

‘It’s down to hard work, lonely work, long, long hours, and you have to be able to sacrifice’; removing the veil of the Gender-Neutral organisation.

ABSTRACT

This research examines the notion of the Gendered Organisation concept within a UK public sector organisation; drawing attention to the presumptions of Gender-Neutrality being satisfied if there are equal numbers of females and males in leadership positions. By examining the experiences of female leaders in a perceived Gender-Neutral public sector organisation that surely ought to apply equality law and policy with rigour, we explore the dominance of agentic leadership styles (assertiveness and competitiveness). Such styles often popularised in comparison to, and to the detriment of, communal characteristics (nurturing), can lead to the creation and reinforcement of masculine-informed structures, language and norms that leave little room for a communal or feminine approach to leadership. The findings from 13 semi-structured interviews look at what extent a public sector organisation may be perceived as Gender-Neutral. However, such perceived neutrality has created only a veneer of equality and what we term a gender complacency, which presents a risk to authentic Equality, Diversity and Inclusion interventions within the workforce.

Keywords: EDI; Female Leadership; Gender-Neutral; Gendered Organisation; Gender Inequality.

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Introduction

Whilst there is evidence of the improvement of attitudes toward gender equality, research suggests that sexism and gender inequalities are still present (Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell, 2019; Hatmaker and Hassan 2021; Gennaro and Piscopo, 2023; Jose and Sivaraman, 2023). Gender inequalities are particularly noticeable in the workplace (CIPD, 2019; Chwarae Teg, 2019; El-Ramly, 2019; Gennaro and Piscopo, 2023). The disparity between males and females is evident when considering critical research areas such as the gender pay gap (the average remuneration differences between women and men), gendered leadership bias (incongruity of the ‘natural’ role of the woman and as a leader) and the lack of representation of females in the higher echelons of organisations (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Scott and Brown, 2006; Hogue, 2015; Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell, 2019; Hutson, Shufeld and Vinci, 2023; Jose and Sivaraman, 2023).

Over the past two decades, there has been a notable increase in the number of female leaders working within organisations in the UK and worldwide (Vogelstein and Bro, 2024). The Council on Foreign Relations found that 25 of the 193 UN member states have female heads of state or government heads (Vogelstein and Bro, 2024). When considering FTSE 100 companies, the UK has seen a rise in female CEOs, especially within the last decade (IG, 2020; PWC, 2024). Nevertheless, there has been a sharp decline in female CEOs from 28% in 2023 to 19% in 2024 (Grant Thornton, 2024b). Therefore, while there is some evidence of a slow increase of females visibly occupying senior roles, these ‘headlines’ do not reflect the whole picture of women’s occupation of leadership roles. Nor do these ‘headlines’ reflect the lived experiences of working in leadership positions for females or highlight the existence of an evident Glass Ceiling.

The term and metaphor Glass Ceiling relates to the barriers faced by females when reaching for leadership positions, a term that many authors have explored (Acker, 1990, 2012; Arulampalam, Booth, and Bryan, 2007; Ng and Sears, 2017). The term Glass Ceiling is used in circumstances where higher-level roles are perceived to be available to females, however, they face an ‘invisible’ social barrier (a glass ceiling), preventing them from attaining that position. Other metaphors used to describe similar contexts include the *glass escalator*, *glass walls*, and *glass cliff* (Women in Research, 2021); the general tenor of these terms relates to the barriers posed to females that tend not to impact males negatively (Women in Research, 2021).

Research suggests that gendered leadership bias is one factor contributing to a glass ceiling effect and lack of female representation (Hogue; 2015; Saint-Michel, 2018). According to Eagly and Karau (2002), gendered leadership bias occurs when there is a preference for a particular leadership style. They argue that since males have traditionally dominated leadership, society has normalised a more agentic style, with connotations of assertiveness, competitiveness, dominance, and autonomy (Hogue, 2015; Saint-Michel, 2018). In contrast, the female leadership style is more often represented by communal and expressive characteristics, displaying nurturing, kind, and sympathetic tendencies (Hogue, 2015; Saint-Michel, 2018; Turnbull, Graham and Taket, 2022), although this has not manifested in practice, with some critics suggesting that the problem is an entrenchment of masculine career pathways (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012). This is still prevalent, despite research demonstrating the changing nature of masculinity to be more inclusive of femininity in Western societies (Valsecchi et al, 2023). If gender differences are socially constructed, then organisations are gendered (Calás, Smircich, and Holvino, 2014), and thus their discursive practices create or exacerbate difference and inequality (Acker, 2006; Jose and

Sivaraman, 2023; Turnbull, Graham and Taket, 2022), which may contribute to the preference for male leadership (Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell, 2019).

There is evidence that female leaders try to replicate male leaders' agentic behaviours only to face prejudice for acting against their prescribed roles (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Turnbull, Graham and Taket, 2022). Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell (2019) argue that this is maintained and reinforced by organisational structures and procedures, resulting in Gendered Organisations. The term Gendered Organisation, coined by Acker, (1990) describes the inequalities built into organisational structures and hierarchies that favour masculine traits. Criado Perez (2021) suggests that the tools that produce organisational structures are themselves flawed and reinforce inequality rather than influence neutrality. In turn, Balmer et al. (2020) infer that formal processes intended to be Gender-Neutral have not altered interactions experienced as inequitable and that this disjuncture contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of gender inequity.

A varied collection of academic work of women in leadership exists; however, further research is required to illustrate the ongoing experiences of women in leadership. First, although academics have addressed research into Gendered Organisations, we identify a gap concerning the public sector. The extant research about the public sector is somewhat outdated and limited; resulting in a gap in understanding of leadership and gender within this sector.

Research suggests that similar problems for women in leadership in the private sector are also present in the public sector (OECD, 2019; Christen, 2022; ONS, 2023). For example, public sector organisations in the UK employ an estimated 5.83 million employees (ONS,

2023), with women workers typically representing 59.6% of the workforce in OECD countries (OECD, 2019). Despite the typically higher levels of women employees working for public sector organisations, research shows women are taking lower-paid roles than men (Christen, 2022); resulting in larger gender pay gaps and a challenge for equal gender participation at higher levels. As public sector organisations are expected to model best practice employment policies and procedures (Bach and Stroleny, 2014) and set standards for equality, diversity and inclusion (OECD, 2019); it is paramount we investigate the experiences of women in leadership to contribute to existing knowledge on gender and leadership.

Second, existing research considers the factors contributing to a Gendered Organisation, emphasising how the language around masculinity informs discursive practice (Carroll, Scott, and Ford, 2019). However, as noted by Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell (2019), illustrations of the female voice surrounding the Gendered Organisation in existing research is limited. Therefore, in this study, we contribute to understanding the reality of living and working as a female in a Gendered Organisation by following in the footsteps of Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell (2019) and promoting inclusivity of the female voice.

In summary, our paper investigates if a rise in females in leadership has created an illusion that equality of opportunity has been attained; otherwise, patriarchal attitudes around notions of what constitutes *leadership* risk being unchallenged. Within this, we address the research gaps by investigating the experiences of women in leadership within public sector organisations, underpinned by the lived experience of these females.

To achieve the purpose of our study, we pose the following research questions:

- To what extent are public sector organisations Gender-Neutral?
- When a public sector organisation is perceived as Gender-Neutral, what impact does this have on the participants' lived experience?
- Does the public sector organisation in question align authentically with Acker's (2012) notion of the discourse of a Gendered Organisation?

