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A 'Novel' Approach to Leadership Development:
Using Women's Literary Fiction to Explore Contemporary
Women's Leadership Issues

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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.

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Chapter 1: Overview

On the maps drawn by men there is an immense white area, terra incognita, where most women live. That country is all yours to explore, to inhabit, to describe.

– Ursula K. Le Guin (1986)

1.1 Introduction

The central aim of this research project is to utilise the creative and transformative qualities of literary fiction to enhance leadership development programmes for women. Harnessing the humanities to study, teach, and learn about leadership is an emerging field of interdisciplinary research and presents a vast array of untapped opportunities, particularly with regards to leadership development (Badaracco, 2006; Marturano, Wren, & Harvey, 2013; McManus & Perruci, 2015). Since formal business case studies mainly focus on carefully pre-selected ‘objective’ features rather than the messy, subjective reality which leaders and followers have to contend with on a day-to-day basis, there is potential for the creative re-invention, critical reflection and analogical exploration offered by the humanities to address complex leadership and management issues (Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Gagliardi & Czarniawska, 2006; Hendry, 2006).

While many factors, including personal, social and academic interests (Bryman & Bell, 2011), contributed to my decision to pursue this research project, my initial interest was sparked by reading Badaracco’s (2006) book *Questions of Character: Illuminating the Heart of Leadership Through Literature*, an exploration into moral leadership through discussion and reflection on serious works of fiction. Badaracco (2006) contends that in the best stories “literature and life converge,” giving a unique inside perspective on leadership (p. 3). However, Badaracco (2006) only uses literary fiction written by men and examines leadership primarily through the eyes of male protagonists, a trend echoed throughout the extant literature (see Chapter Three – Why Literary Fiction?). This points to a problem of ‘invisibility’, where leadership is framed through a male-gendered canon of theory and practice and women’s voices are largely side-lined (Sinclair, 2005).

During my study of leadership at the undergraduate and graduate levels, I discovered this is characteristic of the business environment in general. Heroic/masculine archetypes and

‘great person’ constructs have proven remarkably resistant to change despite criticism and increased emphasis in the leadership literature on ‘post-heroic’ leadership discourses (Fletcher, 2004; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Sinclair, 2005). Yet gender remains a frequently neglected feature of the leadership dynamic which continues to be erroneously framed as gender neutral (Collinson, 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Ford, 2005; Ford, 2015; Kark & Eagly, 2010). So while organisations may profess ‘egalitarian values’, many are still intrinsically ‘androcentric’ in practice, and are prone to uncritically accept and reinforce more agentic and masculine leadership characteristics, such as assertion, control, confidence and self-reliance (Ahl, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2012).

My study is driven by a desire to contribute to this dynamic emergent interdisciplinary field in three ways – addressing the underrepresentation of women’s literary fiction, making gender a central category for analysis, and incorporating a more complex understanding of leadership as a collective process and socially constructed phenomenon. In the following segments, I provide an explanation of the significance of my study, followed by my principal research question and the four key objectives of this thesis. An overview of my position as a researcher in terms of my academic background and epistemology is also provided. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Significance of Study

Although the application of literary fiction, along with other philosophical and historical works, to leadership and management has occurred for almost three decades (Śilwa, Sørenson, & Cairns, 2015), this niche field has yet to receive the full attention it deserves (Warner, 2011).¹ While literary fiction has been harnessed to explore moral and ethical leadership (Badaracco, 2006; Sucher, 2007), interrogate power dynamics (Knights & Willmott, 1999; Whitney & Packer, 2000), and teach post-heroic leadership theories (McManus & Perruci., 2015), along with a wide-variety of more general and ‘universal’ leadership lessons (Brawer, 1998; Carroll & Flood, 2010; Clemens & Meyer, 1999; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994), to date, there is no research study or

¹ Warner (2011) further explains that even when there are references to imaginative literature in leadership studies, these tend to be “fleeting and illustrative rather than analytical,” or underutilised as a “resource for ‘tips’ on successful leadership practices” (p. 171).

leadership development programme where literary texts have been used to draw out insights on important women's leadership issues and concerns. Furthermore, fiction written by women and featuring female protagonists is largely absent from these existing studies. These notable 'gaps' in the literature predicate the originality of my approach.

Current research indicates that female leaders face a unique set of leadership challenges that often go unrecognised or are left unexamined, including gendered expectations and perceptions, prejudice, and the agentic/communal double bind (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). As a result, women must navigate what Eagly and Carli (2007) have aptly described as the leadership 'labyrinth'. While well-designed women's leadership development programmes can be effectively employed to address these issues at the interpersonal level (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008; Ruminski & Holba, 2012), case materials featuring female leaders and managers are still rare (Flynn, Haynes, & Kilgour, 2015; Symons & Ibarra, 2014). Many courses take an 'add-women-and-stir' approach, replicating the same material for women as they deliver to men (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011). This worrying lack of resources that are equipped to meet the *specific* needs of current and aspiring female leaders has sparked calls for more research on women's leadership development from both teaching and learning perspectives (Debebe, Bilimoria, Vinnicombe, & Anderson, 2014). Ultimately, the development of more critical approaches needs to take place in order to challenge taken-for-granted, hegemonic understandings of leadership and introduce alternative ways of seeing, interpreting and enacting the leader-follower relationship (Ford, 2015).

My research seeks to amend the significant 'gap' in the selection of literary texts, while at the same time contribute to the field of women's leadership development by exploring arts-based methods to stimulate debate on gender-related leadership issues in organisations. Subsequently, for this study I adopt an interpretive qualitative research paradigm. Rather than structured interviews and/or participant observations, I draw on data collected from ten systematically and rigorously selected women's literary texts (novels, short stories and plays) and analyse them in terms of the meanings they hold for women's leadership.

1.3 Research Questions and Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to engage the imaginative and transformative possibilities found in literary fiction to enrich critical approaches to women's leadership development. Due to the opportunities for research in this field and the gaps I've identified in the literature, the following research question was central to this study:

How can women's literary fiction be used to explore contemporary women's leadership issues and what literary texts are best suited for this purpose?

To guide the process of answering this broad research question, several specific research objectives were developed. The objectives for this project are four-fold:

Objective 1: To develop a comprehensive conceptual framework based on the current issues and concerns surrounding women's leadership in a 'post-heroic' leadership context.

Objective 2: To justify the use of an 'artful' interdisciplinary approach to women's leadership development. Specifically, this involves using literary fiction as a medium for proactively analysing the gendered nature of leadership.

Objective 3: To develop a viable method for selecting appropriate women's literary fiction.

Objective 4: To create a short list of women's literary texts and demonstrate how they can be used to awaken curiosity, deactivate indifference and stimulate debate on gender-related leadership issues.

1.4 Researcher's Position

My academic background comprises both English and Management. At the undergraduate level, I completed a BA/BBS conjoint degree programme. As a student constantly traversing the space between the creative and subjective realm of the arts and humanities and the structured, more objective world of business, I questioned why there were so few interdisciplinary links and relationships between the two schools as, it appeared to me, each discipline had much to offer the other.

As I advanced in my study of leadership and considered theories promoted by scholars like Ladkin (2010), Grint (2005), Kelly (2015), and Uhl-Bien (2006), I gained a new understanding of leadership as a socially constructed phenomenon. Rather than being the preserve of a single ‘leader’ figure, or reducible to particular traits or basic models, leadership can be conceptualised as a social process, “a ‘moment’ of social relations” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 26). Therefore, as Ciulla (2011) points out, the humanities and arts are ideally placed to help us understand “the context and values that shape the relationship of leaders and followers and the phenomenon of leadership itself” (p. 23). As an avid lover of fiction, incorporating well-written fictional stories with leadership studies presented an exciting starting point for my own research (see also Sections 1.1 and 1.2). Having worked closely with literature and critical theory at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, I already had a solid knowledge-base and skill-set from which to draw on in terms of close reading, literary interpretation, and socio-political analysis.

As a researcher with a foot in both camps, I realise there is a certain amount of tension between reading literary fiction like a literary critic and reading like a management facilitator. Extracting only certain elements from the literary texts, in this case, the meanings they hold for women engaging in, or aspiring to, leadership, reduces the organic unfolding of the stories and the subtler elements of literary effect, such as imagery, resonance and tone. As such, for the purposes of this present study, I am positioning myself as a *leadership* researcher while drawing on the theoretical knowledge and analytical skills of a literary theorist.

A qualitative interpretive paradigm holds that ‘meaning’ is created through peoples’ perceptions and explanations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Extracting and analysing ‘meanings’ from literary fiction is highly interpretive and subjective. Due to the performative effect of language, there can be no such thing as a passive or objective reading of a text as “the ‘gaze’ is actively engaged both in interpreting the text (and thus the reader becomes part of the text) and in the production of the self, or subjectivity, through the very act of looking” (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, the insights I draw out of the literary texts arise from *my reading* of the stories, and are motivated, enabled and constrained by my personal experiences and beliefs, along with the wider cultural expectations and ideologies that all contribute to, and shape, my identity (Leggo, 2008). I outline and justify my epistemological position and research design in more detail in Chapter Four – Methodology.

In order to further clarify my research position for this project, I kept and regularly updated a reflective journal in the form of an online public blog. The blog comprised an integral part of the research process and will further assist the reader in making informed judgements about the significance of my research findings, the credibility of my approach and the authenticity of self-reflexivity in its conduct. I used the blog as a platform to explore my subjective position and identify shifts in my thinking as the inquiry process unfolded. It also provided a place from which to self-consciously reflect on my knowledge of the field and intellectual interests, such as feminism, which informed my research (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). This is further discussed in Section 5.4 *The Reader's Notebook – Personal Reflective Journal*. The full set of journal entries are available in Appendix A.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One has provided a broad overview of the thesis to give context to my study, explain the significance of my project, outline my primary research question and corresponding objectives, and expand on my interpretive epistemological position. Outlines for the following six chapters are provided below.

Chapter Two — Literature Review: In this chapter, I begin with a review of the relevant literature on leadership, with a particular focus on Ladkin's (2010) leadership 'moment' model, before problematising the notion of 'gender neutrality' in post-heroic perspectives. I then turn to the topic of women and leadership, examining the current state of play for women. To explore the 'psychology of prejudice' inherent in most women's leadership experiences, I harness a social constructionism and multi-lens feminist approach to assess and critique 'absent but present' expectations, popular stereotypes, the agentic/communal double bind, and differences in male/female leadership styles. Finally, I provide an overview of women's leadership development methods and the key techniques used by practitioners to address gender-related issues, along with the concerns inherent in women-only programmes. This is followed by an evaluation of and justification for engaging in more emergent interdisciplinary and 'artful' methods for leadership development.

Chapter Three — Why Literary Fiction?: The purpose of this chapter is to justify the use of literary fiction as a medium for women's leadership development. The

transformative qualities of fiction and collaborative opportunities afforded by reading are discussed, followed by an in-depth analysis of four key texts that employ literary fiction as case studies for leadership development and education purposes. This chapter aims to make the reader more familiar with the current literature in this field, the methods employed for selecting and extracting particular elements from aesthetic texts, as well as the gaps which currently exist, most notably, the invisibility of women writers and female protagonists in the present studies and recommended reading lists.

Chapter Four — Methodology: This chapter presents a justification for my choice of an interpretive and critical research paradigm, along with an explanation of the qualitative research methods and tools I utilised for this study. The epistemological assumptions undergirding my research are provided, along with an outline of my conceptual framework which is linked back to the critical concerns for women and leadership identified in Chapter Two. This chapter also includes a description of the reading model I developed to collect and analyse data from my selected literary texts, as well as a summary of the three key projected outcomes of my qualitative/textual content analysis – critical theorising, illustrative analysis, and critical reflection.

Chapter Five — Choosing Stories: Boundaries and Criteria: In this chapter I outline the methods I developed for systematically selecting appropriate novels, plays and short stories for my long and short lists, as there was a lack of a template or systematic method for critically selecting or excluding literary texts beyond subjective opinion. These include four initial reading boundaries and four short list selection criteria. In addition, this chapter explores how I supplemented my reading experiences and the research process by keeping an online reflective ‘reader’s notebook’.

Chapter Six — Findings and Discussion: This chapter discusses the key findings from my reading, selection, interrogation and thematic analysis of the short listed literary texts. These findings are summarised and presented in relation to the relevant women and leadership themes identified in Chapter Two. This is followed by an extended discussion using the data and examples collected from five of the short listed stories which correlate to the five critical concerns outlined in my conceptual framework. The purpose of this discussion is to identify and expand on opportunities provided by the literary texts for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and thoughtful critical reflection, and, subsequently,

their usefulness in terms of providing appropriate and interesting material for women's leadership development programmes.

Chapter Seven — Research Contributions and Recommendations for Future

Research: The final chapter presents my research contributions to the field of women's leadership development, as well as to the emergent interdisciplinary field of arts and humanities-oriented leadership studies. The key research findings are also re-examined in terms of the primary objectives, and the current limitations are identified and discussed. Considering the limitations alongside the new avenues of potential research my study offers points to many exciting opportunities and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to bring ‘gender’ into leadership studies as a central category for analysis, and the specific implications this has for women and how they engage in and experience leadership. Due to the persistence of gender inequality in the workplace and women’s continued underrepresentation in leadership positions, gender bias continues to be a ‘leadership problem’. In this literature review, I investigate what these ideas about women, gender and leadership *do* for and to leaders, followers, and their relationship. The first segment defines leadership in terms of ‘post-heroic’ social process perspectives in comparison to traditional ‘Great Man’ theories, with a specific focus on Ladkin’s (2010) leadership ‘moment’ model. I turn next to the topic of women and leadership, identifying how and why the leadership phenomenon is often incorrectly framed as gender neutral. I then harness a multi-lens feminist approach in order to provide a detailed assessment of the current research on women’s leadership experiences. In the final two sections, I critically examine contemporary thinking about leadership development for women. As a result of this analysis, I identify and justify the use of interdisciplinary and ‘artful’ interventions as an exciting and innovative alternative to more traditional and prosaic leadership development methods.

2.2 Leadership Defined – ‘What is Leadership?’

Leadership holds many different meanings for different people. Little consensus exists between scholars on how to define leadership, with some theorists even questioning whether it has any inherent value as a scientific construct (Ford, 2015; Yukl, 2013). It is no wonder then that Grint (2000) has called leadership “an invention...primarily rooted in, and a product of, the imagination” (p. 13). Nonetheless, leadership continues to be recognised as an authoritative discourse, vital for the effective functioning and progress of an enterprise or organisation, making it too important to ignore (Day, 2011; Ford, 2015; Sinclair, 2005; Wilson, 2016).

Leadership has been studied in a variety of contexts using both quantitative and qualitative methods. In more ‘traditional’ traits-based or behavioural leadership research and theories,

emphasis is placed on the pre-eminence of the individual ‘leader’ figure (Grint, 2011; Northouse, 2016). The heroic images implicit in these ‘great person’ theories of leadership, such as charismatic, visionary and transformational models, often attribute power solely to individual social actors while painting followers as compliant and passive (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992). However, this “mythological view of heroic leaders” (Collinson, 2011, p. 184) has been criticised heavily by contemporary scholars (Northouse, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Gemmill and Oakley (1992) argue that ‘great person’ constructs foster alienation as they reinforce the tendency in Western societies to idealise leaders by implying that only a select few have the ‘right’ traits to exercise initiative and lead the way. Subsequently, this perspective collapses ‘leadership’ into ‘leaders,’ “an individually-based unit of analysis” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 5).

Disillusionment among scholars with this form of ‘leadership romanticism’ has facilitated increasing interest in what has been termed ‘post-heroic leadership’ (Collinson, 2011). This broad approach views leadership from an “information-processing perspective or relational standpoint” (Northouse, 2016, p. 1) and provides a far more nuanced and complex understanding of the nature of leadership, both as a collective dynamic (Uhl-Bien, 2006) and as a socially constructed phenomenon (Ladkin, 2010) or social invention (Wilson, 2016). Subsequently, what has emerged in the leadership literature is a notable shift away from the all-powerful individual to a way of conceptualising leadership that emphasises “purposeful interaction” (McManus & Perruci, 2015, p. 17), and more collaborative and interactive processes of influence and learning between leaders and followers (Fletcher, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003).

But while most post-heroic perspectives re-envision leadership as a collective social process (Fletcher, 2004), the wide variety of differing viewpoints and theories² makes honing in on a single, all-encompassing definition an almost impossible task (Grint, 2011). A number of these recent definitions are summarised in Table 1.

² Post-heroic perspectives include a wide range of leadership ‘theories’, including shared, distributed, quiet, servant, collaborative and community leadership, as well as authentic leadership (Collinson, 2011).

Table 1 Leadership as a Social Process – Five Definitions

<i>Leadership is...</i>
The process by which leaders and followers develop a relationship and work together toward a goal (or goals) within an environmental context shaped by cultural values and norms. (Perruci, 2011, p. 83)
An influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purpose. (Rost, 1993, p. 102)
The process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. (Yukl, 2006, p. 8)
The reciprocal process of mobilising, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realise goals independently or mutually held by both the leaders and followers. (Burns, 1978, p. 463)
A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. (Northouse, 2016, p. 6)

While there are variations between these definitions, they hold several key elements in common – leaders, followers, purpose/goals, context, relationship, and influence. Ladkin (2010) usefully clarifies the importance of these distinct facets of leadership’s identity, arguing that the leadership process is best understood “as a ‘moment’ of social relations” (p. 26).³ Rather than being something that occurs through the agency of a single ‘leader’ figure; followers, context and the purpose to which the effort is directed, all interact and contribute to leadership’s occurrence (Ladkin 2010). These four interlinked ‘pieces’ of the leadership ‘moment’ are illustrated in Figure 1.

³ This idea of ‘moments’ is unrelated to the passage of time. Rather, it’s a phenomenon that is contingent on the existence of other phenomena (Ladkin, 2010).

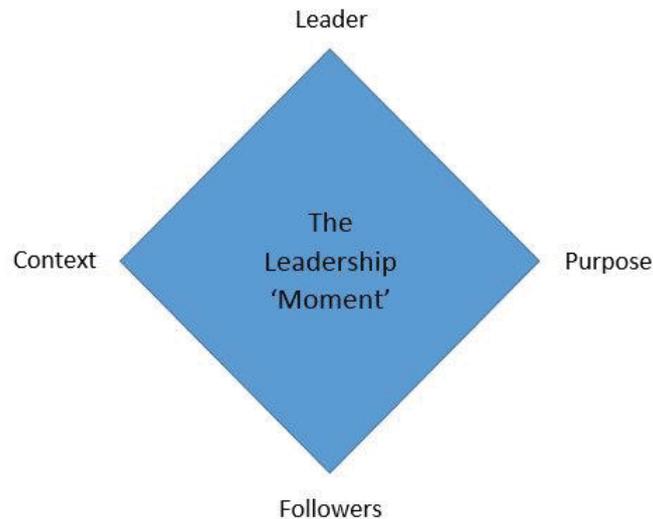


Figure 1 The Leadership ‘Moment’ – (Ladkin, 2010, p. 28)

While leadership moments may materialise in a diverse range of situations, at different times and in different forms, they will always share a common feature: the collective mobilisation of people towards an explicit or implicit purpose, goal or objective (Ladkin, 2010). In the leadership ‘moment’, no single perspective or aspect (i.e. the leader or the follower) can “appreciate the totality of leadership” on its own (Ladkin, 2010, p. 31), nor can it be separated from its context or social construction. Ladkin (2010) explains that leadership will be observed from many different viewpoints, and each perspective can potentially offer a “new insight into its identity” (p. 31). In the context of this study, I am particularly concerned with developing insights into what Ladkin (2010) calls the mutually constructed ‘space between’ leaders and followers and the ‘absent but present’ expectations that operate below the surface.

It is useful at this point to distinguish between ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ in terms of the ‘leader’ and ‘manager’ roles. Although at times the two constructs overlap (Northouse, 2016), managers, and those taking up the leader role, generally enact different behaviours as their positions are vested in alternate forms of power and influence. Managers hold ‘formal’ power due to their organisational position and are responsible for tasks such as planning, staffing, organising, and controlling (Northouse, 2016), and subsequently, their emotional engagement with staff is not necessarily important. Leaders, on the other hand, possess ‘referent’ or ‘expert’ power (Ladkin, 2015). Emotional engagement with others is vitally important as the ability to effectively enact ‘leaderly’ behaviours is acquired as a result of “the strength and quality of the relationships they develop” (Barling, 2014, p. 2).

While individuals may hold the title of ‘leader’, leadership can arise anywhere throughout an organisation or in society. Likewise, it may not rest with a single, designated ‘leader’ figure, but instead move around group members in ways that are unpredictable (Gronn, 2002).

2.2.1 Problematizing Leadership and Gender

Despite the rhetorical shift from individual to collective, and from ‘power-over’ to ‘power-with’, gender remains an important, though frequently neglected, feature of the leadership dynamic, with both theory and practice often being incorrectly framed as gender neutral (Collinson, 2011; Fletcher, 2004; Ford, 2005; Ford, 2015; Kark & Eagly, 2010; Stead & Elliott, 2009). The continued invisibility of gender in the emerging scholarly discourse on ‘post-heroic’ theories of leadership implies that leadership is unaffected by the values and norms found in wider society (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Instead, leadership is construed as an “unproblematized norm, towards which men and women alike should aspire” (Sinclair & Evans, 2015, p. 139). However, research consistently finds that gender remains implicit in people’s individual understandings of leadership and power, placing female leaders at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to their male counterparts (Fletcher, 2004; Kark & Eagly, 2010). In the following section I argue that if post-heroic, social process perspectives of leadership are to be successfully implemented and adopted with equal results for both men *and* women, the ‘absent but present’ gender issues that underlie and influence the ‘spaces between’ leaders and followers, must be critically acknowledged, understood, and proactively addressed (Ford, 2015; Hoyt & Simon, 2016).

2.3 Women and Leadership

Although great strides have been made in the acceptance of women in positions of leadership, there are worrying signs of a pause in the progress towards full gender equality (Eagly & Carli, 2012). In this section I contend that gender differences and gender relations are the “socially constructed product of a system that creates categories of difference and dominance” (Crawford, 2012, p. 120). In order to provide a comprehensive and more complex evaluation of women’s leadership and development, I employ a multi-lens feminist perspective. Complexifying these topics re-orientates the discussion away from one in which women are seen as the problem, to a broader, yet deeper understanding of the structural inequalities and the perceived (and real) differences which arise from

socially constructed norms and expectations. This review finds that despite the emergence of post-heroic models and social process theories of leadership, persisting gender inequality and the ongoing presence of sexual stereotyping and bias in people's perceptions continues to place female leaders at a significant disadvantage (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Clarke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2012; Rhee & Sigler, 2015).

2.3.1 The Current State of Play

Throughout history, leadership has consistently been framed in highly masculine terms (Sinclair & Evans, 2015). While this has decreased to some extent over time, the “favouring of masculinity and the pervasive associations between men, power and authority” continues to be taken for granted (Ford, 2005, p. 245). A set of widely shared conscious and unconscious mental associations supported by society's attachment to these cultural myths of masculine authority, dominance and ambition, still shape people's ideas on leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2012; Kellerman & Rhode, 2012). So even though the macro-level rhetoric on leadership has undergone a significant change, as Fletcher (2004) explains “the everyday narrative about leadership and leadership practices—the stories people tell about leadership, the mythical legends that get passed on as exemplars of leadership behaviour—remains stuck in old images of heroic individualism” (p. 652). Since men are more likely to emulate and encourage the assertive and controlling behaviours that are commonly associated with effective leadership, the heroic/masculine model remains resistant to change (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; McManus & Perruci, 2015; Sinclair, 2005).

Consequently, even though women's gains are extrapolated as if society were on a “continuous march toward gender equality” (Eagly & Carli, 2012, p. 161), progress in women's advancement has slowed considerably in recent years (Carter & Silva, 2010). Women continue to remain under-represented in leadership roles in New Zealand and around the world. According to the New Zealand Census of Women's Participation (NZCWP), in 2012 only 14.75% of directorships were held by women in New Zealand's top 100 listed companies (McAteer, 2013). And in the boardroom, the NZCWP has calculated that at the current rate of change, it will be at least another 35 years before boardroom equality will be a reality (The Human Rights Commission, 2012). As Wilkinson and Wilkie (2014) point out, given that 60% of New Zealand's domestic university graduates (in 2013) are women, New Zealand is underutilising a significant pool of talent. This is reflected globally, where just 4.2% of the S&P 500 CEO positions are

currently held by women (Catalyst, 2016), and in other top executive leadership positions (such as chief financial officer, chief operations officer, and other high tier positions), women account for only 16.5% (Egan, 2015).

While the most common explanations for women's underrepresentation in leadership positions is that it is 'women's choice' (due to career breaks for children or to care for elderly parents) or general female unsuitability for the role (Crawford, 2012), the 'mommy track' or 'leaking leadership pipeline' cannot be conveniently explained away as a voluntary 'opt-out revolution' (Hoyt & Simon, 2016; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007).

Research shows that a growing number of women aspire to leadership positions where they can exercise considerable degrees of power on the same terms as men (Holvino, 2007).⁴ However, women face a unique set of obstacles arising from gender stereotypes and unconscious bias (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; McAteer, 2013). Watson and Hoffman (2004) have found that while women were as effective as men when it came to influencing their team members and making high-quality decisions, they were rated significantly lower on leadership abilities and were seen as less likable than comparative male leaders.

The first step to disrupting these taken-for-granted assumptions and unconscious biases is to re-frame 'leadership' in terms of the powerful impact socially constructed gender norms have on men and women's divergent experiences. The next segment engages a sociological perspective using social constructionism as a lens to analyse the ways gender is conceptualised and gender differences are socially constructed and perpetuated in the workplace.

2.3.2 Exploring the Impact of Social Constructionism and Gender on Leadership

For most social theorists, as well as liberal and poststructuralist feminists, 'gender' is regarded as a socially constructed phenomenon and a central organising feature of day-to-day life. It is useful to conceptualise gender as having two interconnected parts: gender identity and gender relations (Fletcher & Ely, 2003). Firstly, 'gender identity' is concerned

⁴ A recent study conducted by the Center for Gender in Organisations made three key findings: (1) women want to exercise leadership and power, (2) women are working to redefine leadership and power in more collaborative and inclusive ways, (3) women are still not satisfied with their opportunities to exercise power and leadership in organisations (Holvino, 2007).

with individual presentation and performance. It accounts for the sense one makes of the fact that he/she is either male or female and how he/she should “present themselves as gendered beings” in a world of binary opposites in order to “conform to others’ gender-based expectations” (Crawford, 2012, p. 52). Gender socialisation is very pervasive. From a young age, boys and girls are encouraged not to be like the ‘opposite sex’ (Phelan & Rudman, 2010), and so we come to know who we are by “setting our definition in opposition to a set of ‘others’”⁵ (Kimmel, 2013, p. 117). However, this ‘performance of gender’ is not usually a conscious or self-aware decision (Crawford, 2012). Rather, gender identities are created from a fluid assemblage of meanings and behaviours that we construct largely unconsciously from the values, images, language, thoughts, actions, social pressures, expectations and human social processes that we find everywhere in the world around us (Crawford, 2012; Gatrell & Swan, 2008; Kimmel, 2013). While the biasing impact of these multiple and repeating social relational moments in any one encounter may be small, their accumulation over lifetimes and careers can result in substantially different social outcomes for men and women (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Since gender is such a large part of a person’s identity, ‘doing gender’ inevitably occurs when we ‘do’ anything else, such as ‘doing business’, ‘doing parenting’, or, for the purposes of this study, ‘doing leadership’. Employing this sociological concern alongside feminist theories (see Section 2.3.3) sets the stage for further conversations about how ‘doing masculinity’ and ‘doing leadership’, and ‘doing femininity’ and ‘doing subordination’ are frequently conflated (Fletcher, 1999; Fletcher & Ely, 2003).

Gendered paths and outcomes invariably become part of the social world and the organising systems which govern society. This structural component of gender has been termed ‘gender relations’ (Fletcher & Ely, 2003) and emphasises the ways in which the social world and society’s power structures are arranged to give meaning to the binary classifications of male and female (Crawford, 2012; Fletcher & Ely, 2003). While organisational structures and work processes often appear or are conceived of as gender-neutral (Kimmel, 2013), studies highlight the “ongoing and dynamic processes and mechanisms” through which gender roles and norms are reproduced in the workplace and influence the practice and experience of leadership (Gatrell & Swan, 2008, p. 4). Gender then, is something which not only individuals possess, but organisations ‘do’, since

⁵ This doesn’t just include the male/female gender binary, but also race, class and sexual orientation (Kimmel, 2013).

assumptions concerned with gender underpin organisational contracts, documents, job descriptions and hierarchies, and, ultimately, leadership (Gatrell & Swan, 2008; Stead & Elliott, 2009). Subsequently, having predominantly been created by and for men, organisational systems, structures, processes, and practices are imbued by norms which tend to reflect masculine values, masculine experiences, and masculine life situations (Hopkins et al., 2008; Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sands, & Ely, 2003). It is no surprise then that men fit cultural conceptions of leadership better than women do.

Gender relations can further be understood as relations of power (Fletcher & Ely, 2003). At this level, gender is about the power men as a group (not as individuals) hold over women as a group, as well as the power some men have over other groups of men (Kimmel, 2013). In his landmark work *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault (1980) advanced the premise that society is a system based on power relationships, thus, “we are all objects of social power relations (regardless of gender differences) and act in compliance with [these] discursive conventions” (as cited in Gross, Davies, & Diab, 2013, p. 3). While popular ideological viewpoints, such as evolutionary psychology and fundamentalist theology, may explain male domination or masculine success in the public sphere as the natural outcome of sex differences – immutable and eternal – (Cameron, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gross et al., 2013), social constructionism explicates the production of difference and the reproduction of gender inequality as the *result of* domination and sex-power imbalances (Kimmel, 2013). In other words, gender differences are the socially constructed product of a social system that generates and perpetuates categories of difference and dominance (Crawford, 2012).

What does this mean for women’s leadership?

Examining the socially constructed nature of gender identity and gender relations facilitates the refutation of the popular assumption that the workplace is a gender neutral environment in which men and women face the same challenges when enacting leadership. Instead, we can critique how the rules and rituals of organisational life create certain expectations about what leaders and leadership looks like, as well as consider the social interactions and processes which facilitate women’s unique experiences and the specific difficulties they will likely encounter. Since traditional male/female gender binaries continue to “contribute to the labyrinthine challenges that women encounter in attaining roles that yield substantial power and authority” (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari,

2011, p. 637), the next segment employs a feminist lens to analyse the productive ‘discourses’ – ways of speaking and writing about female leaders that produce ‘truths’ about them – which have created particular ways of thinking, being and acting with regards to women’s leadership. This investigation will address an important set of questions: What perceptions, expectations and stereotypes of the ‘female leader’ arise from socially constructed gender norms? What gender differences in leadership practice does inequality produce? Do women really lead differently to men?

2.3.3 Forming a Feminist Critique

A lack of attention to the gendered practices and social interactions of leadership presents an assumption of a gender-blind context, that women and men face exactly the same challenges and are presented with the same opportunities in the workplace (Kimmel, 2013; Stead & Elliott, 2009). To counter this problem, I want to re-orientate the discussion of women’s leadership from ‘inside’ the management literature to an ‘outside’ cross-disciplinary perspective that harnesses a plurality of feminist perspectives. While there is much diversity between approaches, feminist writers often share certain key assumptions, most notably “the recognition of gendered dominance in social arrangements, and a desire for changes from this form of domination” (Calás & Smircich, 2006, p. 286). The goal then of most feminist writers is to explore women’s experiences and expose systems of inequality, showing how anything to do with the feminine is subconsciously framed as the ‘other,’ and seen not only as second class, but out of place in public arenas (Ford et al., 2008).

