
***We are the leaders we've been waiting for: Women and leadership development in college.* Julie Owen. Stylus Publishing, 2020. 236 pp.**

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Leadership is not my specific area of expertise, but I work at a women's university with a leadership programme, and a colleague recommended *We are the Leaders We've Been Waiting for*. As an instructor who is passionate about women's education and empowering students to succeed professionally, I was interested in this topic. I did not expect the book to be so relatable to my own experiences of professional development as a cisgender woman, nor to guide me on a reflective journey to examine my own beliefs about gender and leadership. Owen presents theory, data and research on the topic, addressing intersectional, gender nonconforming and transgender identities, and discussing gender inequality from college to the workplace. She invites the reader to examine their own beliefs about and experiences of leadership through activities facilitating reflection and addresses the controversial topics of regendering or degendering leadership. Each chapter includes students' narratives which embody the themes of the book through accounts of their lived experiences.

In chapter one, Owen gives the reader an overview of the ideas explored in the book and clarifies that she is referring to leadership as "a process between and among people who seek to make a positive influence in the world" (p. 4), not only the occupation of positions at the top of an organization. The next two chapters summarise previous literature, discuss how gender and leadership are socially constructed, and explore the role of identity in leadership development. Dugan's 2017 research is cited to illustrate the importance of leadership efficacy. A person may have high levels of leadership capacity, but if their beliefs in those capabilities are low, they are unlikely to seek opportunities to lead. Owen uses critical theory to invite the reader to consider how their "identities, subjectivities, and assumptions within dominant social, political, economic, and cultural systems" (pp. 26-27) influence their approach to leadership and offers Preskill and Brookfield's (2009) *Nine Learning Tasks of Leadership* as a lens for critical reflection. She stresses the importance of self-awareness in leadership development and explains how identity and intersectionality shape our own journeys.

Owen describes the negative effects of gender socialization, introduces the concept of feminist leadership, and discusses women's representation across different employment sectors in chapters four to six. The section on the effects of gender socialization in schools is both concerning and thought-provoking for teachers. Owen views perfectionism and imposter syndrome as negative effects of gender socialization which she previously identified as barriers to women's leadership

efficacy. She goes on to discuss women's experiences of internalized oppression and the "double bind," which refers to a conflict between the expectation of women to be warm and friendly with the expectation that leaders should be direct and assertive. Owen proposes adopting Shea and Renn's (2017) feminist leadership style which is positioned as one that persons of any gender identity or expression can utilize. Feminist leadership involves overturning systems of power, addressing difference and intersectionality, and engaging in social change. This model is proposed because when people talk about masculine or "feminine leadership styles, they are reinforcing essentialist and heteronormative ways of being" (pp. 103-104), something which Owen wishes to avoid.

Chapter seven examines the metaphors used to describe women in leadership, explores barriers to advancement, and offers personal and organizational strategies for gender equity. In the next chapter, Owen cites literature on the additional challenges for female leaders with intersectional identities, such as burnout or the pressure of being the first or only leader with their set of identities. The notion of degendering leadership is discussed because gendered approaches "typically ignore transgender, nonbinary and intersex leaders" (p.167) and may also lead to a "stereotype threat" where negative attitudes towards women's capacity to lead are internalized. However, it is argued that this concept could lead to overlooking or denying the effects of gender as an aspect of identity upon leadership. Owen concludes that regardless of whether you believe leadership needs to be degendered or not, "it is important to question the role gender plays in leadership" (p. 167). The final chapter includes different strategies for creating change and practical tips on dealing with non-feminists. This chapter would benefit from increasing tangible and practical suggestions for avoiding activist burnout and maintaining hope, given the call for action at the end of the book.

Owen has encapsulated a plethora of theory and literature on women and leadership to create a book that highlights the way that leadership has become gendered and the negative consequences on female leadership journeys from education through to employment. Although Owen often cites American history, laws, and data, the broader themes she discusses are relatable to women outside of the USA and her suggestions, such as how to support healthy gender socialization or develop leadership self-efficacy, are applicable to Japan. This book would be a valuable asset for GALE readers teaching gender or leadership in college settings. Equally, it provides a thought-provoking read for anyone interested in engaging with this topic in a more inclusive way through critical reflection. In June 2023, Japan fell to 125th out of 146 countries in the WEF gender gap report, in part due to the low score for women's participation in politics and economy (Kaneko, 2023). Furthermore, the 2023 Global Gender Gap report (WEF) concluded that no country to date had

achieved complete gender equality. Owen's book reminds us of the profound consequences of gender inequality and proposes strategies for making change at the individual and organizational level. "We can wait for others ... to advocate for more gender inclusive leadership and organizations, or we can roll up our sleeves and get to work. After all, we are the leaders we've been waiting for" (p. 186).

Further reading

Leadership theory: Cultivating critical perspectives by John P. Dugan, (2017), Jossey-Bass.

Learning as a way of leading: Lessons from the struggle for social justice by Stephen Preskill & Stephen D. Brookfield, (2009), Jossey-Bass.

Gender and Leadership: A call to action by Heather D. Shea & Kristen A. Renn. In D. Tillapaugh & P. Haber-Curran (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on gender and student leadership* (New Directions for Student Leadership, No. 154, (pp. 83-94), (2017), Jossey-Bass.

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References

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- World Economic Forum (WEF) (2023, June 20). Global Gender Gap Report 2023. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2023/>