

Not Just ‘Adding Women In’: Women Re-making Leadership

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Abstract: Why is it that so much of women’s contribution to public life has not been recognised as leadership? In this chapter, I look at the construct of leadership itself, its history and recent popularity. Leadership has, in most cultures including Australia, been defined as something that men do. A performance of leadership and heroic masculinity are intertwined. Further, when women emulate male behaviours (even when they appear to do so successfully), they are not judged as leaders. This can and has created profound problems for leading women in Australia. Highly visible and effective women in public life have been designated as something other than leader, such as ‘community activist’ or ‘pioneer’. Here I propose a feminist (re-) conceptualisation of leadership that goes beyond women performing against pre-existing criteria. I argue that alongside our efforts to have women recognised as leaders, we need to use our findings to interrogate and contest received wisdom about leadership. Our interest in Australian women’s leadership should change understandings of what is recognised as leadership: not just ‘adding women in’ but shifting public images and imagination about what good leadership is.

Keywords: leadership theory, women, gender, power, masculinities, feminism

Why has women’s contribution to Australian public life been so neglected and largely treated as something other than leadership? Why are we seeing the flowering of attention to women leaders at the moment? What new things about leadership can we learn from women leaders and scholars? How do we bring a feminist lens to leadership to ensure we are not judging women against unproblematised male norms? In this chapter, I seek to address these questions and de-mystify some less helpful ideas or myths about leadership. Believe me, there are a lot of them.

I begin by looking at the construct of leadership itself, its history and recent popularity. I do so both with an academic overview and via an account of my own journey around the term ‘leadership’. I provide an overview of approaches to women and leadership, including ‘add women and stir’; exploring and validating women’s ways of leading; and third, challenging and re-making the construct of leadership itself. This intention is adapted from the aspiration that Bella Azbug made about power: that ‘leadership will not

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change the nature of women, but women will change the nature of leadership'. Alongside efforts to have women recognised as leaders, we need to use our findings to interrogate and contest received wisdom about leadership. We need to pay close attention to how leadership impacts on and reflects power and oppression. In this chapter I draw on feminist and other scholarship to show how women are remaking and might continue to re-make leadership.

Defining leadership

Defining leadership is no simple undertaking. Many pages of many textbooks have been devoted to settling on one 'final' definition. Despite these efforts, controversy remains. There are multiple definitions, and the ones we decide on are rarely those that are in use.

Most theorists recognise leadership is not a position or a person but a process of influence. According to one definition, leadership is 'a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e. evolving social order) and change (i.e. new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced'.¹ Leadership therefore can be exercised by individuals located in the middle or at the bottom of organisations, by people without formal authority, as much as by CEOs or prime ministers. In contrast to understandings of management, which focus on the ongoing controlling of resources and tasks, leadership is generally thought to include an interest in change: on challenging the status quo or envisioning a new way forward. As Eva Cox puts her view of it: 'the essence of leadership is making up your own mind and then being able to take other people with you'.²

An understanding of leadership as a set of practices, as distributed across a group and collectively achieved is a relatively recent view. As will be shown in the historical section below, there has been a 'long history in institutional thought and practice of considering leadership as an individual property'.³ Further, when you ask people about leadership, they often think of politicians, CEOs, the heads of organisations. More worryingly, and as I describe in my book, they think that a performance of leadership is a heroic one: a performance of tough, out-front decisiveness or 'greatness'. And 'greatness' is an adjective that is almost always applied to men.

How societies and groups define leadership depends on their history, cultural myths and ideologies. As Aboriginal leader Lillian Holt said to me, 'leadership is a white male idea'.⁴ Centrally for this project, leadership has, in most cultures including Australia, been defined as something that men do. A performance of leadership and masculinity are intertwined. Further, when women emulate male behaviours (even when they appear to do so

successfully), they are not judged as leaders but as 'trying too hard to be one of the boys'.⁵

This creates and has created profound problems for leading women in Australia. Even highly visible and effective women in public life have often not had the term 'leader' bestowed on them. To further complicate matters and as amply demonstrated in the research for the conference that inspired this collection, many women are sceptical about the term leadership.⁶ They don't want to be labelled a leader because of what it connotes for them; that is, the out-front, tough and stoic male hero. In her work on educational leadership Jill Blackmore notes that leadership is both 'the problem' and 'the solution'.⁷ We can't ignore the idea of leadership because it is the way of power and legitimacy. At the same time, it is no solution for women to just accept leadership as an unproblematic good and try to measure up to it.

There is, then, a tension between how most texts suggest we should understand leadership and popular and enduring notions of what leadership looks like. It is a paradox that Joyce Fletcher explores powerfully in her essay on 'post-heroic leadership'. Although most of us know that the arguments are in favour of a different model, heroic individualistic leadership is remarkably resilient. Fletcher observes: 'While the rhetoric about leadership has changed at the macro level, the everyday narrative about leadership and leadership practices – the stories that people tell about leadership, the mythical legends that get passed on as exemplars of leadership behaviour – remain stuck in old images of heroic individualism.'⁸ Further, she warns against a token acknowledgement of the value of collaborative processes that fail to properly grapple with the gender and power dynamics at stake in the enactment of heroic versus post-heroic leadership.