The aim of this segment is primarily an epistemological one. I examine three feminist perspectives – liberal feminism, cultural feminism, and poststructuralist feminism⁶ – and

⁶ It should be noted that these are not the only three ‘theories’ of feminism, however, I have chosen not to include psychoanalytical feminism, socialist feminism or transnational/postcolonial feminism in my analysis. The rationale for choosing liberal, cultural and poststructuralist feminist perspectives relates to both their popularity and direct applicability to the field of women’s leadership. Liberal feminism and cultural feminism have generated the most debate and research among scholars (Crawford, 2012), while the increasing use of post-structural understandings to critically examine leadership, and in particular, women’s leadership, predicated the appropriateness of this theoretical perspective to the topic at hand (e.g. Ford et al., 2008; Ford, 2015; Stead & Elliott, 2009). However, the implications for this project associated with excluding transnational/postcolonial feminism and, by association, critical race theory, are further explored in Section 7.3 – Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.

employ them as ‘conceptual lenses’ to enact an in-depth examination of women’s current leadership concerns. The aim is not to judge which feminist discourse is ‘best’, but to describe and recognise how each theory contributes to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of leadership, and to “bring to the fore the many ways in which we can look at women, power, and leadership” (Holvino, 2007, p. 364). As Calás and Smircich (2006) posit, critical feminist organisation studies are vital as they bring ‘into the picture’ the concerns of the ‘other’ – in this case, women – who are too often rendered invisible both in and through organisational processes and leadership literature.

Liberal Feminism

With its overriding and seemingly timeless goals of sexual equity and ‘gender justice’, liberal feminism has been labelled as the historical starting point for all other contemporary feminist theorising (Calás & Smircich, 2006). For the liberal feminist, the ‘good society’ is a fair and objective society that guarantees women full legal and social equality with men. All individuals are conceived of as autonomous beings capable of rationality. And while biological sex is an ‘essential endowment’, ‘gender’ is understood as socially learnt behaviour (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Crawford, 2012). To counter the debilitating effects of traditional gender roles (where men are seen as ‘naturally suited’ to leadership, and women to more caring, supportive roles), liberal feminist theorising emphasises the similarities between men and women rather than ‘socially constructed’ differences, maintaining that “given equal environments and opportunities, males and females will behave similarly” (Crawford, 2012, p. 9). Sex/gender imbalances should and can be corrected using human development and/or structural and legal interventions (Calás & Smircich, 2006). These interventions will, over time, facilitate the achievement of the same individual rights for women as those of (white) men, guaranteeing a level playing field where differences are of no account and women have the same access to opportunities as men (Holvino, 2007).

The liberal perspective is useful for identifying and analysing the incongruities between an ideal ‘genderless’ form of leadership and the actual state of affairs. Additionally, liberal feminist theorising focuses on helping individual women to overcome barriers to advancement by eliminating discriminatory barriers through methods such as special legislation and women’s training programmes, as well as advocating for initiatives that assist women in negotiating a balance between family and work life (Holvino, 2007; Kolb

et al., 2003). Since the goal of this approach – in terms of achieving gender equity – is to minimise differences so that women can compete on equal terms, the liberal viewpoint seeks proactive ways to encourage women to be self-determining and to ‘act powerfully’. In sum, liberal feminism is concerned with the pursuit of *equity* in leadership roles and opportunities, rather than the eradication of *inequality* as a much wider structural problem in organisations and society (Calás & Smircich, 2006).

Countless women have learnt valuable skills from liberally informed leadership development programmes and have learnt to succeed as well as (or even better) than many men (Kolb et al., 2003). However, while this framework may help individual women with the ‘right’ personal attributes, access to mentors, and training programmes to “play the game,” the structures and policies of the game itself still remain resolutely in place (Kolb, et al., 2003). So despite its practical and positive implications for individual women, liberal feminist theorising tends to reinforce a pseudo-ideal of an ahistorical, universal humanity towards which both women and men should aspire (Calás & Smircich, 2006). The problem, Calás and Smircich (2006) explain, is that “this research seldom acknowledged that the ‘ideal humanity’ and the ‘ideal society’ were modelled after Eurocentric, elite, masculinist ideals” (p. 290). This means that when we talk about the best ways for women to ‘act powerfully’ or exercise ‘leadership’, it usually means to “act like white men, from dressing for success to being appropriately authoritative” (Holvino, 2007, p. 365), employing a traits-based or self-help approach which fails to take into account the multi-faceted nature of leadership as a collective, but also inherently gendered process.

Cultural Feminism

Whereas liberal feminism stresses men and women’s innate similarities, cultural feminism focuses on enhancing and celebrating women’s differences (Crawford, 2012; Holvino, 2007). This theoretical perspective holds that the qualities commonly associated with women have been unfairly devalued and should be honoured and respected by society and in the workplace (Crawford, 2012; Kolb et al., 2003). Feminine gender differences are conceived of as either an essential part of womanhood or so deeply socialised and shaped by social roles that they are virtually universal and so not likely to change (Crawford, 2012; Kolb et al., 2003). So, although cultural feminists generally see oppressive gender roles as derived from the sexual and socialised differences between men and women,

proponents of this approach do not advocate the elimination of these differences. Instead, traditional gender variances in values and social behaviours are ‘deemed to be positive’ since they are not only a beneficial addition to an organisation’s skill set (Kolb et al., 2003), but could make women more effective than men, more enlightened and better fitted for contemporary, post-heroic leadership (Holvino, 2007).

Since post-heroic models of relational leadership call for the practice of ‘communal’ attributes that have long been regarded, and subsequently derided, as ‘feminine’ (Ford et al., 2008), a cultural feminist framework serves to facilitate a lively discussion on the value of communal attributes in comparison to agentic leadership practices. For example, gender-cultural scholars propose that “there is a difference between traditionally masculine power, which is defined as ‘power-over,’ and feminine power, which is defined as ‘power-with’ or ‘power-to’” (Holvino, 2007, p. 366). As a result, this framework assesses and celebrates the ‘feminine’ notions of shared power, relational leadership, collaboration, as well as the collective empowerment of women as a group as opposed to autonomous individuals, outside the debilitating confines of more traditional, patriarchal discourses.

There are points of contention with this approach to women’s leadership however. The continual positive re-affirmation of women’s essential ‘femaleness’ and communal abilities ultimately leads to the reinforcement of traditional gender binaries – masculine/feminine, male/female, man/woman. Furthermore, it involves placing women on a pedestal, “albeit a precarious one,” which simply replaces patriarchy for matriarchy by promoting a ‘great woman’ approach to leadership (Pittinsky, Bacon, & Welle, 2007, p. 94). A look at recent book titles demonstrates this phenomenon: *The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership*, *The Woman’s Advantage: 20 Women Entrepreneurs Show You What It Takes to Grow Your Business*, and *Why the Best Man for the Job Is a Woman: The Unique Female Qualities of Leadership*, to name just a few. In concentrating on ‘women’s difference’ or advantage, cultural feminists are unintentionally recreating conditions for their own continued discrimination and stereotyping. (Calás & Smircich, 2006). There is an implicit assumption that naming something as valuable will automatically make it so. However, “it ignores the power of the masculine image that underlies most generally accepted models of success, leadership, and managerial acumen” (Kolb et al., 2003, p. 11). For example, if relational practices are labelled as expressions of ‘essential femininity’, prevalent stereotypes of the ‘maternal leader’ or the ‘selfless heroine’ will continue to be replayed in the gendered workplace (Holvino, 2007). But

despite charges of essentialism, gender-cultural feminism still serves as a useful platform from which to interrogate the privileging of agentic leadership traits and the devaluation of communal qualities.

Poststructuralist Feminism

Poststructuralist feminist theory uses principles of language, subjectivity, and the history of social practices (e.g. leadership) and institutions (e.g. business organisations) to understand and problematise existing power relations (Holvino, 2007). But unlike liberal feminism which is concerned with securing equality within the current structures, or the cultural feminist preoccupation with celebrating an ‘essential feminine’ way of being, poststructuralist feminism isn’t about women per say. Rather, it’s about ‘woman’ and ‘man’ as “subject positions within the structure of language” (Klages, 2006, p. 96). In other words, poststructuralist feminists see “the category or position ‘woman’ as part of a binary opposition, ‘man/woman,’ in which ‘man’ is the favoured term” (Klages, 2006, p. 96); poststructuralist perspectives then want to deconstruct this pervasive binary, and the other binaries which reinforce and sustain it, such as masculine/feminine, rationality/emotionality, objectivity/subjectivity, culture/nature (Billing & Alvesson, 2000; Klages, 2006).

One of the overarching goals of this approach is to study how gender is socially constructed in the workplace through the performative effects of “differences, knowledge, discourse, and the symbolic” (Holvino, 2007, p. 369), and to unpack and deconstruct these gendered assumptions, images and practices which are largely taken for granted.⁷ Once the relevant dichotomies are identified, such as authoritative male leader/relational female leader, the ‘knowledge claims’ that frame and construct these ideas can be destabilised. For example, since popular leadership discourses are impregnated with images of the ‘hero’, visions informed by a battle between ‘the good hero’ and its binary opposite, the ‘dastardly villain’ (Ford et al., 2008), the performative effect is such that the terms ‘leader/hero’ become the equivalent of ‘leadership’ in the business world, and

⁷ While discussing neuroscience is beyond the scope of this literature review, it is worth noting that some scientific studies on gender in relation to brain structure, genetics and chemistry “tend to say that gender is both: it’s enormously mutable, but there does seem to be something that might be essential” (Klages, 2006, p. 91). Fine (2010) provides an interesting summary and critical overview of the latest studies on gender and the brain.

subsequently ‘leadership’ continues to be equated with ‘tough, out-front, self-reliant’ masculine images rather than feminine symbols and attributes (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Similarly, since men are largely regarded as “logical, non-emotional, aggressive, occupiers of the public world” and women as the opposite – nurturing, emotional, empathetic– poststructuralist feminism explores how these descriptors “not only create the genders they supposedly do no more than describe, but become norms by which we do not feel we are truly men or truly women if we do not live up to them” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 132). So where liberal and cultural feminist theories are pre-occupied with solving immediate problems (e.g. increasing the number of female CEOs, the widespread acceptance of communal leadership traits, empowering individual female leaders), poststructuralist feminist theory, according to Klages (2006), “investigates how, and with what consequences, ‘woman’ is constructed as otherness, as non-being, as alterity, as something outside of and dangerous to consciousness, rationality, presence” (p. 96). By carefully questioning and critiquing contemporary notions of ‘reality’, poststructuralism makes room for new modes of reality to be introduced or at least resituated on more equal terms (Butler, 2004; Calás & Smircich, 2006).

However, with its incessant questioning of all categories and knowledge claims, especially those surrounding gender, poststructuralist approaches have been criticised for not being robust enough to support a workable feminist agenda of change (Holvino, 2007). Nonetheless, this perspective is important as it brings to the fore the subjects of gendered discourse and the symbolic in organisations, proposing that women’s leadership issues and questions of power are not just a matter of being granted access to the right resources and positions, but are embedded in the language of power and the structures by which society organises itself.

In summary, although liberal, cultural, and poststructuralist feminist perspectives appear to be frameworks with disparate goals, ‘double vision’ or multi-lens approaches are “theoretically and politically richer and more flexible than visions based on a single tradition” (Crawford, 2012, p. 93), and result in gender equity programmes that are more comprehensive and integrative (Kolb et al., 2003). In the following section, I harness arguments in favour of both equality *and* difference to critically evaluate women’s leadership and to identify the key issues facing female leaders in the contemporary workplace. But while women-in-leadership research inspired by liberal feminism and cultural feminism provides much needed insights into the inequalities between men and

women and the ways in which female leadership is both perceived and practiced, taking a ‘how to succeed’ or ‘women are wonderful’ stance “tends to be uncritical of the gendered (male) nature of organisations” and organisational/leadership theorising (Calás & Smircich, 2006, p. 301). Poststructuralist feminism helps us to pay attention to the language and practices that produce and reproduce unequal power relations and gendered expectations in the social structure of organisations. Gender in this frame is not only about women or discrimination, but is about *the organisation itself* (Kolb et al., 2003).

2.3.4 Psychology of Prejudice: Stereotypes, Expectations and Perceptions

Even when evaluated by younger generations, women in formal leadership positions continue to be subject to a range of competing demands, sexual stereotyping, and biased perceptions (Rhee & Sigler, 2015). Eagly and Carli (2012) claim that this is driven by a “set of widely shared conscious and unconscious mental associations about women, men, and leaders” (p.151). Multiple studies have confirmed that people implicitly associate women and men with different traits and tend to link men with more traits that denote ‘leadership’ (Eagly & Carli, 2012; Fine, 2010). So even for women who are committed almost exclusively to their careers, this mismatch between the characteristics traditionally associated with women and the characteristics traditionally associated with ‘leadership’ behaviours results in a set of incriminating stereotypical images of female leaders. As Stead and Elliott (2009) point out: “The chief utility of such images – and the everyday, taken-for-granted way in which they are articulated – is that they encapsulate, portray and communicate important issues of gender that reflect wider social discourses” (p. 54). The purpose of this segment is to delve into the underlying psychology of prejudice which influences common stereotypical perceptions of female leaders. I will examine the agency/communion dichotomy, along with the resulting popular stereotypes – the Selfless Heroine and the Iron Maiden leader – and the inevitable double bind which continues to inspire resistance towards women exercising power and contributes to the ongoing underrepresentation of women at the top.

Analyzing the spectrum: Agentic versus communal

Research into descriptive stereotypes (i.e. expectations about typical group member behaviours) has consistently shown that men are perceived to be more confident, achievement-oriented, and competent (i.e. agentic) than the ‘fairer sex,’ whereas women are construed to be more compassionate, people-oriented, and sensitive (i.e. communal)

(Phelan & Rudman, 2010). So even though women make up half the New Zealand workforce (Williamson & Wilikie, 2014), these socially constructed roles remain largely intact with men still naturally afforded the ‘provider’ role and women the supportive ‘caretaker’ position (Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Prentice & Miller, 2006). Why is this still the norm and not the exception? As noted previously, throughout the history of Western philosophy, male and female have been contrasted and constructed using the opposite traits, for example: rationality/emotionality, culture/nature, objectivity/subjectivity (Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Masculine traits and values (the ‘agentic’) and feminine attributes (the ‘communal’) are often seen as mutually exclusive, so that the more masculine you are the less feminine you will naturally be, and vice versa (Walter, 2010). Table 2 summarises a set of key terms traditionally associated with either agency or communion, and by default, masculine and feminine values.

Table 2 Binary Oppositions – Agentic versus Communal Traits

Agentic Traits (‘Masculine values’)	Communal Traits (‘Feminine values’)
Action-oriented	People-oriented
Rational and Logical	Expressive and Emotional
Assertive	Helpful
Decisive	Collaborative and Cooperative
Objective and Analytical	Intuitive and Perceptive
Competitive	Compassionate and Empathetic
Self-reliant and Individualistic	Interpersonally sensitive
Aggressive	Affectionate and Kind
Strong and Confident	Gentle and Soft-spoken
Focused	Receptive
Tough	Tender
Visionary	Nurturing

Adapted from Ahl (2006), Billing and Alvesson (2000), Crawford, (2012), Eagly and Carli (2012), Ford et al. (2008), Gatrell and Swan (2008), and Sinclair (2005).

From a cultural feminist perspective, these communal ‘female values’ and care-taking capabilities have remained undervalued and absent from the business sector for too long, incorrectly associated with domestic or supportive roles instead of the public sphere of work and politics. However, current research highlights the urgent need for more communal and collaborative understandings of leadership; the ‘traits’ more readily allied with the feminine, such as compassion, kindness, sensibility, and people-orientation (Ahl, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2012). With the positive framing of the ‘communal’ as the way

forward for modern organisations, how are female leaders who embrace their ‘essential’ communal nature perceived when engaging with followers? Why shouldn’t leaders enhance and find protection in the warm feelings people have for the signifier ‘women’?

The Selfless Heroine stereotype – ‘Women are Wonderful’

While collaborative and communal traits are more closely associated with post-heroic models of leadership, when enacted by female leaders this can become problematic as “women’s sharing of power, or their contribution to the development of others is likely to be interpreted as the behaviour of a selfless giver who ‘likes helping’ – behaviour which is likely to be conflated not only with femininity but with selfless giving and motherhood” (Stead & Elliott, 2009, p. 28). In these cases, the female leader is likely to be perceived as a ‘selfless heroine’, a leader who always places others needs above her own; an embodiment of maternal self-sacrifice or the dutiful daughter who gives up her own ambition for the greater good (of men). Women in leadership is thus an extension of family roles in the workplace – ‘it’s only natural’ then that the mother-leader is *always* more caring and supportive than men (Crawford, 2012; Stead & Elliott, 2009). For example, in a study of CEOs and corporate senior managers, both male and female respondents held that while women were more effective than men at supportive, caretaking leader behaviours, men were more effective than women at taking-charge, delegating and problem solving (Prime, Carter, & Welbourne, 2009). As Crawford (2012) points out, “these expectations reflect the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes – women *are* nurturing, and they *should* be” (p. 306). As the selfless heroine, the female leader embodies the ultimate triumph of selflessness over selfishness; she is a ‘real’ woman.

But what is so wrong with the Selfless Heroine stereotype? Isn’t the up-valuing of feminine attributes and ‘women’s ways’ of leading in the workplace a good thing? Remember that one of the key criticisms of the cultural feminist approach to leadership is that it has a tendency to essentialise gender. By romanticising and over emphasising female differences and women’s ways of leading, the selfless heroine or maternal leader stereotype poses the danger of strengthening gendered assumptions and expectations, as well as reinforcing cultural structures of dominance and submission (Reynolds, 2011). Since the innate femininity of the selfless heroine is associated with embodiment, emotions and sexuality, she is regarded as inferior to male rationality and thus suspect in rational organisations (Ford et al., 2008). So, although caring and nurturing is expected from

women, it is simultaneously devalued and justifies their subordinate status (Anderson, 2015; Crawford, 2012). Studies have also demonstrated that female leaders who principally employ communal behaviours may be liked and perceived as caring and giving in the positive sense, but they are not widely respected, seen as too soft and weak to actually get the job done (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). They are “nice but incompetent” (Fine, 2010, p. 58).

Women as agentic

However, not all women opt to accentuate their communal skills in the workplace. Interestingly, many women are choosing to become more instrumental (agentic and individualistic) instead. Compared to previous generations, female graduates today are just as likely to endorse traits such as ‘acts like a leader’, ‘self-reliant’, and ‘assertive’ as men do (Crawford, 2012). But while women are seeing themselves as more agentic, men are not so likely to see themselves as more expressive and communal (Anderson, 2015; Crawford, 2012). Why would women want to identify with and perform traditional hegemonic masculinity in the workplace? Sinclair (2005) explains that since men are seen to naturally possess more leadership qualities, they are recognised as having more leadership potential. In other words, it is both *descriptive* (‘men have leadership qualities’) and *prescriptive* (‘men should be leaders’), creating a self-perpetuating loop which puts great pressure on women to ‘be like men’ in order to have successful managerial careers and be accepted as ‘real leaders’ (Ford et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2005). It is not surprising then that in an attempt to avoid losing out to men who are deemed ‘naturally’ more qualified for formal leadership positions, women feel they must disconfirm the female gender stereotype by clearly conveying they are more agentic than the ‘typical’ woman (Phelan & Rudman, 2010).

The Iron Maiden stereotype

As women aspire to similar success in organisations, many assume a primary identification with agentic masculinity (Ford et al., 2008). This power-seeking female leader is the anti-thesis of the Selfless Heroine. In liberal feminist terms however, she has the right to strive for leadership positions and to exercise agentic traits on equal terms with men.

Nonetheless, this depiction of the woman leader as someone who takes on and confidently displays traditionally masculine characteristics and traits has been negatively personified by the ‘Iron Maiden’ stereotype – the bitch, the ballbuster, the ice queen, the battle axe, the

dragon lady, the 'Queen Bee' (Fine, 2010; Stead & Elliott, 2009). The terms 'iron maiden' or 'iron lady' conjure up images of 'cold but competent' leaders such as Margaret Thatcher, Indira Ghandi, Hillary Clinton, and Angela Merkel, who have all been criticised for projecting 'unnatural' masculine or 'unsettling' androgynous identities (Eagly & Carli, 2012; Fine, 2010).

Why are men *and* women suspicious and harshly judgemental of the Iron Maiden leader? If masculine performance is more widely regarded as legitimate, what is so problematic about women appropriating agentic traits in order to get ahead? The primary reason researchers cite for the backlash against 'power-seeking' women is a perceived communality/warmth deficit (Anderson, 2015; Gatrell & Swan, 2008; Phelan & Rudman, 2010). Remembering, of course, that when masculine/feminine traits and values are contrived of as mutually exclusive or as binaries, the more masculine you are, the less feminine you will be. So while a man seeking power enhances his masculinity, an ambitious woman seeking power reduces her femininity and capacity for inter-personal sensitivity. This can have extremely negative consequences "as it makes her seem not quite human, as though she has given up something essential about herself" (Walter, 2010, p. 211). So while people may acknowledge that 'career women' or authoritarian female leaders are intelligent and hardworking, "they also believe that they are aggressive, selfish and cold" (Crawford, 2012, p. 47) and will most likely act in ways which are exceedingly intimidating, dominant and arrogant in the most negative sense (Phelan & Rudman, 2010). This may also be a self-fulfilling prophecy in the sense that agentic female leaders have been accused by other women of adopting aggressive 'Queen Bee' behaviours, that is, purposefully holding other women back, 'stinging' those who threaten their power, and failing to support one another (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

These perceptions and expectations have direct implications for women who go against their 'nature' and behave in an agentic fashion as they are perceived as even less effective and less preferred than male leaders who exhibit the same 'masculine' style (Rhee & Sigler, 2015). A meta-analytical overview of more than a hundred studies confirmed that women are consistently rated lower in comparison to men when they assume stereotypically masculine authoritative styles, especially when in male-dominated industries or when the evaluators are primarily men (Kellerman & Rhode, 2012). The Iron Maiden stereotype connotes a bevy of 'non-mothers' who care more for their own comforts than those of others (i.e. followers).

Navigating the double-bind

While the Iron Maiden and Selfless Heroine stereotypes are two of the more extreme versions of the agentic or communal leader, the expectations and biases which arise from these associations about agency and communion create a double bind for female leaders. Highly communal female leaders will likely be criticised for not being agentic enough. They may be perceived as too soft and empathetic, not able to make tough calls or assert enough influence. But female leaders who are agentic, or mimic a more direct, assertive masculine model, may be criticised for failing to perform their ‘feminine role’ properly, criticised as too strident and overly dictatorial (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2012). Consequently, women who pursue leadership positions are faced with a unique dilemma: they can enact communal behaviours and be well-liked but seen as weak and incompetent, perhaps even rendered invisible, or they can enact agentic behaviours and be respected but not liked (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). Hence, women are placed at a disadvantage as they are perceived as naturally having fewer leadership capabilities than men and are regarded less favourably than men when they utilise traditional leadership traits (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010).

In general, most people believe that it is right and natural for women to be nurturing, kind and communal, and for men to be assertive, ambitious and strong, but when it comes to actual practice, do women *actually* lead differently? As Sinclair (2005) asks, has ‘women’s leadership’ failed to be recognised as leadership within the largely male-constructed canon of management theory? It is to these questions I will turn next.

2.3.5 Do Women *Actually* Lead Differently?

Faced with navigating an unavoidable double bind, in response, have women developed a distinct style of leadership or share an innate preference for a particular style? Although today’s businesswomen are becoming more willing to see themselves as having the qualities associated with masculine authority in order to further their aspirations and career goals, the conventional wisdom is that “female leaders are more participatory and interpersonally oriented than male leaders and are more likely to adopt empathetic, supportive, collaborative approaches” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007, p. 16), in other words, a more transformational style (Bass, 1998). Sinclair (2005) also cites research that has found women to be, on average, more consultative influencers than men. And while Eagly and Carli (2007) contend that the demands of leadership promote similarity between the sexes,

some small culturally ‘feminine’ differences can be identified, such as participatory and democratic behaviours.⁸

Since the ‘ideal’ post-heroic leader has been described as “nurturing, empowering, supportive,” and therefore, feminine (Ford et al., 2008, p. 135), does this mean women, as a group, are more effective and have a distinct edge on men when it comes to leadership? Crawford (2012) advises caution to be exercised before leaping onto the ‘female advantage’ bandwagon. In a meta-analysis of 370 studies, contrary to the stereotype of the collaborative and consultative female leader, there were no dramatic gender differences found in leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Women were only “*somewhat* more democratic and participative leaders than men” (Crawford, 2012, p. 317, emphasis added). And, as Crawford (2012) sagely reminds us, any advantages these small differences offer are likely to be offset by the resistance men and women tend to exhibit when it comes to accepting women’s leadership. Recent research also shows that even if there are some distinguishable variances in style, there are no differences in women’s and men’s overall leadership capabilities (Oshagbemi & Gill, 2003; Powell, 2012), and there is no empirical evidence to suggest that meaningful differences exist in terms of overall outcomes and effectiveness (Jonson, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2010). Additionally, from a sociological perspective, any ‘communal’ traits which suggest a unique feminine ‘way of being’ or leading are extremely difficult to disentangle from characteristics that have been “formed through socialisation as a member of social identity groups” (i.e. male or female, gay or straight) along with “the strengths and core competencies one has developed as a function of work and life experiences” (Roberts, 2007, p. 333).

This is not to say that women cannot be very successful when performing leadership tasks in the public realm of work. Anderson (2015) suggests that “women who temper their agentic qualities with a declaration that they are ‘team players’ and more interested in ‘helping others’ than ‘getting ahead’ can convey their competence and lessen the risk of backlash” (p. 129). Eagly and Carli (2007) also claim that the most successful leaders practice a balanced mix of androgynous qualities – positive initiative, social skills, intelligence, openness, integrity, conscientiousness, ability to motivate and inspire – and to

⁸ Eagly and Carli (2007) do note, however, that “this tendency erodes somewhat when women are in male-dominated roles. It is when leader roles are more integrated that women are more likely to exceed men in displaying democratic, participative styles as well as interpersonally-oriented styles” (p. 133).

be too extremely feminine or masculine hinders overall performance. In contrast, in a study with university students, Rosette and Tost (2010) found some evidence suggesting that when top executive women were characterised as exercising a combination of highly agentic and highly communal behaviours, they were rated as slightly more effective than their male counterparts. This did not occur, however, in the lower and middle levels of the organisational hierarchy where gender bias continues to exist unabated (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Nonetheless, this tightrope of expectations requires a careful balancing act between the agentic and communal, placing an additional burden on female leaders, one their male colleagues are unlikely to encounter.

Although the idea of finding a female advantage or a particular set of traits which allow women to compete on equal terms with men is appealing, a note of caution is in order. Promoting the concept of ‘feminine leadership’ as separate and distinct from ‘leadership’ places female leaders in a comparative position to be assessed against a pseudo-model of universal or neutral (aka male) leadership/power. Stead and Elliott (2009) explain that female leaders become “caught in a gender trap in which they are ‘constructed and reconstructed’ in order to make them appear suitable for managerial labour” (p. 26). If the workplace is established to reproduce and sustain masculinity, whether or not real differences and styles are identifiable in women leaders, traditional gender stereotyping will continue to influence how leaders’ behaviours are perceived and rated (Whelan, 2012), perpetuating a ‘psychology of prejudice’ by which gender discrimination continues to be legitimised.

2.3.6 Summary of Critical Concerns

While there is no doubt that women have made significant progress in their personal empowerment and political power (Ruminski & Holba, 2012), the female leader is still too often situated as a ‘traveller in a man’s world’; the exception to the rule, rather than an equal participant (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Thus, organisations, and subsequently leadership, have been shown to be not as universal or gender neutral as they perhaps first appear. In fact, “gender stereotypes are alive [and] well” (Heilman & Eagly, 2008, p. 1).

In this section I employed a multi-lens feminist perspective which integrated the gender equality aims of liberal feminism, the ‘celebration of the feminine’ so important to cultural feminism, and the social constructionism concerns of poststructuralist feminism, in order to provide a balanced account of the underlying biases, masculine ‘grand narratives’, and

gendered social contexts which continue to exert influence on leadership discourse and practice. Taking this approach to analyse the current state of play for women in leadership positions has revealed a myriad of hidden issues. These are summarised as five key overarching critical concerns and are outlined in Table 3. These five critical concerns form the conceptual framework that will provide a basis for my literary analysis and are further explored in Chapter Four – Methodology.

Table 3 Five Critical Concerns

Five Critical Concerns for Women in Leadership
1) Women engaging in leadership ‘moments’ together – Leadership as a social process
2) Agentic versus communal styles – The pervasive double bind and ensuing stereotypes
3) Experiencing and combatting perceptions and expectations – Gender bias and sexism
4) Destabilising grand narratives – Reinterpreting the hierarchy and considering/enacting alternatives
5) Individual women <i>becoming</i> leaders – Personal agency and authenticity

For women engaging in leadership, there is a vital need for more critical evaluation and reflection on the impact of gender on their position. Rather than the “additional promotion of feminine leadership as a regulatory ideal” (Billing & Alvesson, 2000, p. 154), what is required are more “positive representations and images that reflect women’s leadership experiences in a deeper, more nuanced way” (Stead & Elliott, 2009, p. 57). Hoyt and Simon (2016) contend that the first step towards dealing with prejudice and biases at the interpersonal and individual level is to “become aware of [bias]...in others and in ourselves” (p. 411). This is a key concern raised in the emergent literature on women’s leadership development. In the following section I review how leadership practitioners and educators are currently addressing women’s leadership issues, such as stereotypes, double binds, and the socially constructed nature of leadership in women-only leadership development programmes, as well as the intrinsic concerns found in this method.

2.4 Women’s Leadership Development (WLD)

There is considerable evidence to support the claim that designing and providing appropriate leadership development opportunities and education for women benefits both individuals and organisations (Clarke, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008). Well-designed

leadership development programmes have the potential to assist women in learning to navigate pervasive double binds (Ruminski & Holba, 2012), question the stereotypes, myths, and prejudices which govern everyday reality (Ruminski, Whalen, & Branam, 2012), address the negative impact of gendered expectations and perceptions (Debebe, 2011), and, ultimately, facilitate deep learning and transformative change at individual and systemic levels (Debebe et al., 2014).

Despite these positive implications and the growing body of work on women and leadership, Hopkins et al. (2008) have found that the topic of women's leadership development remains underrepresented in both the business and psychology literature. Not only are case materials featuring female leaders and managers still rare (Flynn et al., 2015; Symons & Ibarra, 2014), but educators and practitioners also “lack a coherent, theoretically based, actionable framework for designing and delivering leadership programmes for women” (Ely et al., 2011, p. 475). Very little is written on or provided in the way of guidance for teaching gender and leadership as a potentially sensitive and complex subject (Shollen, 2015). Instead ‘women's issues’ tend to be relegated to the realms of the political and provocative rather than being given serious attention as an area of important knowledge and academic or reflexive theorising for today's leaders (Wahl, 2015). Subsequently, as mentioned previously, many courses take an ‘add-women-and-stir’ approach, replicating the same material for women as they provide to men (Ely et al., 2011), materials which are too often “based on a notion of gender neutrality that belies inherent gendered relations” (Stead, 2014, p. 417). This worrying dearth of information on leadership development programmes and a lack of resources that are equipped to meet the specific needs of current and aspiring female leaders has sparked calls for more research on a variety of topics related to women's leadership from both teaching and learning perspectives (Debebe et al., 2014).

2.4.1 Filling the Gap: Women-Only Leadership Development Programmes

Women-only training (WOT) courses have emerged as a strategic method for addressing a wide-array of concerns, including stereotypes, representations and perceptions of women leaders, gender binaries, leadership styles, double binds, and work-life balance (Anderson, Vinnicombe, & Singh, 2008; Debebe, 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008; Ruminski & Holba, 2012; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003). WOT programmes also provide opportunities for women to build strong support networks, improve self-confidence, and learn leadership skills (Clarke, 2011).

However, a number of concerns have been raised about gender-specific approaches to leadership development. WOTs may unintentionally adopt a ‘fix-the-women’ perspective or ‘individual-deficit’ model (Crawford, 2012; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). According to this model, the best way to improve women’s work situations is to provide training and self-improvement programmes to help women “overcome their deficiencies” (Crawford, 2012, p. 329) and achieve a better ‘fit’ with the male-dominated business world (Ely et al., 2011). Such perspectives run the risk of blaming women for their underrepresentation in formal leadership positions and largely ignore the social factors which influence how gender is perceived and experienced in the workplace. As Crawford (2012) aptly observes, this leaves the work of change to women “without questioning the masculine values that underlie both corporate culture and the double day at home” (p. 329). Criticism has also been levelled at WOTs for overemphasising and celebrating women’s ‘innate’ differences without giving sufficient attention to the socially constructed nature of gender and inequality (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003).

