

Leadership, Gender and Diversity

Gender and diversity have been a focus in the field of leadership studies for quite some time now and considerations of gender and diversity have predominantly focused on differences and similarities between female and male leaders and pondered the relevance of diversity within groups as something that a leader or manager has to enhance and cope with. The focus on gender, in particular, has recently taken a more critical turn in which stereotypical views of male/female and masculinity/femininity have been questioned and gendered representations in leadership theory and discourse have been problematized. In this chapter, we will outline and discuss a wide range of approaches to gender and diversity in relation to leadership. We will explore generally whether and why gender may matter for leadership and critically evaluate views on a feminine advantage in leadership. We will further discuss persisting challenges for women as leaders and outline other forms of diversity and their relevance for leadership.

Chapter Aims

- Introduce the links between gender, diversity and leadership
- Critically evaluate the differences between male/female and masculine/feminine leaders
- Explore the arguments for and against a feminine advantage
- Discuss critically informed views on the study of gender and leadership
- Outline other forms of diversity and their link to leadership

Critical Thinking Box 12.1

Critical leadership scholars have increasingly highlighted the masculine nature of many 20th-century leadership theories and the extent to which this silences other, more feminine forms of leadership. This dominance of masculinity associated with leadership is deeply embedded within western societies and organizations.

Why Gender Matters

One of the most popular questions, according to Jackson and Parry (2011), in relation to leadership is that of whether and what the difference is between a male leader and a female leader. At the beginning of the field of organizational leadership studies there was the great man theory and with it the prime focus on what we can learn from great male leaders in history. Subsequently, many of the early leadership theories outlined in Chapters 2–4 were developed from research conducted in male dominated contexts and have long been criticized for therefore being too masculine in nature and focus. Since then, and particularly in the 1990s, we have seen a certain feminization of leadership studies through which feminine characteristics of care and support have been viewed as a strategic advantage for organizational effectiveness and well-being (Jackson and Parry, 2011). Transformational leadership has also been acclaimed to fit into this wave of seeing feminine traits and behaviours as a leadership advantage.

Yet, there have also been more critical views on the possible perpetuation of gender stereotypes that these considerations may bring (Billing and Alvesson, 2000). What is relatively certain is the continuing glass ceiling that many female leaders face in their career; often related to their child-bearing and -rearing duties as well as dominant societal and cultural structures across many organizations and countries. Yet, what deserves further consideration is whether our concerns for gender differences should be focused on the body (that is, male/female) or certain personal characteristics (that is, feminine/masculine) or indeed an interaction of both. If the question is one of equality, then there is certainly still a lot to be done to unpack gender stereotypes in relation to modern society, organizations and leadership, as well as to ascertain whether gender is indeed of such importance to leadership.

Glass ceiling:
an invisible barrier that hinders women and other minority groups from reaching elite leadership positions despite their qualifications

Male Leaders or Female Leaders? What is the Difference?

The question of difference in relation to gender and leadership has particularly focused on leader effectiveness. We will review in this section some of the most well-known studies that have investigated this particular question.

The difference between male and female leaders has been manifold in research studies, particularly since the 1970s (Bass, 1985b; Book, 2000; Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly et al., 1995; Helgesen, 1990), yet with rather mixed results. No 'hard' evidence exists to suggest that female leaders are more or less effective than male leaders and are indeed consistently different in traits and behaviours compared to male leaders (Dobbins and Platz, 1986; Engen et al., 2001; Powell, 1990).

Key Findings of Gender Differences

Among these research studies on the gender difference, there are some notable meta-analyses of existing research studies in the literature that we will address here. Meta-analyses by Eagly and Johnson (1990) and van Engen (2001), for example, showed that female leaders do not necessarily fall into the stereotypical assumptions of feminine versus masculine leadership behaviours. They were therefore not found to be more interpersonally and less task-oriented than male leaders. These studies as well as other studies on transformational leadership did, however, provide some evidence that female leaders are more participative and democratic in their preferred leadership style compared to male leaders. Eagly et al.'s (2003) recent study showed indeed that female leaders tended to be more transformational and engage more in contingent reward behaviour than male leaders. Although this difference was small, Eagly et al. (2003) concluded that the findings were robust and represented a feminine advantage as these leader behaviours are linked to higher leader effectiveness. We will explore this argument further later on in this chapter.