The paper is shaped as follows: first, we consider the literature, examining the concepts of Leadership and Gender, thus addressing theories of Gendered Organisations and leadership bias. We then consider the context of the public sector study organisation. Following the data analysis, we critically explore the lived experiences of females in perceived Gender-Neutral organisations. By the time we reach our discussion, it will become evident that attempts to produce a Gendered Organisation with interventions like targets and tokenism have been instrumental in preserving male hegemony.

This article makes four contributions to extant literature; first, we dispute the assumption that Gender-Neutrality is satisfied if there are equal numbers of females and males in leadership. Second, we present arguments that patriarchal language and agentic male characteristics are a structural problem within the workforce and serve to reinforce the ideal components of managerial positions. Third, we evaluate the role of communal skills and how they inform female managers of day-to-day practice, and their significance in managing the workforce. Finally, we contribute the term 'gender complacency' to illustrate a silent and complicit habitus that preserves male privilege and prohibits dissent, thus maintaining the status quo. In turn, this impacts progression and enables age-old reproduction of masculinised norms and privilege.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership and Gender

Gender inequality within the workplace is still prevalent (PWC, 2024). Findings from research by Chwarae Teg (2019), a charity that works to increase gender equality in Wales, show that 19.8% of females occupy professional roles compared to 16% of males. Despite more females occupying professional roles, the report found that 8% of females are in senior positions compared to 11.4% of males, leading us to question why equality in these higher positions has not been achieved, despite more female workers in the workforce (Jones, Makepeace and Wass, 2018; PWC, 2024).

When considering this phenomenon globally, Grant Thornton (2024a, 2004b) found that females held 34% of senior management positions, one of the highest recorded: with just 28% of females occupying CEO positions. While there is a seemingly positive trend in the rise in females in leadership, progress has been slow, staggered and nominal (Mastracci and Bowman, 2015; Grant Thornton, 2024b). Research continues to find gender imbalances at leadership levels (Hoobler et al., 2018); just one example can be illustrated by the recent decline in women in CEO positions as of 2024; who cited that reasons for leaving their roles included public pressure, caring responsibilities and the pressures to act agentically in their positions (Grant Thornton, 2024b). So, although the concentration of female senior managers within organisations may be at a larger proportion, barriers or 'glass ceilings' are ever-present (Acker, 1990, 2012). Yet, here are calls to update Acker's assumption that the 'glass ceiling' is the primary obstacle, for example, Bates (2021) calls for greater scrutiny of other structures that sustain male hegemony.

Drawing from feminist theorists, we argue that too often, women are not given an equal voice (as men) to articulate claims for new norms, thus often remaining unheard by those with the power to achieve change (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). Following Acker's (1990) thesis of how silence around gendered issues disadvantages females, feminist theorists such as Fotaki (2013) argue that females are pressured to use language that reflects and reinforces male dominance, and the supposed Gender-Neutrality of organisations thus becomes a form of control over females (Simpson and Lewis 2005). Acker (2012: 208) noted how the invisibility of inequalities as inequalities hinders organisational change: '*One of the most persistent barriers to my efforts to improve equality in organisations, how do you make visible the invisible.*' Rowbotham (1983) argues that since language is a part of political and organisational power, its meanings need to be changed and cannot simply be annexed.

Perhaps it is the case that gender practices are invisible because they are so deeply embedded in organisational practice and behaviour. Maleness in leadership is silent, precisely because it does not need to be vocalised; it is implicit and unquestioned. Male default thinking has become the naturalised way of thinking and doing organisations (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). Next, using the theory of Gendered Organisations as an analytical tool, we demonstrate how gender functions to define leadership performance and identity.

Gendered Organisations

Acker (1990; 2012), challenges the assumption that organisational structures are 'Gender-Neutral' i.e., there is no gender bias and defines Gendered Organisation as

inequalities built into organisational structures and hierarchies (Acker, 1990; 2012), and favours masculine traits, devaluing or ignoring female traits. Perhaps this explains how male-default-thinking is so prevalent in a world that is approximately 50% female. For social psychologists, this would be considered projection bias, occurring as people assume their way of thinking or doing is typical. Projection bias, amplified by a form of confirmation bias (Perez, 2021) helps explain why it is so common to find male bias masquerading as Gender-Neutrality.

Workplace interaction is an area of consideration, focusing on how our day-to-day interactions reinforce and reproduce gender roles (Acker, 1990); for example, how the use of Agentic (masculine) or Communal (feminine) characteristics inform gender ‘prototypes’, which will be addressed later. Britton (2000) posits that organisations are gendered in the behaviours and practices they value, something that Mastracci and Bowman (2015) identify as the reason organisations remain inherently gendered since their practices are rooted in male beliefs and privileges that are highly resistant to change. Although these gendered and typically agentic practices are the inherently preferred model of practice in many organisations, they can also be obstructing, directing and ignoring (Turnbull, Graham and Taket, 2022). Unsurprisingly, stereotypical masculine norms inform gendering processes that then inform organisational logic (Davies and Thomas 2002), a concept demonstrated by Biehl and Schönfeld (2023a; 2023b) in their animated video 'Leadership and Discourse'. Their video shows, using imagery, how the language used in leadership creates a view of white, heterosexual and masculine, which automatically excludes all others (Biehl and Schönfeld, 2023a; 2023b). Bolstered by language, logic can become replete with sexism and male generic terms of address and idioms. This dualism creates a problem that is both one of concept formation within an existing male-constructed discourse and a language that can

articulate an authentic understanding of leading organisations. A further critique of a Gender-Neutral organisation is the notion of gendered leadership bias, a concept that contributes to our ongoing discussion (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hogue, 2015).

Gendered Leadership Bias

Gendered leadership bias is recognised as a cognitive mismatch between the female's socially constructed role and the leader's perceived role (Scott and Brown, 2006; Hogue, 2015). This is caused by shared conscious and unconscious social constructions around the social roles of males and females; and in turn, the 'designated' traits, and characteristics each gender is expected to portray (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Hogue, 2015). Agentic characteristics commonly consist of assertiveness, confidence, competitiveness, ambition, dominant and 'natural leader' behaviours (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Davies and Thomas, 2002). Communal characteristics include affectionate and nurturing tendencies such as helpfulness, kindness, and tend and befriend traits (Taylor et al., 2000; Eagly and Karau, 2002; Turnbull, Graham and Taket, 2022).

Traditional leadership theories such as 'The Great Man Theory', rely heavily on agentic characteristics (Marchington et al., 2016), causing these social norms and thus masculine behaviour to be ingrained and associated with leadership (Scott and Brown, 2006; Hogue, 2015). Since leadership establishes a vital part of an organisation's social structure and cultural norms, an employee's idea of the ideal leader can change based on the group's gender distribution (Lemoine, Hartnell and Leroy, 2016). For instance, Eagly and Carli (2007) maintain that the performance of female leaders is less effective in male-dominated contexts. Other research suggests that changes in the proportion of women in organisations affect

employees' preference for male leaders (Stoker, Velder and Lammers, 2012); with studies by Cook and Glass (2013) and Metcalf, Hueffner and Suss (2022) showing how diversity in leadership positions can increase women's likelihood of being promoted to top-level roles and promote a more positive feedback loop for female employees in general. Lee and Park (2021) also suggest that female employees have more positive views of transformational leadership behaviours. Ironically, these studies provide hope as they show that gender representation in leadership can influence employees' perceptions of leadership styles, perceptions that are capable of being reshaped, more dynamic and less fixed than might hitherto have been believed.