The current and emerging literature on women’s leadership development often takes into account these limitations and is careful not to focus on ‘fixing’ or blaming women (Clarke, 2011; Ely et al., 2011; Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003). Stead (2014), along with Ely et al. (2011), recommend that women’s programmes attend to both the immediate context of leaders, such as the personal experiences and challenges of being a female leader, while at the same time analysing and critiquing the broader social contexts that dictate expected behaviours, gender roles, and cultural norms. A framework which utilises and is grounded equally in both gender studies *and* leadership studies is better situated to address sensitive women’s leadership issues, as it clearly demonstrates how gender shapes women’s paths to leadership, while simultaneously instilling in women a sense of their own agency and abilities (Ely et al., 2011).

But this dual agenda still doesn’t answer the question: *why women?* Since gender pertains to both women *and* men, wouldn’t mixed-gender groups be a more appropriate site from which to explore these important leadership issues? Why do women have to be the ones exclusively concerned with personal and structural change? In an ideal world, employing a poststructuralist feminist perspective to “challenge the gendered structures which have led to such a culture” would lead to “other more collective and relational models of the organisation...[which] value empathy, mutuality, reciprocity and sensitivity to emotional contexts” and where men and women could flourish together in leadership development

settings (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003, p. 302). However, women still face a unique set of leadership problems that often go unrecognised or ignored by others (Hopkins et al., 2008; Stead & Elliott, 2009). When sensitive topics such as gender bias, gender equity, feminism, and personal leadership challenges are introduced in mixed-gender leadership development settings, they tend to invoke a wide array of emotions, often resulting in resistance, denial and reactance among both men and women (Crosby, 2012; Ely et al., 2011; Wahl, 2015; Zawadzki, Danube, & Shields, 2012). Furthermore, as Debebe (2011) explains, many women inadvertently hold themselves and others⁹ back from developing their full leadership potential due to their own “unexamined and internalized gendered messages” (p. 680). For these reasons, the immediate concern must be with developing women’s leadership potential within the present-day structures, providing women with strategies that are “advanced to meet their specific needs” (Hopkins et al., 2008, p. 351) while simultaneously enabling them to challenge the underlying power structures and processes which continue to hold them back (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003).

In addition, research findings consistently demonstrate the immediate tangible benefits and value of WOT development (Anderson et al., 2008; Clarke, 2011; Hopkins et al., 2008). In WOT environments, women’s perspectives are heard and validated and greater levels of openness and intimacy are achieved as women connect with, learn from, and support one another (Clarke, 2011; Ruminiski et al., 2012). In her Women’s Leadership Series studies with a group of female scientists, Debebe (2011) found that “the opportunity to learn with women was critical in making the participants feel that their experiences were valid and important...many said that they couldn’t have imagined themselves opening up as they did had they been in a mixed-gender environment” (p. 703). By providing women-specific material and establishing a safe place for learning, sharing and experimentation, women-only leadership programmes have the potential to create conditions in which female learners will be open to addressing questions concerned with gender *and* leadership. They will be more likely to lower their defences, suspend habitual patterns of perceiving and thinking, express their views, take risks, and become receptive to new possibilities (Clarke, 2011; Debebe, 2011).

⁹ Also called the ‘Queen Bee’ syndrome.

2.4.2 Current Trends and Approaches

To meet the concerns raised in the previous segment, WOT courses often adopt emancipatory or consciousness raising agendas (Ford et al., 2008; Stephenson-Abetz & Alemán, 2012), experiential learning techniques (Arnold & Foster, 2015; Hopkins et al., 2008; Zawadzki et al., 2012;), transformative learning methods (Debebe, 2011; Shollen, 2015), and interdisciplinary approaches (Ely et al., 2011; Ruminski & Holba, 2012) to facilitate leadership learning and development, redress gender imbalances, and incite changes in attitudes and practices. Rather than promoting a functionalist discourse which emphasises leader-centrism and individual performance, these forms of leadership development are interpretive, driven by the assumption that people can, as Carroll (2015) explains, “learn to be in leadership more effectively if their language, dynamics and assumptions become visible enough to them to enable patterns of talking, working and interacting to be changed and experimented with” (p. 100). This interpretive approach to leadership development is at the forefront of my study.

The primary focus of emancipatory or ‘consciousness raising’ (CR) leadership development programmes is not on learning skills or developing competencies, but rather on the development of “knowing of a third kind...knowing from within” (Ford et al., 2008, p. 182). Ford et al. (2008) argue that participants should be taught new or alternative ways of speaking about leadership that allow for “different possibilities of being” and which work to “challenge the unachievable norms of leadership, offering in place of a super-hero a model of a flawed individual in interactions with others” (p. 172). In line with poststructuralist feminist theorising, this approach interrogates the underlying power structures and gender inequalities which influence how leadership is constructed and experienced in the workplace. By enabling critical reflexivity and constructive discussion and dissent (Ford et al., 2008), CR initiatives can work to expose myths and deconstruct gendered ideologies, revealing how women may sometimes internalise gender biases and often unconsciously reinforce them (Stephens-Abetz & Alemán, 2012). However, failure to move beyond dialogue and proactively connect abstract theory to workplace practice may condemn emancipatory CR programmes to the seemingly inaccessible ivory towers of intellectual theorising.

Zawadzki et al. (2012) claim that “simply learning about gender inequity [is] not sufficient for knowledge retention” (p. 613), instead, to bridge the gap between theory and practice

and ensure long-term change, they recommend an experiential learning method based on Kolb's (1984) highly influential learning cycle model.¹⁰ As a systematic and carefully directed process, experiential learning begins with individuals engaging in an activity or having a concrete experience (whether through a structured intervention or generated spontaneously) which lends itself to protracted reflection. Personal reflection is supplemented with guided peer learning and discussion, eventuating in the formation of new insights or abstract ideas about the experience. Finally, participants are encouraged to incorporate newly acquired knowledge and emerging understandings into their lives through active experimentation in a variety of settings and situations (Kolb, 1984; Zawadzki et al., 2012). Experiential learning in this context is closely concerned with eliciting an emotional response in individual women, with the desired result being an identifiable change in attitudes or values (Arnold & Foster, 2015). However, with the focus so closely directed on the 'self', little attention may be given to the underlying power structures and processes which ultimately hold women back, resulting in an unintentional 'fix-the-women' approach.

Debebe (2009, 2011) proposes that women's leadership development should be a transformational experience. Developed by Mezirow (1991), transformational learning entails an epistemological change; a deep and significant alteration in an individual's "taken-for-granted frames of reference, such as personal paradigms, habits of mind, and assumptions" (Shollen, 2015, p. 38). This framework is based on the core supposition that deep individual change is a necessary prerequisite to fundamental organisational and structural change (Debebe, 2011). Why? As mentioned previously, even if structural conditions are drastically altered, "unexamined and internalised gender messages may still hold women back from developing their full leadership potential" (Debebe, 2011, p. 680). Transformative change in this context can be accomplished by employing a four step process that involves: (1) encountering and articulating disorientating dilemmas, (2) making meaning through constructive discourse and critical reflection (both individually and collaboratively), (3) achieving transformative insights (Mezirow, 1991), and, for the purpose of women's leadership development, (4) connecting these insights to real-world leadership practices and experiences (Debebe, 2009). For educators, Mezirow's model can serve as broad guiding framework for use in designing training programmes

¹⁰ Experiential learning consists of four phases: 1) concrete experience; 2) reflective observations; 3) abstract conceptualisations; 4) active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

which encourage deep engagement and meaningful exploration of women's leadership issues (and gender more generally) (Debebe, 2009).

In summary, women-only programmes provide a workable site from which to teach with intentionality, opening up gendered social structures and power inequities to close examination and transmitting relevant knowledge in order to engage female leaders in deep reflection to reawaken a commitment to change. As revealed in this review, successful frameworks share fundamental techniques in common. Firstly, they highlight the importance of supportive women-only groups to provide both those in, and aspiring to, leadership with a 'safe place' to discuss sensitive topics. Secondly, they recognise that for awareness and meaningful change to occur, an unsettling disruption must be manufactured, either through consciousness-raising dialogue, concrete experiences or disorientating dilemmas, or a combination of all three. Finally, they emphasise the importance of equipping women with alternative lenses and material as they are guided in reflective practice and critical self-reflexivity. As a learning method aimed at "complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities" (Cunliffe, 2002, p. 38), critical reflection assists individual women in shaping their "sense of themselves" (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003, p. 301). It encourages female leaders to "see themselves and their worlds in ways that were hitherto not visible to them," as they begin to "explore the 'nitty-gritty' of real life" (Ford et al., 2008, p. 177). By changing normative patterns of thinking (i.e. leader = hero, hero = male) and fostering an ability to recognise and reflect on the impact of gender on women's leadership, an individual's sense of personal agency can be expanded and provide a platform from which she can begin to actively 'story' herself as a leader (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

2.4.3 A 'Fusion' of Disciplines: Embracing Interdisciplinary Methods

In the preceding section I identified women's leadership development programmes as appropriate sites for addressing women's leadership issues using gender-specific resources. Although legitimate concerns have been raised over the nature of women-only programmes, aspiring female leaders still form a distinct group with a particular set of labyrinthine struggles and challenges. Issues concerned with gender and leadership often fail to be explored with the requisite depth and scope in mixed-gender settings due to resistance and reactance. As such, women's leadership development and education remains an important field of academic research.

However, there is room for more creative and innovative pedagogical approaches to women's leadership development, in particular, those which hold the potential to catalyse transformational learning (Debebe et al., 2014). According to Ruminski et al. (2012), women are starting to seek programmes that infuse leadership development approaches with other perspectives from across the social sciences, humanities and arts. Interdisciplinary programmes that combine, for instance, feminism, women's history, sociological perspectives, leadership studies, and communication concepts offer "rich possibilities for scholarly analysis, functional praxis and constructive social change" (Ruminski et al., 2012, p. 6). This growing call for new ways of 'doing', 'seeing' and 'sense-making' is echoed throughout the management and leadership development literature (Sutherland, 2012). Traditional approaches to content development fall short of embracing the complexity, dynamism, chaos and highly subjective relational environments of the modern workplace (Sutherland, 2012). Rational-oriented means of doing education have also been criticised for placing too much emphasis on standard tools, objective analysis and ready-made solutions, failing to meet the myriad challenges found in contemporary organisations, and wider society (Garavan, McGurry, Watson, D'Annunzio-Green, & O'Brien, 2015; Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015). To meet this gap, growing attention is being paid to arts-related methods informed by humanities disciplines (Adler, 2011; Barry & Meisiek, 2010; Garavan et al., 2015; Marturano et al., 2013; Sutherland, 2012; Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009).

2.5 'Artful' Approaches to Leadership Development

Art makes its claim to truth based on resonance with the individual.

– Steven S. Taylor & Donna Ladkin¹¹

Interdisciplinary approaches combined with 'artful' methods, materials, or texts can take innumerable forms, offering exciting possibilities for the development of new teaching resources and the introduction of more innovative interventions. 'Artful' approaches are not without their critics however. If one applies scientific principles of objectivity and positivist verification to the humanities, 'art' appears to have little epistemic value since it doesn't produce verifiable 'facts' based on data (Ciulla, 2008), nor, according to its critics,

¹¹ Reference: Taylor & Ladkin, 2009, p. 59.

does it aid with skills training, or provide specific prescriptions and tools to solve immediate leadership problems and make technical decisions (Gagliardi, 2006). Since many people associate art, and particularly literature, with “abstruse academic talk about Freudian imagery or deconstruction” (Badaracco, 2006, p. 2), it can seem irrelevant, inconsequential or even too subjective to some leadership practitioners and participants. However, we live in a complex world which cannot be completely understood solely by referring to scientific forms of sense-making and logic (Sutherland, 2012). In this section I will outline some of the key advantages of ‘artful’ approaches to leadership in light of these criticisms, before briefly highlighting the considerable potential of emerging arts-based interventions for leadership learning and development, ranging from music and drama to literature and artistic experimentation.

2.5.1 Enhancing Engagement

According to Taylor and Statler (2014), there is the very real possibility that arts-based interventions can facilitate greater levels of engagement, and thereby, improve overall learning outcomes. How is this possible? Taylor (2008) has identified four key advantages of arts-based learning:

- (a) They represent tacit/embodied forms of knowing or direct sensory experience;
- (b) such experiences may be interpreted holistically rather than through logical, systematic processes;
- (c) they encourage meaning-making related directly to personal experiences and
- (d) arts-based experiences may have lasting impacts because they are enjoyable and shareable. (p. 399–400)

In these ways, arts-based interventions increase opportunities for connecting the intellect with emotions, challenge norms and assumptions, and value the subjective and relational facets of the human experience (Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015). ‘Leaders’ can begin to ‘make sense of’ themselves and leadership through reading (literature, history and/or philosophy), performing (drama), gazing (fine art and film), listening (music), or making (workarts and craft).

2.5.2 The ‘Human’ Context

Traditional methods used in leadership development and education, such as case studies, are starting to be criticised on the grounds that they train people to engage superficially with problems (Small, 2006). As Boje (2001) explains, unlike the “unprocessed story” formal case studies replace and reconstruct ‘stories’ of the flux of human experience with

“a ‘narrative’ plot” and a neatly packaged ‘moral’ “to be comprehended as a sequential whole,” trapping learners into obvious and simplistic endings (p. 8). Subsequently, leaders and/or managers become disconnected from the deeply human aspects of managing, leading, and following others. The arts and humanities, on the other hand, favour “rich exploration of the human condition over the development of simple statistical laws” (Hendry, 2006, p. 277) since the artist, writer, and composer often observe things from alternate, more creative perspectives (Cronin, 2009). This suggests that arts-based methods and material provide a broader, more ‘human’ lens from which to understand the “context and values that shape the relationship of leaders and followers,” as well as the phenomenon of leadership itself (Ciulla, 2011, p. 23). This is echoed by Garavan et al. (2015) who explain that while conventional interventions almost always focus on the individual leader with little recognition of the role of followers, arts-based interventions are more likely to highlight the intricate nuances and multi-faceted nature of leadership and followership, along with the myriad expectations arising from different leadership contexts and purposes.

2.5.3 Different ‘Artful’ Approaches and Sites of Practice

The arts and humanities are ideally placed to respond to the complexities of everyday life and the chaos of the modern business world since they offer novel ways of describing and interacting with complexity (Adler, 2006; Sutherland, 2012). But what forms do these ‘novel’ interventions, methods, and sites of inquiry take?

In terms of the performing arts, music (Sutherland, 2012; Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015), as well as drama and theatre (Coopey, 2007; Ibbotson, 2008) have been used to great effect to create artistic workspaces where participants engage in “aesthetic reflexivity to create memories with momentum to inform their future leadership practice” (Sutherland, 2012, p. 25). There is also growing attention being paid to ‘workarts’ and crafts, where learners experience artist-led intervention or engage in the act of making art and/or artistic experimentation, for example, creating physical objects like leadership ‘masks,’ sculptures, or drawings (Ibbotson, 2008; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009). Barry and Meisiek (2010) explain that the use of analogous artefacts defamiliarises the “habitual ways of seeing and believing, enabling them [leaders] to make new distinctions and to shift contexts: to see more and see differently” (p. 1505). Visual art and other media forms, such as famous paintings (McManus & Perruci, 2015) and, more popularly, film and television (Bumpus, 2005; Champoux, 1999; Clemens & Woolf, 1999; Hartwick Humanities in Management

Institute, n.d.), have all been employed successfully in place of traditional business case studies as they provide stimulating and memorable examples of leadership ‘in action’.

However, perhaps the most popular and widely researched arts-related intervention is literature, both fiction and non-fiction.¹² Strong arguments have been made in favour of using literary fiction, including novels, plays and short stories, to explore leadership and management behaviours, issues and theories in order to inspire critical reflection and incite personal change and improvement (Badaracco, 2006; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthoux, 1994; McManus & Perruci, 2015; Knights & Willmott, 1999). As Taylor and Ladkin (2009) point out, there is a virtual cottage industry in mining Shakespeare’s plays for ‘universal’ leadership lessons (e.g. Augustine & Adelman, 1999; Whitney & Packer, 2000). Seminal philosophical texts by scholars such as Aristotle, Plato, and Machiavelli have also been lauded for their timeless leadership examples (Clemens & Meyer, 1999; McManus & Perruci, 2015), as have autobiographies, biographies, and histories of great men and women (Sucher, 2007). Recently, children’s stories (Nehls, 2012), Aesop’s Fables (Short & Ketchen, 2005), and graphic comic novels (Short, Randolph-Seng, & McKenny, 2013) have been identified as excellent discussion starters and potential sources of management and leadership wisdom. Some researchers have even taken an all-encompassing approach, incorporating literary fiction, movies, philosophical texts, theatre, fine art and music into their leadership education and development texts and programmes (Carroll & Flood, 2010; McManus & Perruci, 2015). As evidenced by this review, the creative possibilities are quite endless.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the critical ‘post-heroic’ approach to leadership I have adopted for my study. Emphasis was placed on understanding leadership as a relational and socially constructed phenomenon; in particular, Ladkin’s (2010) explanation of the leadership ‘moment’. This process-based leadership perspective underpins my research and guides all further analysis. After problematising the notion of ‘gender neutrality’ in post-heroic perspectives, I turned to the broad topic of women and leadership. This analysis utilised social constructionism to unpack the term ‘gender’, along with a multi-lens feminist

¹² However, as Warner (2011) points out, this field is still yet to receive the full attention it deserves from scholars and leadership practitioners – See also Section 1.2.

approach which revealed the wide-range of problematic issues and concerns that continue to contribute to women's underrepresentation in formal leadership positions. Despite the appearance of post-heroic models and social process theories of leadership, persisting gender inequality and the ongoing subscription to 'absent but present' gendered expectations and stereotypes continues to place female leaders at a distinct disadvantage (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Clarke, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2012; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). This review resulted in the production of Table 3 as an informing conceptual framework for this study.

I then reviewed the field of women's leadership development to consider how leadership practitioners are addressing these issues at the interpersonal level, as well as the concerns which have been raised over the nature of women-only programmes. This section revealed that while there is still a lack of resources and teaching materials suited to the specific concerns of female leaders, well-designed women's leadership development programmes can be effectively harnessed to address gender-related issues (Ruminski & Holba, 2012). I found that meaningful change may be achieved by minimising opportunities for resistance and reactance, creating disruptions in people's everyday perceptions, and encouraging critical reflection. The final section explored the growing call for more interdisciplinary and innovative pedagogical approaches to women's leadership development. I identified 'artful' humanities-based interventions as an emergent field suited to meeting these requirements. While some might argue this is a grievous misuse of art and that art should always be 'an end in itself' (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009), 'artful' approaches can help leaders and followers to "evaluate events and persons with greater humility, to view phenomena from a broad perspective, to courageously confront moral risks and responsibility" (Gagliardi, 2006, p. 8). Not only do arts-based interventions have the potential to enhance engagement, but they present a vast array of largely untapped opportunities and unlimited possibilities for research (Marturano et al., 2013; Small, 2006). In the following chapter I take this analysis further by presenting an overview of the existing literary approaches to leadership development in order to justify this study.

Chapter 3: Why Literary Fiction?

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to make the reader better acquainted with the current research and methods for using fiction in ‘artful’ literary approaches to leadership development. While a number of diverse arts-based methods, for example music or performing arts, could potentially be utilised for women’s leadership development, I have chosen to harness the transformative qualities of literary fiction to awaken curiosity, deactivate indifference, and encourage critical self-reflexivity. There are several reasons for this choice. These include my background as an English student, the ‘transformative’ qualities of well-written stories, and the collaborative opportunities afforded by reading fiction. To demonstrate the viability of this approach to the reader and to justify the direction of my own research, I provide a review of four recent texts that employ literature for leadership development and education purposes. As a result of this evaluation, I identify an important ‘gap’ in the selection of literary texts. Namely, that women writers and women’s leadership experiences are invisible from the existing canon of research.

3.2 The Transformative Power of Stories

Growing attention is being directed towards the power of literary fiction to invoke transformative insight (e.g. Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence, 2008). In a recent study with 131 undergraduate and graduate students, Hoggan and Cranton (2015) found that fictional stories can serve as “intellectual and emotional catalyst[s]” (p. 22) as they arouse strong emotional responses and inspire deep critical reflection in learners. In this section I investigate how fictional content, reader-response, and the collaborative opportunities afforded by reading all contribute to make stories such a powerful tool for leadership learning and development.

Well-written stories provide substantive content in the form of encapsulated and tractable renderings of real life situations. They are “something we can get our arms around and make sense of, unlike the disjointed flow of reality that we would otherwise face” (Sucher, 2008, p. 15). As Coles (1989) further explains, stories “not only keep us company, but admonish us, point us in new directions, or give us courage to stay on a given course” (p.

xvii), and, as a result, shape our experiences and understandings of the real world (Bruner, 2002). The whole point of good stories then is not to provide neatly packaged ‘solutions’ or ‘correct’ interpretations, but to broaden and even heighten our struggles (Coles, 1989); to ‘shock’ and push us “beyond the limits of our self-perception” (Bruns, 2011, p. 18). As a result, many stories offer dilemmas that are disorientating and cannot be easily ‘solved’ with simple formulas or facts.

By proactively engaging with fictional worlds and characters from a writer’s imagination, the reader and the text become caught up in one another. As Fisher and Sibley (2003) explain, “as we read ourselves...we project ourselves into the situation of the text” (p. xxxi). Fictional characters serve as ‘role models’ or ‘evocative objects’ which induce emotional and sympathetic connections, causing readers to either associate or disassociate themselves with certain characters and their actions or experiences. Since good literature both reflects and shapes lived experience, structured readings enacted for the purpose of transformative learning and discovery can lead learners to recognise themselves in the stories of others (Lawrence & Cranton, 2015), and, subsequently, to “generalize that recognition to taking a critical stance on their own perspectives and assumptions” (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015, p. 9). Yet at the same time, fiction also allows for “emotional distancing” or the disentangling of self from experience — “this is happening to some character in a story, not me”— creating a safe place from which to question and interrogate “deeply engrained ways of thinking and being” (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015, p. 22) without feeling personally vulnerable or threatened.

As people come together to read, share and discuss stories, they negotiate meaning, develop their thinking (Kooy, 2006), and support one another in a “collective working out of their relationship to the contemporary historical moment and the particular social conditions that characterise it” (Long, 2003, p. 22). Although largely invisible to scholars and rarely subject to serious academic investigation (Long, 2003), book clubs and reading groups have found some success as professional and leadership development strategies for teachers (e.g. Dengler, Lassarde, & Sterns, 2005; Kooy, 2006) and nurses (e.g. Greenawald & Adams, 2008; Steffen, 2006). In her protracted observation of book clubs in Houston, Texas, Long (2003) found that reading as a collaborative and organised activity is “quite literally productive” as it enables group members to “not merely to reflect on identities they already have, but also to bring new aspects of subjectivity into being” (p. 22), creating a platform for connecting theory with practice through thoughtful reflection

and collaborative debate and discussion (Kooy, 2006). Book clubs also foster an atmosphere of cooperation, personal sharing, and equality in turn-taking that is too often absent from more traditional ‘classroom’ settings (Addington, 2001). They provide “a time-honoured way for women to share stories in a safe place and simultaneously, claim their own voices” (Kooy, 2006, p. 13). For these reasons, book clubs may be a particularly innovative site from which to run women’s leadership development courses in the future.

In summary, not only is fiction an excellent source of consciousness-raising material, but literary critics also point out that literature observes social relations somewhat better than theory, as where theory is abstract and intangible, literature is concrete and particular (Rapaport, 2011). Dramatic, vivid, entertaining and more relatable to personal experiences than directives, ideologies or rules, good stories tend to make information more memorable and noteworthy (Nehls, 2012; Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001). But perhaps most importantly, stories have a ‘life of their own’, a life that extends beyond the pages of a management textbook and imbeds itself in the mind of a reader, exerting influence long into the future (Sucher, 2007).

3.3 Reviewing Frameworks, Assessing Methods and Identifying Gaps in the Literature

There is no doubt that literature is a valuable source of material for taking discussions to a deeper, more significant level. But how can literary fiction best be utilised for leadership development and learning? In this segment I compare and contrast four different methods, considering not only how and for what purposes the authors use fictional stories for leadership and/or management development, but also how they chose their texts and by what criteria. These four texts were selected due to being widely representative of a range of different approaches.

Knights and Willmott (1999), Badaracco (2006) and, more recently, McManus and Perruci (2015), have created conceptual and theoretical frameworks and methods to draw out insights from literary texts for the purpose of inviting readers to “learn about leadership and about themselves” (Badaracco, 2006, p. 3) and, in the process, develop “multidimensional thinking” (McManus & Perruci, 2015, p. xxi). As a point of contrast, I have chosen a book chapter from *Management Education and Humanities* by Czarniawska

and Rhodes (2006). They adopt a socio-political approach to analyse social constructions of leadership in order to reveal the ‘strong plots’ in popular fiction which “work to emplote” gendered narratives in business (p. 198).

3.3.1 Developing Moral Leadership in *Questions of Character*

In *Questions of Character*, Badaracco (2006) explores leadership via self-reflective practice and discussion of serious works of fiction. Badaracco contends that in the best stories “literature and life converge,” giving a unique insider view of leadership: “It opens doors to a world rarely seen...It lets us watch leaders as they think, worry, hope, hesitate, commit, exult, regret, and reflect” (p. 3), revealing “what they [leaders] are thinking” (p. 4). For example, in his reading of the play *Death of a Salesman*, Badaracco asks: “As a leader do I have a good dream?” Badaracco claims that the play puts two propositions about dreams in front of us: “The challenging idea is that we are all creatures of our dreams. They drive all of us. The disconcerting proposition is that the wrong dreams are slow-acting poisons” (p. 12). However, since “many people associate literature with abstruse academic talk” (p. 2), Badaracco proposes that works of fiction be treated like business case studies, with set questions being addressed and debated alongside the story. In this way ‘serious fiction’ serves as a powerful stimulus for discussion, raising questions which compel individuals to carefully examine themselves and how they lead.

Questions of Character is primarily concerned with what it means and takes to be a ‘moral’ business leader. By raising questions on issues such as trust, obligation, and decision-making, Badaracco attempts to help aspiring leaders develop clarity of “who one is” when faced with “classic leadership dilemmas” (p. 5). In grappling with ‘questions of character’, such as: “How flexible is my moral code? Am I ready to *take* responsibility? Do I really care?” (p. 6-7), men and women “gain a deeper understanding of themselves and of ways to lead more effectively” (p. 5). However, Badaracco focuses on the primacy of the individual ‘leader’; a ‘type’ of person who fits into a universal definition of ‘leadership’. He writes: “The basic challenges of leaders appear so widely, perhaps even *universally*, because they reflect *enduring* aspects of leadership. One is the humanity of leaders – the hopes and fears, traits and instincts of the human nature we all share. The other is the unchanging agenda, in *all* times and places: developing a goal...and working with and through people to make it real” (p. 6, emphasis added). By defining ‘leadership’ in objective terms as an identifiable entity (the ‘leader’) rather than as a socially constructed phenomenon (a ‘process’ of collective relations) (Ladkin, 2010), Badaracco

limits his study to positivist traits-based archetypes where self-determinism serves as the key to success.

In his selection of literature, Badaracco chooses stories “that cast a strong light on the recurring tests of character,” featuring people “in positions of responsibility” (p. 5). To find these stories, Badaracco turns to serious fiction. Serious literature must pass two rough tests: The “test of time,” are they classics?, and the test of “careful reading,” that is, do they have depth and richness? (p. 5). Examples of the novels and plays he’s chosen include *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt, and *I Come as a Thief* by Louis Auchincloss. But why not fiction about business executives? Badaracco explains that much of the fiction about leadership in business contexts is poorly suited for the task of personal reflection as it presents leaders “as one-dimensional people, dominated by the pursuit of wealth and power” (p. 5).

What is so compelling about Badaracco’s approach is its conciseness; the focus is on a single theme – how to *become* a moral leader. Each chapter neatly ties in a story about a ‘leader’ who either displays character or fails to do so and how this relates to ‘real life’ business situations. Rather than providing ‘right’ answers, Badaracco encourages readers to ask thought-provoking questions and search “for explanations...by looking at themselves rather than blaming others” (p. 41). A typical set of questions, such as those for *Things Fall Apart*, include: “How deep are the emotional roots of my moral code? What do my failures tell me? How have I handled ethical surprises?” (p. 34–41). However, while Badaracco claims to be writing for both men and women, his perspective is skewed towards male-dominated narratives. In his selection of literature, Badaracco has only chosen male authors (e.g. Joseph Conrad, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Bolt), and the majority of characters are men. The two female figures who briefly appear, Vesta Lotte Battle from *Blessed Assurance*, and Antigone from Sophocles’ Greek tragedy of the same name, are restricted to maternal or family-centric roles, Vesta as a role-model, and Antigone as an example of destructive leadership. This highlights the ongoing problem of female leaders’ ‘invisibility’ since Badaracco, perhaps unintentionally, equates leadership with traditional masculinity (Sinclair, 2005).

3.3.2 *Understanding Leadership: An Arts and Humanities Perspective*

Whereas Badaracco’s (2006) attention is on self-development, in *Understanding Leadership: An Arts and Humanities Perspective*, McManus and Perruci (2015) stress the

importance of developing a ‘correct’ understanding of leadership: “The first step is not action; the first step is understanding. The first question is how to think about leadership” (Gardner as cited McManus & Perruci, 2015, p. 5). McManus and Perruci believe that since we live in a “complex world,” multidimensional thinking is necessary if “students of leadership” wish to find meaning and purpose as they lead themselves as well as others (p. xxi). How is this ‘multidimensional thinking’ developed? Studying leadership from an arts and humanities perspective provides “the tools, the insight, and the understanding to ask questions, challenge underlying assumptions, and think critically to understand the complexity and interconnection between and among disciplines” (p. xv).

Underpinning McManus and Perruci’s critical approach to leadership is ‘The Five Components of Leadership Model’. This model recognises that the leader, the followers, the goal, the environmental context, as well as cultural norms and values, are all equally important and provide a common language by which to discuss and, eventually, practice leadership as a ‘social process’ (Perruci, 2014). The problem, the authors realise, is that in the West “we have long conceptualised leadership as an individual enterprise, when, in reality, leadership by its very nature is a *collective* undertaking, designed to benefit everyone” (p. 210). This reflects the growing consensus in leadership research which contends that a single, formal leader is impractical and unsustainable in today’s business environment, particularly given the growth of flatter, team-based, and interdependent organisational structures and self-managed, cross-functional teams (Carter, DeChurch, Braun, & Contractor, 2015; Perruci, 2014). Defining leadership as a ‘collective process’ brings “an appreciation of the landscape in which it occurs, encourages us to consider the air it breathes, the environment which feeds it, as well as its distinctive occurrence” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 16). In this way, McManus and Perruci offer a more theoretically rigorous understanding of leadership than Badaracco (2006) does.