Hoyt (2007: 267) highlights other interesting findings such as a meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (1992) that discussed research findings that showed how female managers were 'devalued compared to men when they led in a masculine manner', worked in masculine roles and masculine industries and when they were evaluated by men. These findings stress the prejudice that female leaders have for a long time encountered and continue to face in many countries and industries. Other studies such as Eagly et al. (1995) add to this insight by demonstrating that female and male leaders tend to be more effective in gender congruent roles, that is, female leaders were found to be less effective than men in military positions but more effective in, for example, education. This was linked to different uses of interpersonal skills in these different gendered contexts.

Reflective Question 12.1

Think of female and male managers you have known. To what extent did they differ in their leadership style? If there were differences did this matter? How and why?

Outstanding Questions

What we can conclude at this point is that research so far has not provided robust insights that would confirm a clear difference between leadership styles and leader effectiveness in relation to the gender of the leader. But, as Jackson and Parry (2011) suggest, maybe we are not asking the right questions? Indeed, these studies have not unpacked what exactly we mean by gender. They have studied the differences between men and women without questioning in detail whether it is indeed the biological difference, that is, male/female that needs attention or whether it is personal characteristics of feminine and masculine often associated with one sex more than the other that we should consider (Ely and Padavic, 2007). Some studies have indeed conflated the two rather than explored where these interact.

Yukl (2010) summarizes key limitations of the dominant comparative studies on gender and leadership and suggests that other contextual variables affecting the comparability of male and female leadership behaviours have seriously contaminated the results of these studies. We recommend the exchange of articles between Vecchio (2002, 2003) and Eagly and Carli (2003) in *The Leadership Quarterly* for an in-depth reading of the methodological and conceptual issues around these meta-analyses of gender related differences in leadership. In this chapter, we help readers unpack gender further by introducing some of the main problems that women in leadership positions have faced in recent history and critically considering feminine leadership as an alternative approach. Here we will also address the interaction of body and character in the genderizing of leadership and organizations.

Female Leaders and Feminine Leadership – Opportunities and Persistent Challenges

In light of the positive changes over the last few decades in terms of percentage of female graduates, employees and female managers, the greater part of research into challenges for female leaders is focused on their access to top managerial positions. The statistics for leaders in top political and organizational positions continue to show a relatively low proportion of women in these positions. Despite the rise in numbers of women in managerial positions overall and some top hierarchical positions over the last few decades many scholars suggest that inequalities and persistent challenges continue

to exist (Carli and Eagly, 2011; Hoyt, 2007). We will first highlight several theories and ideas as well as research findings that try to explain these challenges. We will then also review some of the literature on what has been termed a 'feminine advantage' as a counter-movement or possibly remedy to the seeming inequalities for female managers. Through this contribution, we will also highlight the differences between female and feminine and their relevance for more critical current and future gender and leadership studies.

Challenges for Female Leaders

Hoyt (2007) has looked in particular at the so-called 'glass ceiling' that is preventing women from being promoted into top hierarchical positions and therefore perpetuating the unequal distribution of female and male leaders across an organization's hierarchy. She identified three main reasons for the persistence of this invisible barrier: human capital differences, gender differences and prejudice. Hoyt draws on a wider range of research (Eagly and Carli, 2004; Haslam and Ryan, 2008; Powell and Graves, 2003) to explore the different forms and impact of human capital differences, that is, the relatively lower level of education, training and work experience of women compared to men. One of the key issues discussed here is the culturally, socially and legally ingrained notion of child-bearing and -rearing responsibilities where women seem to naturally take more time out of work, seek less full-time employment, drop out of employment more often and find re-entry into employment more difficult than men in many countries. Yet, with rising numbers of female graduates, the increasing number of women choosing not to have children and the more active involvement of men in child-rearing responsibilities (Carli and Eagly, 2011), this cannot be seen as the only explanation for low numbers of female leaders throughout all hierarchical levels.

