hamburger Morgenpost
5	4