McManus and Perruci define their criteria for selection as ‘classic works’ which can be easily accessed by readers. Rather than only using literary fiction, the authors make a wider selection which encompasses, for example, *The Prince* by Machiavelli, Charlie Chaplin’s film *Modern Times*, Eugène Delacroix’s painting “July 28: Liberty Leading the People,” and even Antonín Dvořák’s *New World Symphony*, alongside selected plays and novels. McManus and Perruci engage in ‘textual analysis’ to read and interpret the themes found in the selected artefacts and the context in which each artefact was originally produced. Parts one and two of the book use these ‘classics’ to illustrate The Five

Components of Leadership Model. For example, to highlight the importance of good followership and to differentiate between ‘types’ of followers, McManus and Perruci read Arthur Miller’s adaptation of Ibsen’s famous play *An Enemy of the People*. This approach is more in line with ‘leadership education’ as opposed to ‘self-development’ as the focus is on assimilating knowledge and learning *about* leadership in order to establish a strong “disciplinary foundation” (Perruci, 2014, p. 43). It is only in the final, and comparatively smaller section (46 of 255 pages), that McManus and Perruci turn to the reflexive questions: “Leadership for what? How will you apply these concepts to yourself?” (p. 209). However, like Badaracco, McManus and Perruci also fail to use any notable female authors or characters in their discussion. When considering “leadership to develop others” (p. 225), they use a play by Athol Fugard called “*Master Harold*” ...*and the Boys* to discuss transformational and collaborative leadership, theories which have been more readily associated with ‘feminine’ communal styles of leadership (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). In conclusion, even though McManus and Perruci exclude women’s perspectives, their approach creates an illuminating framework that provokes the multidimensional thinking required for understanding leadership and decision-making from a process perspective.

3.3.3 Illustrative Analysis in *Management Lives*

Management Lives (1999) was one of the first books to systematically integrate the use of novels with a conceptual framework for the purpose of “analysing the lived experience of management” (p. x). While Knights and Willmott have labelled their study a “small contribution” to the emerging dialogue on ‘artful’ methods, it is the product of several years’ collaboration and experimentation. Knights and Willmott adopt a pedagogical strategy to closely investigate four interrelated themes: identity, insecurity, power, and inequality at work. They explain that knowledge about management¹³ “benefits from placing it within the broader context of human life and society” (p. 1), and contemporary novels are perfectly suited to illuminate the deeply human and social aspects of work life.

¹³ *Management or Leadership?* Knights and Willmott use the term ‘management’ in their analysis as opposed to ‘leadership’. While the terms can at times overlap (Northouse, 2016), in this case Knights and Willmott explain: “We refrain from treating management from the point of view of a set of theories and/or a series of techniques that examine what are assumed to be effective yet diverse ways of managing (e.g. motivation, leadership, training, organisational structure). Instead, we seek to address *managing* as a vibrant, complex, challenging and even exciting human experience” (p. viii). However, since their four interrelated themes – power, inequality, insecurity, identity – are also facets of leading and leadership, as well as managing and management, I am making the assumption that where Knights and Willmott talk about ‘management’, their analysis could simultaneously and more widely refer, in some cases, to ‘leadership’.

But whereas Badaracco (2006) highlights literatures' transcendent and universal 'lessons' as the primary reason for using fiction, Knights and Willmott claim this is an "innovative alternative" to prosaic business texts and predictable guru guides. In fact, Knights and Willmott are scathing in their evaluation of management textbooks, claiming that the current range of options are "unhelpful, narrow and unduly sterile" (p. 14). However, their aim is not to completely replace traditional methods, but rather, to complement textbook learning with "different and fresh perspective[s]" and to facilitate "the development of a more critical, questioning approach to the study of management" (p. x) and, by association, leadership.

Four novels are used in *Management Lives* for the purpose of 'illustrative analysis,' an interpretive technique that is intended to be both instructive and entertaining. Rather than review each novel on their own, Knights and Willmott present a carefully integrated discussion that is guided by a conceptual framework that comprises four central and interlinked themes for "making sense of the complexity of social relations" – power, inequality, identity and insecurity (p. 163). To illustrate each concept in practice, examples are drawn from the novels in order to develop "a meaningful illustration of, and complement to, academic treatments of these issues" (p. 25). They incorporate theoretical perspectives, for example, behaviourism and symbolic interactionism (p. 53) and 'Luke's three-dimensional model of power' (p. 95), into their analysis to illuminate the fictional examples, and concurrently, for the stories to illuminate the theory.

The authors acknowledge their subjective interpretive position, explaining that "when we say that we are 'drawing out insights' that are 'contained' in the novels, we are speaking in a loose and rather commonsense manner. A moment's reflection reminds us that these insights arise from *our reading* of the novels" (p. 7). Subsequently, they are acutely aware of the need to steer away from overly simplistic interpretations or 'universal' lessons. Instead they emphasise the importance of guiding and encouraging readers to "value and develop their own interpretive and critical resources" (p. 26). In these ways, their research encourages critical reflection and reflexivity on the personal and structural elements of power, management and leadership.

For their literary examples, Knights and Willmott draw on contemporary novels by well-known male writers, principally *Nice Work* by David Lodge, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* by Milan Kundera, *The Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro, and *The Bonfire of*

the Vanities by Tom Wolfe. Little is provided in the way of justification for these selections beyond the dual stipulation that they be “effective in ‘bringing to life’ dimensions of human experience” (p. 5) and “distil and dramatize issues that, at best, appear as brief, formulaic case studies in standard textbooks” (p. 8). As an added bonus, these texts have all been made into TV series or films. In terms of making women’s experiences visible, Knights and Willmott do slightly better than Badaracco (2006) and McManus and Perruci (2015) at interrogating the socially constructed nature of women’s subordination at work. Using an excerpt from the novel *Nice Work*, the authors briefly address the typified male/female gender binary in a segment on stereotyping and inequality. They compare and contrast Vic, the ‘hero’ – a traditional, effective manager, the ‘macho’ man “who enthusiastically pursues a no-nonsense approach to business” (p. 15) – to Robyn, a progressive, middle class feminist, and university professor who is subject to both hostile and subtle sexism throughout the novel. Nonetheless, the book still constructs the male manager or leader as normative by predominantly focusing on male protagonists in novels written by men.

3.3.4 Identifying Strong Plots through Popular Literature

Rather than it being “good novels that count,”¹⁴ Czarniawska and Rhodes (2006) contend that popular culture, and consequently popular fiction, have a stronger influence on the theory and practice of management and leadership. Their interest in the relationship between popular fiction and leadership development is in terms of “how each work to emplot working life into particular narratives” (p. 198). While Badaracco (2006) focuses on “I” as the measure of value, Czarniawska and Rhodes problematise the power of “I” and self-reflection, asking: “Are leaders therefore the products or the producers? Effects or causes?” (p. 196). Furthermore, unlike Badaracco (2006) who considers the principles and traits governing leaders, and subsequently leadership, universal and unchanging, Czarniawska and Rhodes take a poststructuralist approach. They argue that since people learn primarily by “contact imitation” (p. 199), it is the ‘strong plots’ (the dominant

¹⁴ In 1994, Barbara Czarniawska co-edited a book titled *Good Novels, Better Management*. This text used classic literature by authors such as Zola, Conrad and Prus to encourage multidimensional thinking in management practice, the key idea being that “novels offer vicarious experience, and a sense of history and tradition in management.” However, they were very firm on one point: it was only *good* novels that counted (Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2006, p. 197).

narratives found in popular culture, i.e. novels, movies, TV, magazines, news) which influence the ways leadership is practiced in organisations. Popular culture with its “larger-than-life heroes” not only transmits and furnishes descriptions of masculine, ‘great person’ constructs of leadership, but also “teaches practices and provides a means through which practices might be understood” (p. 199). In short: “The mirroring and the projection, the expression and the construction, the imitation and the creation are never separated. Expression becomes control, as popular culture selects and reinforces certain wishes and anxieties of its audience” (Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2006, p. 199). Based on this proposition, reading for self-development as Badaracco (2006) suggests is moot if ‘ethical leadership’ is not a current ‘strong plot,’ since “detouring from expected forms of emplotted behaviour [will] be rendered unacceptable” in organisational reality (Czarniawska & Rhodes, 2006, p. 199). Therefore, ‘socio-political’ frameworks for analysing literature reveal and address ‘taken-for-granted realities’ along with the assumptions and objectifications which underlie a phenomenon like leadership.

Czarniawska and Rhodes provide an example of socio-political literary analysis in a close reading of a detective story called *Starfall*, examining how the novel “perpetuates certain strong plots in relation to gendered practice in the financial service industry” (p. 199). Elin Friman, the only fleshed out female character in the story, is a businesswoman who has transgressed into a man’s world. Rather than being taken seriously, Elin is perceived by her male colleagues as a sex object or symbol. Her portrayal is problematic, since “Elin is even more intelligent than most, thus reinforcing the conviction that, for the same job, women need to be twice as good as men” (p. 206). The final message of the story, Czarniawska and Rhodes contend, is that the world of finance is no place for female ‘leaders’, those who make it there are “unnatural – twice everything the men are” (p. 206). In this instance, the novel captures the prevailing view of ‘female leadership’ as accepted and encouraged in popular culture, especially in the high-flying financial industry (p. 207). Czarniawska and Rhodes don’t give any solutions to leadership dilemmas, present new, exciting theories, or attempt to make individuals ‘better leaders’. Their use of literature as a leadership development and/or learning tool is concerned solely with consciousness-raising – using stories to reveal *how* things are and the ‘strong plots’ which govern the way society conceptualises leadership at any given point in time.

The findings from this review are arranged and summarised in Table 4.

Table 4 Summary of the Four Approaches

Title and Author/s:	Purpose:	Format/layout:	Method/s for Analysing Texts:	Method/s for Selecting Texts	Primary Literary Texts (excludes other art forms):
<p><i>Questions of Character: Illuminating the Heart of Leadership Through Literature</i> (2006) by Joseph L. Badaracco</p>	<p><i>Leadership development:</i> Developing moral and ethical leaders by guiding individuals in deep critical reflection.</p>	<p>Eight ‘moral leadership’ questions form eight separate chapters. Each chapter uses one literary text to explore a specific moral or ethical question/issue.</p>	<p>Textual/content analysis: Identifying universal ‘lessons’ (post-positivist), self-reflective questions, fictional stories as individual ‘case studies’</p>	<p>Dual testing criteria: 1) ‘Test of time’ – classic works 2) Test of ‘careful reading’ Subjective opinion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Death of a Salesman</i> by Arthur Miller • <i>Things Fall Apart</i> by Chinua Achebe • “Blessed Assurance” by Allen Gurganus • <i>The Love of the Last Tycoon</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald • “The Secret Sharer” by Joseph Conrad • <i>I Come as a Thief</i> by Louis Auchincloss • <i>A Man for All Seasons</i> by Robert Bolt • <i>Antigone</i> by Sophocles
<p><i>Understanding Leadership: An Arts and Humanities Perspective</i> (2015) by Robert M. McManus and Gama Perruci</p>	<p><i>Leadership education:</i> Teaching the ‘correct’ leadership theory in order to encourage multidimensional thinking in both leaders and followers.</p>	<p>Fourteen chapters which each investigate a different aspect of the ‘Five Components of Leadership Model.’ Each chapter employs one or more arts-based ‘units’ for informing analysis.</p>	<p>Critical theorising, fictional stories and other forms of art as ‘case studies’, social constructionism, self-reflective questions (final section only)</p>	<p>Dual testing criteria: 1) Classic works 2) Easy access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> by Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels in relation to <i>Anthem</i> by Ayn Rand • <i>An Enemy of the People</i> by Henrik Ibsen (adapted by Arthur Miller) • <i>The Prince</i> by Machiavelli • <i>Siddhartha: An Indian Tale</i> by Hermann Hesse • <i>Tao Te Ching</i> by Lao Tzu • “<i>Master Harold</i>”...and the Boys by Athol Fugard
<p><i>Management Lives: Power and Identity in Work Organisations</i> (1999) by David Knights and Hugh Willmott</p>	<p><i>Management/leadership education and development:</i> Renewing understandings of management as <i>lived experience</i> and guiding reflexive practice.</p>	<p>Integrated and thematic analysis of four interrelated concepts. The four novels are used interchangeably to explore all four themes. Novel synopses are included as an appendix.</p>	<p>Critical theorising, social constructionism, illustrative analysis (using excerpts from texts), socio-political analysis, critical reflection and reflexivity</p>	<p>Contemporary novels that ‘fit’ with conceptual framework, subjective opinion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nice Work</i> by David Lodge • <i>The Unbearable Lightness of Being</i> by Milan Kundera • <i>The Remains of the Day</i> by Kazuo Ishiguro • <i>The Bonfire of the Vanities</i> by Tom Wolfe
<p>“Strong Plots: Popular Culture in Management” (2006) by Barbara Czarniawska and Carl Rhodes</p>	<p><i>Social criticism:</i> Identifying ‘strong plots’ in the business environment that influence leadership and management, with special attention on gender representations.</p>	<p>Segment from a book chapter which uses two ‘pop culture’ books as examples of ‘strong plots’ regarding the common perceptions of women in organisations.</p>	<p>Close-reading, poststructuralist theorising, gender studies, socio-political analysis, interpretive analysis</p>	<p>Mainstream detective novels, subjective opinion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Starfall</i> by David Lagercrantz • <i>Nest of Vipers</i> by Linda Davies

3.4 The Invisibility of Women's Stories and Female Perspectives

As revealed in my review, there is a 'gap' in the selection of literature. Stories written by women which feature dynamic, fully-fleshed female voices are blaringly absent from the current studies and recommended reading lists. For example, Badaracco (2006) in his choice of 'serious fiction' only picks stories written by men, with six of the eight texts published over fifty years ago. Subsequently, the two female characters who are given 'voices' are constrained to familiar maternal or family-oriented leadership roles. While he does recommend two female authors, Barbara Kingsolver and Ayn Rand, in his final bibliography, they represent only two out of twenty-three suggestions. Likewise, McManus and Perruci (2015) fail to counterbalance male hegemony with the feminine 'other' in their analysis. In their only example of a woman in leadership, they idealise 'Lady Liberty' from Delacroix's famous painting. She is an 'invisible' leader whose value is completely vested in her symbolic power (McManus & Perruci, 2015, p. 62).¹⁵ While Knights and Willmott (1999) use more contemporary novels, such as *The Remains of the Day* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, they still fail to recommend a novel by a female author.

A more comprehensive analysis of the books and articles in this field further illustrate this unsettling pattern. For Harvard Business School's popular literature-based leadership course titled "The Moral Leader," Sucher (2008) only uses two texts by female authors – an 11-page short story called 'Trifles' by Susan Glaspell, and an autobiography by *Washington Post* magnate Katherine Graham. In her bibliography list, Sucher does only slightly better than Badaracco, citing six novels by female authors out of thirty-five recommendations. Brawer (1998) in *Fictions of Business: Insights on Management from Great Literature* ignores women's literature altogether and takes his discussion points from classic novels by authors like Chaucer, George Bernard Shaw, Mark Twain and Joseph Conrad. Similarly, Whitney and Packer (2000) in *Power Plays: Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management* devote an entire book to Shakespeare's 'great men' dramas, such as *Julius Caesar*, *Henry IV*, and *Macbeth*. The Hartwick Humanities in Management Institute has published 57 literature-based cases and teaching notes (Peters & Nesteruk, 2014), however, less than 16% of the cases feature female characters or books

¹⁵ Although McManus and Perruci do use Ayn Rand's novella *Anthem* as a starting point for a discussion on directive approaches to leadership, the story features a male protagonist.

by women authors.¹⁶ Cronin (2009) also provides a male-dominated list, suggesting that students will gain invaluable insight from reading great plays and novels such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, Wole Soyinka's *Death and The King's Horseman*, Melville's *Billy Budd*, and Shakespearian tragedies. Even in more recent recommendation lists, such as that provided by Warner (2011), there is little offered in the way of inspiring women's writing, with Warner citing only one female author, Willa Cather for her American frontier novel *O Pioneers!*

3.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, when purposefully employed for leadership development, literary fiction has the potential to catalyse transformational learning and change. Good stories often present examples of disorientating and unsettling dilemmas or problems that cannot be easily 'solved' with simplistic formulas or facts. Instead they encourage dialogue in which contradictory interpretations may surface, allowing for the trying on of different points of view and divergent perspectives (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015). Although reading groups have been largely ignored by leadership scholars, research suggests that the transformative potentialities of fiction can be further enhanced in collaborative 'book club' settings (Kooy, 2006). An in-depth review of four representative and recent studies that employ literary fiction for leadership development and education were provided to demonstrate the viability of this approach and justify my own research paradigm (this is outlined in detail in Chapter Four). This chapter also highlighted the absence of women's literary texts and perspectives from the extant literature. As Anderson (2015) points out, this is reflective of wider society in general where "roles for men and stories about men continue to be the norm...characters and plots telling men's stories are considered the norm and they are not gender marked due to their supposed universal appeal" (p. 76). By failing to balance the male to female ratio of protagonists and authors in their selections, these texts continue to overemphasise masculine understandings of leadership and incorrectly frame leadership as 'gender neutral', unaffected by the values and norms of gendered discourse found in wider society (Stead & Elliott, 2009).

¹⁶ While some of the cases feature famous women from history, such as Saint Joan, Elizabeth I and Cleopatra, the only female authors on the Hartwick Humanities in Management Institute list are Susan Glaspell, Virginia Woolf and Rosemary Sutcliff.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The absence of any research that explores women's unique leadership concerns using literary fiction, along with the male-oriented scope of literary selections in the studies that do exist, presented an ideal research opportunity. The literature review on women's leadership set a clear direction in this regard, as it employed a multi-lens feminist perspective to identify an important set of topical issues concerned with gender that remain largely unresolved and ignored in the field of leadership studies and leadership development. An examination of emergent women's leadership development approaches and concerns pointed to the need for more creative, 'artful' approaches to leadership development. Literary fiction was then presented as an appropriate medium for addressing the complexities inherent in the field of leadership. This chapter offers a justification for my choice of research paradigm and outlines the key assumptions underpinning my approach, namely an interpretive critical research paradigm which incorporates Ladkin's (2010) leadership definition with a critical feminist perspective. It also provides a detailed explanation of the research methods and reading model I employed to systematically select, read, and interpret appropriate literary stories. Due to the absence of a template or systematic method for critically selecting or excluding literary texts beyond subjective opinion, I developed a set of reading boundaries and selection criteria which are outlined separately in Chapter Five.

4.2 My Research Philosophies

While all forms of qualitative research will be subjective and biased to a degree, interpretive inquiries using 'artful' methods and data are highly self-conscious, flexible and mutable (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). As a result, it is important for the researcher, as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, to clarify their epistemological position.

Epistemology can be defined as the philosophical underpinnings of a researcher's particular beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how it is created or gained (Yin, 2016). These assumptions regarding what knowledge is and how it is constructed "shape

how the researcher sees the world and acts in it” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 26). Subsequently, a researcher’s epistemological position implicitly guides the entire research design and closely informs the decision-making process. Research epistemologies normally fall between two major paradigms: positivist and interpretive (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A positivist orientation takes an objective and value free view of reality, that is, reality is observable, stable and measurable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Knowledge gained using a positivist paradigm is often claimed to be ‘scientific’, while an interpretive paradigm argues that reality is socially constructed and there is no single observable reality; multiple realities are created by human perceptions and explanations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Instead of ‘finding’ knowledge, researchers construct it; placing special emphasis on process, understanding, and meaning rather than final claims to truth. Since interpretive qualitative studies emphasise socially constructed realities, intersubjectivity, practical reasoning, and rich description (Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007), I have located my project within an interpretive paradigm in order to open up my selected literary texts to ‘questions, questions, questions’. I am deeply aware that there are no ‘right’ interpretations, but rather multiple meanings, perspectives and conclusions, all of which are potentially meaningful (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016).

My interpretive paradigm is further substantiated by situating it in the realm of critical leadership studies and critical feminist research. A basic assumption of critical research is that “all thought is mediated by power relations that are historically and socially constructed” (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011, p. 164). In the context of this project, I have identified both leadership and gender as socially constructed phenomena that are closely influenced by power dynamics (Collinson, 2011; Sinclair, 2005). A critical perspective holds that, in general, people tend to unconsciously accept things as they are, and, consequently, reinforce the status quo (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In terms of leadership, this approach works to challenge and interrogate hegemonic perspectives in the mainstream literature, particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions relating to power relationships in leadership dynamics and about how to act as ‘a leader’ or ‘a follower’ in contemporary organisations and societies (Collinson, 2011).

The tensions between men and women, masculinity and femininity, are unavoidable features of the leadership dynamic (Collinson, 2011). In light of critical feminist re-thinking, the structural and underlying power dynamics and gender norms that govern women’s leadership practices and experiences are made visible, allowing people to

proactively question and challenge gendered power relations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With this in mind, I foregrounded my use of a critical feminist perspective by employing a multi-lens feminist approach in my review of women's leadership (see Chapter Two).

4.3 Application of My Critical Research Paradigm

To apply a critical research approach to the data collection and data analysis phases, I adopted a two-pronged approach which comprised Ladkin's (2010) leadership 'moment' definition and a critical feminist perspective.

4.3.1 Revisiting Ladkin's Leadership 'Moment' Definition

As discussed in Section 2.1, leadership is a collective *process* or a 'moment' of social relations (Ladkin, 2010). Leaders and followers "develop a relationship and work together toward a goal within an environmental context shaped by cultural values and norms" (McManus & Perruci., 2015, p. 15). These four elements – leader/s, followers, context, and purpose – act in concert as a collective process when 'leadership' transpires.

In novels, short stories, and plays, multiple leadership 'moments' may transpire in a variety of contexts and for many different purposes. To recognise these moments within fictional narratives and as a technique for gathering evidence, I employed Figure 2 as a framework for guiding data collection and analysis. Ladkin's (2010) model worked to consciously re-orientate the focus away from a default 'leader-centric' understanding of events to reveal what goes on *between* people when leadership takes place and how it is experienced by different parties as they work together (or against one another) in various settings and for many different purposes. This critical perspective was also vitally important to my analysis of the literary texts because if women's attitudes and understandings don't transcend traditional definitions, whereby 'leadership' is naturally equated with the 'leader' figure, then the heroic-masculine model is merely replaced with a heroic-female acting in the same or a similar manner.

In addition to expanding 'leadership' beyond an individually-based unit of analysis, I also used this model to identify "the impact of absent or invisible aspects of an entity as well as explicitly present ones" (Ladkin, 2010, p. 6). This may include, unexamined expectations and unexpressed wishes, stories told about the leader/s, and multi-layers of culture. Ladkin (2010) suggests that when exploring a phenomenon such as leadership, often what we do

not see can be as important as what we do see. Where gender is concerned, these ‘absent but present’ expectations underpin leadership ‘moments’ and shape the experiences of those engaged in the leadership dynamic. The relationships between leaders and followers, as well as context and purpose, all became possible sites for further inquiry and thematic analysis, as it is within these ‘spaces between’ that socially constructed and unexamined gender expectations, perceptions and behaviours exert their influence.

4.3.2 Critical Feminist Lens

In conjunction with Ladkin’s (2010) leadership definition, I have drawn on feminist theory as a ‘lens’ for interrogating stories, identifying themes concerned with gender, and critically interpreting the content of literary texts. I employed this lens in order to make gender a central category for analysis as I explored the leadership ‘moments’ in my literary selections.

Applied to literature, feminist criticism is not about “labelling books as good or bad, sexist or non-sexist,” but rather setting aside conventional readings and/or patriarchal filters and instead reading to question and challenge what is done to and experienced by women (Parker, 2015, p. 169). It asks questions about gender, power and inequality that would otherwise go unexplored (Leavy, 2007) and closely examines how female characters successfully (or in some cases, unsuccessfully) resist the imposition of narrow sex roles and question stereotypical views and prejudices. Most importantly, interpreting texts in light of a feminist re-thinking of women’s positions and roles in society allows for serious attention to be paid to women as doers, subjects, and agents of their own future (Parker, 2015), as well as the diversity in their experiences and voices.

I have engaged a poststructuralist feminist perspective in tandem with more common approaches – liberal and cultural feminism (see Chapter Two) – to emphasise the ‘play’ of language, and from this ‘play’, the exploration of multiple meanings and realities which shed light on “possibilities for being and acting otherwise – and for imagining more just and ethical conditions” (Gavey, 2011, p. 185). Rather than looking for universal or objective ‘lessons’, a poststructuralist perspective investigates “how, and with what consequences, ‘woman’ is constructed as otherness, as non-being, as alterity, as something outside of and dangerous to consciousness, rationality, and presence” (Klages, 2006, p. 96). This perspective moves from an overreliance on ‘women’s experiences’ that may inadvertently reify or regulate dominant conceptions of gender and hegemony, to allow for

the critical evaluation and questioning of these norms instead (Leavy, 2007). A feminist lens then is both practical and stimulating as it creates room to utilise multiple feminist theories to simultaneously illuminate and critique how gender has been constructed and represented through language (Rooney, 2006).

4.3.3 The Conceptual Framework

Table 5 outlines the conceptual framework – the product of the critical research paradigm and my literature reviews on leadership and women’s leadership (see Chapter Two). The corresponding guiding questions were developed concurrently during the literary selection and analysis phases outlined in detail in Chapters Five and Six. In this way, the questions served as prompts to guide the discussion and allowed for the natural emergence of flow and creativity during the research process.

Table 5 Conceptual Framework and Corresponding Questions for Guiding Content Analysis

Five Critical Concerns for Women in Leadership	Guiding Questions
1) Women engaging in leadership ‘moments’ together – Leadership as a social process	<i>How should I think about leadership? Should I exercise ‘power-over’ or ‘power-with’ others?</i>
2) Agentic versus communal styles – The pervasive double bind and ensuing stereotypes	<i>Am I aware of my own and others’ absent but present gendered expectations and their impact on the ‘leaderly’ engagements I participate in?</i>
3) Experiencing and combatting perceptions and expectations – Gender bias and sexism	<i>How do I navigate these invisible ‘aspects’ of leadership?</i>
4) Destabilising grand narratives – Reinterpreting the hierarchy and considering/enacting alternatives	<i>What alternative worlds might women create if given the opportunity? Would women actually lead differently?</i>
5) Individual women <i>becoming</i> leaders – Personal agency and authenticity	<i>How am I ‘storying’ myself as a leader? Am I asking the right questions?</i>

4.4 Research Methods and Tools

This thesis argues that the analysis of fictional stories qualifies as ‘qualitative research’. While structured interviews and/or participant observations most often comprise the data for qualitative research projects, legitimate sources of information, such as fictional documents and artefacts, have been consistently underused (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Subsequently, mining and analysing data from literary fiction for the purpose of leadership and management research remains a largely underexploited method (Warner, 2011). There are, however, fundamental similarities between mining data from documents, such as novels, and using interviews and observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Nathan, 2013). Each book or story represents at least one ‘voice’ or person who can be considered a potential equivalent to the management practitioner’s interviewee, since, in literary publications, “people converse, announce positions, argue with a range of eloquence, and describe events or scenes in ways entirely comparable to what is seen and heard during fieldwork” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 163). Nathan (2013) further argues that a literary work, such as a novel or play, generally possesses far greater depth than an interview or interview series, as it offers a uniquely detailed account and a rich source of data on social issues and questions (see also Chapter Three). While on the edge of qualitative enquiry, utilising literature as the unit for textual analysis can constructively contribute to and productively inform leadership research and practice.

Potential ethical issues for this project were discussed with my supervisors and a member of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. It was concluded that as there were no human participants involved in this project, the only ethical consideration was the involvement of myself as the researcher. There was clearly no question of risk, but the researcher is obligated to uphold the principals of ethical practice. This included adherence to copyright regulations and an honest and open approach to the research process (this was tracked in my reflective journal – see Appendix A).

4.4.1 Qualitative/textual Content Analysis of Texts

Qualitative/textual content analysis comes in a variety of guises, but these myriad approaches exhibit a key feature in common – the researcher extracts themes from the data (Bryman, 2011). As a technique, content analysis allows the researcher to analyse relatively unstructured data, search for meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive content contained within (Krippendorff, 2013). Studies taking this form can be very fertile

in terms of engendering new areas of enquiry, but have sometimes been criticised for lacking robustness (Bryman, 2011). To systematically select appropriate texts, collect data, and analyse and interpret a wide range of fictional narratives for the purpose of illustrating and critically reflecting on women’s leadership issues, I adapted and employed a heuristic model – RITES – a technique for narrative inquiry and content analysis recommended by Leggo (2008) and Barone and Eisner (2012) (see Table 6). Leggo (2008) issues a cautionary warning to advise against “simplistic ways of telling, writing, interpreting, communicating, and understanding stories” (p. 9) when using the RITES model. However, underpinning the RITES rubric with my critical conceptual framework (Table 5) addressed this issue.

Table 6 The RITES Rubric

<i>Step 1: Read</i>	The researcher reads the narrative in order to gain a general sense of the entire story.
<i>Step 2: Interrogate</i>	The researcher asks a set of basic core questions to determine an applicability rating.
<i>Step 3: Thematise</i>	The researcher reads the story again with focus on a specific theme/s, and identifies parts and excerpts from the story which relate to that theme/s (informed by the conceptual framework – Table 5).
<i>Step 4: Expand</i>	The researcher expands on the theme by drawing connections between the story and relevant theory (critical theorising), while also proposing possible meanings (illustrative analysis).
<i>Step 5: Summarise</i>	The researcher summarises the discussion in order to indicate in a clear manner what is learned from the narrative, along with recommending questions for further reflection.

Source: Adapted from Leggo (2008) and Barone & Eisner (2012).

4.4.2 Data Collection: Read and Interrogate

While the RITES rubric provides a clear method for structuring the project findings and discussion, a key problem remained – how do I choose which books to read (Step 1) and what criteria do I use to interrogate them in order to determine their overall applicability and usefulness (Step 2)?

As evidenced by my review of the existing literature (see Chapter Three), there are still only a small number of comprehensive reading lists and literary case materials available, and where leadership and humanities scholars do offer recommendations, the lists are predominantly dominated by male authors writing about male characters. Furthermore, due to the small amount of scholarship in this domain (Warner, 2011), there is no template and little in the way of tried and tested methods for critically selecting or excluding texts. To address this gap I have developed a workable set of reading boundaries and selection criteria to identify appropriate women’s stories which consider both gender dynamics *and* leadership issues within a rich and imaginative variety of fictional contexts and genres. I have included this section of the methodology as a separate chapter (Chapter Five) as the structured and systematic method for selecting texts, and the resulting long and short reading lists, provide original contributions to the emergent leadership and humanities field.

4.4.3 Data Analysis: Thematised, Expanded, and Summarised

To answer my central research question – How can women’s literary fiction be used to explore contemporary women’s leadership issues and what literary texts are best suited for this purpose? – to critically address and make power dynamics visible so that women, as the intended audience, can consider and challenge power relations in everyday leadership contexts, I utilised the final three steps of the RITES model underpinned by the conceptual framework (Table 5). While it was beyond the scope of this project to provide an extended analysis on a similar scale to those conducted by Badaracco (2006), Knights and Willmott (1999), or McManus and Perruci (2015), the findings and discussion are structured so as to thematise, expand on, and summarise five key examples from the short listed texts (see Table 12) in line with the requirements of the conceptual framework. These clearly identified opportunities for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and critical reflection

can thus be considered the *product* or outcomes of my discussion.¹⁷ Table 7 summarises the data collection and data analysis process, phases, and the proposed outcomes.

Table 7 Process, Phases and Product of Data Collection and Data Analysis

	Process (what did I do?)	Phases (what steps did I take? RITES Rubric)	Product (what were the outcomes?)
Data Collection	<i>Chapter 5</i> Book selection: Setting boundaries and developing criteria (method development)	<i>Chapter 5</i> Step 1: Read Step 2: Interrogate	<i>Chapter 5</i> Long list Workable short list
Data Analysis	<i>Chapter 6</i> Application of the conceptual framework to ten short listed texts	<i>Chapter 6</i> Step 3: Thematisé Step 4: Expand Step 5: Summarise	<i>Chapter 6</i> Critical theorising Illustrative analysis using excerpts from texts Critical reflective questions

Opportunities for critical theorising provided rich contextualisation for my interpretation by situating the analysis within a broader body of knowledge (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014), both complementing and challenging current understandings of leadership. Theorising in this context was a “systematic example of interpretation in which a coherent body of thought [i.e. a theory or concept] is mapped onto the literary work in order to explain its meaning” (Rapaport, 2011, p. 7). It was a productive form of inquiry as it made literature ‘do’ something, rather than just ‘being’ something (Klages, 2006), that is, the theory illuminated the work, and the work illuminated the theory (Rapaport, 2011). In this current study, illustrative analysis went hand-in-hand with critical theorising. It was demonstrated that the short listed texts contained multiple ‘moments’ or excerpts that could be meaningfully used to illustrate the five critical concerns outlined in Table 5 in a way that is intended to be instructive, analytical and reflexive, as well as entertaining and memorable.