Hoyt (2007) also addresses other interesting research such as Powell and Graves' (2003) work into women's weaker access to key informal mentoring relationships and general development opportunities than their male counterparts. Bowles and McGinn (2005) have further argued that women tend to be more strongly represented in organizational roles and departments that do not naturally lead to top leadership positions, for example, HR. Haslam and Ryan (2008) have further explored this latter aspect of career transition and found a 'glass cliff' rather than a glass ceiling. This means that female leaders are more likely to be promoted into top positions in times of crisis or poor organizational performance. These appointments into higher positions are seen as highly risky and female leaders inevitably end up being associated with the current failures in organizations, which are out of their control yet lead to a problematic continuation of their career in top managerial positions.

Linked to this first explanatory area of the glass ceiling is the issue of natural and nurtured gender difference, that is biological as well as socially constructed gender notions. This area is linked to some extent to the research introduced in the previous

Glass cliff: female leaders get promoted to elite positions in time of crisis and are subsequently associated with pre-existing organizational failures, which are out of their control, that then affect their careers negatively

section on differences in leader style and effectiveness in relation to gender. As noted previously, the evidence to justify the outright support of a clear difference in female and male leaders is rather mixed and weak. Another gender difference highlighted by Bowles and McGinn (2005) is the relative hesitance by many women to identify themselves and promote themselves as leaders. This may be also linked to the historically masculine definitions of what is deemed to be appropriate and effective leadership (Ford, 2010) and has to be seen in light of research findings into the gender bias in perceptions of the appropriate ways of behaving as women and female leaders. Other research by Small et al. (2007) further suggests that women are less inclined to negotiate than men – a skill that they posit is crucial for leadership. This ultimate nature–nurture debate of whether these gender differences are biologically imposed or socially constructed (developed in line with social norms and expectations) is ongoing and there has arguably not yet been enough exploration of dominate, transitional and resistant notions of the body, gender attributes and sexuality in different societies.

A third area of concern is that of prejudice, that is, stereotypical assumptions and judgements in relation to gender. Eagly and Carli (2003) make reference to ‘sex-typed’ theories of leadership that suggest men and women behave consistently differently and hence impose stereotypical judgements on those they observe. Bolden et al. (2011) draw a link here to leadership in the sense that leadership has been stereotyped over time as masculine and hence associated with competition, control and change and as therefore standing in clear contrast with feminine stereotypes of care, support and stability. As biological gender difference is often conflated with the personal characteristics associated with feminine/masculine, we can see how this leads to female leaders being expected to be feminine and hence are perceived as inapt to perform the masculine leadership roles that society provides. Eagly’s (1987) social role theory further argues that in order to avoid being outcasts and to receive praise leaders want to behave in accordance with society’s gender expectations. This leads to continuing gender stereotyping into the caring and task-focused camps of female and male leaders.

Reflective Question 12.2

Reflect critically on an organization you know. How masculine/agentive (that is, competitive, controlling, focused on change) is the organization? Alternatively how feminine/communal (that is, caring, supporting, focused on stability) is it? What implications does this have for ‘real’ equal opportunities?

Carli and Eagly also talk about a double bind situation in which ‘highly communal female leaders are criticized for not being agentive enough, but highly agentive female leaders may be criticized for lacking communion’ (2011:108). Communal is here defined

as warm, supportive, kind and helpful and associated with female leaders whereas agentic is seen as assertive, dominant, competent and authoritative and as stereotypical for male leaders (Carli and Eagly, 2011). It is this double bind situation that has proven particularly limiting in female leaders' ability to work against the organizational and culturally ingrained assumptions around success of management and leadership as an outcome of agentic behaviours.

Addressing the Challenges

Attention has, of course, also been paid in the literature to ways in which we can work towards reducing this invisible barrier, the glass ceiling or glass cliff. Hoyt (2007) usefully summarizes some of the existing suggestions and highlights the need for a wider role renegotiation of women at home and at work – both at an immediate social and wider societal level. She draws on Powell and Graves (2003) who suggest that women have the choice to circumvent the glass ceiling through seeking organizations that are dominated by women entrepreneurs. A compelling alternative opportunity that has also become more widely known as the feminine advantage is the popularity of an allegedly feminine leadership style: that of transformational leadership.