Suppose we accept Butler's (1990) argument that gender is created through the repetition of acts through socialisation such that we become the 'performative self'. In that case, it follows that it is through such continuous exposure to gender in practice that we learn what Bourdieu (1984) calls the 'rules of the game', thus, while *leadership* is not male, it is masculine, and masculinity is a gender concept. These tendencies are not new: both Aristotle and Plato had a normative notion of humanness that is inseparable from a notion of masculinity. Aristotle arrogates both the idea of manliness and humanness to male citizens. Leaving aside gender for a moment, Scott and Brown (2006) argue that this happens anyway, as part of the Categorisation Leadership Theory in which an individual witnesses a particular behaviour and thus encodes that behaviour as the 'prototype' of understanding. Yet, there are two disadvantages of the Categorisation Leadership Theory. First, females may face a negative bias due to not being automatically perceived as possessing agentic characteristics (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hogue, 2015). Consequently, workforce attitudes may be less favourable toward female leaders as the notion of agentic authority is normalised (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Eagly and Carli, 2007), leading to difficulties for females, not only in becoming

leaders but also in being perceived as successful leaders (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Second, when females successfully reach leadership positions whilst assuming agentic characteristics, Eagly and Karau (2002) and Saint-Michel (2018) argue that they can experience prejudice due to a ‘violation’ of their stereotypical social role. In some cases, female leaders are labelled ‘bossy’, ‘irrational’ or ‘aggressive’ even though they may be displaying the same characteristics as males (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Furthermore, Hekman et al., (2017) found that while male leaders are praised for promoting diversity, female leaders are penalised, because it reminds men that these female leaders are, in fact, women. And thus, the stereotypes become salient: bossy, assertive, cold and all the rest. Hogue (2015) refers to this as a cycle of secondary gender bias where female leaders experience less favourable treatment. This can lead to reduced career opportunities for female workers, with fewer opportunities available for female leaders to create and find female leadership identity or improve the current leadership ‘prototype’ (Scott and Brown, 2006; Hogue, 2015).

Research demonstrates the factors that have impacted female occupation of leadership roles; highlighting key areas where the Gendered Organisation narrative can play. At the same time, more females are now in the workplace and leadership positions, and ongoing stereotypes of leadership *and* pre-existing gendered leadership biases present barriers. Further research is required to paint a picture of females’ ‘real-life’ experiences on their career path toward leadership. These questions are not rhetorical. For very good and very important reasons, feminists have insisted on asking how gender affects or is affected by every branch of human inquiry.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Influenced by a Feminist lens, our approach enabled us to understand the self-perceptions of females in leadership and to add to existing social theory (May, 2001; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Using interview data alongside secondary organisational data we portray the participants' lived experiences. In the data analysis section, we drew upon theories such as Gender Incongruity Theory (Eagly and Karau, 2002) and Gendered Organisational Theory (Acker, 1990; 2012), to contribute fresh narratives and perspectives from these lenses.

Participants

To recruit participants, HR data was used to identify Female Team Leaders, Middle Managers and Senior Managers or department Directors / Leaders in *The Organisation*. Influenced by a Feminist lens, the recruitment process emphasised the self-selecting and voluntary nature of participation due to the sensitivity of the topic. Initially, 11% of the organisational female leader's population members expressed interest in taking part. However, the final sample included 8% of the organisation's female leader population, all varying in length of service (between 3 – 32 years), responsibility (from 1 to 30+ members of staff), disciplines and specialities. The final sample ranged from various services in the organisation to allow for insights from across the organisation as a whole. To protect the participants' identity, we omitted names and distinguishing details disclosed by participants, using pseudonyms (see Table 1). Although the participants' management level was used to identify a participant's responsibilities, job titles have been generalised so that the participants' identities cannot be distinguished from other Local Authorities within Wales.

<i>Management Position</i>	Number of Participants	Participant Pseudonyms
Managers	3	Claire, Lucy, Ashley
Middle Managers	8	Susan, Eloise, Hannah, Helen, Lauren, Natalie, Jessica, Greta
Directors / Leaders	2	Elinor, Jennifer

Table 1. Participant Details

Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured one-to-one interviews over Microsoft Teams, which allowed for rapport building, where participants could answer questions freely, without fear of cutting across others due to decreased visibility of body language over the video call. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and saved in a secure manner using encrypted files.

The interview questions were inspired by the work of Cimirotić et al's., (2017) research into female leaders in executive positions. True to the nature of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire), prompts were used (Bryman, 2012). Questions 1-2 were tweaked following a pilot interview to focus on the participants' career paths. Furthermore, questions 3 – 4 concentrated on the skills and attributes that are

perceived to link to successful *leadership*. The interviews lasted on average 28 minutes, with the duration of the shortest conversation lasting approximately 15 minutes and the longest lasting approximately 41 minutes. We started to reach data saturation on some concepts, around the 8th interview, therefore indicating that the data was self-replicative within this study, adding to the validity of the data (Saunders et al., 2017)

Data Organisation and Analysis

Transcripts were coded manually, without the use of specialist software. The first author completed the coding by identifying emerging themes and manually note-taking these onto the transcripts. The coding and emerging themes were then coded into a table noting the code, the quotation, and the participant identification. Once all the data was coded, the categories were sorted into umbrella themes; showing us where our commonalities and differences were. The umbrella themes and their categories were then analysed through a feminist lens. To maintain trustworthiness in the data collection, coding and analysis process, the research was examined and re-examined by all of the authors and professional discussions were held in the cases where any disagreements occurred. This allowed us to not only question and justify the observation and analysis but also to ensure the validity of our analysis.

The Organisation

This empirical case study considers the factors affecting the lived experience of female leaders in one public sector organisation within Wales. Wales is a devolved nation of the United Kingdom (UK), situated to the West of England and bordered by the Irish Sea (Wales.com, 2021). As a devolved nation, Wales is governed by the Welsh Government, with a First Minister, Cabinet and Elected Parliament based in the country's capital, Cardiff. As of 2019, Wales had an estimated population of around 3,152,879, spanning across a total of 22

different counties and making up 4.8% of the UK Population (Stats Wales, 2019; Wales.com, 2021). Wales is a bilingual country, with the native language being Welsh (Wales.com, 2021).

Due to Wales' small size, the details surrounding the organisation have been kept to a minimum as a cautionary measure and to maintain organisational anonymity. As an additional measure, the organisation in question will be referred to as *The Organisation*. Female employees predominantly dominate the workforce in *The Organisation*, as is common in the UK public sector (Jones, Makepeace and Wass, 2018). At the time of writing, *The Organisation* employed 47% more females than males; with 151 females in leadership positions and 116 males in leadership positions. The nature of the service provided by *The Organisation* could be considered particularly feminine, thus contributing to the higher percentage of female employees. *The Organisation's* CEO is female and has increased the number of females in the senior leadership team, suggesting a female progressive or, as Acker (1990) and Gray, de Hann and Bonneywell (2019) would claim a Gender-Neutral organisation. However, the higher-paid senior management and leadership roles within *The Organisation* are occupied by a slightly higher number of males and *The Organisation* does have a gender pay gap. However, was lower than the Welsh and National average of 11.3% at the time of the study (Chwarae Teg, 2019). Like many public sector organisations, *The Organisation* has model standard practices and policies to help ensure the fair and equal treatment of both female and male employees (Bach and Stroleny, 2014).