How leadership is defined and understood is the result of power, not truth uncovering. Any efforts to define leadership do not mark a solid and enduring line in the sand. Rather, they should be understood as efforts in asserting discursive power. There is good and bad news in this for women's leadership. The bad news is that definitions and discourses of leadership have been remarkably impervious to the efforts and accomplishments of women. A great deal of women's leadership simply has not registered in the canons of leadership knowledge. The good news is that discourses are always open to challenge and contestation. It is precisely by processes such as this conference, that discursive dominance with only male voices and male experience being heard, gets undermined and perhaps overturned.

My own journey around leadership⁹

I want to begin this brief history of leadership with an account of my own interest in the topic. I want to do so at least partially because I think it helps

answer a question a number of people have put about our research project. Why are we talking about women and leadership now?

I have been observing and researching women and men in leadership for close to thirty years, beginning in the 1980s after my PhD, when I was commissioned to do some research on women councillors in local government – or, more specifically, on why there were so few. For many years my interest was in women first and leadership only tangentially.

As I conducted more and more research into women's experiences and especially of their exclusion (and I use that word rather than the more benign 'absence') from formal leadership, I realised that I was focusing on the wrong thing. In order to understand why women were so effectively excluded from leadership, we needed to understand men and the construction of masculine leadership cultures. To foster change and promote women's interests we needed to turn our attention from women to the powerful forces keeping in place the status quo, the forces of hegemonic masculinity which perpetuate a white male elite.¹⁰

Of course just naming this, I realised, was a radical and confronting act. It is far more comfortable to keep everybody focused on 'the other', the problem, the women. Talking about masculinity with mixed corporate groups drew gasps. Teaching about masculinities to MBAs was often unpopular, as I documented in a journal article I only half-jokingly called 'Teaching Managers about Masculinities: Are you Kidding?'¹¹

At the same time, I also found that annexing the language and discourses of leadership gained more attention than I'd had when I was speaking about women or diversity. I had direct experience that the discourse of leadership is a powerful and privileged one. People take notice of what you are saying. Everyone, it seems, wants to know more about leadership and many want to know more about how to be a better leader.

But many of us – including the best leadership scholars – wince when yet another university, school or corporate report extols the need for leadership in the most banal terms.¹² Alongside our interest in leadership, we need to ask why it has become such a prevalent discourse. What does it leave out of analyses? How does it re-frame and limit our understanding of what is really going on in exchanges between those with power and those without?

A turning point for me personally was the realisation that instead of just feeling marginalised and dejected by these norms, I could name them and speak out about their impacts. As I did so, it became very evident that the experiences I was describing were not just a matter of my personal failings; they were institutionalised. Processes of naming, critiquing and challenging may have looked very different to conventional notions of leading, but I had direct evidence that they often functioned as forms of leadership themselves:

supporting others to act differently and freeing them to find new ways of influencing.

A brief history of leadership

In his review of the history of leadership thinking, scholar Keith Grint traces modern leadership studies to Thomas Carlyle, Rector of Edinburgh University in 1866. In this construction 'leadership was irredeemably masculine, heroic, individualist and normative in orientation and nature'.¹³ Historically, notions of leadership have derived from studies of all-male hierarchical environments in societies. These include monastic communities and the military.¹⁴ An alarming amount of common wisdom about leadership derives directly from the military. Grint notes our increasing preoccupation with all things rational and our love of the Mission-Command doctrine of decentralised operational leadership (practised by the German army since at least as early as the nineteenth century). When some colleagues and I did some research exploring leadership, one of the key themes was the idea of leadership as combat. Then and now, you will find discussions of leadership peppered with phrases like 'rallying the troops' and 'taking no prisoners'.¹⁵ Grint observes, 'we seem to have gone forward to the past' 'in thrall to inspirational individuals'.¹⁶

From about the mid twentieth century, American capitalism embraced leadership, turning it into a moral concept that advanced the interests of business and imbued leaders like the head of IBM, James Watson, as heroes doing God's work. This sat alongside the American military who have long self-identified as America's training ground for leaders. In the last decades the American-dominated leadership industry (an elite conglomeration of business and academics) have looked to the lessons of leadership to retrieve control and dominance. Thus leadership scholar Barbara Kellerman observes, the 'contemporary leadership field is an American product, planted in American soil and harvested by American scholars, educators and consultants'.¹⁷ Views of leadership have taken on aspects of American national character, such as individualism, self-reliance, competitiveness and assertiveness, and these assumptions find their way into leadership theory, development and training.

Despite these strong themes of military discipline, self-reliance and stoicism in the construction of leadership, more recently there has been a return to a focus on transformational or charismatic leadership.¹⁸ Here the emphasis is on the power of the leader to inspire followers through their personal qualities and individualised consideration. In earlier research, I noted a related discourse informing understandings of leadership.¹⁹ The words 'seduction' and 'leadership' have common origins with the Latin root of seduction, *se ducere*, meaning 'lead' or 'to lead astray'. In the fifteenth century, seduce had a masculine application, meaning the process whereby

men (leaders) seduced other men from their earlier allegiance or loyalty. By the sixteenth century, seduction was being applied to women, specifically meaning to induce a woman to surrender her chastity. While seduction is something that has become associated with private sexual relations and seductive is a term usually applied to women, these roots remind us that leadership has always been understood as involving processes where followers (including men) are 'swept off their feet' by a male leader's charisma and persuasiveness. The most notorious example of this usage was Mussolini who was known as *Il Duce*.