Feminine Advantage

We highlighted earlier in this chapter research by Eagly et al. (2003) that has shown women to be more natural at engaging with transformational and contingency-reward type leadership behaviour which has been – over the last few decades – seen as particularly successful and popular in organizations. This finding is not entirely surprising as transformational leadership is associated with more traditionally feminine characteristics such as caring, supporting and considering followers than necessarily masculine attributes. Based on their research findings Eagly et al. (2003) suggest that women should play this feminine advantage and embrace their natural tendency for transformational leadership behaviours as future organizations will only continue to promote and value this type of leadership style. Vecchio's (2003) critical response to meta-analyses carried out on the subject of the feminine advantage warns that the research findings supporting the assumption that a feminine advantage does exist are rather weak and inflate the real existence of such an advantage. He calls for a more cautious evaluation of such research, especially also in light of the limitations and danger of over-relying on the wonders of transformational leadership (see Chapter 4). Finally, Carli and Eagly (2011) also draw on research by Twenge (1997, 2001) to argue that women have changed and have become more assertive, dominant and masculine and hence better able to combine the communal and agentic aspects of leadership that have previously created tensions and a double bind situation for female leaders.

Critical Views on Gender and Leadership Studies

Whether or not a feminine advantage exists in the way it has been formulated in the literature, we contend that we have not unpacked enough of what we mean by feminine and masculine and how this interacts with the more biologically focused notion of gender. Jackson and Parry (2011) also suggest that future research needs to focus more on issues of power, context, style, identity and social construction in relation to gender and leadership. Indeed, more recent critically focused leadership research into gender has addressed these interconnections of the feminine/masculine and the female/male body and explored the socially co-constructed and power infused nature of the meaning of these. Billing and Alvesson, for example, have critically reviewed the suggestions of a feminine advantage or feminine leadership and argue that 'constructing leadership as feminine may be of some value as a contrast to conventional ideas on leadership and management but may also create a misleading impression of women's orientation to leadership as well as reproducing stereotypes and traditional gender division of labour' (2000: 144). They argue that both biological notions of gender and notions of femininity and masculinity have been overly focused on opposites and assumed to be clearly different and separate from each other. Billing and Alvesson (2000) suggest that this is a rather simplistic view of gender and that we need to recognize the constantly changing and culturally constructed nature of what is feminine and masculine and how this is linked to biological notions of gender. This calls for research that sheds further light on different constructions of gender across cultures and over time and also on how feminine and masculine interact on their own and with the biological notions of gender in a particular context.

Other research has further explored the performative impact that the dominant, masculine discourse has had on women managers (Ford, 2010; Stead and Elliott, 2009). It has particularly highlighted the extent to which women in leadership positions feel pressured to conform to the dominant image of a successful – masculine – leader in speech and behaviour in order to be accepted by and have influence on others. This has also been found to create tensions for those female managers with regard to who they would like to be and how they would like to interact with others and the style they feel they have to adopt to conform and be successful. Carli and Eagly (2011), in contrast, argue that notions of leadership are changing and becoming more communally focused and consequently less masculine. Collinson (2011) recognizes the latter changes in leadership studies but argues that it continues to be highly gendered and polarizes the similarities and differences between women and men as well as between women and between men. He argues we are therefore no step further from the categorizations of biological and personal notions of gender. Drawing on critical feminist contributions (Bowring, 2004; Bligh and Kohles, 2008), Collinson (2011) also highlights the possibly interlinked nature of gender and power in society and leadership where women – similar to followers – are seen as the Other

(rather than the leader). Similar to Billing and Alvesson (2000) he calls for a more nuanced view of gender in different contexts and particularly as interlinked with ethnicity and class.

Related to the above, Hoyt (2007) stresses that the key weakness of current gender and leadership research is its heavy emphasis on research conducted in western societies. It is hence in itself biased by its culturally limited view of gender roles and the meaning of masculinity and femininity. More research in different cultures needs to be conducted to broaden our view on this. Hoyt (2007) further argues that gender could be subsumed under the broader heading of diversity. We would argue the other way round, that gender currently receives more attention in leadership textbooks and leadership studies than diversity as a broader phenomenon. It is hence diversity that we address in the final section of this chapter.

VIGNETTE 12.1

Extract from Case Study 5 highlighting the complexity of what is gender

When asked whether as a woman June brought something different to the table, she found this was difficult to answer. Perhaps her response would be this: June feels for humanity and acts in all she does to make the world a better place.