FINDINGS

Before we separate the findings into three intrinsically linked themes: **Perceptions of Gender-Neutrality, Communal and Gender-Neutral Approaches, and Gendered**

Representation of Leadership Success Factors, we first highlight some general comments that underpin the findings. Overwhelmingly, the findings showed that many participants considered that they had unintentionally become managers, driven by accident or luck or because their recruiters were ‘desperate’ (Hannah). Only one participant expressed a strategy to become a manager, with most attributing their status to serendipity:

‘it’s just I was in the right places at the right time with the right knowledge’ Eloise

Many participants were highly qualified, with at least ten having postgraduate degrees, most of which were in some form of people or change management. Yet, armed with the most appropriate qualifications, few planned to attain managerial positions. The relationship between the unintentional progression to leadership and the high level of education or qualification seems somewhat oxymoronic, yet the irony was lost on the participants. Their own skills and abilities were less credited, guided by a sentiment of unworthiness. This is a notion mimicked in a study by Ahuja and Weatherall (2022), whereby their participants, despite being generously qualified, labelled their efforts and success as ‘Lucky’ and somewhat invisibilized their own role in their success.

When considering the three themes, the first theme, **Perceptions of Gender-Neutrality** illustrates how the participants historically and currently perceive the leadership. The second theme, **Communal and Gender-Neutral Approaches** to leadership signals the behaviours the participants show, appreciate or aspire to display in their roles. Finally, the **Gendered Representation of Leadership Success Factors** theme shows how managers represent themselves and the factors they consider success measures.

Perceptions of Gender-Neutrality

In this section, we examine how participants perceive *The Organisation*, and more specifically its Perceived Gender-Neutrality. While participants were not explicitly asked to consider other female managers or the gendered makeup of *The Organisation*, during the interviews this became a natural topic of conversation for participants, which reflects their experiences and natural reflections within their roles. Eloise reflected this best when stating:

‘I’ve never worked anywhere before this ... had such a strong degree of female leadership. You go to the manager’s meetings; it’s always equal or if not, a few more women around the table.’

This comment by Eloise shows positivity towards the perceived Gender-Neutrality of *The Organisation* and their experiences as a female leader. We see from Eloise’s perspective that other female leaders in the workplace visibly surround them. Similarly, to Eloise, other participants would also share their perceptions of Gender-Neutrality within *The Organisation*. Within this, almost all participants referred to the history of females in leadership, often noting a change in visibly more females, with many referring to *The Organisation*’s CEO being female. This demonstration of a Gender-Neutral organisation and visible development of females seemingly inspired participants, with many of the participants perceiving senior managers and leaders as *‘role models’*.

Within the next extract, Claire expresses the encouragement she has from her experience of seeing females within senior and leadership roles within *The Organisation*.

‘Erm, there are opportunities I think the [organisation], you know, we’ve got a woman, woman chief exec. So I think that’s, you know, it’s quite an inspiring thing to have as a [organisation] that you can reach the top if you want to.’

Both Eloise and Claire demonstrate the recognition that many participants had of the development of female leaders. This is important in understanding the participants’ Gender-Neutral view of *The Organisation*, which was seemingly common among participants. The exposure and visibility of female leaders witnessed in the everyday lives of these participants reinforce a Gender-Neutral perception and play a role in normalising females within these positions. Therefore, by way of experience, the role of the female leader within the organisation has potentially become a phenomenon for these participants.

Within their experience of witnessing a ‘Gender-Neutral’ leadership team within *The Organisation*, some participants expressed a consciousness of different leaders and (perceived) gender-exclusive traits and skills. Hannah considers this in her statement below:

‘But, erm, there’s a lot more women in management, and I think they bring a lot of skills that, again stereotypically possibly that men don’t have, in terms of being able to deal with people and you know, having that sorts of natural degree of sympathy with people that possibly doesn’t come from men necessarily.’

Hannah discusses her experience of female managers having the ability to display empathy and sympathy towards others, a skill that they recognise is stereotypically associated with feminine leadership styles. Through her experience, Hannah is directly comparing perceived feminine and masculine leadership styles, recognising the ‘stereotypical’ nature of these skills and behaviours, whilst also valuing skills and behaviours associated with communal leadership styles. Although discussions of leadership styles often directly

mentioned or described actions of using empathetic and sympathetic skills, not all participants agreed. Indeed, identical behaviours displayed by males and females were labelled as assertive for the latter and '*bolshie*' for the former. Lucy comments that through experience, her leadership style is sometimes viewed as '*abrupt*' and justified this owing to the nature of her professional role, and her types of (typically male) clients. This possibly stems from the idea that using feminine leadership styles (such as communal approaches) is incongruent with traditional leadership and is less valued. However, Lucy shared how these skills may not be of particular use when dealing with emotional interactions. Moreover, later in the conversation, Lucy does explain her desire for further training and development to develop her softer leadership skills.

Altogether, the results presented two perceptions of Gender-Neutrality within *The Organisation*. The first is the experience of seeing a higher representation of females in senior positions, whilst noting how this has developed from a more Gendered Organisation in the past, from '*the old boys club*' (Hannah). Second, participants have recognised the different leadership skills between female and male managers, which somewhat blurs the experience of a perceived Gender-Neutral organisation.

Despite the perception of Gender-Neutrality, there was a significant reliance on academic achievement. Virtually all the participants held post-graduate qualifications and a number shared their desire to do more qualifications, or how it is impossible to progress without them. Take Helen, who shared '*I'm a big advocate of qualifications*' and who '*decided not to have a family and do the qualifications*'. They explained how it was very much a career or a family at that time. Being qualified appeared to provide the participants with the confidence to do their job.

Communal and Gender-Neutral Approaches to Leadership

We have seen how the representation of female leaders within the organisation has affected the participants' perceptions and everyday experiences; from the inspiration to the experience of more communal leadership within *The Organisation*. In this section, we consider how these participants lead themselves, looking at the approaches to leadership that they deploy.

The first extract considers the approaches Ashley takes to her leadership style, and how the deployment of communal behaviours has differentiated them from her predecessor.

‘...I wanted to be one of the team. So, they will be able to approach me with any problems...that they would take me on as more of a colleague rather than a manager, do you know what I mean, and I didn’t want to be ‘I’m the manager and you do what I say type of person’. I just wanted to be approachable.’

In this example, Ashley explained how they deliberately situated themselves on the 'office floor', instead of in a separate office like her predecessor. In Ashley's opinion, this helped her to appear more 'approachable' and to be 'one of the team'. Here we can see that Ashley's idea of successful leadership is to demonstrate communal characteristics which will encourage the team to engage openly. We can also see that Ashley has differentiated herself from the experience of her predecessor's 'authoritative' style. Thus, suggesting a preference for a communal style of leadership, whilst recognising the difference in feminine and masculine behaviours. However, this approach was not consistent across all participants.

In the next extract, Greta discusses boundary setting between creating an ‘approachable’ and ‘authoritative’ environment.

‘I think if you can’t have that, if you can’t make that barrier, then you probably can’t embark on management, because you have to be prepared to not be liked anymore.’

