

## **John Collard & Cecilia Reynolds, Eds., Leadership, Gender & Culture in Education: Male & Female Perspectives**

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As a former school administrator and teacher, and current instructor of graduate and doctoral students, I am continually surprised by the lack of attention given gender in mainstream US education. The more international literature I read, the more I realize how much further along countries like Britain, Sweden, Canada and Australia are with regard to attitudes, theory and practice. In their training and in their day-to-day routines, educators in the US are infrequently challenged to inform or interrogate their essentialist notions of gender differences. As they continue to work within a persistent, male-led system<sup>1</sup>, leadership is needed to foster change and bring gender equity issues to the forefront.

The insights and investigations in this edited volume on gender, culture and leadership should benefit students and scholars of educational leadership not only in the US, where interest in the topic is beginning to take hold, but around the world where gender has been on the agenda for some time.

The authors in this collection generally advocate for a more nuanced understanding of gender and leadership that moves beyond longstanding *men-are-autocratic / women-are-nurturing* dichotomies. They argue for the importance of culture and context in shaping multiple femininities and masculinities, creating a more culturally inclusive theory of gender and leadership. This strategy calls for the inclusion of race, ethnicity and sexuality in the discourses as well. Edited by John Collard and Cecilia Reynolds, it features leading international scholars on gender and education, including Sandra Acker (Canada), Jill Blackmore (Australia), Margaret Grogan (USA), and Olof Johansson (Sweden), to name a few of the 13 contributors.

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<sup>1</sup> Though women are over 80 percent of teachers in the US, they only comprise 35 percent of school principals (NCES 2000). Only 13 percent of all district superintendents were female in 2000. Though women now earn more than 50 percent of doctoral degrees in the US, they comprise less than 30 percent of full-time faculty in higher education (Grogan this volume, p. 91).

Divided into three sections, there are unifying themes that run throughout the book. First, gender does not necessarily determine leadership style. Second, both male and female leaders can either reproduce the status quo in education or transform it through the notion of “critical professionalism” (Blackmore, p. 192). Third, culture and context work to actively shape male and female leaders and leadership in schools and universities. Each of these themes emphasize the importance of creating a more culturally inclusive theory of gender and leadership in education as well as serve to weave together a more complex tapestry of gender, leadership and culture in education than has existed before.

The authors in the first section of the book spend considerable time refuting leadership discourses and theories that, in the past, have emphasized gender differences in leadership styles and/or were drawn from business management theories of leadership. The traditional notion that women are consultative leaders (Gilligan, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1987) who use an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1992), while men are more autocratic is rejected in favor of a more complex theory of “multiple masculinities and femininities” (Connell, 1995) interacting with race, class, context and culture. While this view is nothing new to gender scholars, it is new in the field of educational leadership which is beginning to catch up with women’s/gender studies. For example, Collard’s chapter “Steel Magnolias in Velvet Ghettos” illustrates a complex picture of women leaders of Australian girls schools. His study finds “no one distinctive, female leadership style in schools, but multiple forms, which appear to be dependent upon a variety of contextual and historical factors” (p. 87).

Apparently, gendered notions of leadership are deeply ingrained even in countries that have more women in school leadership roles. For example, in Sweden where women were 73 percent of all principals in 2002 (Davis & Johansson, p. 39), Franzen found that gender stereotypes of leaders persist especially for *men*. Male principals who used traditionally female leadership styles characterized by sensitivity and support met with more resistance from their teachers. This study also found that both women and men could be hierarchical, autocratic leaders, or collaborative, supportive leaders, though women who used traditionally masculine leadership styles were more accepted.

One of the problems with educational leadership discourse in the past is that it has drawn heavily from organizational and management theories, which may or may not be appropriate to the educational context. At the same time, a dearth of female school leaders and still powerful gender stereotypes undermine leadership studies. For example, in Marian Court’s chapter on reconstructing gendered leadership discourses, she advocates a feminist post-structuralist approach to gender and leadership. Drawing on her research of a co-principalship at a school in New Zealand, she illustrates that within a dominant leadership discourse of chief executive or entrepreneur, the co-principals in her study were able to construct a counter discourse of collective educational leadership. Being able to challenge and redefine what it means to be a good school leader is crucial in an age of greater accountability and increased globalization. Moreover, Collard’s chapter on school size emphasizes institutional scale and size has more of an impact on leaders than their gender. “As school size increases, so the perceptions, beliefs and relationships of principals alter (p. 36). The authors make clear that leadership theories that do not take into account multiple femininities and masculinities as well as school context are incomplete.

The second theme, that of a need for both female and male leaders to critically transform education, is woven throughout the other two sections of the book. Several authors acknowledge that our current context of globalization and accountability can both help and hinder the leader who wants to work for gender equity and social justice in education. Grogan's chapter on mentoring, in particular, highlights the significance of "changing leadership discourses" (p. 90). Grogan makes the case that in the US, where women are severely underrepresented in educational leadership, it is worth examining the process of how women are mentored into educational administration. The danger lies in what she calls the mentoring paradox – that while mentoring is desirable, it is also a privileging process that can "assist in maintaining the status quo of unequal gender relations and socially unjust educational practices and policies" (p. 90). Mentoring for gender equity and social justice means that leaders – who are change agents – must continually ask *who benefits most from this educational reform?* To not ask this question is to reinforce the status quo.

To change the status quo in education means to actively develop school leaders with a real commitment to social change. Merchant's chapter on leaders for social justice grapples with the question of whether one has to have direct experience with marginalization in order to become a social justice leader. Her research suggests that university faculty *can* "develop a sensitivity in students who have not yet had . . . marginalizing experiences" (p. 171) through student activities such as field experiences in underserved communities. Merchant also recommends that schools of education aggressively integrate social justice concepts and practices into *all* aspects of their preparation programs. Thus, it is not enough for these programs to have a commitment to social justice as part of their mission statement or philosophy. Issues of equity and justice must infuse every course in the curriculum. It is only then that school administrators will explicitly adopt "equity-driven leadership practices" (Blackmore, 2004).

The final theme of how culture and context shape school leaders further highlights the need to re-conceptualize the discourses on leadership and gender. Authors in the last section of the book advocate creating a more inclusive theory of educational leadership, one that encompasses not only gender, but power, sexuality, race, culture and context. Expanding notions of gender and leadership means reconceptualizing the theoretical frameworks which have previously served the discipline. For example, Reynold's chapter on gender scripts illustrates the dangers inherent in old gender stereotypes that oversimplify and polarize female/male leadership styles. In addition, one's sexuality and "body work" can limit women and men in their leadership capacities. This gendered notion of power *over* – rather than power *with* – can limit women who in leadership positions, as Brunner's study of female superintendents illustrates. Furthermore, the presumption of heterosexuality in educational leaders is interrogated in Koschorek's chapter on heteronormativity in educational administration.

The very broad scope of this text is both its greatest strength and weakness. Though the reader is given a sweeping international view of school leadership from primary through postsecondary education, from principals to superintendents, this volume is nevertheless limited by its focus on only six Westernized countries. Perspectives from Latin American, Asian or African countries are not included. Furthermore, the brief chapters on heteronormativity and aboriginal education seem to represent an incomplete afterthought.

As one who works to prepare future school administrators and teacher educators, I could see this text becoming part of my curriculum. My university is now offering a doctorate in educational leadership for social justice. While US graduate programs that emphasize social justice often focus on race and ethnicity, I want to bring gender equity into what is traditionally a “gender-blind” discourse. Social justice needs to explicitly include gender equity issues in educational leadership. Others who prepare future school leaders or are leaders themselves will also want to consider including this text in their curriculum.

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