¹⁷ These approaches to utilising and integrating aesthetic texts for leadership (or management) research are based on the methods used by McManus and Perruci (2015), Knights and Willmott (1999), Badaracco (2006) (see Chapter 3 – Table 4).

In order to demonstrate the myriad possibilities for theory-practice linkages, I included suggestions for critical reflective and/or reflexive questions for each key concept that related directly to the illustrative examples. Both reflective practice and reflexive thinking, individually and in group settings, are vital for enhancing personal awareness (Berggren & Soderlund, 2011; Cunliffe, 2004), ‘making sense of’ complex issues (Harvey & Jenkins, 2014), and inciting meaningful transformative learning and change (Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2009; Shollen, 2015; Sutherland, 2012). By ‘reflection’, I mean a critical iterative process of “returning to what one has studied, thought, experienced, done, and felt” and, through a structured and disciplined process, “synthesising lessons, conclusions, uncertainties and questions” with new information and theories (Harvey & Jenkins, 2014, p. 79).¹⁸ In this study, the proposed critical reflective questions took three distinct forms: 1) general reflective observations based on issues raised in the illustrative examples, 2) abstract conceptual questions based on key theories and/or concepts, and 3) reflective questions related directly to concrete experience (Osman & Koh, 2013).

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined and justified the research design and methods employed for my project. A detailed description and justification of my critical interpretive paradigm and the conceptual framework guiding my study has been provided (Table 5). However, while it was established that literature is a credible object of inquiry in qualitative research (Nathan, 2013), due to the lack of scholarship in this domain, it has been noted that it is much more difficult to apply traditional methods of qualitative analysis in a straightforward manner (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014). Taking into account the unstructured, creative and highly interpretive nature of qualitative/textual content analysis, I provided the RITES rubric as a research tool by which to systematically read, interrogate, thematise, expand, and critically summarise key moments/examples from the literary texts. This methodological tool allowed me to structure my data collection and data analysis;

¹⁸ The purpose of questioning and challenging long-held assumptions, beliefs, and identities is so that “we can develop more collaborative, responsible and ethical ways of managing organisations” (Cunliffe, 2004, p. 408). Reflective practice in this context facilitates the construction of bridges between theory and practice (Berggren & Soderlund, 2011; Sutherland, 2012). Critical reflexivity takes this form or reflection a step further by going beyond the self to embrace wider social, historical and moral contexts (Ford et al., 2008); it is a means of “reassessing the way one has posed problems and one’s orientation to perceiving, believing and acting” (Gray, 2007, p. 497).

however, it still allowed me to be flexible and keep an open mind during the discovery process. The outcome of this analysis was not certainty but plausibility as I identified opportunities in the selected stories for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and critical reflection on women’s leadership issues. Using these methods, it was demonstrated that the short listed literary texts were able to facilitate meaningful and productive connections between theory and practice.

Table 8 Summary of Research Approach

Research Paradigm	Research Methodology	Research Tools
Interpretive ↓ Critical research – Critical leadership studies and critical feminist theory	Qualitative/textual content analysis – Literary fiction as the unit of analysis	RITES Model – Reading boundaries and selection criteria, conceptual framework for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and critical reflection

Chapter 5: Choosing Stories: Boundaries and Criteria

5.1 Introduction

From the vast universe of books available, what ‘types’ of women’s stories can best be used to awaken curiosity, deactivate indifference and stimulate debate on gender-related leadership issues? Answering this question comprised the first two steps – Read and Interrogate – of the RITES rubric and involved the development of my own reading boundaries and selection criteria. In this chapter I will outline the systematic and rigorous steps I took to find, select, rate, evaluate and, ultimately, short list key literary texts that not only employ the female ‘voice’ to address women’s leadership issues but also make ‘gender’ a central theme for examination. I will also discuss how I supplemented my reading experiences and the research process by keeping a reflective ‘reader’s notebook’ in the form of an online blog. Using the methods developed specifically for this project, I provide a wide-range of examples and a workable list of current and well-written women’s fictional texts which can be approached freshly, as Fisher and Silber (2003) suggest, “by putting at the centre of analysis girls’ and women’s different perceptions, their distinct predicaments, and their varied experiences” (p. xxiii). By making room for and giving a voice to the feminine ‘other’ in this emerging interdisciplinary field, I believe leadership development programmes for women can be enlivened, enriched and improved.

5.2 Step 1: Read – Developing Initial ‘Reading Boundaries’

As discussed in Chapter Three, fictional male protagonists and their leadership dilemmas are taken-for-granted as ungendered and universally representative – applicable to everyone, regardless of gender, race, or sexuality (Fisher & Silber, 2003). Since novels, plays, and short stories written by women which feature dynamic, fully-fleshed female voices are largely excluded from the existing reading lists, the first ‘reading boundary’ I set was to limit my selection to female authors. The purpose of this condition was not to pit female authors against male writers or encourage a ‘battle of the sexes’, but rather to usefully and thoughtfully expand on the limited array of recommendations and textual analysis. While books by women have gained wider critical acceptance in recent decades,

there is still an unfortunate tendency for women's literature to be unduly dismissed as either unimportant or uninteresting (Fisher & Silber, 2003; Long, 2003; Vnuk & Donohue, 2013). For example, Nobel-prize winning novelist V. S. Naipaul recently lashed out at female authors, claiming there is no woman writer whom he considers his equal and criticising women's writing for its supposed "sentimentality...[and] narrow view of the world" (Fallon, 2011). However, female authors often focus on addressing questions of "power, privilege, authority, point of view, and 'otherness'" in a wide-range of settings and circumstances (Fisher & Silber, 2003, p. xxxi), topics that are vitally important for leaders to engage with as they continue to operate in gendered business environments. In addition, poststructuralist feminists, Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva, have each suggested that women's writing evokes a sense of freedom and unpredictability as it "flows in rhythms outside the stultifying logic and systemising language and linguistic structures" of predominant masculine or phallogocentric language (Parker, 2015, p. 162). Although this perspective has sometimes been criticised as essentialist, Calás and Smircich (1991) highlight the adventurous form some women author's thinking and writing takes, uninhibited by the bounds of traditional writing as they operate outside the dominant academic order. Novels on my long list which exemplify this transgressive idea of writing with the female body and *her* 'flesh' (as opposed to the normative male 'pen') include *The Natural Way of Things* by Charlotte Wood and *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith. Thus, women's novels, plays and short stories are more likely to be consciously 'anti-patriarchal', and even transgressive, offering positive portrayals of characters and contexts which violate and call into question the value of traditional gender norms and binaries (Tyson, 2011).

To navigate the seemingly endless supply of formulaic women's fiction, such as the romance or 'chick lit' genres, I chose to devote more attention to female writers who were either self-professed feminists or who took a specific interest in gender issues and portrayals of female experiences outside the home in their writing, for example, Caryl Churchill, Marilyn French, Sue Monk Kidd, and Ursula Le Guin. In addition, to define and frame my understanding of literary worth, I worked within the confines of pre-established 'cultural authority' (Long, 2003), opting for authors who were generally well-reviewed by critics or who had received prestigious award nominations or prizes for their literary and storytelling prowess, such as Barbara Kingsolver and Jane Smiley.

Another important ‘reading boundary’ I set in place during this early phase of selecting stories to read, was to limit my ‘top 50’ list to current works, that is, texts written after 1960. The reasons for this were essentially practical. While there is a rich canon of women’s literary classics, to which authors such as Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, Zora Neale Hurston belong,¹⁹ choosing literature written after 1960 gave me space to engage more creatively and critically with a text without the need to take into account wider scholarship, possible reader-response biases, and conventional thematic readings, as would be required for well-known classics such as *Jane Eyre* or *Middlemarch*. Furthermore, since the books should be suitable for a ‘general’ audience with little background in the study of literature, literary theory or history, the stories needed to be universally appealing, widely accessible, and easy to understand. As Long (2003) argues, “to be ‘discussable’ a book must be interesting as well as good; otherwise, reading and talking about it will fall into the category of onerous and unpleasurable ‘shoulds’” (p. 123).²⁰ While a strong case could be made for only selecting ‘the great books’ based on their supposedly superior literary merit, as Badaracco (2006) points out, it pays to be suspicious of the “great books” approach to literature as once “early reviews of books we now call classics...[such as] *Anna Karenina* was declared “sentimental rubbish,” and one reviewer thought *Gulliver’s Travels* was “evidence of a diseased mind and a lacerated heart”” (p. 207).

In terms of plot and characterisation, for a story to reach the reading stage it had to feature at least one female protagonist who was responsible for guiding and/or was subject to the majority of action in the narrative. This proved more difficult than I’d first anticipated as many award-winning novels by women, such as Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, Kate Atkinson’s *A God in Ruins*, or Eleanor Catton’s *The Luminaries*, place male characters in the leading roles. In fact, books written wholly from a woman’s point of view rarely win prestigious prizes (Regan, 2015).

I also employed caution when it came to popular depictions of ‘badass heroines’. Even though there has been a recent surge in popular fiction featuring strong, young, agentic

¹⁹ For the full list of ‘classic’ women writers see *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1996).

²⁰ This was an important consideration given my key long term research recommendation of running a women’s leadership development ‘book club’ (see Chapter Seven – Research Contributions and Recommendations for Future Research).

female leaders, for example Tris in the *Divergent Trilogy* by Veronica Roth or Katniss in *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, these stories continue to perpetuate ‘great person’ viewpoints of leadership by replacing a male hero with a female leader who is ‘just as good as a man’, albeit moodier. As Czarniawska and Rhodes (2006) explain, the heroic archetype is a ‘strong plot’ which continues to be retrieved, made simple, accessible and relevant through popular fiction. To avoid these conventional representations of leadership, while scouring reviews and summaries I looked for references to leadership ‘moments’ (Ladkin, 2010) and for the potential presence of gender and leadership issues. However, it was difficult to apply this as a strict pre-reading criterion.

With this basic set of guiding boundaries in place, I created a long list of 50 possible literary texts (See Table 9).²¹ I read, blogged about, and rated these novels, short story collections, and plays over a period of eight months (July 2015 – February 2016).

5.2.1 Observations on Genre

Historical fiction, science fiction and dystopian literature emerged as genres that frequently featured interesting ‘leadership moments’. Women’s historical fiction is often written as a form of revisionist history, that is, it gives remarkable female leaders from the past ‘voices’ in periods and places where they have traditionally been erased from the history books. These are the missing ‘herstories’. Examples include Sarah Grimke, the abolitionist and women’s rights activist (featured in *The Invention of Wings*), as well as the silent maiden Lavinia from Virgil’s male-dominated epic *The Aeneid*, rewritten and reimaged by Ursula K. Le Guin. Similarly, the science fiction genre offers female writers the chance to interrogate patriarchal politics, misogyny and sexism in more imaginative and utopian/dystopian spaces, as well as being a philosophical tool to closely examine feminist thinking (Moody, 2006). Feminist writers can explore “separatist communities, the exacerbation of women’s oppression, the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, women’s roles, and the deconstruction of patriarchal language” (Moody, 2006, p. 178) in these potentially non-binary, unbounded worlds. *The Matter of Seggri* by Le Guin and *The Gate to Women’s Country* by Sheri S. Tepper are two thought-provoking examples of this phenomenon.

²¹ I estimated I could read up to 50 novels, plays, and short story collections within the time frame available for this thesis project.

Table 9 The ‘Top 50’ Long List

<p>Historical Fiction</p> <p>[Set in pre-1900]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Flow Down Like Silver: Hypatia of Alexandria</i> by Ki Longfellow • <i>Lavinia</i> by Ursula Le Guin • <i>Pope Joan</i> by Donna Woolfolk Cross • <i>Remarkable Creatures</i> by Tracy Chevalier • <i>The Dovekeepers</i> by Alice Hoffman • <i>The Red Tent</i> by Anita Diamant • <i>Year of Wonders</i> by Geraldine Brooks <p>[Slavery/American History]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Property</i> by Valerie Martin • <i>The House Girl</i> by Tara Conklin • <i>The Invention of Wings</i> by Sue Monk Kidd • <i>The Last Runaway</i> by Tracy Chevalier 	<p>Modern/Contemporary Fiction (set between 1980 – 2016)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Lady Cyclists Guide to Kashgar</i> by Suzanne Joinson • <i>A Thousand Acres</i> by Jane Smiley • <i>Base Ten</i> by Maryann Lesert • <i>Calling Invisible Women</i> by Jeanne Ray • <i>How to be Both</i> by Ali Smith • <i>In the Name of Friendship</i> by Marilyn French • <i>Now and Again</i> by Charlotte Rogan • <i>Outline</i> by Rachel Cusk • <i>The Bean Trees</i> by Barbara Kingsolver • <i>The House Girl</i> by Tara Conklin • <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> by Sue Monk Kidd • <i>The Ten-Year Nap</i> by Meg Wolitzer • <i>Unless</i> by Carol Shields • <i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> by Karen Joy Fowler 	<p>‘Feminist’ Fiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Almost Famous Women</i> by Megan Mayhew Bergman • <i>Base Ten</i> by Maryann Lesert • <i>In the Name of Friendship</i> by Marilyn French • <i>The Gate to Women’s Country</i> by Sheri S. Tepper • <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> by Muriel Spark • <i>The Shadow of the Sun</i> by A. S. Byatt • <i>The Ten-Year Nap</i> by Meg Wolitzer • <i>The Women’s Room</i> by Marilyn French • <i>Top Girls</i> (play) by Caryl Churchill 	<p>Prize-winning/Nominated Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Thousand Acres</i> by Jane Smiley • <i>How to be Both</i> by Ali Smith • <i>Lavinia</i> by Ursula Le Guin • <i>Olive Kitteridge</i> by Elizabeth Strout • <i>Outline</i> by Rachel Cusk • <i>Possession</i> by A. S. Byatt • <i>Property</i> by Valerie Martin • <i>The Gate to Women’s Country</i> by Sheri S. Tepper • <i>The Invention of Wings</i> by Sue Monk Kidd • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> by Ursula Le Guin • <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> by Barbara Kingsolver • <i>The Red Tent</i> by Anita Diamant • <i>The Natural Way of Things</i> by Charlotte Wood • <i>The Secret Life of Bees</i> by Sue Monk Kidd • <i>Unless</i> by Carol Shields • <i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> by Karen Joy Fowler
<p>[Set in pre-1980]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Lady Cyclists Guide to Kashgar</i> by Suzanne Joinson • <i>Day After Night</i> by Anita Diamant (WWII) • <i>In the Time of Butterflies</i> by Julia Alvarez • <i>The Boston Girl</i> by Anita Diamant • <i>The Help</i> by Kathryn Stockett • <i>The Lifeboat</i> by Charlotte Rogan • <i>The Nightingale</i> by Kristin Hannah (WWII) • <i>The Poisonwood Bible</i> by Barbara Kingsolver 	<p>Short Story Collections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Almost Famous Women</i> by Megan Mayhew Bergman • <i>Oliver Kitteridge</i> by Elizabeth Strout • <i>Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology</i> edited by Ann and Jeff VanderMeer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Northern Chess” • <i>The Unreal and the Real: Outer Space and Inner Lands</i> by Ursula Le Guin: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “The Matter of Seggr” (sci-fi) - “Sur” - “Betrayals” • <i>The Unreal and the Real: Where on Earth by Ursula Le Guin:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Hand, Cup, Shell” • <i>What I Didn’t See</i> by Karen Joy Fowler 	<p>Dystopian + Science Fiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology</i> edited by Ann and Jeff Vandermeer • <i>Sarah Canary</i> by Karen Joy Fowler • <i>The Gate to Women’s Country</i> by Sheri S. Tepper • <i>The Gracekeepers</i> by Kirsty Logan • <i>The Handmaid’s Tale</i> by Margaret Atwood • <i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i> by Ursula Le Guin • <i>The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet</i> by Becky Chambers • <i>The Natural Way of Things</i> by Charlotte Wood • <i>The Unreal and the Real: Where on Earth by Ursula Le Guin</i> • <i>The Unreal and the Real: Outer Space and Inner Lands</i> by Ursula Le Guin 	<p>Plays</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Top Girls</i> by Caryl Churchill • <i>Welcome to Thebes</i> by Moira Buffini

5.2.2 Where Did I Look?

As a starting point for identifying contemporary female authors of interest, I reviewed the award-winning and shortlisted writers for the Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction (formally known as the Orange Prize for Fiction). Launched in 1996, this prestigious prize is awarded annually to celebrate “excellence, originality and accessibility in women’s writing throughout the world” (Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction, 2016, para. 1), making it an excellent source of cultural authority on women’s modern-day classics.²² I also expanded my search to include publications directly concerned with recognising and discussing women’s fiction. Particularly helpful was Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s comprehensive second edition of *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1996), *100 Great Plays for Women* (2013) by Lucy Kerbel, and *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel* (2005) by Pulitzer prize-winning novelist Jane Smiley. As an indicator of more popular women’s reading interests, I perused *Book Lust* (2003) by Nancy Pearl, along with Rebecca Vnuk and Nanette Donohue’s showcase of over 600 titles in *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Popular Reading Interests* (2013). In addition, I asked for personal word-of-mouth recommendations from family members, friends, and my supervisors.

I also found the following ‘topical’ online lists helpful:

- 75 Books Every Women Should Read: The Complete List (Jezebel)
- Are These the 50 Most Influential Books by Women? (The Guardian)
- 21st Century Literature by Women (Bookriot)
- 21 Books from the Last 5 Years that Every Woman Should Read (The Huffington Post)
- The Life-changing Novels Every Woman Should Read (Independent)
- 18 Pulitzer Prize-Winning Books by Women You Should Read Right Now (Bustle)

To keep track of my reading progress I created an online Goodreads profile which I regularly updated. As the world’s largest site for readers and book recommendations (Goodreads, 2016), this ‘book lovers’ paradise was useful for establishing which texts held universal appeal and why (based on the Goodreads 5-star rating system), and what general readers, as opposed to professional critics, liked and/or didn’t like about each individual book (in the form of extensive amateur user reviews). As a member of the world’s largest

²² To a lesser extent, I also reviewed award-winning literature of The Stella Prize, the Australian equivalent of the Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction.

online reading community, reading became less of a solitary endeavour and, as Long (2003) suggests, a collaborative and communal undertaking.

5.3 Step 2: Interrogate – Refining the Selection Process

As I began reading and familiarising myself with a wide array of women’s literature, ranging from the unsettling dystopian worlds of *The Gracekeepers* and *The Natural Way of Things*, to the American Frontier in *The Last Runaway*, I refined my selection criteria in order to classify and rate texts on their completion. In this segment I will briefly outline the four key criteria I used to create a short list of suitable literature. These included Badaracco’s test of ‘careful reading,’ the ‘Bechdel Test,’ identifiable ‘moments’ of women engaging in and experiencing leadership, and the presence of provocative and discussable gender themes.

Inevitably, some of the books I found using my basic criteria didn’t fulfil my subjective ‘good story’ requirements, these included *The House Girl* by Tara Conklin, *The Nightingale* by Kristin Hannah, and *Calling Invisible Women* by Jeanne Ray. Why? While these stories did have the potential to trigger brief socio-political critiques of gender and power, for the purpose of developing understandings of and encouraging engagement with complex questions on women and leadership, they lacked the requisite depth and complexity. To counter this problem, each short listed story was required to pass a more rigorous version of Badaracco’s ‘test of careful reading and rereading’: Does the story have depth and richness beyond popular social stereotypes? Does it critically and creatively engage the reader? Is the prose style elegant, expressive, and grammatically correct? Examples of possible ‘rich’ texts included *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver and *Year of Wonders* by Geraldine Brooks.

In addition to ‘careful reading’, I also added the Bechdel Test. This short feminist test, proposed by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in 1985, “calls attention to gender inequality” in the media (Bechdel, 2014, para. 5) and, unfortunately, is still just as relevant in 2016 as it was in 1985 (Swanson, 2016). Although primarily used to evaluate movies, the test can easily be applied to literature using a three-pronged question: Does the story have at least two women in it? Who talk to each other? About something other than a man? Examples of stories which not only pass the test of careful reading, but also fulfil Bechdel’s requirements, include *The Dovekeepers* by Alice Hoffman, *The Lifeboat* by Charlotte

Rogan, and *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill. While not a definitive benchmark, I applied this test to those books which had made it through the first criterion, since far too many fictional works focus on the doings of men, or of women in relation to men, and as Virginia Woolf (1928) succinctly points out, “how small a part of a woman’s life is that?” (p. 82).

While novels like *Base Ten* by Maryann Lesert, *The Women’s Room* by Marilyn French, and *Unless* by Carol Shields, excellently challenge patriarchal grand narratives and gender norms while addressing questions of female empowerment, they lack clear and protracted examples of leadership in action. Therefore, in order for a story to make it onto the short list, it had to contain more than one example of a leadership ‘moment’. Interestingly, rather than writing specifically about work and business, women’s stories tend to favour contexts and settings which allow for the exploration of the ‘human condition’ as a whole, incorporating themes such as love and loss, loyalty and friendship, sympathy and compassion, growth and change, oppression and grief, care and passion, anger and bitterness, fear and endurance within the narrative (Hill, 1990). This made it more difficult to find novels, short stories, and plays directly concerned with women leaders operating in public work settings (*Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill is the only long listed story set in an office environment) or which featured women in politically powerful positions (*Welcome to Thebes* and *Pope Joan*). While I first saw this as a constraint, leadership itself is concerned with more than just ‘leading’. As explored in Chapter Two, there is an important conceptual difference between formal authority vested in a ‘leader’ figure and leadership as a collective process. Leadership can occur in a wide variety of contexts and for a multitude of different purposes, encompassing both those who would be known as ‘leaders’ and those who would be known as ‘followers’ and the spaces created between them (Ladkin, 2010). Since leadership is an activity employed for the purpose of addressing challenges and influencing others to collaboratively create positive change (Sulpizio, 2014), novels concerned with the ‘human condition’, such as *The Help* and *The Secret Life of Bees*, are equally well-equipped to explore the phenomenon of leadership as those that are set in the public sphere of work and politics.

The final criterion required that the nominated stories make the gendered nature of leadership and power visible and open to protracted discussion. In line with the requirements of my critical feminist lens, I wanted the short listed texts to reveal the myriad ways gender binaries, stereotypes and gendered expectations influence women’s

experiences of leadership (both as leaders and followers). With this prerequisite in mind I was able to identify ‘discussable’ themes which women writers regularly brought to the fore in their fiction. Most notably, in historical fiction, gendered expectations and sexist perceptions of women were made salient. The ensuing gender binaries were presented as obstacles to be questioned and overcome, such as by the Mirabal sisters in *In the Time of Butterflies*. Often the heroine is required to go through a process of ‘self-actualisation’ and personal development in order to grow into or exercise her leadership potential, such as in *The Invention of Wings* and *Remarkable Creatures*. In the play *Welcome to Thebes* and in the novels *The Lifeboat* and *The Dovekeepers*, women are faced with crisis situations or ‘wicked problems’, and are compelled to exercise leadership as a result. The stories I read frequently explored and emphasised the communal spaces created between women and the role of female mentors as sources of leadership inspiration.

The reading boundaries and short list selection criteria can be summarised as follows in Table 10.

Table 10 Summary of Reading Boundaries and Selection Criteria

Initial Reading Boundaries:	Short List Selection Criteria:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Literary fiction written by women 2. Author profiling – feminist interests and award-winning/nominated 3. Written after 1960 4. At least one well-developed female protagonist 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Badaracco’s test of ‘careful reading’ 2. The ‘Bechdel Test’ 3. Identifiable ‘moments’ of women engaging in or experiencing leadership 4. Relevant and provocative gender themes and issues

5.4 *The Reader’s Notebook* – Personal Reflective Journal

To supplement the data collection and data analysis phases, I kept a reflective journal in the form of a public blog which I updated every 2-4 weeks (see Appendix A). The purpose of this research diary was to log my progress and personal development over the course of writing my thesis, or, as I put it in Entry 1, to provide “a space to process the great amount of information I will be attempting to cram into my brain over the course of the next 12 months. An opportunity to reflect...without worrying how it all ‘fits’ into the bigger picture...capturing [my] change in motion.” The blog also formed an integral part of the

research process in terms of exploring my self-presentation and interpretive research position (see Chapter One – Researcher’s Position).

Blogging is described by Freeman and Brett (2012) as an “individual exploration of ideas of personal interest through frequent online posts, documenting ideas as they emerge over time” (p. 1032). As a form of self-reflective practice, blogging has the potential to improve analytical skills and reflective thinking, along with facilitating the thoughtful questioning of beliefs and practices, and, in some cases, changes in attitude (Sim & Hew, 2010; Freeman & Brett, 2012). For example, in Entry 2 “On the Road” I explored my reasons for an important change in direction from an ‘authentic leadership’ perspective to a ‘women and leadership’ angle:

Although I was hesitant at first to focus solely on women’s leadership, especially since authentic leadership was/still is something I’m quite passionate about and interested in, in terms of creating excellent discussion material and contributing to feminist discourse within business and management studies, refining my focus seems like the best course of action. Furthermore, finding good literature with strong female characters which also contained examples of ‘authentic’ leadership moments was proving tricky!

This doesn’t mean that at least one of the stories I select can’t be concerned with authentic leadership and how women enact it and experience it (I’m thinking *The Secret Life of Bees!*), but rather that I’ll have the freedom to utilise both a wider range of literary texts and make the whole study more provocative, topical and hopefully less ‘fluffy’/feel good – I don’t want to simply provide nicely packaged ‘right’ answers. Thus, the focus will be more on women’s leadership *development* rather than authentic leadership *lessons*. With this in mind I’m in the process of re-defining my criteria for the selection of texts.

I also used the blog to discuss my emerging understandings of key theories and intellectual ideas. In Entry 8 “Storytelling as the ‘Other’ (Part 2)” I conducted an in-depth analysis of Badaracco’s (2006) approach before suggesting and then deliberating at length on an alternative method:

Badaracco takes a popular business concept (in this case a leader’s in-built ‘moral compass’), problematizes widespread ideas/norms surrounding individual morality, demonstrates why there are flaws in this way of thinking (using the story of

Okonkwo's downfall in *Things Fall Apart*), and proposes possible solution/s in the form of self-improving reflexive questions. Essentially, he is providing aspiring leaders with ideas to help them become better, more ethical, moral leaders. It's like book club on steroids basically, but for men.

I can't bring myself to write something so blatantly post-feminist; buying into the wider discourse of Western individualism and over-simplifying the pressing issues surrounding women's leadership by relegating problems to the 'I/me/you'. And so I would like to turn to feminist poststructuralism, deconstruction and critical reflexivity (scary names, huh?) as potential 'methods' or strategies for content analysis.

My blog has served as a springboard for action, helping me to engage creatively with new ideas, as well as providing a discursive platform on which to clarify my emerging understandings of complex theories. It has been a forum for candid yet thoughtful self-expression, making me deeply aware and critically self-conscious of my own learning and development. The entries which focus on this are:

- Entry 1: [The Beginning of the Beginning or 'Listomaniac'](#)
- Entry 3: [Signposts in Wonderland](#)
- Entry 5: [Storytelling as the 'Other' \(Part 1\)](#)
- Entry 7: [Storytelling as the 'Other' \(Part 2\)](#)
- Entry 9: ["I'm not a Feminist, but..."](#)
- Entry 10: [The Year That Was & The Year That Will Be](#)
- Entry 12: [The 'Art' of Writing](#)
- Entry 14: [Keep Calm & Write On](#)
- Entry 16: [Making Ends Meet](#)
- Entry 17: [How to Finish?](#)

The blog has also played an integral role in my assessment of women's literature. I used the blogging platform to reflect on potential long and short list candidates, make 'applicability ratings', pick out relevant 'women and leadership' themes, and provide key thoughts on plot, favourite characters, personal likes and dislikes, and possible discussion points. These highly self-conscious reader-response 'book reviews' have served as scaffolding for all further data collection and data analysis during implementation of the five phases of the RITES rubric:

- Entry 2: [On the Road](#)
- Entry 4: [Still Time for Butterflies](#)
- Entry 6: [Thoughts from and Enthusiastic Reader](#)
- Entry 8: [Calling All Bookworms](#)
- Entry 11: [In the Name of Reading](#)
- Entry 13: [Straight from My Book Bag](#)
- Entry 15: [“That’s a Wrap!” A Book Review Finale](#)

The complete set of blog entries are available in chronological order in Appendix A.

5.5 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter outlined in detail the processual steps I took to develop my own methods for systematically selecting appropriate literary fiction for my research. These included four reading boundaries to identify texts for the long list along with four short list selection criteria (see Table 10). Applied to the novels, short stories and plays, I was able to choose 50 texts for my long list (see Table 9), and from this broad selection, ten stories for my short list (see Table 11). My critical reflective journal served to capture in detail the developmental phases of my ‘artful’ approach by tracking the reading and discovery process, managing positions of not knowing, and, ultimately, assisting me in finding flow and unity in my research.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from my reading, selection, interrogation and thematic analysis of ten short listed literary texts using the reading boundaries and selection criteria methods developed in Chapter Five. These ten stories and their corresponding ‘women and leadership’ themes are summarised in Table 11. A short plot synopsis and summary of key themes are also provided. These concise vignettes inform the thematic arrangement (Step 3 of the RITES rubric) of the stories in line with the conceptual framework, as well as providing context for all further qualitative/textual content analysis. This is followed by an extended discussion (Steps 4 and 5 of the RITES rubric) of the data mined from five of the texts in view of the meanings they hold for women’s leadership. Due to the size limitations for this research project, I provide only one extended illustrative example for each of the five theoretical concepts, identifying multiple opportunities for critical theorising, illustrative analysis and critical reflection in my analysis of these texts.

6.2 The Short List

The stories which have been short listed are those that create points of tension in the narrative and, subsequently, have the potential to engage female leaders in stimulating debates on a wide range of women’s leadership issues, including gender binaries, power-play, gendered expectations, and women’s diverse range experiences as both leaders and followers. Most importantly, my short listed selections position women as subjects – not objects – of study. The protagonists in these texts are not passive, powerless victims or stereotypical depictions of the ‘gentler sex’. Rather, they represent a diverse array of women’s voices and experiences in the context of thought-provoking leadership scenarios. There were many strong contenders for this short list and it was difficult to limit my selection to just ten texts. Several additional titles could have been included, for example *Lavinia*, *The Matter of Seggri*, *The Secret Life of Bees*, and *In the Time of Butterflies*. However, in a careful weighing up of the stories in terms of the four selection criteria (see Table 10), and in an effort to avoid replicating material, the following ten stories identified in Table 11 were chosen. The ‘applicability ratings’ are the product of my decision-making processes tracked in my reflective journal (see Appendix A).

Table 11 The Short List

Title:	Author:	Publication Year:	Genre:	Applicability Rating:	Key Women and Leadership Themes:
<i>The Dovekeepers</i>	Alice Hoffman	2011	Historical Fiction	9/10	Interplay of masculine/feminine traits, 'doing' gender, challenging gender roles, leadership in crisis situations, relationships between women, the role of followers, the divine feminine (celebration of the feminine)
<i>The Gate to Women's Country</i>	Sheri S. Tepper	1988	Science Fiction	8.5/10	Matriarchal societies, women in power, male/female leadership differences, cultural feminism, ethical and moral decision-making
<i>The Help</i>	Kathryn Stockett	2009	Contemporary Fiction	8/10	Collaborative and distributed leadership, women's stories and perspectives, intersectionality/racial issues, authentic leadership and engagement
<i>The Invention of Wings</i>	Sue Monk Kidd	2014	Historical Fiction	9/10	Authenticity, expectations and perceptions, overcoming obstacles, self-actualisation and empowerment, learning to be a wise and ethical leader
<i>The Last Runaway</i>	Tracy Chevalier	2013	Historical Fiction	9/10	Relationships between women (followers and leaders), 'power-with' others, ethical and moral decision-making, female role models and mentors ('staying-with'), self-actualisation and empowerment
<i>The Lifeboat</i>	Charlotte Rogan	2012	Historical Fiction	8.5/10	Power and status, leadership double bind – agentic/communal, the role of followers, crisis situations, expectations and prejudice, ethical dilemmas
<i>Pope Joan</i>	Donna Woolfolk Cross	1996	Historical Fiction	8.5/10	Women in power, 'doing' gender, masculine vs. feminine traits enacted by leaders, male and female leadership differences (cultural feminism), leadership in crisis situations
<i>Top Girls</i>	Caryl Churchill	1982	Play – Contemporary	8.5/10	Women at work, women in power, agentic leadership, liberal feminist ambition, 'Queen Bee' syndrome
'Sur'	Ursula K. Le Guin	1982	Short story – Science Fiction	8.5/10	Collaborative and distributed leadership, relational leadership – 'power-with,' collective mobilisation, communal leadership traits, gender roles and expectations
<i>Welcome to Thebes</i>	Maira Buffini	2010	Play – Contemporary	9/10	Power and status, gender binaries, expectations and perceptions, women's leadership in crisis situations, benign and hostile sexism

6.3 Step 3: Thematise

In Chapter Four I outlined five central and interlinked themes for critically making sense of a range of women's leadership experiences and the complexity of leadership as a social process (see Table 5). Implementing Step 3 of the RITES rubric involved a second thorough reading of the ten short listed texts, with a specific focus on the five critical concerns outlined in the conceptual framework. During this second close reading, I developed and applied the set of corresponding questions (also outlined in Table 5) to guide my analysis.