Greta discusses the need to use 'masculine' behaviours to maintain hierarchical boundaries, discussing the boundary between being a manager and a team player; some describe this as a *‘fine line’*. For example, Greta shared her experience of how it had taken time to adapt from being a co-worker to a leader, and the need to separate herself from being *‘one of the gang’*. Greta demonstrates the normative agentic and masculine behaviours associated with leadership, and the power of boundaries to alter the staff members’ perceptions about her as a manager.

Another common sub-theme relating to leadership behaviour was team building and staff development. Natalie leads on this sub-theme by discussing her intentions of developing staff in the next extract.

‘I’m not one of these who’s jealous about somebody, you know, who’s beneath me coming in and going above me. I want those people to manage me down the line, you know.’

Like many of the leaders who exhibited communal traits when discussing how they supported their teams, Natalie discussed the importance of nurturing her team’s learning and development. In this statement, Natalie seems to embrace a communal leadership style by deferring from the typically agentic notions of competitiveness and exclusivity and embracing

a typically more ‘feminine’ approach to leadership. These expressions of nurture were not exclusive to Natalie, with other participants stating the importance of servant leadership to develop their team and not merely ‘*ploughing*’ (Jessica) through others to reach one’s potential. Similarly, Hannah summarises many discussions around the nurturing of the team below:

‘Erm, I would say, I would be saying... erm...you can go far on your own, together you’ll go further.’

These descriptions show a step away from masculine characteristics such as competitiveness and independence towards a more feminine, communal, and nurturing approach.

Gendered Representation of Leadership Success Factors

In this section, we look at how the participants perceive successful leadership. During the interviews, participants were asked their opinion of successful leadership. Participants shared the factors that were beneficial to their development in leadership.

In this following extract, Jennifer discusses characteristics such as ‘strength’ and their importance in creating a successful leader.

‘But you have to be strong and, erm, very strong-minded to get your points over and not to be influenced or pushed into a corner.’

Jennifer's use of the word 'strong' shows the value put upon traits associated with agentic leadership characteristics. Strength and vocality are seen as essential to assert oneself in discussions and not be influenced without evidence; in other words, adopting typical agentic characteristics of assertiveness. Jennifer's words might infer that she has been silenced and unable to express herself and links to how the participants speak of themselves or assert their reputation. Many other participants also alluded to stereotypically agentic factors such as strength and resilience as a measure of their success, and often provide these in their recommendation for future managers. As well as 'strong', participants commented about their reputation such as '*quite abrasive*' (Hannah and Lauren) with Lauren suggesting female leaders '*have sharp elbows*'. Self-reflections such as these not only link to how they describe themselves but potentially their preferred reputation.

The perception of being credible or reliable was often expressed in conjunction with the notion of working hard. For example, the willingness to '*try your best always and always, you know, try to go that extra mile*' (Jessica). Claire confirms this as her experience in the extract below.

'I suppose you do have to maybe, push yourself a bit more as a woman' and 'you've got to be a bit more ballsy and a bit more pushy'.

In the experience of both Jessica and Claire, these behaviours have seemingly become ingrained within the psyche of the woman. Meanwhile, Jessica notes below her perception of the relationship between hard work and their reputation to be a credible manager.

‘Erm, a willingness to go the extra mile, I think... So, erm, for me, I think it is... that, that’s been a big factor in it, that they can, can kind of say, well, we know that piece of work is going to be okay because [participant name omitted] dealing with it. And if she needs any help, she will come to us.’

The relationship between hard work and reputation is intriguing, suggesting an underlying consciousness of the competitive nature often associated with the masculine ideal of leadership (Eagly and Karu, 2002; Davies and Thomas, 2002). Davies and Thomas (2002) call this ‘Entrepreneurial Masculinity’, a discourse largely demonstrated by males in the public sector favouring target-oriented behaviours and selfless dedication to *The Organisation*. Therefore, the participants emphasise their need to go above and beyond what is expected in their job role, providing insight into their self-reliance and creating a perception that they are reputable, credible, or congruent managers. We can see that the participants committing to these behaviours favour a more masculine perception of their leadership style, suggesting their awareness of the congruity that this behaviour brings to the perceived leadership style. For instance, male *Managers* tend to be self-reliant in their approach, whilst female *Managers* will share if they need help (Huse and Nielsen, 2010).

While participants did recognise and use communal skills, when questioned on their perception of managerial success, they were less likely to mention the softer skills. Furthermore, the methods they used to get to their position involved typically agentic masculine behaviours, such as ‘*extra hours, all the time*’ (Lucy) or being ‘*outspoken*’ (Greta). So as participants recognised the importance of stereotypically communal or softer skills in day-to-day work, they relied on the accepted, taken-for-granted dominant agentic styles in many ways. See *Table 2* below for further perceived success measures.

Perceived Leadership Skills and Success Measures (In order of most discussed to least discussed)
Experience (In both current and previous organisations)
Strength / Resilience
Credibility / Reputation
People Management Skills
Education
Communication Skills
Empathy
Organisational Skills
Creative Thinking
Clear Vision

Table 2. *Perceived Leadership Skills and Success Measures derived from interview data*

The findings infer that a Gendered Organisation is more than simply increasing the number of female managers. In fact, they demonstrate that there is a complex web of factors contributing to the appearance of a Gender-Neutral organisation, whilst also working against

this in the background. Further, they highlight the complexity surrounding participants' views of *The Organisation*; often explicitly stating notions of Gender-Neutrality whilst simultaneously describing a different reality. In the discussion, we will answer our research questions and address these complexities in more detail, examining how this relates to existing literature while adding further knowledge to the field.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has explored the nature of perceived Gender-Neutral Organisations and the lived experiences of those working within them. We will first discuss how *The Organisation* aligns with the discourse of a Gendered Organisation, whilst still appearing as Gender-Neutral, before debating the behaviours that create and sustain a veneer of Gender-Neutrality and shed light on the lived experience of employees.

In answer to our first research question 'To what extent are public sector organisations Gender-Neutral?', the findings demonstrate that the organisational structure in question lends itself to a more female-dominated focus, in line with principles of public sector life (Cukrowska-Tarzska, 2019). The study demonstrated 47% more females than males being employed by *The Organisation*; 151 of which occupying a leadership position in comparison to the 116 males occupying leadership positions. Participants in this study also indicated an inclination toward a more female-dominated workspace, especially in middle or senior-level leadership; with many participants comparing this to the historical representation of females in leadership both within *The Organisation* and in general. This depicted an acknowledgement of the historical gender leadership bias that previously existed; a bias

supported by discursive practices within norms that create silencing and acceptance (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hogue, 2015).

We identified, on the surface, that Gender-Neutrality is perceived when career advancement opportunities for females are on par with males. However, under further scrutiny, male skills and attributes are deemed successful leadership measures despite the utilisation of communal leadership skills being both preferred (a finding that concurs with research by Lee and Park, 2021) and utilised in female managers' day-to-day practice. Thus, we found a dissonance between the perception and practice of female managers and the invisibility of inequality. Participants' awareness of how females can achieve higher levels of leadership, was also referenced to their experiences of witnessing this within the organisational structure. Typically, male-dominated leadership spheres reinforce a prototype of masculine or agentic leadership. In contrast, *The Organisation* appears to have challenged this through equal representation of males and females at leadership levels, a fact emphasised by many participants. Further, the explicit recognition of the value that communal management styles can bring to *The Organisation* highlights a reverse in the gender leadership bias and gender categorisation within *The Organisation* (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Scott and Brown, 2006).

