Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
A ‘Novel’ Approach to Leadership Development:
Using Women’s Literary Fiction to Explore Contemporary
Women’s Leadership Issues

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Business Studies
in
Management
at
Massey University Albany, New Zealand

Lydia Anne Martin
2016
Abstract

The central aim of this thesis is to investigate how women’s literary fiction can be harnessed for the purpose of exploring contemporary women’s leadership issues. This thesis argues that literary fiction is a valuable source of interdisciplinary and ‘artful’ consciousness-raising material for proactively addressing at the interpersonal level a wide range of critical concerns related to women’s leadership experiences. Having identified a significant ‘gap’ in the extant literature – the underutilisation of women’s novels, short-stories and plays in leadership studies – this thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach to demonstrate how literary works can be used to examine women’s contemporary leadership issues.

For this research project I adopted an interpretive qualitative research paradigm informed by critical leadership studies and a multiplicity of feminist perspectives. I developed a systematic method for long listing and short listing appropriate texts and analysed selected works in response to a five-point conceptual framework of critical concerns arising from a review of the women and leadership literature. I also kept a reflective blog to track the iterative nature of the research process and to record my learning during this study.

The findings demonstrate that women’s literary fiction offers a rich repository of thought-provoking illustrations of women’s leadership concerns, including gender binaries, power-play, socially constructed perceptions and gendered expectations, and women’s diverse range experiences as both leaders and followers. The extended analysis provides a number of in-depth examples and reflective questions, revealing myriad opportunities for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and critical reflection. Subsequently, this thesis argues that fictional stories are a viable and potentially transformative ‘artful’ intervention for addressing complex leadership issues concerned with gender within the context of women’s leadership development programmes. My recommendations for future studies include a focus on ethical leadership, the evaluation of participant ‘book club’ interventions and an extension of the reading lists to include more culturally relevant New Zealand authors.

To my knowledge, there are no studies that utilise women’s literary fiction for the purpose of exploring contemporary women’s leadership concerns and questions. Consequently, my thesis makes an original contribution to the leadership and humanities field, as well as providing an innovative and creative product that can be used for critical and interdisciplinary approaches to women’s leadership development.
Acknowledgements

This thesis has only become a reality due to the help and support offered by many key individuals. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to all of them for assisting me in realising my aims for this research project.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to my supervisors, Dr Margot Edwards and Dr Janet Sayers. This thesis would not have been possible without their dedication, assistance and willingness to engage with more ‘artful’ approaches to leadership development.

From the moment this research project was just the spark of an idea, Dr Margot Edwards has provided me with untiring support, kind encouragement and expert advice, keeping me motivated and on-track during each stage of the research process. Likewise, Dr Janet Sayers has offered invaluable advice and feedback, encouraging me to stretch myself and engage more creatively and critically with complex theories and ideas. I’m also thankful to Dr Kaye Thorn for kindly giving of her time to read my work and provide feedback during the final stages of this project.

I would also like to thank my parents, my grandma and my sister and brothers for their prayers, encouragement and unequivocal support.

Finally, I owe a very special and heartfelt thank you to my husband Mitchel for his unwavering support, unending patience and thoughtful feedback throughout the entirety of my study. A mere expression of thanks does not suffice to convey how grateful I am.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ iii
List of Tables and Figure ..................................................................................................... vi

Chapter One - Overview
1.1 Introduction ................................................................................................................... 1
1.2 Significance of Study ..................................................................................................... 2
1.3 Research Questions and Objectives .............................................................................. 4
1.4 Researcher’s Position .................................................................................................... 4
1.5 Structure of the Thesis .................................................................................................. 6