1. June Burrough is the successful founder of a social enterprise and has quite strong views on many aspects of leadership. Yet when asked about gender, she is lost for words. What is your interpretation of her belief in humanity and striving to make the world a better place. Is this a feminine approach?
2. Is our definition of feminine as communal and caring applicable here? Could there be other culturally informed views of gender and femininity?

Diversity and Leadership

The broad term of diversity has served as an umbrella for many specific foci such as ethnicity, age, gender, education, class and sexual orientation (Yukl, 2010). Diversity as a catchphrase has then within the wider field of business and management received a lot of attention over the last couple of decades owing to the increasing importance it has for global organizations where employees from a large range of diverse backgrounds come to work together. Rickards (2012) stresses particularly the literature's focus on diversity in teams at all hierarchical levels and the complexities of expatriate

leaders' work. Within leadership studies, diversity has not achieved as much attention on its own but has rather in the past been subsumed within three different areas: gender as a form of diversity; cross-cultural studies of leadership (and expatriate leaders); and in leadership textbooks as an element of groups and group leadership in organizations.

Reflective Question 12.3

Critically reflect on an organization you know. How diverse is this organization? Does it matter? What are the implications for employee opportunities within the organization?

Queer theory: critically explores texts and phenomena focusing on gender as part of the essential self and the socially constructed nature of sexual acts and identities

So, with regard to the first area mentioned above, we can see strong parallels between what we have said throughout the chapter about the challenges for women as leaders and feminine leadership and the challenges that minorities face within organizations. Critical leadership scholars are highlighting similar issues of exclusion and prejudice that the dominant white, male, middle-class image of leaders has for leaders from other ethnicities and classes (Collinson, 2011). Rickards argues that this has encouraged minorities to circumvent this 'diversity dilemma' by 'becoming entrepreneurial founders of business of various kinds' (2012: 178). It is then the overcoming of the glass ceiling that women and minorities face that creates their shared social identity and drives their entrepreneurial aspirations. More recently we have also seen work using queer theory (Harding et al., 2011) to unpack sexuality and leadership in organizations further and particularly with a view to homosexual and heterosexual aspects of dominant leader images and a queer reading of dominant leadership texts.

Expatriate Leadership

The second area of leadership in different cultures, leading followers from different cultures and expatriate leaders, has to a large extent been addressed in Chapter 10 in this book. It is the latter complexity of expatriate leadership that has not received as much attention within leadership studies per se. It has been explored, particularly in relation to the technical training and competence of expatriate leaders in the cross-cultural and comparative management literature (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Toh and Denisi, 2003) but remains under-explored with reference to the exploration of the expatriate leader–local follower relationship. Hailey (1996) has stressed the culture shock that many expatriates experience owing to inadequate cultural training and awareness. Western expatriates often find it difficult to adjust to local culture and

their behaviours and attitude are then often perceived as a 'colonial mentality' by local employees (Hailey, 1996: 263). The expatriate leader–follower relationship is bounded by the complexity of this culture clash and indeed the short-term, fixed nature of the expatriate's placement in the local culture. The perception of the expatriate as stranger (Richards, 1996) by the locals and equally the perception of the local context as a strange environment for the expatriate leader create an immediate tension that is very difficult to subsequently overcome. More research is needed to unpack and understand the added complexity that these time and culture issues bring to the leader–follower relationship.

Diversity Management

Finally, Yukl (2010) draws our attention to the work that has been done on the management of diversity in groups and the potential benefits and challenges that this poses for leadership and the organization (Kochan et al., 2003; Triandis et al., 1994). The main advantages of having a diverse workforce are the likely increase in creativity and innovation as well as a greater potential talent pool and more balanced decision-making process that an influx of different views and values of a diverse workforce brings. Yukl (2010) warns though that with greater diversity in the workforce may also come more opportunities for distrust and conflict due to less shared commitment and identity in the group. With a view to the management of diverse groups, this research has also focused on ways in which an appreciation of and tolerance for diversity can be enhanced and equal opportunities created. Insights from critical and feminist studies on gender and diversity as highlighted above do, however, call into question the extent to which any such diversity training measures are able to make a difference and to what extent they may instead lead to a perpetuation of stereotypes and an emphasis on the difference between different forms of diversity.