Our participants witnessed a change in greater numbers of females in higher leadership positions. We suggest that this influenced their perception of Gender-Neutrality such that they bought into Bourdieu's (1984) *illusio* that led instead to what will term gender complacency below. Our finding that an assumed Gender-Neutrality satisfied by equal numbers of females and males in leadership leads us to our first contribution. We argue that over-attending to these numbers can produce a double jeopardy: first, it leads to satisficing

behaviour that acts out the status quo daily; second, it obscures the inequality beneath and thus leaves it unchecked (Collins and Wray Bliss, 2005). Our second contribution, whilst a focus on numbers contributes to an assumption of gender-neutrality in *The Organisation*, masculine-informed prototypes of leadership influence organisational structures and language where agentic male characteristics are reinforced unquestioningly and entrenched in dominant leadership styles; a notion that is addressed further in answer to our second research question.

In answer to our second question ‘what impact does *The Organisation* perceived as Gender-Neutral have on the participants’ lived experience?’, we found these views of gender-neutrality to be somewhat surface level when considering the differences between participants' perception and practice. The way participants talk about successful leaders contains a paradox: participants talk about what makes a successful manager, and link it to themselves, but maintaining a third-person narrative. For example, participants' concerns about how they might be viewed as *Leaders* contrasted with the communal skills they suggest they use in their daily staff management. This offers us insight into the complexity of how participants view their own success, often reinforcing male dominance as aforementioned (Fotaki, 2013). In this narrative, many identified typically agentic traits like strength and resilience (Hogue; 2015; Saint-Michel, 2018) somewhat in contrast to their use of a communalistic approach to leadership. The notion that these participants are perceived as strong, resilient and with lots of experience raises questions surrounding others' perceptions of the success of these leaders. This builds on the findings of Smithson and Stokoe (2005) who found that that their participants maintained a gender-neutral view of their organisation, despite alluding to gendered issues within their experiences. In their study, Smithson and Stokoe (2005) found that participants often framed a gendered issue with Gender-Neutral statements. Similarly, we see this from our participants' views on their own

success within leadership. The participants note the importance of communal skills and the typical 'feminine' skills that female leaders can offer. However, these same participants assign agentic skills at the forefront of their perceived success measures of leadership. Yet again, moving forward, the participants conclude the importance of using communal leadership skills in their own work. This coincides with Mecalfe, Hueffner and Suss' (2022) findings whereby they infer that status beliefs become somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy, creating a barrier for women when declaring their competence and actual performance.

If we consider these findings through Goffman's (1956) dramaturgy lens, whereby the participants put on a show, almost, of agency to be perceived as legitimate or successful, yet backstage, we see the use of communal skills. The dissonance between perception and practice is built further on the internalised bias that segues into a sense of confirmation bias, whereby the participants recognise their own communal skills but self-describe agentic skills, such that in order to appear as successful or legitimate, they must conform to typically masculine agentic skills (Crockett, 2002).

The participants conform to agentic managerial skills both consciously and subconsciously with a hint of prejudice or even imposter syndrome; a phenomenon that Eagly and Carli (2007) warned us about. We have witnessed this through some participants' self-descriptions and other managers and suggest that adopting these stereotypical male attributes is not always subconscious, and to assume so would take away their autonomy (Simpson and Lewis, 2005). Instead, it seems to carry a sentiment of 'playing the game' and Bourdieu's *illusio* in order to get on and be perceived as a successful manager. Insights from Cook and Glass (2020) would deem this as a 'performative contortion', whereby female leaders behave, act or make decisions to boost their credibility and self-empowerment strategy. However,

Glass and Cook (2020) find that this strategy only gives the illusion of control and fortifies the systematic bias within leadership roles (Glass and Cook, 2020). This leads to our third contribution, that while communal skills inform female *leaders* on a day-to-day basis, guided by gendered ideology and norms, they appear to be of secondary importance to masculinised agentic characteristics. This does raise the question of how female managers can champion the worth of the communal skills they bring, especially where masculine skills are still denoted as the ‘success factors’ and continually reinforced despite the limited amount of credibility they get when used by female leaders (Glass and Cook, 2020).

In addition, when considering participants' perceived success factors of management, they felt compelled to over-invest in building their credibility and reputation, derived from qualifications, effort and experience that surpassed the needs of the job. According to Green Park's (2017: 26) report on leadership, *'females are three times more likely than men to need a degree from a prestigious university to gain a position on the board'*. Similarly, Ashworth, Krøtel and Villadsen (2022) found that women with more educational and work experience are more likely to succeed and grow within the organisation. Risse (2022) shares how a female's conscious over-investment in qualifications is owing to the internalisation of the need to ‘jump higher hurdles’. For example, participants worked above and beyond and offered this advice to other aspirant managers. However, despite the importance they put on undertaking qualifications and gaining experience through hard work to gain the role, the participants still feel ‘luck’ or denote their success to the ‘desperation’ of the recruiters. Again here we see an incongruence between the participant's actions and their feelings, and in a sense, a silencing of the hard work they have put into attaining the positions they are currently in (Ahuja and Weatherall, 2022). The irony here is that this notion of participants over investment and drive to prove themselves can lead to feeling like an imposter; by having to

prove one's worth by working harder than male counterparts yet maintaining a humbleness about their achievements (Ahuja and Weatherall, 2022). Thus, McKinsey's (2021) finding that females are 'burned out' following the pandemic is unsurprising.

Interestingly, research suggests that while females tend to assess their intelligence accurately, males of average intelligence think they are more intelligent (Perez, 2021). Can we assume here that there is a link between how feelings of self-consciousness and imposition, caused by being the 'inferior' representation of leadership capabilities, may contribute to this humbling *per se* of females within the workplace? And thus, perhaps, it isn't the case that rates of females putting themselves up for promotion are too low, but that men's are too high (Perez, 2021), in turn, contributing to and reinforcing the prototypes for successful leadership.

The high representation of female employees within *The Organisation* suggests that the employees adopting communal skills and behaviours towards team leadership is a surface-level phenomenon, where employees resort to surface acting (Lewig and Dollard, 2003) as a coping mechanism. Although we see somewhat of a challenge to gender categorisation amongst managers, the drivers behind adopting agentic skills to be perceived as successful still exist beneath the surface. While we witness a surface-level notion of Gender-Neutrality within *The Organisation*, there remains an underlay of a Gendered Organisational mindset that seems to devalue the communal leadership skills deployed on a day-to-day basis.

In answer to our third research question, although many of the attitudes within *The Organisation* lean towards a gender-neutral organisational perspective, evidence remains of an underlay of a gendered organisational collective mindset that serves to disadvantage

female *Managers*. It is as if the contemporary emphasis on Gender-Neutrality has disinterred focus on enduring inequality and stress on masculinity, in turn enabling us to assume the existence of a level playing field that is not in fact there. But this mistruth is not without its supporters for in distributive accounts of leadership, there is a pretence that the workforce is made up of equals, all working towards the same harmonious ends.

This leads to our fourth and theoretical contribution. Due to underlying gendered patterns, participants fell into what we coin ‘gender complacency’, derived from the success of attaining a leadership position through hard work and the recognition that more females are also attaining positions of power in *The Organisation*. Despite efforts to demonstrate communal leadership skills, complacency is achieved and reproduced through the unwitting and eventual demonstration of traditional masculinised leadership prototypes. As Fox (1966) pointed out long ago, such a unitarist perspective disguises structural and hierarchical power imbalances, within which ‘gender complacency’ enables time-worn reproduction of masculinised norms and privilege, prohibiting new horizons in leadership.