Organisational scholars Marta Calas and Linda Smircich have pursued the connection between leadership writing and seduction, deconstructing sections of texts from five leadership 'gurus' whose work spans more than fifty years (Barnard, McGregor, Mintzberg and Peters and Waterman).²⁰ They suggest that 'leadership feeds on the denial of consummation while constantly playing on the edges of transgression. Rather than suppressing desire ... leadership works because it embodies desire, while covering its traces with the sign of truth'.²¹ Calas and Smircich show how each of the four texts accomplish seduction in historically contextualised ways, meanwhile often presenting themselves as new and urgent knowledge about leadership. For example, Barnard takes the high moral ground, imbuing leaders with a father-confessor aura of superiority deserving of reverence, while MacGregor's text appeases 'the ambivalence felt by those in dominant positions – American corporate bosses and American heterosexual males – when the winds of equality (blow) too close for comfort'.²² As critical organisational researcher Barbara Czarniawska reminds us, motifs like leadership do not stand outside history.²³

This is important to those of us with an interest in women's leadership because we can notice how leadership has been remarkably adaptive. As soon as a powerful critique begins to be mobilised about traditional or elitist views of leadership, we see emerging a new emphasis on 'collaborative' 'empowered', 'democratic' or 'participatory' 'relational' or even 'post feminist' leadership. We may be tempted to sigh with relief at this point and say 'Oh they've finally got it'. Mostly 'they' haven't. Many of these manoeuvres are about providing a veneer of doing leadership differently, of looking more enlightened but without any systematic analysis of power, who has it and how it gets reproduced. An example is an international list that a UK colleague forwarded to me. It asked eminent world scholars to nominate their 'best book on leadership'. Of the twenty listed – all with enormously encouraging titles tilting at devolution and empowerment – nineteen were by men and almost all of these were American or English white males.

A brief history of women and leadership

An interest in women and leadership gained momentum through the late 1970s and 1980s alongside the rise of second wave feminism, widespread attention and agitation concerning equal rights and affirmative action legislation.²⁴ Australian and Australian-based feminist scholars were in the vanguard of theorising a feminist perspective on bureaucracy, including issues of discrimination and difference, masculine bias and advantage.²⁵

It was also during this period that leadership, as an idea, was particularly taken up by business schools, management theorists and social psychologists. Whereas in the past leadership was the domain of political scientists, historians, philosophers and military theorists, from around the 1980s onwards much of the research and writing about leadership comes from this business-oriented and psychological perspective.

Women managers and the challenges they faced entering the 'foreign country' of male management was the focus of early research.²⁶ Some of this literature on 'women in management' was 'business oriented, American in origin and in cultural assumptions, often unduly optimistic about the immediate possibilities for change'.²⁷ A psychological preoccupation became common. Studies focused on the qualities women needed in management, and whether there were enduring sex differences that meant that women and men led and managed differently. The 'sex differences' approach to studying women-in-management has generated considerable and ongoing research from the late 1970s. Meta-studies have concluded there was little difference due to sex in achievement motivation, risk taking, task persistence and other significant managerial skills.²⁸

On the other hand, pioneering scholars argued that the focus should be taken off women and their individual characteristics in favour of providing a more systemic view of the gendered power relations in organisations and society, which are often aimed at keeping women in subordinate roles and largely responsible for families and children. Judi Marshall's important book, *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* documented that it is not women's characteristics that require analysis, but the overt and more subtle ways women are excluded.²⁹ In another path-breaking contribution, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Rosabeth Moss Kanter argued that it was not sex that determined what was happening to women managers but exclusion from power and the effects of being a token.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s there emerged a new interest specifically focused on women and leadership. Again, much of the early work came from American business-oriented researchers. Judy Rosener, writing in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1990, argued that there was now a 'second wave' of women leaders who no longer had to mimic the 'command and control' male model of organisational leadership. Further, she maintained,

they are ‘succeeding because of – not in spite of – certain characteristics generally considered to be “feminine” and inappropriate in leaders’.³⁰ Drawing on a 1989 survey of members of the International Women’s Forum, Rosener makes the case that these women are ‘transformational’ or distinctly ‘interactive’ in their leadership, that they demonstrate a commitment to making their interactions with subordinates positive for everyone. ‘More specifically, the women encourage participation, share power and information, enhance other people’s self-worth, and get others excited about their work.’³¹ This form of leadership is highly effective, she argues, even advantageous, and organisations should be open to it and to expanding their definitions of effective leadership.

Rosener’s argument – that women lead differently from men – predictably elicited controversy. While she made it clear that she felt these differences were due to socialisation and career paths, not innate sex differences, other researchers have explored some of the consequences of identifying a female style of leading. One outcome is that research and writing that deplores the effects of stereotyping gets used to create new stereotypes; for example, that women are more empathetic and people-friendly. Such stereotypes are not benign. They are deployed to set higher standards for women in some areas, such as nursing and child care, where their leadership is then downgraded and treated as ‘just what women are good at’. Another effect also taken up in the pages of the *Harvard Business Review* was the idea of a ‘mommy track’, a special, slower career track created for women with family responsibilities.³² Proponents argued that it was necessary to ‘face the facts’: that women are the child bearers and in large part, child rearers. Rather than expect all leaders to travel the same career path, organisations should make alternative tracks available to women with family responsibilities.