VIGNETTE 12.2

Extract from Case Study 1 highlighting diversity in action

The engineering industry is renowned for continuously winning/losing contracts. With this comes a transfer of undertaking (protection of employees) (TUPE), where employees who work on that contract are transferred across with the contract to the new supplier. For leaders this means fresh talent, and it can also mean a diverse

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mix of capabilities, cultures and work standards. There have been instances where companies have used TUPE to transfer across employees who are not as capable, to ensure they keep a good talent pool in their organization.

1. Reflect on how this example of 'diversity management in action' relates to Yukl's (2010) views on the opportunities and challenges of diversity.
2. What may be the challenges of frequent changes in staffing for leadership?

Critical Thinking Box 12.2

A significant problem with equal opportunities policies and diversity management programmes is their inevitable perpetuation of gender and other diversity related stereotypes. This is because they have to define diversity categories and locate individuals within these in order to ensure that each individual falling into a minority category is given equal opportunities within the organization. Unfortunately, this deepens rather than removes stereotypes in organizations and society. What can organizations do to ensure equal opportunities without naming and perpetuating stereotypes?

Summary

In this chapter, we have introduced the reader to several key fields of leadership studies in relation to gender. We have particularly focused on the research and meta-analysis conducted over the last three decades on the existence of differences between female and male leaders and their effectiveness in organizations. Through this review we have also highlighted some of the persistent challenges that female leaders face in light of the well known notions of the glass ceiling and glass cliff in organizations. We have also highlighted claims in the wider literature for a feminine advantage in leadership and sought to unpack further how this holds up to critical and feminist views on a deeply ingrained structural and cultural bias towards the male and masculine. In light of these more critical views of gender and leadership we have also highlighted the danger of viewing biological notions of gender as well

as personal gender characteristics as separate, distinct entities and as clearly different and opposite. This therefore recognizes research that explores feminine and masculine as fluid, shifting and socially constructed notions of gender and looks at how these interact with each other and with biological forms of gender in the context of organizations. A final section then drew the link to the broader term of diversity that includes not only gender but also ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and education. We highlighted similarities in opportunities and challenges for these other forms of diversity in light of the dominant white, male, middle-class image of the successful leader in western countries. We also stressed that the wider notion of diversity has often been subsumed under other topics such as gender, culture and team leadership and briefly reviewed each of these areas. We concluded on the note that more in-depth research is needed on different forms of diversity and their influence on dominant leader identities as well as the leader–follower relationship.

Additional Reflection Questions

1. What is the difference between research into female leaders and feminine leadership? What can we learn from either about leadership?
2. There is a clear difference in styles between female and male leader. Critically discuss and relate to your own organizational experience.
3. Is there a feminine advantage?
4. What are the dangers of promoting a feminine advantage?
5. Critical leadership scholars argue that women are seen as the ‘Other’. What does this mean?
6. Critically reflect on the opportunities and limitations of gender studies into leadership and their potential to work against or reinforce stereotypes.
7. What can be described as a diversity dilemma and what solutions can we find to it?
8. How does diversity affect the leader-follower relationship? Critically reflect on organizational examples.

Case Study Questions

1. Read carefully through Case Study 3 and note down specific behaviours and attributes that Ken, Mike and Frank display. To what extent are these behaviours and attributes masculine or feminine (as defined in this chapter)? How masculine or feminine are the organization and culture they are working in? What influence may this have on their effectiveness as a leader and follower?
2. Case Studies 4 and 5 describe the particular views of two female leaders on their approach to running organizations. Compare and contrast the relative agentic

and/or communal nature of their views and set these in the context of the particular organizations their work in. Link your analysis back to mainstream and critical ideas on gender as discussed in this chapter.

3. Diversity is often associated with either gender or ethnicity. What other forms of diversity are visible in the three case studies? What does diversity mean in the context of each case study?
4. This chapter has highlighted the problematic nature of diversity management. June Burrough reflects in Case Study 5 on equality and the importance of showing everybody equal respect. How can she embed this belief in an active practice of equal opportunities in her organization and avoid the pitfalls of traditional diversity management?

Further Reading

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