Limitations

The study, like all studies, has limitations. Concomitantly, it advances evidence that can nurture future research. While offering a potentially generalisable account of the crafting of leadership selves within a public sector workspace, our work remains the product of a deep immersion in one setting. Future research in different settings will be able to test its validity and boundaries. For example, scholars might investigate the influence on the process of

managers' age, experience, structure and status, as well as individual variations such as learning orientations, personality traits and culture.

Future research

We suggest that there is a sense of change or a veneer of change within the gendered makeup of leadership positions within public sector organisations; which unites the four contributions noted in this research article. There is evidently a desire to take apart the grammar of Gendered Organisation completely and to make way for more communal leadership; of which functions transactionally, not to maintain masculine leadership but to honour our common humanity. The near restless focus on EDI bolstered by our policy-rich organisations whose narrative opposes inequality vehemently in all its forms has, somewhat paradoxically, fuelled our complacency. Therefore, assuming that the public sector is leading on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the workplace, this suggests an urgent need for a research agenda committed to more robust and empirical engagement reflecting the complexity of gender and leadership in contemporary capitalism. Greater theoretical insights into how masculinity unfolds into the very sinews of work practices and peers out from the fissures of organisational life are needed.

In the context of global turbulence from a pandemic, fuel crisis and war, to mention just some factors, might encourage us to seize the moments of communality by considering new ways of leading. Indeed, the notion of relational or collective ethics is one which is familiar to many feminist researchers concerned with issues of equity and inclusion (e.g. Acker, 2006; Benschop, 2021; Branicki, 2020). The focus on relationality and collective agency opens a

novel space for scholars to research leadership and to write differently (Pullen and Vachhani, 2020).

REFERENCES

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organisations. *Gender and Society*, 4(2), 139-158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>

Acker, J. (2006). Gender, work & organization. In *Handbook of the sociology of gender* (pp. 177-194). Springer.

Acker, J. (2012). Gendered organisations and intersectionality: Problems and possibilities. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 31(3), 214-224.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02610151211209072>

Ahuja, S., & Weatherall, A. (2022). 'This boys club world is finally getting to me': Developing our glass consciousness to understand women's experiences in elite architecture firms. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 30(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12921>

Arulampalam, W., Booth, A., & Bryan, M. (2007). Is there a glass ceiling over Europe? Exploring the gender pay gap across the wages distribution. *IZA Discussion Paper Series*, 60(2), 163-186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979390706000201>

Ashworth, R., Krøtel, S. M. L., & Villadsen, A. R. (2022). Right time to join? Organizational imprinting and women's careers in public service organizations. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 30(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12911>

Bach, S., & Stroleny, A. (2014). Restructuring local government employment relations: Pay determination and employee participation in tough times. *European Review of Labour and Research*, 20(3), 343-356. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258914535546>

Balmer, D. F., Courts, K. A., Dougherty, B., Tuton, L. W., Abbuhl, S., & Hirshfield, L. E. (2020). Applying the theory of gendered organizations to the lived experience of women with established careers in academic medicine. *Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, 32(5), 466-475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10401334.2020.1767106>

Bates, T. (2021). Rethinking how we work with Acker's theory of gendered organizations: An abductive approach for feminist empirical research. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12795>

Benschop, Y. (2021). Grand challenges, feminist answers. *Organisational Theory*, 2, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877211020323>

Biehl, B., & Schönfeld, K. (2023). Writing differently with film: An animated video on gender, leadership and language. *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 30, 1611-1630. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12999>

Biehl, B., & Schönfeld, K. (2023). Leadership and discourse [Video]. *Gender, Work and Organisation*. https://players.brightcove.net/656326989001/default_default/index.html?videoId=6322497124112

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Branicki, L. J. (2020). COVID-19, ethics of care and feminist crisis management. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27(8), 872-883.

Britton, D. M. (2000). The epistemology of the gendered organization. *Gender and Society*, 14(3), 418-434. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190136>

- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Butler, J. (1990). Gender trouble, feminist theory, and psychoanalytic discourse. In L. Nicholson (Ed.), *Feminism/postmodernism* (pp. 327-340). Routledge.
- Calás, M. B., Smircich, L., & Holvino, E. (2014). Theorizing gender-and-organization: Changing times... Changing theories? In S. Kumra, R. Simpson, & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender in organizations* (pp. 17-52). Oxford University Press.
- Chwarae Teg. (2019). *State of the nation*. Wales: Chwarae Teg.
- Carroll, B., Scott, T., & Ford, J. (2019). *Leadership: Contemporary critical perspectives*. Sage.
- Christen, A. (2022). *Closing the gender pay gap in the public sector*. [online] www.peoplemanagement.co.uk. Available at: <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1790007/closing-gender-pay-gap-public-sector>.
- Cimirotić, R., Dutler, V., Durstmüller, B., Gärtner, B., & Hiebl, M. (2017). Enabling factors that contribute to women reaching leadership positions in business organisations: The case of management accountants. *Managing Global Transitions*, 15(2), 165-194. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MRR-10-2014-0233>
- CIPD. (2019). *Not just a number: Lessons from the first year of gender pay gap reporting*. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/gender-pay-gap-reporting-lessons-1_tcm18-55693.pdf
- Collins, H. and Wray-Bliss, E. (2005). Discriminating ethics. *Human Relations*, 58(6), pp.799–824. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705057175>.
- Cook, A., & Glass, C. (2013). Women and top leadership positions: Towards an institutional analysis. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 21(1), 91-103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12018>

Cook, A., & Glass, C. (2020). Performative contortions: How White women and people of colour navigate elite leadership roles. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27, 1232-1252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12463>

Crockett, L. J. (2002). Agency in the life course: Concepts and processes. *Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology*, Paper 361. University of Nebraska Lincoln. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1355&context=psychfacpub>

Davies, A., & Thomas, R. (2002). Gendering and gender in public service organizations: Changing professional identities under new public management. *Public Management Review*, 4(4), 461-484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616670210163024>

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>

Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007, September). Women and the labyrinth of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2007/09/women-and-the-labyrinth-of-leadership>

El-Ramly, Y. (2019). Steps toward closing the gender pay gap: CPA employers can take three concrete actions to make compensation more equitable. *Journal of Accountancy*, 228(3), 36-45. <https://www.journalofaccountancy.com/issues/2019/sep/gender-pay-gap-cpa-firms.html>

Fotaki, M. (2013). No woman is like a man (in academia): The masculine symbolic order and the unwanted female body. *Organization Studies*, 34(9), 1251-1275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840613483658>

Fox, B. (1966). Discrete optimization via marginal analysis. *Management Science*, 13(3), 210-216. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2627862>

Gennaro, D., & Piscopo, G. (2023). Pinkwashing and mansplaining: individual and organizational experiences of gender inequality at work during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Culture and Organization*, 29(4), 298-314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2023.2176501>

Glass, C., & Cook, A. (2020). Performative contortions: How White women and people of colour navigate elite leadership roles. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 27, 1232-1252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12463>

Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh.

Grant Thornton (2024a). *Women in business 2024: Pathways to parity*. [online] Grant Thornton UK LLP. Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/insights/women-in-business-2024-pathways-to-parity/> [Accessed 6 Aug. 2024].