Do women lead differently or are they just perceived differently?

The suggestion that women – as a group – exhibit different but equally valuable ‘feminine’ styles of leadership continues to be controversial. Research confirms that whether women lead differently depends. It depends on which population of women is sampled but also on who is doing the research and how and what they are measuring.

Managerial-oriented research finds little difference between the measured capabilities of men and women leaders in mainstream organisations. Women learn quickly to adapt their styles and are as effective in key competencies. As described above, research also shows women to be higher on some transformational leadership behaviours.³³ These findings persist in organisations where there are large numbers, or a ‘critical mass’, of women in middle management roles but where power remains centralised in a small

number of male hands. In these circumstances, women largely conform to male models of leadership and do so effectively.

In contrast, the small amount of research into women's organisations suggests that where women are freer to create their own organisational and leadership culture, they will often do so differently.³⁴ In these cases, women's leadership will generally be more collaborative and less hierarchical, power will be more devolved and structures more participatory and there will be greater interest in the whole person.

Long-time scholar of women's leadership, Alice Eagly, notes the tensions and contradictions in much of the popular research on women leaders. They are identified as having a 'female advantage': showing up as consistently demonstrating qualities of transformational leadership such as 'individualised consideration', 'inspirational motivation' and 'intellectual stimulation'.³⁵ However, women leaders are simultaneously disadvantaged by stereotypes of leadership that generally resemble stereotypes of men; that is, agentic, confident, aggressive and self-determined. Eagly concludes: 'men can seem usual or natural in most leadership roles ... people more easily credit men with leadership ability and more readily accept them as leaders'.³⁶ She notes that though prejudices against women leaders have dropped significantly since the 1970s and 1980s, there is contemporary evidence of plateauing or even reversal of this trend, especially in traditionally masculine fields.

In my own research focusing on bodies in leadership, I have argued that there is consistent evidence that women continue to be judged as inferior leaders according to masculine bodily norms; for example, they are judged as sexualised or disruptive bodies (through maternity and emotionality) which pose threats to command and efficiency.³⁷ Women's identities, gender and bodies are tied together and attributed meanings in the public psyche that are often antithetical to leadership. In contrast to men, women are routinely photographed with more of their bodies and skin on show and in ways that invite public commentary and evaluation, as media coverage of Australia's current prime minister, Julia Gillard, shows. Gillard has been rendered less leader-like through public commentary of her hips, hair roots and wrinkles. Women are also judged against stereotypes of all women.³⁸ For example, Gillard's decision not to have children was interpreted as evidence 'she doesn't have much love in her'. In another example, during her presidential campaign Hilary Clinton was stalked by a critic who yelled 'iron my shirt!' throughout her speeches. 'Reducing' women leaders to their bodies and to gendered roles is a time-honoured way for followers to cope with anxieties about women with power.³⁹

Broadly, then, research confirms that women are not psychologically or physically handicapped for leadership, but rather face a barrage of gendered

assumptions and stereotypes about their fitness for leadership which get translated into discriminatory norms and organisational practices in areas such as recruitment and promotion. Despite the confident prediction and assertion by some that such practices have disappeared, the evidence is that they continue to be powerfully in play, especially in leadership where decisions about 'fitness' and 'fit' are based on the 'judgement' of insiders. An example in the Australian context is the number of women on corporate boards. It has not been until recent reforms requiring companies to be more transparent about board recruitment and director selection processes, that the proportion of directors who are women has increased from a low of around 8 per cent, to being 26 per cent of all new board appointments in 2011.

In the chronology above, we can identify three broad approaches to women in leadership. The first basically accepts the task is for women to perform against pre-existing criteria of leadership, an approach sometimes described as the 'add women and stir' remedy. This approach underpins a lot of contemporary leadership development and 'talent management' approaches, for example the mentoring programs currently being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Company Directors in a bid to increase the number of non-executive company directors who are women. In this approach, leadership is treated as a good that all people should strive towards and is not subject to any critique.

The second approach is to seek to change, or expand the criteria of leadership to include qualities that women often have an interest in mobilising in leadership. There is a very substantial body of scholarship by feminist writers and others who show, for example, the centrality of relational practices, of an ethic of care and nurturance, of more lateral and decentralised structures in 'women's ways of organising'.⁴⁰ However, the very real risk with this approach is that 'women's ways of leading' get 'essentialised' – that all women will be expected to deliver this, and only this, approach. Further, women's ways of leading then gets simplified and stereotyped as a kind of second-order leadership.

The third approach, which is the one I argue for in this chapter, is to accompany any discussion about women and leadership with a more searching critique of power and leadership, including the mechanisms by which elites perpetuate centralisation of power often in gendered forms. It is to these ideas that I now turn.

Women re-making leadership

As I hope will now be clear, women have and are re-making leadership in two interrelated ways – in their practices of organising and through their accounts and theorisations of women's participation and contributions to public life.

The Women and Leadership conference at which this material was initially presented provided many examples of women who have taken power, supported other women and provided new ways forward, as well as scholars bringing new understanding and applying new lenses to those processes and achievements.⁴¹ In the following section, I describe and summarise findings from these two areas: first, women's practices in organising and leadership; second, how women's scholarship has contributed to reconceptualisations of what leadership is.