Chapter Two - Literature Review
2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................... 9
2.2 Leadership Defined – ‘What is Leadership?’ ............................................................... 9
    2.2.1 Problematising Leadership and Gender ............................................................ 13
2.3 Women and Leadership ............................................................................................... 13
    2.3.1 The Current State of Play ................................................................................. 14
    2.3.2 Exploring the Impact of Social Constructionism and Gender on Leadership 15
    2.3.3 Forming a Feminist Critique .......................................................................... 18
    2.3.4 Psychology of Prejudice: Stereotypes, Expectations and Perceptions ........... 24
    2.3.5 Do Women Actually Lead Differently? ............................................................ 29
    2.3.6 Summary of Critical Concerns ....................................................................... 31
2.4 Women’s Leadership Development (WLD) ................................................................ 32
    2.4.1 Filling the Gap: Women-Only Leadership Development Programmes .......... 33
    2.4.2 Current Trends and Approaches ..................................................................... 36
    2.4.3 A ‘Fusion’ of Disciplines: Embracing Interdisciplinary Methods .................... 38
2.5 ‘Artful’ Approaches to Leadership Development ....................................................... 39
2.5.1 Enhancing Engagement ................................................................. 40
2.5.2 The ‘Human’ Context ................................................................. 40
2.5.3 Different ‘Artful’ Approaches and Sites of Practice .................. 41
2.6 Chapter Summary ........................................................................ 42

Chapter Three - Why Literary Fiction?
3.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 44
3.2 The Transformative Power of Stories ............................................ 44
3.3 Reviewing Frameworks, Assessing Methods & Identifying Gaps in the Literature .................................................. 46
   3.3.1 Developing Moral Leadership in Questions of Character .......... 47
   3.3.2 Understanding Leadership: An Arts and Humanities Perspective .......... 48
   3.3.3 Illustrative Analysis in Management Lives ................................. 50
   3.3.4 Identifying Strong Plots through Popular Literature .................. 52
3.4 The Invisibility of Women’s Stories and Female Perspectives .......... 55
3.5 Chapter Summary ........................................................................ 56

Chapter Four - Methodology
4.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 57
4.2 My Research Philosophies ........................................................... 57
4.3 Application of My Critical Research Paradigm ............................... 59
   4.3.1 Revisiting Ladkin’s Leadership ‘Moment’ Definition ............... 59
   4.3.2 Critical Feminist Lens .............................................................. 60
   4.3.3 The Conceptual Framework .................................................... 61
4.4 Research Methods and Tools ....................................................... 62
   4.4.1 Qualitative/textual Content Analysis of Texts ........................... 62
   4.4.2 Data Collection: Read and Interrogate .................................... 64
   4.4.3 Data Analysis: Thematise, Expand, and Summarise ............... 64
4.5 Chapter Summary ........................................................................ 66

Chapter Five - Choosing Stories: Boundaries and Criteria
5.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 68
5.2 Step 1: Read – Developing Initial ‘Reading Boundaries’ ............................................. 68
   5.2.1 Observations on Genre ......................................................................................... 71
   5.2.2 Where Did I Look? ............................................................................................. 73
5.3 Step 2: Interrogate – Refining the Selection Process ................................................ 74
5.4 The Reader’s Notebook – Personal Reflective Journal ............................................. 76
5.5 Chapter Summary ...................................................................................................... 79

Chapter Six - Findings and Discussion
6.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 80
6.2 The Short List ............................................................................................................... 80
6.3 Step 3: Thematise ....................................................................................................... 82
   6.3.1 Summaries of the Short Listed Texts ................................................................... 82
6.4 Steps 4 and 5: Expand and Summarise ...................................................................... 89
   6.4.1 Concept 1: Women Engaging in Leadership Together ....................................... 89
   6.4.2 Concepts 2 and 3: Understanding and Navigating Socially Constructed Expectations ............................................................................................................ 93
   6.4.3 Concept 4: Destabilising Grand Narratives ....................................................... 102
   6.4.4 Concept 5: Individual Women Becoming Leaders .......................................... 106
6.5 Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 110

Chapter Seven - Research Contributions and Recommendations for Future Research
7.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 111
7.2 Research Contributions ............................................................................................. 111
7.3 Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research .......................... 113
7.4 Final Words ............................................................................................................... 116

References ...................................................................................................................... 117

Appendix A: The Complete Set of Reflective Blog Entries .......................................... 142