Grant Thornton (2024b). *Women in business: The global picture*. [online] Grant Thornton International Ltd. Home. Available at: <https://www.grantthornton.global/en/insights/women-in-business/the-global-picture/#ii> [Accessed 6 Aug. 2024].

Gray, D. E., De Hann, E., & Bonneywell, S. (2019). Coaching the ‘ideal worker’: Female leaders and the gendered self in a global corporation. *European Journal of Training and Development*, 43(7/8), 661-681. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJTD-01-2019-0011>

Green Park. (2017). *Leadership 10,000*. <https://www.green-park.co.uk/insights/leadership-10-000-2017/>

Hatmaker, D. M., & Fayaz, S. (2021). When do women receive managerial support? The effects of gender congruence and the manager-employee relationship. *Public Management Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1937683>

Hekman, D. R., Johnson, S. K., Foo, M. D., & Yang, W. (2017). Does diversity-valuing behavior result in diminished performance ratings for non-White and female leaders? *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(2), 771-797. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2014.0538>

Hoobler, J. M., Masterson, C. R., Nkomo, S. M., & Michel, E. J. (2018). The business case for women leaders: Meta-analysis, research critique, and path forward. *Journal of Management*, 44(6), 2473-2499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316628643>

Hogue, M. (2015). Gender bias in communal leadership: Examining servant leadership. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 31(4), 837-849. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-10-2014-0292>

Hutson, A., Shufeldt, G. and Vinci, C. (2023). State-Level Policies, Descriptive Representation, and the Gender Pay Gap, 2010–2019. *Gender Issues*, 40(2-4), 185-205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-023-09311-7>

Huse, M., & Nielsen, S. (2020). Women directors' contribution to board decision making and strategic involvement: The role of equality perception. *European Management Review*, 7, 16-29. <https://doi.org/10.1057/emr.2009.27>

IG. (2020, May 5). Top female CEOs in the UK 2020. <https://www.ig.com/uk/news-and-trade-ideas/top-female-ceos-ftse-100>

Jones, M. K., Makepeace, G., & Wass, V. (2018). The UK gender pay gap 1997–2015: What is the role of the public sector? *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 57(2), 296-319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irel.12208>

Jose, I. and Sivaraman, S. (2023). Gender Inequality and Gender Gap: An Overview of the Indian Scenario. *Gender Issues*, 40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-023-09313-5>

Lee, D. S., & Park, S. C. (2021). Civil servants' perceptions of agency heads' leadership styles: The role of gender in public sector organizations. *Public Management Review*, 23(8), 1160-1183. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1730941>

Lemoine, G. J., Hartnell, C. A., & Leroy, H. (2019). Taking stock of moral approaches to leadership: An integrative review of ethical, authentic, and servant leadership. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 13, 148-187. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0121>

Lewig, K. A., & Dollard, M. F. (2003). Emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction in call centre workers. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 12(4), 366-392. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13594320344000200>

Marchington, M., Wilkinson, A., Donnelly, R., & Kynighou, A. (2016). *Human resource management at work*. Kogan Page Publishers.

Mastracci, S., & Bowman, L. (2015). Public agencies, gendered organizations: The future of gender studies in public management. *Public Management Review*, 17(6), 857-875.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.867067>

May, T. (2001). *Social research: Issues, methods and process* (3rd ed.). Open University Press.

McKinsey. (2022, January 5). Seven charts that show COVID-19's impact on women's employment. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/seven-charts-that-show-covid-19s-impact-on-womens-employment>

Metcalfe, A., Hueffner, A. and Suss, J.M. (2022). Beyond Inclusion Through Female Empowered Leadership: Status and Strategy in Iceland. *Gender Issues*, 39.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-022-09300-2>

Muzio, D., & Tomlinson, J. (2012). Structure, agency and career strategies of women and BME individuals in the legal profession. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2012, No. 1, p. 1019). <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2012.10199abstract>

Ng, E. S. W., & Sears, G. (2017). The glass ceiling in context: The influence of CEO gender, recruitment practices and firm internationalisation on the representation of women in management. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(1), 133-151.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12135>

OECD (2019), "Gender equality in public sector employment", in *Government at a Glance 2019*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9735a9f2-en>

ONS (2023). *Public sector employment, UK - Office for National Statistics*. [online] www.ons.gov.uk. Available at:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/march2023>.

Perez, C. C. (2019). *Invisible women: Data bias in a world designed for men*. Abrams Press.

Pullen, A., & Vachhani, S. J. (2021). Feminist ethics and women leaders: From difference to intercorporeality. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 173, 233-243. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-020-04526-0>

PWC (2022). *Women in Work Index 2020*. [online] PwC. Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics/insights/women-in-work-index.html>.

Risse, L. (2022, May 3). The gender qualification gap: Women 'over-invest' in workplace capabilities. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/the-gender-qualification-gap-women-over-invest-in-workplace-capabilities-105385>

Rowbotham, S. (1983). *Dreams and dilemmas: Collected writings*. Virago Press.

Turnbull, B., Graham, M. and Taket, A. (2022). A Multilevel Grounded Theory of Quantitative Job Quality Among Mothers, Fathers and Childless Women and Men in a Gendered, Classed and Aged 'Growth-Driven' Organisation. *Gender Issues*, 40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-022-09307-9>

Saint-Michel, S. E. (2018). Leadership gender stereotypes and transformational leadership: Does leader sex make the difference? *M@n@gement*, 21(3), 944-966. <https://doi.org/10.3917/mana.213.0944>

Saunders, B., Julius, S., Kingstone, T., Baker, C., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity*, 52, 1893-1907. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8>

Scott, A. K., & Brown, D. J. (2006). Female first, leader second? Gender bias in the encoding of leadership behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 101(2), 230-242. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2006.06.002>

Simpson, R., & Lewis, P. (2005). An investigation of silence and a scrutiny of transparency: Re-examining gender in organization literature through the concepts of voice and visibility. *Human Relations*, 58(10), 1253-1275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705058940>

Smithson, J., & Stokoe, E. H. (2005). Discourses of work-life balance: Negotiating 'genderblind' terms in organizations. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12(2), 147-168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2005.00267.x>

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking out again: Feminist ontology and epistemology*. Routledge.

Stats Wales. (2020, June). Population estimates by local authority and year. <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Population-and-Migration/Population/Estimates/Local-Authority/populationestimates-by-localauthority-year>

Stoker, J. I., Van der Velde, M., & Lammers, J. (2012). Factors relating to managerial stereotypes: The role of gender of the employee and the manager and management gender ratio. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27, 31-42. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9210-0>

Taylor, S. E., Klein, L. C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R. A. R., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). Biobehavioral responses to stress in females: Tend-and-befriend, not fight-or-flight. *Psychological Review*, 107(3), 411-429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.107.3.411>

Wales.com. (2020, June). Facts about Wales. <https://www.wales.com/about/facts-about-wales>

Women in Research. (2021). Glass cliffs, ceilings and walls. <https://www.womeninresearch.org.au/glass-cliffs-ceilings-walls>

Valsecchi, G., Iacoviello, V., Berent, J., Borinca, I. and Falomir-Pichastor, J.M. (2023). Men's Gender Norms and Gender-Hierarchy-Legitimizing Ideologies: The Effect of Priming Traditional Masculinity Versus a Feminization of Men's Norms. *Gender Issues*, 40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-022-09308-8>

Vogelstein, R.B. and Bro, A. (2024). Women's power index. [online] Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/article/womens-power-index>.