First and importantly, women's leadership often involves working within, around and underneath institutional, cultural and societal contexts that may be authoritarian, oppressive and hierarchical, gendered and racist. These contexts in which women work, inevitably constrain and shape the way individual women 'do' leadership. For example, and as demonstrated by many of the women described at the Women and Leadership conference and in this collection, leadership is often provided from a position of being 'outsiders', denied access to networks of privilege and power. This outsider status frequently requires, and bestows, a discernible courage, a familiarity with 'not belonging' and a willingness to be non-conforming.⁴² Women leaders often have less to lose in 'going it alone'.

So what might be some emphases in women's leading in the context of wider patriarchal organising? There has been extensive discussion about principles of feminist organising, particularly in international development and transnational networks, among postcolonial scholars, feminist, Indigenous and other women's groups. The following are common (not universal) features in both the way women lead and what they are often leading for, but writers in this area recognise the traps of universalising, essentialising and being over-idealistic:

1. Recognition that power structures and institutions are gendered in both overt and more deeply embedded and enduring ways. Women are routinely left out of formal positions of authority and their experiences systematically neglected. However, 'adding women and stirring' will not necessarily provide an enduring solution. What follows from this recognition is an interest in how leadership is exercised from below and within, as well as against, appointed leadership: how strategies of resistance often provide leadership. This view is often underpinned by critiques of capitalism that privilege economic values and notions of growth as measures of successful society.
2. An acknowledgement of diversity in women's experiences and voices. Following second wave feminism and a powerful critique of many white women's tendency to act as if they spoke for all women, there is now wide recognition of how important it is to avoid universalising and essentialising women.

3. A rejection of what is seen to be individualistic, heroic, out-front notions of leadership in favour of more distributed, shared and context-determined leadership exemplified in processes of consultation, devolved decision-making, development and empowerment of other women. Yet there is an acknowledgment that we still need brave thinkers and activists who are prepared to step forward and say things that others fear cannot be said.

4. Promotion and integration into leadership and organisations of what are understood as feminine or women's values and ethics, such as putting a value on care and nurturance, especially of the weak, of maternal strength and resilience and of community and relationships.

5. An emphasis on practice and on routinely reflecting on and interrogating practices. Here, there is no 'one right way' but generally a commitment to negotiated and devolved practices with all the complexity they bring.

One more substantial source of examples of women leading is in educational leadership in schools and universities where women have been at the forefront of upholding pedagogical values in the context of corporatised education.⁴³ Blackmore and Sachs document women educational leaders' experience as one of living in contradictions; for example, between performing to new stakeholders versus focusing on substantive educational and ethical issues: 'doing well' versus 'doing good'.⁴⁴ Drawing on research such as this and on my own work, I suggest the following additional features. Again this is not a characterisation of women's leadership, but a way to underline that the contexts from which women work often elicit a way of going about leadership:

A mix of strongly held and original ideas and convictions with an understanding that leadership needs to be 'co-produced', that is, leadership can't be done alone. These two approaches often sit in tension.

A refusal to 'dumb down' – a belief and trust that people will be able to engage with difficult ideas and contradictory impulses, and an expectation they will be able to meet a high standard.

An interest in using power and influence to give voice to the interests of those who are less powerful. Leadership is not treated as an end in itself but a means to clearly articulated social and political purposes.

Less bothered by being liked. In my research, it is men who often have difficulty in corporate settings 'speaking truth to power'. Evidence from cases of corporate wrong-doing and ethical failure confirm that in homogeneous decision-making groups, men often display high levels of 'concurrence-seeking', behaviour based on an unwillingness to challenge a dominant view, or ask questions which may make them

'look stupid'. My own hypothesis is that women, who have had lots of experience of being excluded from the dominant group, have less to lose in speaking out against the majority. Further though, research in areas such as corporate governance confirms that one protection against ethical failures is to ensure there is diversity in decision-making groups because outsiders are more likely to 'blow the whistle' or at least ask important questions.

Re-making leadership through scholarship

Turning to the second area of women's contribution to re-making leadership, gender and feminist scholars have had a long but often neglected history of deconstructing administrative life from the late 1970s and throughout the period of leadership's ascendancy.⁴⁵ A central part of their contribution was to shift the focus from women as the 'other' who needed to 'learn the ropes' of leadership, to documenting how organisations and leadership were set up to maintain a gender order where masculinities were privileged. Administrative logic, and 'merit-based' principles and practices are not neutral but designed, in the words of Australian scholar Clare Burton, to 'mobilize masculine bias'.⁴⁶ Burton and others have thus argued that our focus should shift from individual women and their experiences in organisations and as managers to the structures in which they are located. While some authors have been interested in organisations created along feminist lines, others, such as Kathy Ferguson and Joan Acker, have been at the forefront of a critique of the patriarchal logic of organisation and bureaucracy itself. In her *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, Ferguson notes the power of supposedly neutral 'bureaucratic discourse' to 'manipulate, twist, and damage human possibility' in pursuit of capitalist goals.⁴⁷ Similarly, Acker seeks to develop a theory which will explain the 'extraordinary persistence ... of the subordination of women', further arguing that gender assumptions that devalue women are deeply embedded in organisational processes, language and metaphors.⁴⁸

While there is not space here to provide a complete review, I want to show that women scholars and practitioners have been at the leading edge of critical thinking on leadership. I identify five key and interrelated areas: understanding the nature of leadership; putting analyses of power into leadership; a focus on the spaces between leaders and followers; an interest in the physicality, aesthetic and sensuous dimensions of leadership, and a very different approach to learning about and researching leadership.