In the following segment I provide brief synopses for each short listed text. Based on the examples and excerpts identified in each story that related to, or said something important about, these five critical concerns for women in leadership, I then grouped the short listed texts in Table 12 from most relevant to least (in terms of material, depth, and scope) in relation to each key concept. As exemplified in Table 12, there was no shortage of relevant material.

6.3.1 Summaries of the Short Listed Texts

1. *The Dovekeepers* (2011) by Alice Hoffman

Set in 70 C.E. soon after the fall of Jerusalem, *The Dovekeepers* retells the tragic story of Masada, a Jewish stronghold on a mountain outside the Judean desert. Nine hundred Jews held out for several months against the Romans, but by the end of the siege, only two women and five children had survived. The haunting tale is narrated from the perspective of four extraordinary women whose lives and secrets become inextricably intertwined – Yael, the unwanted daughter of an assassin, Revka, a baker's wife who has witnessed unspeakable brutality, Aziza, both daughter and son of a warrior, and Shirah, a wise and powerful woman who many suspect is a witch. Their interlinked stories explore and interrogate the tensions and expectations arising from traditional masculine/feminine gender binaries as well as the leader/follower dichotomy, allowing some characters to transgress gender boundaries and enact and play with both the masculine and the feminine, the agentic and the communal.

2. *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett

The Help is concerned with addressing a ‘wicked’ problem – the ill treatment of black maids, and more widely, racism in 1960s America. The story is told by twenty-two-year-old Skeeter, a privileged yet ambitious white girl who has just graduated from college, and two black maids, the wise and regal Aibileen and her best friend Minny, the sassiest maid in all of Jackson, Mississippi, but also the best cook. The entire story can be conceived of as a leadership ‘moment’ which sees these three radically different women working together on a covert project that has the potential to start a social movement and alter how women view one another. As Skeeter, Aibileen and Minny collaboratively engage and exercise ‘power-with’ one another as they navigate complex expectations and long entrenched stereotypes, the task of writing a book about their situation becomes the ‘leader’, providing an excellent illustrative example of leadership as a social process.

3. *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988) by Sheri S. Tepper

The Gate to Women’s Country is set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian reality where only two extreme political alternatives exist: an oppressive polygamist faction that subscribes to patriarchal religious fundamentalism, and a closely controlled neo-Hellenic matriarchal dictatorship known as Women’s Country. In this ‘unnatural’ world, Greek mythology and religious fundamentalism meet science fiction. In an attempt to avoid another world war, the majority of men in Women’s Country are only allowed to live in Spartan-like military garrisons outside the cities. The women, on the other hand, manage the economy and are entirely responsible for the government, agriculture, industry, learning and science. Told primarily from the perspective of Stavia, the devoted yet errant daughter of a leading councilwoman, the novel investigates the consequences of such rigid social systems and the ethical dilemmas that inevitably arise and must be swiftly dealt with by the “Damned Few” (as the female leaders call themselves). With its strict adherence to cultural feminist thought, Tepper’s novel raises manifold questions about the nature of male and female leadership differences in a world completely at odds with itself.

4. *The Invention of Wings* (2014) by Sue Monk Kidd

The Invention of Wings traces the life of Sarah Grimke (1792 – 1873), abolitionist speaker and American women’s rights activist, and her childhood slave, Hetty (‘Handful’). Brought up in a wealthy Charleston household, Sarah, at the age of eleven, is given Handful as a birthday gift. This event sparks a flame of resistance in Sarah, setting her on a dangerous path that begins with teaching Handful to read (a serious crime in antebellum South Carolina) and culminates in her outspoken public opposition to slavery and inequality. However, having been told her whole life that being a woman means she has no right to ambition, Sarah struggles with debilitating self-doubt and anxiety as she attempts to establish and ‘story’ herself as a credible female leader. In parallel to Sarah’s remarkable re-invention from a timid and fearful young woman to a force for change, Handful narrates her side of the story. Handful possesses incredible resilience and strength, exercising moments of bravery and independence despite the strict confines of her life. Neither Sarah nor Handful are heroines in the conventional sense of the word, instead, the value of this novel lies in the way it traces the processual steps a woman must take to both *become* and *see* herself as a leader, proposing an alternative to the debilitating question: “*Who am I to do this, a woman?*”

5. *The Last Runaway* (2013) by Tracy Chevalier

Set in the 1850s, *The Last Runaway* tells the story of Honor Bright, a sheltered and timid Quaker girl who impulsively decides to immigrate to America with her sister Grace. Soon after their arrival, Honor’s sister dies unexpectedly from yellow fever, forcing Honor to set off on her own to a small pioneering Quaker community. Opposed in principle to slavery, Honor is forced to test her beliefs when runaway slaves start showing up on her new husband’s farm. As the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 comes into full force in the North, Honor is faced with a moral dilemma: protect her new family or help the runaways and risk losing everything. Honor doesn’t act alone – she becomes friends with the indomitable Belle, the local milliner, and a free black woman known as Mrs Reed, both ‘station masters’ for the Underground Railroad. These spirited female role models challenge Honor to change how she sees herself and what she is capable of, giving her a new understanding of the world and mobilising her for collective action. As well as demonstrating how individual women can take up the leadership role wisely by ‘dwelling’ and ‘staying with’

(Ladkin, 2010), *The Last Runaway* transcends conventional 'leader' and 'follower' binaries, providing valuable examples of what it truly means to have 'power-with' others.

6. *The Lifeboat* (2012) by Charlotte Rogan

As the *Empress Alexandra* sinks in the middle of the Atlantic in 1914, a group of thirty-nine men and women find themselves fighting for their lives on a lifeboat built for thirty. Told from the perspective of Grace, a newly married social climber whose dubious motto is "God helps those who help themselves," the novel explores the power struggle between an experienced sailor/saviour, Mr Hardie, and two calmly formidable women, Mrs Grant and Hannah. As the survivors impatiently wait for rescue and struggle to make sense of their own ethical obligations, the antagonism between the stranded men and women progressively worsens. At times a supporter of both Mr Hardie and Mrs Grant, Grace becomes an acute observer of the emerging leadership crisis, shedding light on the role of the imaginary and symbolic in constructing the idea of an 'all powerful' leader and the importance of 'followers' in either saving or damning him/her. In highlighting the conflicting gendered expectations women face when they take up the 'leader' role, *The Lifeboat* offers a sobering 'damned if they do, damned if they don't' take on women's leadership.

7. *Pope Joan* (1996) by Donna Woolfolk Cross

This novel brings to life the legend of Pope Joan, a talented ninth-century woman who allegedly disguised herself as a man and may have been the first, and only, female to preside on the papal throne. As a 'man' to all but a select few, Joan is free from the negative perceptions and expectations which are naturally afforded the female sex, however, her ever-present awareness of prejudice serves to make it all the more visible and open to critique. Interestingly, Woolfolk Cross has Joan embody more communal leadership traits even though these have rarely been modelled for her and she spends the majority of her life in the company of men. Joan's vision for a cleaner, safer, more inclusive, compassionate and moral nation-state is in stark contrast to her competitor Anastasius's aggressive, authoritative and individualistic political goals. In taking a cultural feminist stance on women's leadership, the story raises an important set of questions about the nature of gender differences – are they innate or socially constructed?

While some members of the papal court are deeply suspicious of her/his egalitarian and communal behaviour, the majority accept Joan's 'feminine' attributes so long as they are presented in the guise of the normative masculine body. But when her 'innate femaleness' is spectacularly revealed, she is quickly judged unacceptable as a leader.

8. *Top Girls* (1982) by Caryl Churchill

In the play *Top Girls*, Churchill is concerned with challenging traditional female 'roles,' while at the same time critiquing liberal feminist ambition, particularly when it is exercised purely for individual gain within traditionally patriarchal structures. Act I opens with Marlene, the newly appointed Director of 'Top Girls' Employment Agency, celebrating her promotion "over all the women you work with. And all the men" (p. 14) with a group of 'friends' – famous women from the past (including Pope Joan!). As the play progresses, Marlene emerges as a certain type of 'new woman' – ambitious, career-minded and agentic (Naismith, 2008). Marlene and her female colleagues at 'Top Girls' are largely dismissive of men, and they cleverly exploit the hierarchal system to their advantage, completely free (or at least they think so) from masculine influence. However, by failing to challenge patriarchal authority, they have themselves become ruthless 'Queen Bees.' When Angie, Marlene's working class niece, shows up at the office, Marlene is unwilling to undermine her professional 'image' or mantra of individualism by giving Angie what she needs – care and a helping hand. Nonetheless, Churchill is sensitive to the myriad difficulties and criticism women like Marlene face when entering top jobs. So while not averse to celebrating the success of individual women in the workplace, Churchill asks, at what cost? If one still has to mould oneself to fit a patriarchal/masculine model to succeed, then the system itself desperately needs to be reformed.

9. 'Sur' (1982) by Ursula Le Guin

In the fictional short story 'Sur' (the Spanish word for 'south'), a party of nine South American women secretly set off for Antarctica in 1909, two years before the official claim documented by Amundsen. Together they traverse the freezing continent for three months and work as a team to accomplish their exploratory goals. This feat goes unacknowledged as the women know it would be labelled unacceptable (and unbelievable!) for the weaker sex to have achieved the Southern Journey alone. Le Guin's

female narrator is deeply aware of the inimitable issues and unique struggles facing women when they journey outside the private sphere of home and family into a ‘man’s world,’ ranging from benign sexism to bodily differences (one of the women gives birth on the expedition). Nonetheless, ‘Sur’ is a triumphant example of distributed leadership that celebrates the value of authentic engagement over individual acts of ‘heroism’ as the ‘leader’ role moves seamlessly between group members.

10. *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) by Moira Buffini

Inspired by Sophocles’ play *Antigone*,²³ *Welcome to Thebes* marries modern politics with ancient myth in a contemporary encounter between the world’s richest superpower (Athens) and the world’s poorest country (Thebes). Thebes represents an unnamed African nation emerging from a brutal civil war. It is struggling to establish a democracy under a new president, Eurydice, a female leader with a clear feminist agenda. In choosing to make the newly elected democratic cabinet all female (with one ‘token’ man), Buffini flips the normative patriarchal centre on its head and replaces it with a matriarchal one. By doing so, the play illuminates the double-bind and ensuing prejudice and sexism that women may face when in positions of authority, portraying the ways their presentation, power, and choices are mercilessly questioned and challenged by men and women alike. As she tries to establish her legitimacy as a leader, Eurydice faces a labyrinth so treacherous that one wrong move could cause her downfall.

Based on their relevance to the key concepts, the short listed texts have been grouped as follows in Table 12. However, only texts marked with an asterisk are used in the extended analysis for this project.

²³ *Antigone* is a very popular recommendation for literary approaches to leadership, and is included by Badaracco (2006), Warner (2011), and the Hartwick Institute (n.d.) in their literary recommendations.

Table 12 Conceptual Framework Themes and Corresponding Short Listed Texts

Topical themes:	1) Women engaging in leadership together – Social process perspectives	2) The pervasive agentic/communal double bind	3) Experiencing and combatting perceptions and expectations	4) Destabilising grand narratives – Reinterpreting the hierarchy	5) Individual women becoming leaders – Personal agency and authenticity
Applicable texts:	‘Sur’ by Ursula Le Guin*	<i>The Lifeboat</i> by Charlotte Rogan*	<i>Welcome to Thebes</i> by Moira Buffini*	<i>The Gate to Women’s Country</i> by Sheri S. Tepper*	<i>The Invention of Wings</i> by Sue Monk Kidd*
	<i>The Help</i> by Kathryn Stockett	<i>The Dovekeepers</i> by Alice Hoffmann	<i>The Lifeboat</i> by Charlotte Rogan	<i>The Dovekeepers</i> by Alice Hoffmann	<i>The Last Runaway</i> by Tracy Chevalier
	<i>The Last Runaway</i> by Tracy Chevalier	<i>Top Girls</i> by Caryl Churchill	‘Sur’ by Ursula Le Guin	<i>Welcome to Thebes</i> by Moira Buffini	<i>Pope Joan</i> by Donna Woolfolk Cross
	<i>The Dovekeepers</i> by Alice Hoffmann	<i>Pope Joan</i> by Donna Woolfolk Cross	<i>The Invention of Wings</i> by Sue Monk Kidd		

6.4 Steps 4 and 5: Expand and Summarise

The purpose of this discussion is to give a broad overview of the potential scope, depth, and possibilities these short listed texts offer for proactively addressing, at the individual and interpersonal level, the five critical issues identified in the conceptual framework. This section is structured using the final two phases of the RITES rubric: Expand and Summarise. I draw on examples from five of the stories to expand on the concepts and guiding questions, summarise key points, and recommend questions for critical reflection. Due to the strict word count limitations for this project, I am not able to utilise all ten of the texts outlined in Table 11, nor am I analysing the stories in their entirety. The material is so rich and varied that to do so would result in a book-length thesis. At this point it is also important to reiterate that I am operating from the position of a leadership researcher rather than a literary theorist (see also Section 1.4 Researcher's Position). Subsequently, in this study, my extended analysis and discussion of the texts is limited to exploring the meanings they hold for a specific audience – women engaging in, or aspiring to, leadership – rather than contextual and historical details, such as setting, plot, imagery and language, as well as other important socio-political issues, such as race and class. Rather, the value of this discussion lies in each text's ability to ask and provide interesting and provocative responses to a set of 'right' questions. Questions and answers that require the reader/leader to venture beyond the self and embrace wider social, moral and historical contexts, making what was hitherto invisible (i.e. leadership 'myths,' stereotypes, gendered expectations, prejudices, and 'grand narratives') visible and open to thoughtful critique, transformative insight and resituation.

[*Note to the reader:* To improve readability the works of literary fiction are fully referenced the first time they appear and after that, only page numbers are provided.]

6.4.1 Concept 1: Women Engaging in Leadership Together

'How should I think about leadership?'

Conceptualising leadership as a relational process or a 'moment' of social relations (Ladkin, 2010), requires purposefully moving away from 'human-centric' thinking and, instead, "towards an acknowledgement of leadership's collective and open-ended character" (Kelly, 2015, p. 169). However, the literature review demonstrated that the

primacy of the heroic/masculine model remains resistant to change in both theory and practice (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; McManus & Perruci, 2015; Sinclair, 2005). As noted in Chapter Four, if women's understandings of leadership fail to transcend traditional 'leader-centred' viewpoints, then leadership development is limited to the replacement of the heroic-masculine archetype with a duplicate heroic-feminine model.

How then should we think about leadership? What does exercising 'power-with' others instead of 'power-over' look like in practice? Answers to these questions can be found in the short story 'Sur' (1982) by Ursula K. Le Guin. In problematising the traditional 'leader' role, the story requires the reader to rethink and embrace a more complex and collaborative understanding of the leader-follower dynamic.

In an exploratory trip christened the 'Yelcho Expedition,' nine women undertake a secret journey to Antarctica (see plot synopsis). Although called "mad, or wicked, or both" (p. 319), the women are mobilised for action by their collective desire "to go, to see – no more, no less" the untouched polar snows; "if Captain Scott can do it, why can't we?" (p. 318). However, the journey is "attended with not inconsiderable uncertainty and danger" (p. 319), especially since they hope to "go a little further, perhaps, and see a little more" (p. 318) than both Ernest Shackleton and Captain Scott. The Narrator remembers that:

At the time we left South America, we knew only that Mr Shackleton had mounted another expedition to the Antarctic in 1908, had tried to attain the Pole but failed, and had returned to England in June of the current year, 1909. (p. 327)

It would make sense to assume that such a physically and psychologically demanding, and not to mention dangerous, expedition would require the presence of a brave and heroic leader akin to Shackleton or Scott, along with a crew of well-disciplined and loyal followers. However, the unnamed female narrator rejects this simplistic and individualistically-oriented rendering of the leader-follower dichotomy:

But then, the backside of heroism is often rather sad; women and servants know that. They know also that the heroism may be no less real for that. But achievement is smaller than men think. What is large is the sky, the earth, the sea, the soul. (p. 323)

Not only does heroism have alienating consequences for 'others,' but individual achievement and heroic action is only one small 'aspect' of leadership in the context of the

much larger 'space' in which it exists. So despite the fact that the women in 'Sur' venture further than both Scott and Shackleton, they decide to leave no sign of their presence in Antarctica, "we left no footprints even" (p. 330). The Narrator reflects with more than a hint of irony: "But I was glad... for some man longing to be first might come someday, and find it, and know what a fool he had been, and break his heart" (p. 329). Their expedition is relegated instead to the realm of fairy tales – a "world of seven suns" inhabited by "a great white, mad dog named Blizzard!" (p. 329).

Subverting the 'heroic' masculine archetype of individual accomplishment, the women on the *Yelcho* Expedition favour instead what Sinclair and Evans (2015) describe as "distributed and context-determined leadership exemplified in processes of consultation, devolved decision-making, development and empowerment of other women" (p. 140). In other words, leadership for these nine adventurous women becomes a collective undertaking, a process of mutual decision-making and influence: "The nine of us worked things out amongst us from beginning to end without any orders being given by anybody, and only two or three times with recourse to a vote by voice or show of hands" (p. 320).

Consequently, rather than power residing solely with an appointed 'leader' figure, leadership is allowed to flow freely between group members, directed by the purpose or task at hand and dependent on each individual's skills and abilities (Gronn, 2002; Ladkin, 2010). For example, Juana, the group's surveyor, "had trained herself well," and subsequently acted as the team 'leader' when attaining the group's shared goal rested on her "faithful and methodical" sightings and directions (p. 327). Likewise, Berta and Eva, the "most ingenious builder-excavators," jointly took on the role of "chief architect-designers," and were responsible for directing the women in the creation of habitable ice dwellings (p. 324). However, this doesn't mean the formal 'leader' role is completely void or unnecessary. The Narrator is *given* the "unenviable honour" of being the voice that must be obeyed should the group find themselves in urgent danger. But to her "very great pleasure and relief" her qualities as a 'leader' are never tested (p. 320).

These examples suggest that when the 'leader' role moves between the team, the experience is potentially more dynamic and collaborative (Ladkin, 2010), and ultimately, equally 'empowering' for all those involved. However, Le Guin is also careful not to romanticise this relational experience:

We argued a good deal. Usually at least one person grumbled about the decision, sometimes bitterly. But what is life without grumbling, and the occasional opportunity to say, “I told you so”? How could one bear housework, or looking after babies, let alone the rigours of sledge-hauling in Antarctica, without grumbling? Officers – as we came to understand aboard the *Yelcho* – are forbidden to grumble; but we nine were, and are, by birth and upbringing, unequivocally and irrevocably, *all crew*. (p. 320, emphasis added)

But despite their ‘grumbling’ the women manage to negotiate an equitable balance of ‘power-with’ one another, and with ardent cooperation, achieve their goal.

As an illustrative example of women engaging in leadership together, ‘Sur’ disrupts the default assumption that a single ‘leader’ figure, such as Shackleton or Captain Scott, is tantamount to ‘leadership’. Instead leadership can be conceived of as a process, by which leaders and followers “develop a relationship and work together toward a goal within an environmental context shaped by cultural values and norms” (Perruci, 2011, p. 83). On the *Yelcho* Expedition, the women collectively mobilise themselves in order to successfully fulfil their vision to reach “that white place on the map, that void.” And once there “we,” not ‘I,’ “flew and sang like sparrows” (p. 326). In the context of this leadership ‘moment,’ no one person exercises ‘power-over’ the others, instead the leader-follower dynamic is constantly being restructured. Thus, by looking more closely at the processes that make up the leadership interactions and activities between groups of people, different stories than ones vested solely in individual achievement and the ‘leader’ role might be told, challenging how we subconsciously think about power, organisations and society (Kelly, 2015).

Recommended reflective questions:

- What are your assumptions about the ideal partnership between leaders and followers? Do these assumptions match the examples presented in ‘Sur’?
- ‘Sur’ suggests a model of leadership in which all group members are “crew” and there is very little in the way of formal hierarchy. The goal guides and ‘empowers’ the group so ‘we,’ not ‘I,’ can share ‘power-with’ outside the bounds of traditional leader-follower constraints. Do you think this model of ‘power-with’ as opposed to ‘power-over’ is a realistic proposition in other settings and contexts? At the

personal level, are you prepared to let go of the security which is ‘power-over’ and embrace the unknown of ‘power-with’?

- Can you identify leadership ‘moments’ in your work experience where the ‘task’ at hand has acted as the ‘leader’? Were the results successful?
- ‘Sur’ situates the *Yelcho* Expedition in relation to two well-known ‘heroic’ explorers, Shackleton and Scott, and their individual ‘successes’. However, the Narrator comments that “achievement is smaller than men think” (p. 323). Considered in terms Ladkin’s (2010) leadership ‘moment’ model, what other ‘aspects’ contribute to leadership’s success? How important are they in comparison to the ‘leader’?
- Le Guin proposes that women might be more comfortable than men with collaborative and/or distributed leadership as a result of their “birth and upbringing” (p. 320). Do you agree with this statement?

6.4.2 Concepts 2 and 3: Understanding and Navigating Socially Constructed Expectations

‘Am I aware of my own and others’ absent but present’ gendered expectations and their impact on the ‘leaderly’ engagements I participate in? When taking up the ‘leader’ role, how can I navigate these invisible ‘aspects’?’

As demonstrated in ‘Sur,’ leadership isn’t the preserve of a single ‘leader’ figure nor does it occur in a vacuum. Rather we should think of leadership as a more complex series of ongoing and interconnected “systems, practices, people, stories, institutions, histories, objects, spaces, places and technologies” (Kelly, 2015, p. 169), not all of which may be immediately apparent. Ladkin (2010) has proposed the notion of ‘absences’ to describe the invisible factors that exert influence over “leaderly engagements” (p. 39). A significant absence is expectations. The implicit expectations held by both those who view themselves as ‘followers’ and those taking up the ‘leader’ role always underpin and influence the leadership dynamic and the ‘spaces between’ leaders and followers (Ladkin, 2010). As revealed in the literature review, an important set of historically and culturally influenced ‘absent but present’ expectations are those arising from socially constructed gender binaries (i.e. masculine/feminine and agentic/communal). Recent studies have shown that people still subconsciously associate men and women with different traits, linking men

with more of the traits that signify ‘leadership’ (Eagly & Carli, 2012; Fine, 2010; Sinclair, 2005). As a result, women in the ‘leader’ role face a unique ‘double bind’: they can enact communal behaviours and be well-liked but perceived as weak and even incompetent, or they can use agentic behaviours and be respected but not liked (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Rhee & Sigler, 2015).

One of the first steps to take in dealing with these ‘absent but present’ gendered expectations and ensuing prejudice, is to increase individual women’s personal awareness by enhancing their ability to recognise and understand how expectations and perceptions impact both their own leadership experiences and that of others (Hoyt & Simon, 2016; Stead & Elliott, 2009). As reflected in Table 12, due to the scope of this topic it has been divided into two parts. Charlotte Rogan’s novel *The Lifeboat* (2012) provides a fascinating case study of the agentic/communal double bind from the perspective of a female ‘follower’, while Moira Buffini’s play *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) illustrates the myriad ways expectations arising from gendered norms may manifest themselves in the experience of a female ‘leader’.

The Lifeboat – The agentic/communal double bind

Locked up and awaiting trial with two other women for the murder of Mr Hardie, Grace records her version of what happened on their overcrowded lifeboat as it drifted for three weeks in the middle of the Atlantic (see plot synopsis). There were “webs of influence and deceit in the lifeboat from the very start” she writes (Rogan, 2012, p. 27). In these dire circumstances, Mr Hardie, the only experienced sailor on board, is immediately recognised by the group as their vouchsafed ‘leader.’ In retrospect, Grace observes: “Though we hardly knew one another, a sense of ourselves in the lifeboat was beginning to form, with Hardie at the center the way a grain of rough sand lies at the very center of a pearl” (p. 47). But as the conditions change, a bitter power struggle emerges between Hardie and a would-be female ‘leader’, Mrs Grant.

Grace frames her observations of Hardie and Mrs Grant in highly agentic and communal terms. Based on the long-held and implicit belief that she has some “obligation to the man in charge – to men in general – and, of course, to God, who I had always assumed was a man” (p. 187), Grace, and many others on the lifeboat, initially subscribe to the ‘Great Man’ myth of leadership. They envisage Hardie as a tough, courageous and omniscient decision-maker who naturally occupies a place in the power structure above them. He is a

“kind of oracle” (p. 90), and “something either more or less than human” (p. 132). Subsequently, Hardie, who “won’t take orders from anyone” (p. 27), is expected to exercise ‘power-over’ everyone else.

In contrast, Mrs Grant is seen as the “ideal mother” figure (p. 210). She appears selfless, caring and accessible, “always stretching a hand out for someone to hold or turning her unsmiling face, with its fixed look of deep compassion and concern, toward one or another of the women” (p. 39-40). Grace remembers that most people on the boat *liked* Mrs Grant as she had a gift for “making a person feel understood” (p. 187), as well as “warmed and embraced” (p. 195). Nonetheless, Mrs Grant remains inferior to Hardie’s ‘superior’ male rationality and fortitude until his suspect motives cause him to lose his ‘godlike’ status in the eyes of his ‘followers’:

Perhaps he had changed, or perhaps we had, or perhaps it was only the situation that was now calling for something new. But whether Mr Hardie had changed or not, Mrs Grant had only become more...solid, enduring, endlessly capable. (p. 185)

At the behest of the lifeboat occupants, and together with her ‘devoted daughters’ (Grace included), Mrs Grant successfully directs the overthrow and replacement of the ‘Father’ figure with the ‘Mother.’ After dumping Hardie over the side of the boat

Mrs. Grant emerged into a businesslike rationality; Hannah made a show of busy concern for the other occupants on the boat – after all, we had just killed someone for them, and wasn’t that evidence of how much we cared? (p. 194)

However, once safely back on land, Mrs Grant is perceived as having transgressed too far onto the agentic side of the traditional gender binary and “against the grain of the public’s expectations” (p. 237). While Grace is also implicated in Hardie’s death, she might “just [be] innocent enough to get away with it” (p. 237). Mrs Grant, however, presents “a fearful sight. She dresses in nothing but black. Her hair, which in the boat had been pulled back into a tight knot, is now nearly shorn, and though the ordeal left her twenty pounds lighter, she is still robust” (p. 250). While she garners grudging respect from many and loyal support from some, at the trial it is easy for the jury to believe the Colonel when he accuses Mrs Grant of being a power-hungry, manipulative and self-interested matriarch (p. 238). Once the ‘Selfless Heroine,’ she is quickly relabelled the ‘Iron Maiden’ incarnate.

Through the ‘gaze’ of Grace, Mrs Grant’s ‘leaderly’ actions and quiet strength are at first reassuring (she is nurturing, and she *should* be because she is a woman). However, as circumstances change and Mrs Grant manages to secure official control with the assistance of her “Apostles” (p. 239), what was once seen as caring selflessness becomes to Grace, and ultimately, the public, something much more dangerous and not quite human - “I too was partially under her [Mrs Grant’s] spell” (p. 187). In the eyes of those unconsciously influenced by traditional stereotypes, masculine traits and values (the ‘agentic’) and feminine attributes (the ‘communal’) are often seen as mutually exclusive, so that the more masculine you are the less feminine you will naturally be, and vice versa (Walter, 2010). As demonstrated in *The Lifeboat*, this can be extremely negative for a woman, as seeking power reduces her femininity and causes her to be regarded less favourably than men (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). For Mrs Grant, this means there is no middle ground between the agentic and communal in people’s perceptions – if she is liked, she is not respected, if she is respected, she is not liked (Rhee & Sigler, 2015). So while Hardie is exonerated posthumously for his role in the untimely deaths of many on the lifeboat (he was simply ‘doing his duty’), Mrs Grant is condemned for taking almost the exact same actions.

Recommended reflective questions

- At the end of the novel, Grace wonders if Mrs Grant and Hannah would have been incarcerated if Mrs. Grant had been a man (p. 252). How much of a role do you think expectations arising from her gender play in Mrs Grant’s conviction?
- At different points in the story Mrs Grant is viewed as a ‘Selfless Heroine’ and at other times, an ‘Iron Maiden.’ What accounts for such divergent stereotypes? Does Mrs Grant drastically change her behaviour or is it a matter of changing expectations on the behalf of Grace, the other survivors, and the public?
- Imagine for a moment a highly visible contemporary female leader. What implicit expectations might you have of her as a woman *and* a leader? What place do you perceive her occupying on the agentic/communal spectrum?

Welcome to Thebes – Navigating expectations and perceptions

How can female leaders who are aware of the problematic nature of the highly visible ‘leader’ role successfully navigate the pervasive double bind? Researchers suggest that this

tightrope of divergent expectations and perceptions requires a careful balancing act between the agentic and communal, as well as the enactment of more androgynous qualities such as positive initiative, social skills, openness, integrity, and conscientiousness (Anderson, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007). This difficult ‘balancing act’ is exemplified in the play *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) by Moira Buffini. In the conflict-devastated nation of Thebes, the newly elected president, Eurydice, must deal with a leadership crisis while simultaneously negotiating a wide range of implicit preconceptions, unconscious bias and gendered expectations from both her inner circle of followers, as well as from those actively seeking to test and undermine her legitimacy as a female leader.

While the fighting in Thebes has stopped due to a “grass-roots movement” (p. 20) ignited by a group of Theban women who “would congregate in numbers and place themselves in the line of fire” (p. 19) and a new democratic and female-dominated government has been formed, “there is no infrastructure whatsoever” (p. 18). “No electricity / No schools, no medicine, no roads / No jobs, no drinking water / Children dying in their droves” (p. 59). Faced with the possibility of sliding into yet another civil war, Eurydice must secure the goodwill of neighbouring Athens, and in particular, their First Citizen, Theseus.

Eurydice is wary of her formal ‘leadership’ position as she has always hated politics – the “ebb and flow of power from man to man / The little games of consequence” (p. 13) – and its potentially corrupting influence. Entering the “world of men” (p. 15), Eurydice is also mindful of the pressures she may face as a female leader. She attempts to navigate the double bind by presenting an image of competence and strength, yet also care and nurturance through her dress:

Ismene You need accessories / A scarf, you see? / Connotations of humility / But powerful mystique. / It softens all your lines / And then the architecture works

Eurydice Oh yes

Ismene You need an elegant but manly watch / To show that Time is your new god.” (p. 14)

However, Eurydice cannot lead Thebes out of danger and realise the government’s objective of Athenian partnership without the collective support of her female ministers, her ‘followers.’