As discussed at the start of this chapter, defining leadership is no simple matter. Many women and critical scholars have helped us see that leadership is not 'great deeds by great men' but a relational, negotiated and inter-subjective phenomena between people.⁴⁹ Feminist scholars have been central in exploring the role of discourse in mediating leadership.⁵⁰ Leadership is not

simply the way someone does a job or activity, but, rather, a series of ways of talking and understanding that are prefigured by relations of power and knowledge. Accordingly from this perspective, leadership is already a discursively produced, privileged ideology which casts some performances as leadership and others, such as what women do, as something less than leadership. Drawing on a discourse perspective changes our understanding of leadership as a predetermined power/language position made available only to designated individuals.

Related to this, women scholars have always been centrally interested in the relationship between leadership and power. Power has been neglected in most leadership texts, which often take the view that formal power is an unproblematic accompaniment of leadership. Because of their general lack of power, women have often been more attuned to its use and effects, as well as open to theorising alternatives. How does leadership get used to centralise and entrench power in an elite, or how is leadership sometimes used to unmask power and reduce oppression? Further, how is power played out in more micro, intimate relationships and how do we exercise leadership in ways that minimise dominance and oppression?

Feminists and postcolonial scholars have offered powerful critiques of leadership, of the dominance of elites and institutions such as the World Bank. A common thread is the focus on the discourses of colonialism, development and postcolonialism. Mohanty, for example, argues that genuine decolonisation that allows for the recovery of authentic indigenous values and culture, is hindered by the embedded 'archive' of Western 'knowledge and systems, rules and values'.⁵¹ She says that 'privilege nurtures blindness'. Feminist standpoint theory has advanced the idea that the perspectives of the marginalised and disempowered are a source of leadership. As Sandra Harding has also argued, standpoint research seeks to 'study up', by revealing 'principles and practices of dominant institutions' that can only be understood from the perspective of those 'governed' by them.⁵²

Women scholars and leaders have also shown that leadership is often done in resistance and refusal from the bottom or the margins of society, rather than from formal positions at the top. Australian Indigenous scholars have increasingly documented the ways Indigenous women have enacted leadership in the face of the deliberate dehumanising sexism and racism that accompanied colonisation and which continues.⁵³ Pat Dudgeon, for example, argues that the women she has researched, including her grandmother (Martha) and great grandmother (Lillian), demonstrated great leadership in their resistance, in their humour and in their pride and confidence as women. Though the historical records show Aboriginal women were treated as chattels, incubators and prostitutes, these women continued to stand up and push back, to assert their value as women.⁵⁴

It has only been in the last decade or so that the physical and aesthetic dimensions of leadership have been exposed as important.⁵⁵ The ideal organisation had always been portrayed as a rational, hierarchical one from which the 'disruptive' forces of sex and bodies had been eradicated. Accordingly and astoundingly, leadership has usually been portrayed by scholars as a domain where sexuality is, or should be, removed.⁵⁶

It has often been women theorists and researchers who have dug beneath these myths to draw attention to the performance of gendered sexual identities and how these are threaded through understandings of organisation and leadership. Feminists have been at the forefront of the critique of enlightenment dualisms of mind versus body, reason versus instinct. They challenge the idea of leadership as a cerebral, gender-neutral achievement.

Part of this work has also been to provide another set of explanations for the failure of organisations and leadership to be genuinely open to women. From the work of feminists and commentators like Anne Summers, we see that women, historically and now, are defined and subordinated by their female embodiment.⁵⁷ The persistence of discrimination hints at deeper causes than the rational, logical ones. Enduring and powerful archetypes of maternal figures are activated when women have power. These archetypes include the omnipotent, controlling mother, and the seductress intent on distracting men from noble purpose.⁵⁸

Finally, in learning about and studying leadership, the dominant paradigm is a social psychological one that I have characterised as: 'Track down the truth about leadership and train in it.'⁵⁹ With a relentlessly positivist and instrumental intent, leadership research rarely asks questions such as 'leadership for what?' or 'who gains and who suffers from this leadership?'

Women researchers have often been leaders in critiques of dominant positivist ways of knowing and researching. They have shown us new and powerful ways of exploring leadership phenomena through narratives, oral history and story telling, observation and participant observation. Many of the chapters in this book provide examples of how such methods deliver important new insights and understandings about leadership.

While the contribution of the research mentioned here is much wider than leadership, it shows us the ways in which conceptualisations and assumptions underpinning leadership are skewed toward male experience and blind toward certain dimensions of leadership such as power and bodies. The importance and value of scholarly processes of deconstruction, critique and remaking cannot be understated. It provides the foundation for problematising assumptions about leadership and the distortions they produce – in the media, in scholarship and in education.

Conclusion

In this chapter I join other researchers in arguing that, despite welcome attention to women and leadership, it is important to be wary of unproblematised analyses. The idea that we should simply ‘add women’ to leadership-as-usual – then ‘stir’ – remains enormously appealing to many. Many contemporary leadership studies which purport to be about gender focus on women, treating ‘the problem’ of gender as one which only women have and which women must ‘fix’. Other common approaches, such as ‘body counts’ of women leaders, fail to materially grapple with significant issues that would improve the quality of leadership, not just give women more opportunity. In contrast, I have argued we need to keep our gaze firmly trained on the gendered societal and power structures that shape the very discourse of leadership. I have shown how feminist and women’s research is informing this bigger project: not just adding women in, but transforming conceptions of what good leadership is.

¹ Mary Uhl-Bien, ‘Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 17 (2006): 668.

² Eva Cox, *Leading Women: Tactics for Making a Difference* (Sydney: Random House, 1996), 294.

³ Joseph Raelin, ‘From Leadership-as-practice to Leaderful Practice’, *Leadership* 7, no. 2 (2011): 195.

⁴ Lillian Holt is cited in Amanda Sinclair, *Leadership for the Disillusioned: Moving beyond Myths and Heroes to Leading that Liberates* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2007).

⁵ Amanda Sinclair, *Trials at the Top: Chief Executives Talk about Men, Women and the Executive Culture* (Melbourne: Australian Centre, University of Melbourne, 1994).

⁶ Women, Leadership and Democracy in Australia conference, 1–2 December 2011, Old Parliament House, Canberra, ACT, Australia.

⁷ Jill Blackmore, *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 5.

⁸ Joyce Fletcher, ‘The Paradox of Post Heroic Leadership: An Essay on Gender, Power and Transformational Change’, *The Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004): 652.

⁹ This section draws on an earlier article of mine; see Sinclair, ‘Journey around Leadership’, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 25, no. 1 (2004): 7.

¹⁰ See for example R. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987) and *Masculinities* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1995).

¹¹ Amanda Sinclair, ‘Teaching Managers about Masculinities: Are you Kidding?’, *Management Learning* 31, no. 1 (2000): 83–101.

¹² See also Don Watson, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* (Sydney: Random House, 2003).

¹³ Keith Grint, 'A History of Leadership' in *The Sage Handbook of Leadership*, ed. Alan Bryman, David Collinson, Keith Grint, Brad Jackson and Mary Uhl-Bien (Sage: London, 2011), 8.

¹⁴ For historical accounts see Gibson Burrell and Keith Grint, *Leadership: Classical, Contemporary, and Critical Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ Sinclair, *Trials at the Top*.

¹⁶ Grint, 'A History of Leadership', 9.

¹⁷ Barbara Kellerman, *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why it Matters* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Writing in the late 1970s, political scientist James MacGregor Burns and his American academic colleague Bernard Bass were responsible for leading a resurgence of interest in inspiring, 'transformational leadership', as distinguished from transactional leadership which relies on the use of sanctions and material incentives. Transformational leadership remains a highly influential idea in the leadership literature. See for example, Bernard Bass, 'From Transactional to Transformational Leadership: Learning to Share the Vision', *Organizational Dynamics* (Winter 1990): 19–31.

¹⁹ Amanda Sinclair, 'Seducing Leadership', *Gender, Work and Organization* 16, no. 2 (2009): 266–84.

²⁰ Marta Calas and Linda Smircich, 'Voicing Seduction to Silence Leadership', *Organization Studies* 12, no. 4 (1991): 567–602.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 560.

²² *Ibid.*, 582–3.

²³ Barbara Czarniawska and R. Wolff, 'Leaders, Managers, Entrepreneurs On and Off the Organizational Stage', *Organization Studies* 12, no. 4 (1991): 529–46.

²⁴ In Australia, the Federal Sex Discrimination Act was passed in the 1970s and the Affirmative Action Act in 1986. This was a period characterised by increased opportunities for women, especially in politics and the federal bureaucracy where women were known as femocrats. For exploration of these processes see Marian Sawyer's research in, for example, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990) and also Hester Eisenstein's work, for example, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1996).

²⁵ For example, Clare Burton, *The Promise and the Price* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991); Joan Eveline, 'The Politics of Advantage', *Australian Feminist Studies* 19 (1994): 129; as well as Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

²⁶ Rosabeth Moss Kanter's highly influential *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1977) was an in-depth study of women in a single organisation. Kanter argued that women's treatment was the result of their token status, and lack of numbers and power. In contrast, another classic of the period, M. Hennig and A. Jardim's *The Managerial Woman* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978), focused on women's experiences across workplaces.

²⁷ Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin, 'Women, Men and Leadership: A Critical Review of Assumptions, Practices and Change in the Industrialized Nations' in *Women in Management Worldwide*, ed. N. Adler and D. Izraeli (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc), 24. On the dangers of being over-optimistic about women's progress, see also L. Blum and V. Smith, 'Women's Mobility in the Corporation: A Critique of the Politics of Optimism', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13, no. 3 (1988): 528–45.

²⁸ C. Jacklin and E. Maccoby, 'Sex Differences and their Implications for Management' in *Bringing Women into Management*, ed. F. Gordon and M. Strober (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 23.

²⁹ Judi Marshall, *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* (Chichester, UK: Wiley, 1984).

³⁰ Judy Rosener, 'Ways Women Lead', *Harvard Business Review* (November–December 1990): 120.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Felice Schwartz, 'Management Women and the New Facts of Life', *Harvard Business Review* (January–February 1989): 65–76.

³³ The work of Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe has consistently shown that women score higher on transformational leadership behaviours; see, for example, 'An Investigation of Female and Male Constructs of Leadership and Empowerment', *Women in Management Review* 10, no. 2 (1995): 3–8. See also Christina Cregan, T. Bartram and P. Stanton, 'Union Organizing as a Mobilizing Strategy: The Impact of Social Identity and Transformational Leadership on the Collectivism of Union Members', *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 47, no. 4 (2009): 701–22.