Thalia We must have Theseus

Euphrosyne And to get him we need her, Eurydice / Her confidence, her charm,
her gravitas / Her sense of her own right

Aglaea Her pride

Euphrosyne Your pride

Thalia I feel we're holding the floodgates closed / Exhausted with the weight /
We have to be united. Please stand firm / Or the approaching rush / Will
overwhelm us all

Euphrosyne The greatest threat to Thebes / Is Thebes itself. (p. 52)

This exchange demonstrates the role of 'reversibility' between 'leaders' and 'followers' (Ladkin, 2010). Through their gaze, Eurydice knows what is required of her, and through Eurydice's vision, her 'followers' know that unity and commitment is what is required of them. But even as Eurydice is trying to navigate the expectations of others, so too are her followers trying to negotiate and realise their own personal expectations of Eurydice. Aglaea is particularly critical, accusing Eurydice of putting "her own needs first" (p. 17) and making mistakes "like an autocrat" (p. 51) when she refuses to bury the body of Polynices, the man who murdered her son. Eurydice falls short of fulfilling Aglaea's vision of the 'Selfless Heroine,' the leader who always places others needs above her own in self-sacrificial acts of maternal care and support.

In this politically volatile situation, Tydeus, "the man with god inside" (p. 28), along with his paramour Pargeia, poses a hostile and open threat to Eurydice's leadership. Tydeus attempts to challenge Eurydice publicly by inciting traditional concerns about the suitability of women for the public 'leader' role: "The very female nature is chaotic. / They can't structure or impose / They won't inspire respect / The woman [Eurydice] / She should do what she was made for" (p. 102). Playing on these gendered stereotypes, Tydeus and Pargeia confront Eurydice publically:

Tydeus (*to the crowd*) You have been robbed of strength / Your power is lost in
woman's hands

Pargeia Our ancestors are grieving / Thebes, her promises are hollow / Eurydice
can't keep control

Tydeus Don't betray the Theban dead / Revolt against this government of women
(p. 36–37).

But Eurydice will not let their “dark ideas” silence and oppress her. Her response is swift and sure: “I did not march into the guns of violent men / To then be cowed by them. / I will speak. I will speak. I will speak” (p. 37).

Sexism may not always be so blatant and hostile however. Hoyt and Simon (2016) explain that female leaders are often subject to unconscious gender bias in the form of more “subtle and implicit preconceptions and institutionalised discrimination” (p. 409). Theseus, the political leader of Athens, appears to be supportive of Eurydice, singing her praises: “You have a way with people that I envy; got them wrapped around your finger... You appear humane, intelligent, compassionate and wise” (p. 58). But rather than her leadership capabilities, he is more interested in determining whether he likes her or not:

Theseus But what do we think; do we trust her?

Talthybia Yes, I think / she's –

Theseus Do we *like* her?

Talthybia – Very good news. (emphasis added, p. 20)

Theseus further exemplifies his subtle prejudices when, after congratulating Eurydice on her first speech as president, he offers her the services of his writing team. The reason? “You know, an expert on language and the human brain said that women find rhetoric more difficult” (p. 39). While Eurydice knows how to counter Tydeus's hostile threats, she is taken aback by Theseus benign sexism; “Thank you very much for telling me” she replies (p. 39).

However, the unsettling nature of Theseus prejudicial views towards Eurydice aren't revealed until they meet alone to discuss what Athens can do for Thebes. While Theseus claims to be treating Eurydice as his “equal” (p. 60), he uses this false rhetoric of equality to manipulate the Theban leader – “you're begging here, you're on your knees” (p. 61). Eurydice's physical appearance is also up for close scrutiny:

Theseus You're also beautiful

Eurydice I – what?

Theseus That is so unusual in politics / Not coming on to you; just stating bare fact...A clever, charming, deeply foreign woman. (p. 59)

But unlike Tydeus, Theseus doesn't appear to be purposefully undermining Eurydice (he expects her to take his comments as a compliment). Rather, his implicit assumptions about what is appropriate behaviour when engaging with a female leader are strongly influenced by traditional gender norms and expectations:

Theseus Dionysus – he was born here, wasn't he, the god of wine? Don't you women have a dance for him, some sort of rite? I'd like to see it. / Would you dance for me?

Pause.

Theseus What's up? I'm asking you to dance with me

Eurydice You said for, dance for you

Theseus I said to dance

Eurydice I'm sorry but that isn't / what I heard

Theseus Don't apologise

Eurydice I'm not

Theseus No seriously, don't apologise / In politics, you can't admit mistakes

Eurydice I haven't made one

Theseus You cannot be wrong

Eurydice I know that

Theseus So then. What are you afraid of? Dance.

Neither moves. (p. 61–62)

Discussing this ill-fated encounter with her ministers, Eurydice is unsure how to frame the insult – is it her fault or his? “Maybe he was trying to make a link / To get beneath the mask / Perhaps I misinterpreted – / He didn't mean it as an insult – / Offered me an intimacy” (p. 65). Thalia is convinced Eurydice brought it on herself: “You can't pretend you didn't see it coming / You were flirting with him” (p. 65). Aglaea, on the other hand,

realises that Eurydice had simply “assumed equality, respect. / She didn’t realise these were gifts to be bestowed by him” (p. 66).

Ultimately, Eurydice refuses to ‘perform’ to Theseus’s expectations. Angry, he prepares to leave Thebes without settling an agreement. But before he does, Eurydice poses a final challenge:

Eurydice Are we not behaving like the pets you hoped to tame? / Are you discovering instead of women pliable and biddable / That we’re passionate and human; that we’re free?

Theseus My personal involvement with you ends right now

Eurydice That is not leadership. (p. 82– 83)

In conclusion, *Welcome to Thebes* provides multiple examples of the ways in which ‘absent but present’ gendered expectations infiltrate and influence the middle space between people during leadership ‘moments.’ These expectations may be the product of concern (Aglaea and Thalia), hostility (Tydeus), or simply ignorance (Theseus). Thus, for women “walking into the world of men” (p. 15), there is the constant need to proactively address and challenge the long held ‘psychology of prejudice’ that continues to exert its influence over ‘leaderly’ engagements, making this play ideal for reflective thinking.

Recommended reflective questions

- Which challenge to Eurydice’s authority as a female leader poses the greatest threat – Aglaea and Thalia’s criticism, Tydeus’s hostility or Theseus’s subtle sexism? When taking up the leader role at work, how do you personally deal with hostile and/or benign sexism and competing expectations and perceptions?
- Eurydice attempts to negotiate gendered expectations in three different ways – in her personal presentation, by her actions, and with her words. Do you think she manages this successfully within the context of the leadership event? Are all three ‘methods’ equally as effective? Do you think she could she have dealt with the ‘situations’ differently?
- Eurydice is careful to ‘dress to impress.’ How important do you think physical appearance is for a woman taking up the ‘leader’ role? What works and what doesn’t?

- After Theseus apologises for telling her to dance, Eurydice proposes: “These fists of yours / One force, one gentleness / Open them” (p. 112). Imagining each fist as a metaphor for the agentic/communal double bind, is Eurydice’s solution a valid option for both male and female leaders alike? Why or why not?

6.4.3 Concept 4: Destabilising Grand Narratives

‘What alternative worlds might women create if given the opportunity? Would women actually lead differently?’

We often use the phrase ‘it’s a man’s world’ or ‘the world of men’ to describe the upper echelons of power distribution in Western society. As pointed out in the literature review, the assumption is that women will “overcome their deficiencies” and adapt to suit these prevailing conditions if they wish to succeed (Crawford, 2012, p. 329). However, as discussed using *The Lifeboat*, female leaders are often still penalised for enacting either highly agentic (masculine) or highly communal (feminine) leadership behaviours. And as *Welcome to Thebes* demonstrated, navigating ‘absent but present’ gendered expectations and sexism can be an extremely demanding and difficult task for female leaders.

But what if we completely re-imagined the normative grand narrative with its hegemonic centre and replaced it with a matriarchal one instead? What alternative worlds might women create if given the opportunity? On what terms can ‘lower’ binary terms ‘trade places’ with traditionally higher ones (male/female, agentic/communal, leader/follower)? Would women *actually* lead differently to men and with different results in a female-dominated society?

Sheri S. Tepper’s science fiction novel *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988), portrays just such an ‘unnatural’ world (see plot synopsis). Under the careful guidance of the female-run councils in each city, with names like Marthastown and Abbyville, women hold sole responsibility for managing the economy, along with learning, science and cultural development. From its conception, Women’s Country has been premised on the essentialist notion that “certain ‘gendered’ traits are genetically determined” (Roberts, 2013, p. vii). Thus, men are conceived of as possessing an innate desire to dominate and eliminate potential rivals, and, of course, “to copulate with as many women as possible” (Maxwell, 2011, p. 116). In an effort to prevent another world war, the majority of men in

Women's Country are banished to military garrisons outside the cities. However, between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, those who choose to do so can return through the 'Gate' and live as 'servitors' in the women's households.

Three hundred years ago almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men. It was men who made the weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defence. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off. And we died...Almost all of us. Women. Children. Only a few were left. Some of them were women, and among them was a woman who called herself Martha Evesdaughter. Martha taught that the destruction had come about because of men's willingness – even eagerness to fight, and she determined that this eagerness must be bred out of our race. (p. 301)

The implication here is, of course, that women will lead and govern differently than men – more peaceably and equitably. Given the chance, their natural 'feminine' attributes, such as emotional intelligence, nurturance and connection, will make "women more effective than men," more enlightened and better fitted for contemporary leadership (Holvino, 2007, p. 366). Throughout the story, characters continually re-affirm the women's essential 'femaleness.' As Septemius Bird, an itinerant magician, observes: "Misplaced nurturing...the biggest chink in your female armour. The one thing you cannot and dare not absolutely guard against, *for your nature must remain as it is for all your planning to come to fruition*. You dare not change it" (p. 290, emphasis added). Following this thread of cultural feminist theorising, Women's Country should celebrate 'feminine' notions of shared power, collaboration, relational leadership, as well as the collective empowerment of women as a group (Holvino, 2007).

This model of innate male and female biological 'traits' is in stark contrast to liberal feminist theorising, in which 'gender' is seen as socialised onto sexed human beings to ensure 'proper' male/female behaviour (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Crawford, 2012); "traits exaggerated and bedded-in to behaviour by the conventions and ideologies of culture" (Roberts, 2013, p. vii). Liberal perspectives on gender stipulate that the similarities between men and women are far greater than the 'socially constructed' differences.

Subsequently, if provided with equal opportunities in similar environments, men and women will behave very similarly (Crawford, 2012).

It is very tempting to read and critique the novel as an overly simplistic cultural feminist rendering of gender relations. 'Men do war' and 'protect' the cities, while women, being more interpersonally-oriented and better suited to post-heroic leadership (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), maintain culture, industry, trade and almost everything else worthwhile in society. But as Roberts (2013) contends, that would be a misinterpretation of Tepper's project. In fact, the story infers its own contradiction as these 'binary opposites' "don't stay neatly on their proper side of the slash" (Klages, 2006, p. 59). Scattered throughout the text are distinctly dystopian elements. Rather than shared or distributed leadership, where 'power-with' is valued more highly than 'power-over' others, the realm is governed by only a select few, a closed and secretive circle: "Councilwomen are not elected by the people. They are chosen by other members of the Council" (p. 132). While it is widely understood that this is done for the 'collective good' of the citizens of Women's Country, the power balance is maintained through performance and control *not* authenticity and openness:

Morgot had said performance experience was important. "When you are grown, you may be asked to serve on the Council," she told Stavia. "Half of what we do is performance. Ritual. Observances. If we are seen to be in control, the people are calm and life moves smoothly. Nothing upsets the citizenry more than to believe its administrators are uncertain or faltering. Doing nothing with an appearance of calm may be more important than doing the right thing in a frantic manner. Learn to perform, Stavia, I have." (p. 127)

What is going on behind the scenes? Are the Councilwomen really leading and acting differently than men would, given the same circumstances? Although the female leaders don't elect to openly celebrate violence like the 'warriors' do, they are fighting a war all the same (Roberts, 2013). Near the end of the novel, Septemius asks Morgot whether the Councilwomen's secret eugenics programme is worth the guilt, pain and sacrifice it inevitably incurs. Morgot's response suggests that even she, a proponent of the regime, is not entirely sure: "She sat for a time without answering. At last she shifted in her chair and said, 'I'll tell you what we call ourselves among ourselves. That will answer your question...we call ourselves the Damned Few. And if the Lady has a heaven for the

merciful, we are not sure any of us will ever see it” (p. 290). Despite the ethical dubiousness of genetic manipulation, as well as the highly questionable science behind it, the Councilwomen have managed to breed a more androgynous and intelligent human – the male servitor. Unlike the warriors, the servitors are loyal and peaceable, “highly competent, calm, judicious men, and they are highly respected, particularly by the most competent women” (p. 288). But this comes at a terrible cost,²⁴ one that provides Stavia, in particular, much to consider in terms of this “strange and bewildering” (p. 294) level of power and control the Women’s Country councils hold.

In sum, contrary to cultural and radical feminist ambitions, the novel suggests that merely replacing male leaders with female ones *isn’t* going to result in a utopian-like solution. Although male and female behaviours may manifest themselves in slightly different ways, whether this is the result of nature or nurture is ultimately irrelevant as the matriarchal society portrayed in *The Gate to Women’s Country* remains far from perfect either way. Subsequently, the story unsettles our desire to overemphasise visions of ‘feminine perfection,’ while at the same time, disrupts liberal feminist ideals of an ahistorical, universal humanity in which men and women are considered essentially, and unquestionably, the same.

Is there any possible way forward then? Applying a poststructuralist feminist lens to this story suggests that rather than the visible male/female differences and similarities, what we should pay closer attention to instead is the language, practices, and structures that continue to produce and reproduce unequal power relations between not only women and men, but women and women, and men and men. The fact that the Councilwomen hold significant ‘power-over’ others (their right to live or die included) points to a much deeper issue imbedded in the very structure of society itself and the way it is organised according to essential ‘Truths’ and ‘Grand Narratives’ about gender relations, power, and leadership (Boje, 2001). In this way, the novel inadvertently suggests a much more complicated explanation, one in which the production of difference and the reproduction of inequality is the *result of* domination and sex-power imbalances (Kimmel, 2013).²⁵

²⁴ I don’t want to give away the final plot twist in the novel by discussing the details – it is worth reading the story to discover just how far the Councilwomen are willing to go to secure the genetic demise of the ‘alpha-male’ warrior.

²⁵ Gender theorist, Judith Butler (2004), takes this proposition a step further, asking: Is subjection not the process by which regulations produce gender? She writes: “Thus, a restrictive discourse on

This brings us full circle back to the question: *How should I think about leadership and, subsequently, power? What other possibilities for being and acting in leadership can I imagine?*

Recommended reflective questions

- Scholars have suggested that female leaders are better suited to ‘post-heroic’ leadership as they ‘naturally’ possess more of the traits suited to distributed and shared leadership (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007). How does *The Gate to Women’s Country* both support and problematise this ‘grand narrative’? Do you think any of these essentialist ‘truths’ or ‘grand narratives’ about gender, power, and leadership in the novel are reflected in contemporary organisations and society more widely?
- Maxwell (2011) writes that *The Gate to Women’s Country* can be thought of as satire, “not just of patriarchal values, but also of the radical feminist’s desire to overcome oppression and create a more peaceful society by jettisoning the male of the species” (p. 124). In light of your reading of the novel, do you agree or disagree with her conclusion? Why or why not?
- Employing a poststructuralist lens, what language, practices, and structures produce and reinforce unequal power relations between groups of people in *The Gate to Women’s Country*?

6.4.4 Concept 5: Individual Women *Becoming* Leaders

‘How am I ‘storying’ myself as a leader? Am I asking the right questions?’

So far the illustrative examples have addressed taken-for-granted assumptions about leadership, revealing the impact of gender on the ‘leader’ role and the implicit expectations held by men and women alike, as well as destabilising cultural and liberal feminist renderings of women’s leadership. Buoyed by this information, we can finally turn to the dual question: How am I ‘storying’ myself as a leader? Am I asking the right questions?

gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalises the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption” (p. 43).

Why is it important for women to learn how to imagine and present themselves as leaders? As explored in the literature review, research indicates that women can “find it difficult to envisage or label themselves as leaders” (Stead & Elliott, 2009, p. 146), preferring instead to use informal terms such *organiser* or *facilitator* (Hoyt & Simon, 2006). Perhaps as a result, women are “less likely than men to promote themselves for leadership positions” (Hoyt & Simon, 2016, p. 403), and are frequently perceived by others as having fewer leadership capabilities (Dahlvig & Longman, 2010). Subsequently, research indicates that ‘storying’ and envisaging oneself as a ‘leader’ is an ability that women need to develop in order to negotiate gendered processes and expectations in the workplace (Stead & Elliott, 2009). Through critical and reflexive ‘storied accounts,’ new interpretations of peoples’ experiences can begin to surface and may even lead to meaningful resistance against the status quo (Ford et al., 2008).

The journey to both *story* and *see* oneself as a ‘leader’ on these terms (both in informal and formal roles), however, is not always straightforward. Sue Monk Kidd’s (2014) fictionalised account of Sarah Grimke’s life (1792 – 1873) in *The Invention of Wings* is deeply concerned with this gradual process of overcoming and ‘becoming.’ Sarah’s journey from a shy young woman to outspoken abolitionist and one of America’s first women’s rights activists highlights the importance of learning to ask oneself the right questions by engaging in critical self-reflection and purposeful inquiry. But “what constitutes a ‘right’ question? How would we know one when we heard it?” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 166). As Sarah’s story demonstrates, finding the ‘right’ question is an ongoing process of self-discovery, one that involves shaking up our taken-for-granted assumptions and engaging in continuous dialogical inquiry.

As a child, Sarah dreams of changing the oppressive slave laws by becoming a jurist in antebellum South Carolina:

Naturally, I knew there were no female lawyers. For a woman, nothing existed but the domestic sphere...For a woman to aspire to be a lawyer – well, possibly, the world would end...I told myself the affliction in my voice wouldn’t stop me, it would compel me. It would make me strong, for I would have to be strong. (p. 24)

However, Sarah’s hopes are quickly dashed by the prevailing expectations and clear gender divisions of the time. Her Mother offers her scant sympathy, claiming that “every girl must have ambition knocked out of her,” and that Sarah is unusual only in her

determination to “fight what is inevitable” (p. 91). Although Sarah is dismayed and troubled by her Mother’s ‘advice’ to “give yourself over to your duty and your fate” (p. 91), her aspirations to become a jurist and free her slave, Handful, are soon “laid to rest in the Graveyard of Failed Hopes, an all-female establishment” (p. 98). As a result, Sarah begins to ask herself the *wrong* question, the one that belongs to her family, the church, and wider society: *Who am I to do this, a woman?* (p. 366).

Even though Sarah resigns herself to the values that underpin her designated ‘role’ in society, she continues to be disturbed by the institution of slavery. But while she has tried to help Handful by teaching her to read, in a moment of insightful self-reflection, she realises her naivety:

I saw then what I hadn’t seen before, that I was very good at despising slavery in the abstract, in the remove and anonymous masses, but in the concrete, intimate flesh of the girl beside me, I’d lost the ability to be repulsed by it. I’d grown comfortable with the particulars of evil. There’s a frightful muteness that dwells at the center of all unspeakable things, and I had found my way into it. (p. 130)

Ladkin (2010) explains that one starting point for finding the ‘right’ question/s is with “feelings of vague unease and discomfort that can arise from the very edges of our awareness in certain situations” (p. 166). But despite Sarah’s unease and her burning desire to *do* something about it, she lacks the courage to pose a question which would spur her into action. She continues to subscribe to others’ taken-for-granted expectations and perceptions of what she should do or is capable of, and by doing so, completely immobilises herself. She cannot imagine herself as a ‘leader.’

Although a slave in the Grimke household, it is Handful who recognises Sarah is trapped by her habitual “existing frames” (Ladkin, 2010):

She was trapped same as me, but she was trapped by her mind, by the minds of the people round her, not by the law...I tried to tell her that, I said, “My body might be a slave, but not my mind. For you, it’s the other way round”. (p. 231)

However, Sarah initially dismisses Handful’s insightful allegation – “what could she know of it?” (p. 241). Only much later as she reflects on these words does she realise Handful was correct; “My mind had been shackled” (p. 241). After this acknowledgement, Sarah

becomes willing to engage in “the quest for the question” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 167). For Sarah, the first step in this ‘quest’ involves thoughtful self-inquiry:

It came to me that what I feared most was not speaking. That fear was old and tired. What I feared was the immensity of it all – a female abolition agent traveling the country with a national mandate. I wanted to say, *Who am I to do this, a woman?* But that voice was not mine. It was Father’s voice. It was Thomas’. It belonged to Israel, to Catherine, and to Mother. It belonged to the church in Charleston and the Quakers in Philadelphia. It would not, if I could help it, belong to me. (p. 366)

As she begins travelling the abolitionist speaking circuit, Sarah begins to discover the *right* question: “*I am who I am, so how shall I do this?*”

I was gazing at a sea of faces, and it occurred to me that after my tall, dazzling sister, I must’ve been a sight...I was short, middle-aged, and plain, with a tiny pair of spectacles on the end of my nose, and I still wore my old Quaker clothes. I was comfortable in them now. *I am who I am*. The thought made me smile, and everywhere I looked, the women smiled back, and I imagined they understood what I was thinking. (p. 375)

By releasing the wrong question and embracing the right one, Sarah is able to deliberately take up the ‘leader’ role which has been waiting for her: public abolitionist and women’s rights activist. Along with her younger sister, Angelina Grimke, Sarah “sets the country in an uproar...They christened us ‘female incendiaries’” (p. 378).

In conclusion, Sarah’s story highlights, in Ladkin’s (2010) words, “not only the difficulties associated with finding the right question but also the challenge of summoning the courage to give it voice” (p. 168). For Sarah, ‘inventing her wings’ and ‘storying’ herself in the ‘leader’ role required engaging in thoughtful self-reflection and inquiry, as well as being willing to start actively ‘questing for the question.’ By moving from ‘who’ to ‘how,’ Sarah unsettles her ‘existing frames’ and is able to declare something very different about her reality and, by doing so, enact what was hitherto “unthinkable” (p. 241).

Recommended reflective questions

- How are you currently ‘storying’ yourself as a leader? What questions are guiding your actions? Are these the ‘right’ questions?

- Stead and Elliot (2009, p. 159) propose that ‘storying’ oneself as a leader provides a basis from which women can gain insight into:
 - 1) How situations unfold (the political)
 - 2) The values that underpin such situations (the theoretical), and
 - 3) How you might deal with these issues (the personal)

What does your ‘storied account’ reveal in light of these three factors?

- In *The Invention of Wings*, it is Handful who prompts Sarah to re-examine her harmful “existing frames.” What does this encounter say about the importance of relationships between women? How might you assist other women in finding the ‘right’ questions?

6.5 Chapter Summary

The findings and discussion have demonstrated that women’s literature is a rich source of information on, and provides thought-provoking illustrations of, both leadership and women’s unique leadership concerns. Ten texts were identified, organised in a short list, and then examined in terms of their key women and leadership themes. An extended qualitative/textual content analysis of five texts in line with the five concepts and corresponding questions outlined in the conceptual framework revealed fresh and memorable insights into how situations unfold between leaders and followers, and the values, assumptions and gendered expectations that continue to underpin the leadership phenomenon. In my analysis, the texts clearly illuminate the theory, and the theory illuminates the texts. Instead of neatly packaged ‘solutions’, critical reflective prompts inspired by the illustrative examples were provided. These questions were developed based on their potential to push aspiring female leaders “beyond the limits of [their] self-perception” (Bruns, 2011, p. 18) and towards a richer, more nuanced understanding of themselves as leaders, followers, and the ‘spaces between’ themselves and others.

Chapter Seven: Research Contributions and Recommendations for Future Research

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this concluding chapter is three-fold. To begin with, it serves to summarise my research findings and contributions by linking them back to my four central objectives. I then examine the limitations of this thesis and outline my key recommendations for future research. Finally, I will return to my original opening statement and reflect on the importance of my study in light of the implications it has for leadership practitioners.

7.2 Research Contributions

The worrying lack of resources and theoretically-based frameworks equipped to address the challenges and meet the specific needs of current and aspiring female leaders (Ely et al., 2011; Flynn et al., 2015), presented an opportunity to research more critical and interdisciplinary approaches to leadership development (Ford, 2015; Ruminski et al., 2012). Consequently, this thesis has sought to contribute to the field of women's leadership development by creating a critically-informed arts-based approach to inspire critical reflection on gender-related leadership issues. This principal contribution was underpinned by the question – **How can women's literary fiction be used to explore contemporary women's leadership issues and what literary texts are best suited for this purpose?** – and was further substantiated by four central objectives. The following discussion points outline these objectives in terms of their key contributions and findings.

Objective 1: To develop a comprehensive conceptual framework based on the current issues and concerns surrounding women's leadership in a 'post-heroic' leadership context.

In order to critically make sense of women's leadership and, simultaneously, the complexity of leadership as a social process, I developed a cohesive conceptual framework which was informed by critical leadership studies and critical feminist theory. The five

critical concerns were 1) women engaging in leadership together (understanding leadership as a social process), 2) the agentic/communal double bind, 3) gendered expectations and perceptions, 4) destabilising grand narratives, and 5) individual women *becoming* leaders. The application of these concepts, and their corresponding questions, provided a guide for productively analysing women's literary fiction. Each of the five concepts built progressively on one another to demonstrate how gender can shape women's paths to leadership, while at the same time seeking to cultivate in women a sense of their own agency (Ely et al., 2011).

Objective 2: To justify the use of an 'artful' interdisciplinary approach to women's leadership development. Specifically, this involves using literary fiction as a medium for proactively analysing the gendered nature of leadership.

I justified my approach by providing an extensive review of women's leadership concerns in order to identify and discuss a set of important gender-related issues that can be proactively addressed at the individual and interpersonal level in women's leadership development programmes. This was followed by an evaluation of four recent studies that have utilised literary fiction to enhance leadership development and practice. I assessed these approaches and provided a detailed summary of each authors' purpose, format, selected texts and methods for analysis and interpretation. This validated literary fiction as a suitable medium and set the direction for my own research. As a result of this review, I also found that stories written by women which feature dynamic female leaders as examples were largely absent from the existing reading lists, pointing to a significant 'gap' in the literature.

Objective 3: To develop a viable method for selecting appropriate women's literary fiction.

Due to the underrepresentation of women's literary fiction in the existing canon and the absence of a template or systematic method for critically choosing texts beyond subjective opinion, this study required that I develop a method for selecting appropriate literary texts. In order to achieve this outcome, I proposed a series of tailor-made and context specific reading boundaries and selection criteria in conjunction with the adapted RITES model. This provides a systematic and rigorous tool that can be utilised and adapted by other researchers who would like to develop reading lists for their own purposes. I used my

reflective journal to track the decision-making process, discuss a multitude of women's texts and test different criteria (see Appendix A).

Objective 4: To create a short list of women's literary texts and demonstrate how they can be used to awaken curiosity, deactivate indifference and stimulate debate on gender-related leadership issues.

To fulfil this final objective, I adopted an interpretive qualitative research paradigm to read and interrogate fifty novels, short stories, and plays by female authors. In a careful weighing up of the literary texts against one another and by applying my four selection criteria, I narrowed down my short list to ten primary texts. My thematic analysis of these selected literary texts found that there is an abundance of relevant and useful content on leadership to be mined from women's fiction, further proving that this particular data source has been unduly dismissed and unfairly underrepresented in the current recommended reading lists and studies conducted by authors including Badaracco (2006), Knights and Willmott (1999), and Sucher (2008).

The extended analysis demonstrated that women's literary fiction is a valuable source of interdisciplinary and 'artful' consciousness-raising material for use in a women's leadership development context. My analysis identified opportunities for the thoughtful application of critical leadership perspectives and feminist theory to the illustrative examples, encouraging meaningful transformative insight and providing critical questions for reflecting on new ways of 'doing', 'seeing' and 'sense-making' (Sutherland, 2012). In these ways, my research provides an original and creative product that can be used for critical and interdisciplinary approaches to women's leadership development.

7.3 Research Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In this section, I outline the limitations of this study alongside my key recommendations for future research. Although they do not detract from my overall research findings and contributions, the major limitations of this study relate to its scope in terms of the themes I focus on, the literary texts selected for the long list and the conceptual framework used to investigate the data. All research invariably suffers from limitations of this form (Wilson, 2016), especially when the word count is restricted. Nonetheless, there are many

opportunities to contribute further to this field, with a key recommendation being a participant-focused study which utilises my short list and conceptual framework.

As discussed in Section 6.4, I was unable to include all the short listed texts in the extended discussion. In addition, subsequent reading suggested that ethical leadership would be another concept worthy of analysis, taking the form of a sixth concept/question in the conceptual framework – Ethical engagement: ‘How can I take up the leader role wisely?’ As identified in Section 6.2, many of the short listed texts, such as *The Last Runaway* and *The Lifeboat*, are closely concerned with ethical leadership and moral dilemmas. Drawing on Ladkin’s (2010) use of Heidegger’s theory of ‘dwelling’, which includes the notions of ‘staying-with’, ‘comportment’ and ‘participation’, I anticipate that learning to lead wisely would have presented an equally compelling topic for analysis since several of the short listed texts provide in-depth illustrative examples on this theme from women’s perspectives. However, it fell outside the scope of what was achievable in a Master’s thesis. Nonetheless, these limitations serve to reinforce my finding that women’s literature provides a rich source of data and examples on and about complex leadership concerns and issues. Further protracted analysis of the short listed texts along with the addition of other concepts to the conceptual framework would serve to expand the comprehensiveness of my study.

Feminist criticism often connects analysis of the female position and gender bias with examination of other forms of domination and oppression, such as race, sexuality, and class (Fisher & Silber, 2003; Collinson, 2011). Since my focus is solely on gender and representations of women, race, sexual orientation and class are rendered largely invisible. This suggests I may be over-emphasising white, middle-class feminist modes of interpretation (Kim, 2016). There is room to redress this limitation in the future by combining critical race theory with transnational/postcolonial and socialist feminist theory to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of social location, hegemony, class boundaries, power, and oppression into the inquiry on women’s leadership issues. This would entail drawing from a broader spectrum of literature to include a number of translated literary texts and stories by authors from historically oppressed people groups, as well as expanding the literature review and conceptual framework to include intersectionality as a key thematic concern.

Missing from my long list and short list are novels, short stories and plays written by New Zealand authors. While I did initially attempt to include New Zealand women writers on my long list, such as Patricia Grace and Charlotte Grimshaw, I struggled to discover any suitable works within my designated reading timeframe. This may have been a result of my own unfamiliarity with female New Zealand authors, as well as my desire to make this research relevant on an international scale. However, for New Zealand women participating in an ‘artful’ women’s leadership development programme, culturally relevant literary texts may provide illustrative examples and critical reflective questions that are considered more applicable and relatable to the New Zealand context. Subsequently, a key future research opportunity would involve narrowing down my reading criteria and boundaries to only read and analyse literary fiction by New Zealand women writers. Such a focus would also allow me to include post-colonial, indigenous and post-settlement perspectives.

As stated in Chapter Four – Methodology, due to the limited amount of research in this field, the focus of this thesis has been on plausibility and possibilities. The research findings reflect this by providing a carefully developed conceptual framework, methods for selecting appropriate women’s literary texts, and a rigorously reviewed short list. However, to further validate my findings in terms of their practical and empirical worth, future studies should be concerned with conducting, observing and recording the results from participant-focused research in the form of a women’s leadership development ‘book club’ (e.g. Kooy, 2006). A qualitative study of this kind would further contribute to the leadership and humanities field, as at present there are still too few studies which have investigated and recorded the overall effectiveness, and both short and long-term impacts, of arts-based approaches to leadership development (Garavan et al., 2015; Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014; Sutherland & Jelinek, 2015).

Blogging, as a tool for critical reflective practice, also has future research implications. My reflective journal is as an example of a learning method which could be employed as part of a leadership development ‘book club.’ While research on the educational uses and effectiveness of blogs is still in its infancy, blogging has the potential to assist individuals in making connections between theory and practice by enhancing personal awareness, critical thinking, and personal action through written experimentation with new concepts and unfamiliar material (Osman & Koh, 2012). The collaborative affordances of blogs (writing, reading, and commenting) might also increase opportunities for enriched

communication, alternative methods for resolving challenges and cognitive conflict, as well as constructing knowledge and encouraging deeper thinking (Hall & Davison, 2007). In effect, my blog worked as a ‘book club’ nexus for myself and my supervisory team, enabling my supervisors to co-read several books with me. This co-learning process is another avenue for further research on post-graduate learning processes.