³⁴ Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (eds), *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

³⁵ Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, 'Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership', *Harvard Business Review* (September 2007): 63–71; Alice Eagly, 'Female Leadership Advantage and Disadvantage: Resolving the Contradiction' in *Leadership* vol. IV: 2005–2009, ed. D. Collinson, K. Grint and B. Jackson (London: Sage, 2011): 251–72.

³⁶ Ibid., 257. For further contemporary evidence that men are regarded as ideal managers, while women are viewed as having less potential, see K. Elsesser and J. Lever 'Does Gender Bias Against Female Leaders Persist? Quantitative and Qualitative Data from a Large-Scale Survey', *Human Relations* 64, no. 12 (2011): 1555–78.

³⁷ Amanda Sinclair, 'Body Possibilities in Leadership', *Leadership* 1, no. 4 (2005): 387–406 and Amanda Sinclair, 'Leading with Body' in *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization*, ed. Emma Jeanes, David Knights and Patricia Martin (John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 117–30.

³⁸ Moira Rayner, 'Gillard, Bligh and Leadership in a Crisis', *Eureka Street*, 7 January 2011.

³⁹ Amanda Sinclair, *Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power and Sexuality in a Changing Business Culture* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998/2005).

⁴⁰ Joyce Fletcher, *Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power and Relational Practice at Work* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999); Helen Brown, *Women Organising* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1992) and Kathleen Iannello, *Decisions Without Hierarchy: Feminist Interventions in Organization Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁴¹ See this collection.

⁴² Amanda Sinclair and Valerie Wilson, *New Faces of Leadership* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

⁴³ Valerie Hall, *Dancing on the Ceiling: A Study of Women Managers in Education* (London: Paul Chapman Publishing, 1999); Jill Blackmore, *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999); Jill Blackmore and Judyth Sachs, *Performing and Reforming Leaders: Gender, Educational Restructuring, and Organizational Change* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007); Michelle Young and Linda Sklra (eds), *Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

⁴⁴ Blackmore and Sachs.

⁴⁵ Joan Acker, 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies', *Gender and Society* 4, no. 2 (1990): 139–58; Kathy Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); and Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought*.

⁴⁶ Clare Burton, 'Merit and Gender: Organizations and the Mobilization of Masculine Bias' in *Politicization and the Career Service*, ed. G. Curnow and B. Page (Canberra: Canberra CAE and NSW Division of RAIPA, 1989). See also Cynthia Cockburn, *In the Way of Women: Men's Resistance to Sex Equality in Organizations* (London: Macmillan, 1991).

⁴⁷ Ferguson, xii.

⁴⁸ Acker.

⁴⁹ See for example, Jackie Ford 'Discourses of Leadership: Gender, Identity and Contradiction in a UK Public Sector Organization', *Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2006): 77–99 and 'Studying Leadership Critically: A Psychosocial Lens on Leadership Identities', *Leadership* 6, no. 1 (2010): 47–65; also Donna Ladkin, *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Leadership Questions* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010).

⁵⁰ Gail Fairhurst, *Discursive Leadership: In Conversation with Leadership Psychology* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2007); Jackie Ford, 'Discourses of Leadership'.

⁵¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2003), 47.

⁵² Sandra Harding, *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 117.

⁵³ See, for example, Nerida White, 'Indigenous Australian Women's Leadership: Stayin' Strong against the Postcolonial Tide', *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 13, no. 1 (2010): 7–25.

⁵⁴ Pat Dudgeon, 'Mothers of Sin: Indigenous Women's Perceptions of their Identity and Sexuality/Gender' in *Australian Indigenous Women's Intellectual Traditions and*

Gendered Writing, ed. P. Dudgeon, J. Herbert, J. Milroy and D. Oxenham (forthcoming).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Arja Ropo and Erica Sauer, 'Corporeal Leaders' in *The SAGE Handbook of New Approaches in Management and Organization*, ed. D. Barry and H. Hansen (London: Sage, 2008), 469–78; Donna Ladkin, 'The Enchantment of the Charismatic Leader: Charisma Reconsidered as Aesthetic Encounter', *Leadership* 2, no. 2 (2006): 165–79; also Sinclair, 'Body Possibilities in Leadership' and Amanda Sinclair, 'Leading with the Body' in *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization*, ed. Emma Jeanes, David Knights and Patricia Yancey Martin (Chichester UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 117–30.

⁵⁶ Amanda Sinclair, 'The Sexuality of Leadership', *International Review of Women and Leadership* 1, no. 2 (1995): 25–38.

⁵⁷ Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police: The Colonisation of Women in Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1974).

⁵⁸ See, for example, Barbara Poggio, 'Who's Afraid of Mothers?' and A. Telford 'Maiden, Mother, Mistress, Monster: Controlled and Uncontrolled Female Power and the Curse of the Body in the Early Victorian Novel – Implications of Historical Stereotyping for Women Managers' in *Interpreting the Maternal Organization*, ed. Heather Höpfl and Monica Kostera (London: Routledge, 2003); also Amanda Sinclair, *Doing Leadership Differently*.

⁵⁹ Sinclair, *Leadership for the Disillusioned*.