7.4 Final Words

I began my thesis with a quote by the feminist science fiction writer, Ursula K. Le Guin (1986):

On the maps drawn by men there is an immense white area, terra incognita, where most women live. That country is all yours to explore, to inhabit, to describe.
(p. 160)

In this thesis I have endeavoured to explore, describe, and contribute to one small corner of this “immense white area” by engaging the imaginative and transformative qualities found in women’s novels, plays and short stories to enrich critical approaches to women’s leadership development. My key contributions demonstrate that women’s literary fiction is a valuable source of interdisciplinary and ‘artful’ consciousness-raising material, offering memorable and potentially transformative insights into women’s leadership issues and concerns. It is my hope that these research findings and contributions will both encourage and assist women’s leadership development practitioners in embracing alternate, more ‘artful’ methods for addressing complex leadership topics, particularly those arising from the ‘absent but present’ gender norms and expectations that continue to influence the leadership phenomenon.

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Appendix A: The Complete Set of Reflective Blog Entries

Entry 1: Beginning of the Beginning or ‘Listomaniac’

How to start? I don’t want to make this pre-meditated like most of my writing, which is either carefully sculpted or hurriedly assembled (uni vs. work), but rather to serve as a train(wreck) of unmitigated consciousness, unstopped and unhindered by the need to say something or anything in particular. Rather I foresee it contributing to my thesis (yes, I now have a ‘*my thesis*’ can you believe!) by being a space to process the great amount of information I will be attempting to cram into my brain over the course of the next 12 months. An opportunity to reflect on the poignant nuances, downright absurdities or dazzling revelations found in what I read, without worrying how it all ‘fits’ into the bigger picture. Simple existence amidst the rush, pull, push, and general distractions of everyday life. Will I share this with anyone? Perhaps, perhaps not. This is for *me*, after all.

But back to the beginning. The start. The inevitable. The task is daunting – how do you research, write, and give of yourself to create/mould/shape an idea which has ‘meaning’ in just one short year? Perhaps the universities have it all wrong – pumping out Masters students and collecting money for the ‘good of mankind’ without really giving us a chance to learn, except how to meet deadlines that is. *But* it really is what you make it. And SO I have begun.

“But the eyes are blind. One must look with the heart” – Antoine De Saint-Exupery
(French writer, poet, and pioneering aviator).

So begins the fourth book (*The Aviator’s Wife* by Melanie Benjamin) of twenty which I am setting out to read within the next 40 days. To be honest, I don’t think I will continue with this one. I am learning to recognise the very subtle difference between what is merely a simple reflection of daily life/culture (or the way I want daily life to be like) – the socially acceptable and constructed way of being – and the genuinely life-changing, moving, provoking, unexpected. Some stories have this innate quality of engaging ‘the philosopher’ within (or ‘the concerned citizen’) which I suppose (or hope!) resides in all of us, while others merely reflect what is acceptable and palpable. Easy to read, easy to forget. That doesn’t mean popular fiction should be ignored or shunned, but rather that it is simply *less* than ‘great’ literature; less engaging, less thought-provoking, less life-changing. I think I now understand why Badaracco and McManus & Perruci were so

insistent on ‘great works of art’ for their research. The ‘great’ being the ungraspable essence which makes a story exist as an entity seemingly, and perhaps deceptively, separate from its creator and reader, so much so that I almost forget books like *The Poisonwood Bible*, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, and *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* (to name a few of my more recent literary endeavours) even had an author, a thinking, breathing human being who strung words into meaning.

And so while Katniss Eberdeen or the Divergent heroine (who even remembers what her name is?) continue to perpetuate the ‘great man’ myth of leadership by replacing the titular white male hero with an even whiter female leader who is ‘just as good as a man,’ albeit downright moodier, I am preparing to slog my way through 20 odd books/plays/short story collections in order to find the ‘great.’ Oh and to make that harder for myself, they have to be by female authors, with female characters, practicing leadership. Sound like an easy requirement? Let me tell you – it’s not. If it’s one thing women don’t like to write about, its leadership (unless it’s about a badass, brooding heroine...who's white...and needs men to help her out). Heartache, love, family, children, relationships, violence, grief, passion, fear, endurance, etc...that we can do, yes sir. But ‘leadership’ or ‘leading’ beyond the conventional masculinities of the term? Perhaps not so easily.

Here is my list so far, with a few hopeful empty slots:

Title:	Author:	Year:	Type:
<i>A Room of One’s Own</i>	Virginia Woolf	1926	Extended essay
<i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>	Barbara Kingslover	1998	Novel
<i>The Women’s Room</i>	Marilyn French	1977	Novel
<i>Top Girls</i>	Caryl Churchill	1982	Play
<i>The Secret Life of Bees</i>	Sue Monk Kidd	2002	Novel
<i>The Group</i>	Mary McCarthy	1963	Novel
<i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i>	Muriel Spark	1969	Novel
<i>The Aviator’s Wife</i>	Melanie Benjamin	2013	Historical Fiction
<i>Cousins</i>	Patricia Grace	1998	NZ Fiction
<i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>	Zora Neale Hurston	1937	Novel
<i>The Golden Notebook</i>	Doris Lessing	1962	Novel
<i>Excellent Women</i>	Barbara Pym	1952	Novel

<i>The Left Hand of Darkness</i>	Ursula K. Le Guin	1969	Sci-fi Novel
<i>How to Be Both</i>	Ali Smith	2014	Novel
<i>Outline</i>	Rachel Cusk	2010	Novel

I like these authors. They're not afraid of the unconventional. And I feel that their writing is for something better, more important than the money or the Man Booker Prize. In the same way, I feel that 'authentic' leadership is for something more than just effectively managing people or making a company more profitable. Because really, it's not exactly authentic to hijack authenticity to do or encourage something inauthentic. It's a *way of being* more than anything else, starting with self, but flowing onto others. An individually collective endeavour, a balancing of the innate propensity for selfishness with the desire to *be* better, kinder, engaged and loving to *others* as you lead, and without ignoring injustice, inequality or ethical dilemmas for the 'good' of business.

I expect my viewpoints to change over the next 6 weeks as I read and absorb these stories. And so this journal is for the simple purpose of capturing change in motion. My change, and my motion. The who I am *now*, the who I *will* be, and the who I *could* be.

Entry 2: On the Road

I've discovered that I'm an abominable (or superlative – depending on how you look at it!) skim reader. Imagine a speedboat riding along the waves/pages so fast that you are barely touching the surface of the water/words. This is a good thing, at present, although perhaps a habit I will later regret? Anyway, I've read almost 3 novels (300 pages approx. each) in the last 4 days (and that's with work and weekend commitments!). I would estimate that I can read a full novel of that size in probably less than four hours without disturbances. Textbooks are bit trickier – although my tactic with them is to highlight and post-it note until kingdom come! Meticulously going over them later and typing up notes.

The direction I'm taking with my thesis has changed somewhat over the last week.

Although I was hesitant at first to focus solely on women's leadership, especially since authentic leadership was/still is something I'm quite passionate about and interested in, in

terms of creating excellent discussion material and contributing to feminist discourse within business and leadership studies, refining my focus seems like the best course of action. Furthermore, finding good literature with strong female characters which also contained examples of ‘authentic’ leadership moments was proving tricky!

This doesn’t mean that at least one of the stories I select can’t be concerned with authentic leadership and how women enact it and experience it (I’m thinking *The Secret Life of Bees!*), but rather, that I’ll have the freedom to utilise both a wider range of literary texts and make the whole study more provocative, topical and hopefully less ‘fluffy’/feel good – I don’t want to simply provide nicely packaged ‘right’ answers. Thus, the focus will be more on women’s leadership *development* rather than authentic leadership *lessons*.

With this in mind I’m in the process of re-defining my criteria for the selection of texts. For example: ‘Novels, short stories, and plays that raise contemporary leadership issues outside the bounds of traditional business case studies and are particularly concerned with the experiences of women, not only in relation to one another but also in relation to men. The narratives must create *tension*, raising pertinent questions and concerns about women’s leadership, and thus facilitating discussion on a diverse range of issues such as expectations & perceptions, female stereotypes, communal/relational leadership, feminism, working mothers, post-heroic leadership, authenticity, etc...’

Since the semester started four weeks ago I think now is as good a time as any to evaluate my progress. Obviously I’ve read a broader range of material (see end list) than I’m presenting here, but for time’s sake here are the possibilities so far (including an applicability rating, the relevant ‘women in leadership’ themes and a few thoughts on how each text could be used/discussion points):

1. *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998) by Barbara Kingsolver

Applicability Rating: 6.5/10

Relevant Themes: Power + status, crisis situations, followership

Key thoughts: Examples of leadership in crisis, personal reflection, patriarchal domination, women's struggles and position relative to men. Only concern is that the material is much weightier than would be suited to a management course, and subjecting it

to corporate scrutiny would overpower its more subtle, yet equally powerful elements (such as racial tensions).

2. *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1967) by Muriel Spark

Applicability rating: 6/10

Relevant Themes: Female ambition, power relationships between women, unsettling role models

Key Thoughts: I initially didn't enjoy this novel and, to be honest, I still don't think I like it very much (Jean Brodie is just...ugh!!). But the story does say some very interesting things about power and independence, expectations and perceptions, and what happens to women who act outside the bounds of societal convention. So while Miss Brodie is rather unlikeable, her methods are unconventional (at least for the time period she is situated in), and thus worthy of discussion; i.e. what should young women be taught? How do female role models influence students? What power dynamics exist between women?

3. *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002) by Sue Monk Kidd

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Authentic leadership & engagement, racial issues & women

Key Thoughts: A clear work environment (the honey business) where there is leadership and followership between women. August Boatwright exemplifies authentic leadership in its fullest sense, i.e. heart leadership, solid values, passionate engagement, self-discipline. Since the story is told from perspective of Lily, I could investigate how women respond to authentic leadership and female support.

4. 'Sur' (1982) by Ursula K. Le Guin

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Communal leadership, post-heroic leadership, expectations

Key Thoughts: A party of nine women head to Antarctica in 1910 unbeknownst to almost any men, they explore the freezing territory for over three months and work as a team to accomplish their exploration, all of which goes completely unacknowledged as it wouldn't be acceptable (or even believable!) for women to have done this alone. It presents a range of examples of teamwork, leadership moving between group members, authentic engagement, the unique problems they encounter as women and the continual struggle to be accepted in a 'man's world'.

5. *A Room of One's Own* (1926) by Virginia Woolf

Applicability Rating: 7/10

Relevant Themes: Conditions for female leadership & examples of the social constructionism of gender.

Key Thoughts: This is a pioneering feminist text. While it is a non-fiction piece, Woolf examines in detail the struggles faced by women in a world dominated by patriarchy, asking: 'What does it require and mean for a woman to be successful? Can she ever be equal with the 'dominant' sex? How can she come into her own (as a writer or as a leader)?' Woolf uses a range of novels as examples to illustrate her point so it could work as part of my study if I picked out certain portions (mostly located in the latter half of the book) for analysis. Virginia Woolf is not very well read these days so most women (apart from literature buffs) are unlikely to have encountered her work in any great depth, and if they have, more likely one of her novels, such as *Mrs Dalloway* or *To the Lighthouse*.

6. *The Lifeboat* (2012) by Charlotte Rogan

Applicability Rating: 9/10

Relevant Themes: Power & status, crisis situations, styles of leadership, the role of followers

Key Thoughts: Set in 1914 just as war is breaking out in Europe, a group of 39 men & women find themselves on a lifeboat only meant for 30 fighting for their lives. Told from the perspective of Grace (age 22) the novel explores the struggle for survival and leadership between Mr Hardie and Hannah & Mrs Grant. Grace, the protagonist, cleverly

observes the leadership crisis and subsequent struggle for power between the men and women stranded on a lifeboat. At times both a supporter of Hardie and Mrs Grant, Grace sheds light on the human need for control and the power held by 'followers' in saving or damning their leaders. What is truly valuable about this novel is that it highlights the struggles women face as leaders and how when they emulate masculine styles of leadership and authority (making difficult life and death decisions) they are punished. Regardless of the time-setting, *The Lifeboat* is equally as applicable to today's society as 1914 America. Definitely a winner!

7. *The Red Tent* (1997) by Anita Diamant

Applicability Rating: 7.5/10

Relevant Themes: Maternal leadership, female support networks, decision-making

Key Thoughts: This book is a rich portrayal of womanhood and contains a huge array of well-developed female characters. While the focus is on motherhood and the bonds between women rather than leadership per se, *The Red Tent's* universal themes and linear narrative lends itself to discussion on the 'power of women' and the importance of female relationships and support. How do women interact with one another when there are clear power boundaries? How does age influence leadership dynamics between women? Dinah's grandmother, Rebekah, is an example of a strong, perhaps almost masculine leader (see pages 147 - 166) who makes hard decisions which are often criticised. Yet at the same time she is also deeply perceptive and caring of those around her. Rebekah's section may raise some good discussion points.

Other books I've read but have given lower applicability ratings:

- *Outline* by Rachel Cusk
- *The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin
- *Olive Kitteridge* by Elizabeth Strout

As far as textbooks go, I've read a couple of anthologies for women's plays and modern literature, along with a complete psychology textbook by Mary Crawford called *Transformations: Women, Gender & Psychology* (2012) to give me a reference point and basic understanding of current women's issues and the nature vs. nurture

argument. I'm currently reading two other scholarly texts, including *Women's Leadership* (2009) by Valerie Stead and Carole Elliott and *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about How Women Become Leaders* (2007) by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli. I hope to finish these by the end of this week, along with at least two more novels.

All in all, I feel this is quite a good effort for just four weeks of study! I'm going to give



myself three more weeks of reading before I start writing seriously. This should give me time to read at least 7 more novels/plays and finish investigating women's leadership from an academic standpoint. From there the road will take an upward slant and I will start on the path leading to the summit.

Entry 3: Signposts in Wonderland

In Lewis Carroll's magical Wonderland, Alice approaches a fork in the road where she sees a cat sitting in a tree. Alice asks the cat, "Which road should I take?"

"Do you know where you want to go?" inquires the cat. "No," says Alice.

To which the cat replies, "Then any road will get you there."

To avoid being the proverbial Alice, I have finally assembled an outline for my thesis. A bona fide plan with chapter headings no less. At long last I feel that I am on top of this (well for now at least!). While the last 6 weeks have felt a bit like walking in circles (to clarify: I have been reading and thinking a LOT but the amount of pen to paper/fingers to keyboard time feels like it has been rather...lacking), the direction is finally set and the signpost clearly reads: 'thataway! at'em girl!'

[Original outline not included in this appendix]

Entry 4: Still Time for Butterflies

- 15 novels
- 3 short stories
- 2 plays

I'm starting to form the basic outline for my selection criteria. While I started my reading with some sketchy criteria already in place (i.e. stories written by women, strong female lead characters, identifiable moments of leadership, etc...), I decided not to stifle the wide array of options before getting a feel for what was available. Unlike Badaracco who chose 'serious' literature based on two rough tests: The "test of time," are they classics?, and the test of "careful reading," that is, do they have depth and richness? I always knew I wanted my selection to extend beyond 'classics.' I've scoured lists like:

- [75 Books Every Women Should Read: The Complete List](#)
- [Are these the 50 most influential books by women?](#)
- [21st Century Literature by Women](#)
- [21 Books from the last 5 years that every woman should read](#)
- [The life-changing novels every woman should read](#)
- [Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction](#)
- *The Norton Anthology of Women's Literature*
- *100 Great Plays for Women*
- *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Popular Reading Interests*
- *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel*
- Etc...!

But now, having read at least 20 pieces of women's literature (most of which would classify, however subtly, as 'feminist fiction') and poured over summaries for over 50, the process itself has naturally brought forth a set of additional (unifying) criteria. I will outline them briefly here:

- *Well-reviewed, award-winning literature.* Now, when I began this project, I wasn't being very fussy about reviews or literary critiques...but, after reading a couple of popular fiction pieces which would never ever make it onto any classics list, I've refined my selection to books which have received some recognition from the 'powers that be.' Essentially, Badaracco's 'depth and richness' test.

- *Historical elements/historical figures.* This isn't a be all & end all prescription, but historical fiction, whether being simply set in the past (i.e. 1950's America, 1914 on the Atlantic, or the 1960s in the Dominican Republic) or featuring 'real' historical women (i.e. Sarah Grimke, Minerva Mirabal, Dinah daughter of Jacob, etc...), tend to be more focused on what it means to step beyond boundaries, expectations and the traditional delineations of femininity.
- *Grounded in reality and featuring a linear narrative.* I really do love Le Guin's feminist science fiction stories (which is why there are several of her books/short stories on the list!) and 'slice of life'/alternative, indie pieces, however the stories with the clearest 'moments' of leadership and tension in terms of women's experiences, are the ones following a conventional story line/plot and with rich narrative and dialogue.
- *Written after 1980 (or maybe 1970 or 1960?).* The pre-1980 pieces I've read seem to be either exclusively focused on women's rights (second wave feminism) or are so well-known and loved (think *Jane Eyre*, *Pride & Prejudice*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Middlemarch*) that I feel there is little room to be creative/untraditional in exploring them; it's almost like desecrating something holy.

Recent Reading Endeavours

1. *The Invention of Wings* (2014) by Sue Monk Kidd

Applicability Rating: 9/10

Relevant Themes: Authenticity, expectations & perceptions, overcoming obstacles

Key Thoughts: This is a truly beautiful story which traces the events of Sarah Grimke's life & how she 'invents her wings' as both an abolitionist speaker and a women's rights activist. It is a story of overcoming the expectations and roles society traps/enslaves you in. Narrated from both Sarah and Hetty's perspectives, *The Invention of Wings* is simplistic in its thematic concerns & yet powerful in the way it thoughtfully examines injustice, hypocrisy, and authenticity. No easy resolutions are proposed, and in fact, it ends rather abruptly, especially considering how long was spent on Sarah & Hetty's childhood. However, for me at least, I enjoyed how it explored what it means to find one's own

‘authentic self’ in the mess of societal expectations and when evil is masked by ‘righteousness’ and tradition. I particularly love that Sarah is not a heroine in the conventional, kicking-ass sense. She makes poor decisions and is, at times, hindered by almost debilitating fear and anxiety. For me, the most profound moment of the novel is when she observes (after so long searching for her purpose) that: "What I feared was the immensity of it all - a female abolition agent traveling the country...I wanted to say, *Who am I to do this, a woman?* But that voice was not mine. It was Father's voice. It was Thomas'. It belonged to Israel, to Catherine, and to Mother. It belonged to the church in Charleston and the Quakers. It would not, if I could help it, belong to me" (p. 320).

2. *Welcome to Thebes* (2010) by Moira Buffini

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Power & Status, women's leadership, crisis situations, peace & war

Key Thoughts: Set in the present day but inspired by ancient myth, *Welcome to Thebes* offers a passionate exploration of an encounter between the world's richest (Athens) and the world's poorest (Thebes) countries in the aftermath of a brutal war.

This play encompasses so much more than women's leadership in its stark & brutal portrayal of war torn 'Thebes' (an unnamed African nation). However, in choosing to make the elected democratic cabinet all female (with one ‘token’ man) and led by a new female president, Moira Buffini explores the double-bind that women face in positions of leadership and the ways their positions of power are challenged by men and women alike.

3. *The Matter of Seggri* (1994) by Ursula K. Le Guin

Applicability Rating: 7.5/10

Relevant Themes: Gender role reversal, matriarchal societies, female superiority, collaboration

Key Thoughts: In this thought-provoking science fiction story, Le Guin experiments with gender roles, imagining a matriarchal society where traditional signs of male superiority – strength, aggression, competitiveness, sexual dominance – signify social inferiority. By

deconstructing the warrior identity and masculine traits commonly idealised by Western society and asking what would a society be like if the male sex were only used for pleasure and pro-creation, Le Guin works towards a reconciliation of the sexes.

Disturbing, satirical, and at times sexually explicit, Le Guin touches on both the negative and positive aspects of an all-female run society. Unfortunately, due to its sexual overtones and explicit language, it's not likely to be a story that everyone will enjoy. There is also a lack of character development as it switches abruptly between different perspectives and stories.

4. *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) by Julia Alvarez

Applicability Rating: 8.5/10

Relevant Themes: Relational leadership between women, courage & ambition, authentic leadership & followership

Key Thoughts: I thoroughly enjoyed this book! I had no prior knowledge of the Mirabal sisters and their tragic deaths, but Alvarez vividly portrays their lives and the events leading up to their assassination during Trujillo's dictatorship in the Dominican Republic in stunning detail. A few of the particularly pertinent discussion points include the development of solidarity between women and what it means to 'have courage' and what it takes to *become* courageous. What contextual factors contribute to the process of 'becoming' a leader, and particularly, a female leader?

In a postscript at the end of the novel titled 'Still Time for Butterflies', Alvarez writes:

Often when we read about brave women like the Mirabal sisters, we think that in order to advance the cause of freedom we have to do grand things. But in fact, if we look at the lives of these four sisters, we realise that all of them came to their courage in small, incremental steps, little moments and challenges we all face every day of our lives. In some ways, we become brave, almost by accident. Something happens and we respond to that challenge courageously and compassionately. But really, all along the way to that something big happening, we've been cultivating a compassionate heart, a listening and big-hearted

imagination. **And one of the ways to cultivate such an elastic and inclusive imagination is by reading books.**

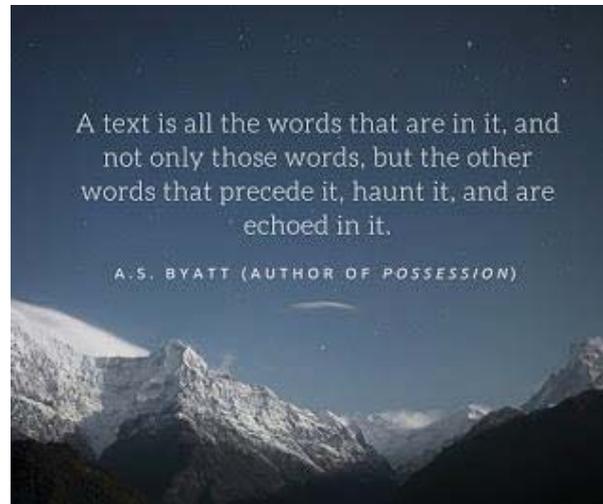
And this is what my reading list looks like now! Yay!!

Title:	Author:	Year:	Type:
A Room of One's Own	Virginia Woolf	1926	Extended essay
The Poisonwood Bible	Barbara Kingslover	1998	Novel
The Women's Room	Marilyn French	1977	Novel
Top Girls	Caryl Churchill	1982	Play
The Secret Life of Bees	Sue Monk Kidd	2002	Novel
The Group	Mary McCarthy	1963	Novel
The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie	Muriel Spark	1969	Novel
Cousins	Patricia Grace	1998	NZ Fiction
Their Eyes Were Watching God	Zora Neale Hurston	1937	Novel
The Left Hand of Darkness	Ursula Le Guin	1969	Sci-fi Novel
How to Be Both	Ali Smith	2014	Novel
Outline	Rachel Cusk	2010	Novel
The Real & The Unreal: Short Stories	Ursula Le Guin		Sci-fi Short Stories
Welcome to Thebes	Moira Buffini	2010	Play
The Woman in the Window	Alana De Greon	1998	Play
Pax	Deborah Levy	1985	Play
girl.	Megan Mostyn-Brown	2004	Play
The Red Tent	Anita Diamant	1997	Novel
In the Time of Butterflies	Julia Alvarez	1994	Novel
Olive Kitteridge	Elizabeth Strout	2008	Novel
The Lifeboat	Charlotte Rogan	2012	Novel
The Invention of Wings	Sue Monk Kidd	2014	Novel

Key: Yellow indicates what I still want to read, blue indicates texts that I want to read but am having trouble finding copies of.

Entry 5: Storytelling as the ‘Other’ (Part 1)

I often like to start essays with a quote or short anecdote. I see it as an act of centring oneself; a moment of mindfulness in the swirling mass of thoughts and possibilities.



One of the questions I still haven't fully resolved in terms of my thesis outline is: *How am I going to read the literature? What am I really hoping to achieve and demonstrate in my analysis of the literary texts?* And I think what's really important about this section, is that I write what *I* want to write. Essentially, everything I write should be authentic for and meaningful to *me* as well as the reader.

When I was desperately trying to finish my research project last semester (and yes, surprisingly for me, it was rather last minute!), one of the parts that frustrated me and I struggled with the most was applying the leadership theory to the short story. As I was writing that section I knew deep down that it wasn't what I wanted to write. It didn't really have any meaning for me, as both author and reader, and subsequently, it felt rather contrived (which showed!). One of my other key concerns was that by reading a cultural work in this way, especially since 'leadership' was a secondary concern to racial issues in the short story, I was reducing it to fit a neat model that was too reductive and subsequently, overly simplistic.

I've noticed that when I am writing merely to achieve a grade, no matter how technically good the piece is, it will never be excellent. In these cases, there is always a feeling of stiltedness. Disconnection. Disengagement. No moments of epiphany. The '*so what*' remaining frustratingly elusive.

So I feel that more than anything, I want what I write about for, say, *The Lifeboat* or *The Invention of Wings*, to be engaging, persuasive, provocative and authentic/genuine/true for me as well as others. I think I've been getting too caught up in the idea that I have to completely divorce literary analysis from my subjective 'interpretative' readings of the texts. That my analysis has to be strikingly precise and wholly relevant to business leaders – raising questions which will instantly encourage reflective practice and, ultimately, 'change' people for the better. And this isn't a bad goal. In fact, this is what I believe good literature has the power to do. But is it the right or only objective for *this* thesis, at this particular point in time?

I've been looking back at some of my favourite English literature essays, particularly the ones concerned with thematic analysis and sociological criticism, trying to decipher what exactly made them so compelling (and why I loved writing them!). For example, in my essay "'Voicing' and 'Identifying' Sexual Violence in the Congo and Iraq" the problem/issue presented is political: "In patriarchal societies and cultures, the battle for domination and nation-wide control is played out on the powerless and faceless female body." But women's literature has the power to speak about this issue in a different, more inclusive and expressive way than purely factual reports or non-fiction ever can. Through the medium of theatre two female authors, Heather Raffo in *9 Parts of Desire* and Lynn Nottage in *Ruined*, are able to give the previously 'faceless female bodies' powerful new identities and 'voices,' freeing them to tell their own stories and become more than just another rape statistic.

Similarly, in another of my essays titled: "The Struggle for Author/ity: Interrogating the Colonising Acts of Writing and Reading in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*," I investigate the novel's overarching concerns with the colonising activity of writing and reading and subsequently, the ensuing power struggle for authorship and identity. The main thrust of the essay was to consider how *Foe* engaged with the 'reader' and involved him/her in the reading and writing process. Rather than separating ideas and theory from close textual analysis, I considered the methods Coetzee used to convey his message and the affect this has on the reader. By writing in metatextual form, using opposing binaries and changing narrative patterns throughout the novel, Coetzee places the reader in a unique position, spurring him/her on to question the very nature of language and the ideologies which inform his/her own beliefs on patriarchy, colonialism, feminism and race.

So what does this mean for me? How can I potentially harness this ‘method’ of analysis in my thesis?

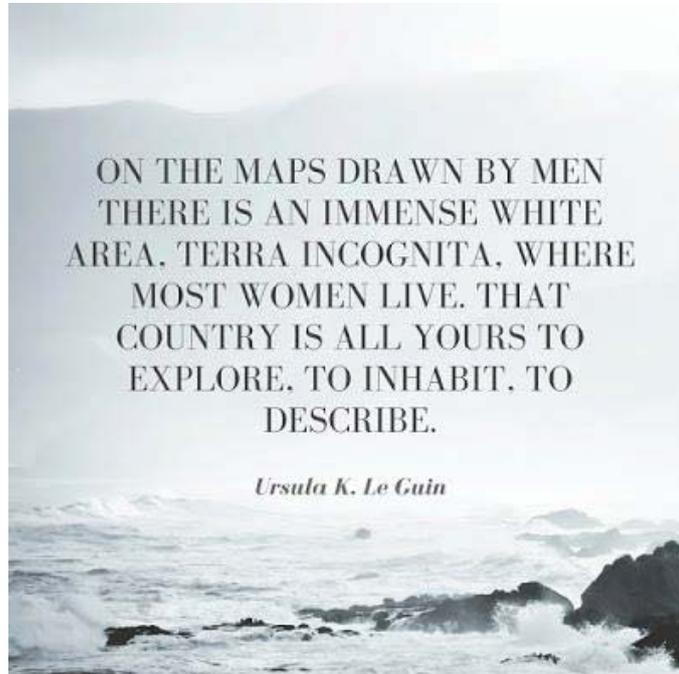
In *The Literary Theory Toolkit* (2011), Rapaport explains that in the application of a critical approach to literary analysis, ‘examples’ or selected texts/narratives should work in such a way that they help explain and develop a theory that to many people makes no sense without a ‘key’: “**The theory should illuminate a work, and a work should illuminate a theory**” (p. 9). Rapaport goes on to describe “art’s purpose,” noting that ‘art’ has the potential to “revolutionise our perception in such a way that we won’t see the world as we ordinarily do. In this sense, it is as if literary language itself were a sort of revolutionary hero that reforms the fallen (automatic, habitual) thinking” (p. 15).

In some ways this is very similar to what Badaracco attempts to achieve in *Questions of Character*, particularly with regards to what it means and requires to be/come a more ethical and moral leader in the twenty-first century. However, his analysis of classic literature tends to lack depth in terms of leadership theory, as well as focusing more on ‘great man’ constructs of leader = leadership. This is most likely because the book is geared towards mainstream audiences who want a ‘practical’ step-by-step guide as opposed to an academically rigorous approach.

However, by thoughtfully incorporating theory on women’s leadership with storytelling (or re-telling?) and textual/rhetorical analysis, I believe the novels/plays/short stories I select will be able to ‘voice’ something important about contemporary women’s leadership and followership. Especially since good literature can articulate alternatives to dominant worldviews by *making thought as felt and feeling as thought* (Williams, 1977).

Rather than being purely reflective (as I tried to do in my research project), my role (as I tread the fine line between leadership/management facilitator and literary analyst) should be to eloquently summarise, illuminate, analyse, and provide questions which give female leaders and aspiring leaders a ‘key’ which will help them both understand leadership from a different perspective (the voice of the ‘Other’) and encourage meaningful reflective practice. Creating ‘space’ for the reader to engage in new ways with women’s leadership issues and “working to relate the extraordinariness of imaginative literature to the ordinariness of cultural processes” (Filmer, 2003, p. 199).

I will leave it at that for now (along with another inspiring quote, this time by [Ursula K. Le Guin](#)!) as I have a whole lot more reading to do on storytelling and narrative methods...Part 2 will follow as soon as I have completed the next stage of research!



Entry 6: Thoughts from an Enthusiastic Reader (#goals)

Storytelling as the ‘Other’ (Part 2) is coming soon I promise! But I haven’t quite finished sorting through all the data yet to compose what I really want to say/explain/impart. So instead I thought I would give an update on my latest reading endeavours.

First and foremost on my mind has been a book called *Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminism in a Post-Feminist Era*. This is a recent study on feminism (published in 2014) by Kristin J. Anderson, a Professor of Psychology at the University of Houston-Downtown in the US. I read this book over a cup or two of coffee in a single afternoon (it was honestly *that* good!). If you’re looking for a concise, well-researched, but easy-to-read summary of the state of Western feminism (or post-feminism) today, then this is a must-read.

While Anderson doesn’t discuss women’s leadership in any great detail, feminism is one of the key informing concepts I’ll be using in my research to justify the use of women’s

literature and the value of women's perspectives. Rather than being gender-neutral as many people would like to believe, leadership discourses are still informed, however implicitly, by hegemonic masculinity and "impregnated with concepts of the hero" (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008, p. 116)

Anderson begins her analysis by discussing **post-feminism**, she writes that "...post-feminism is marked by the shift from feminism as a collective movement for women's liberation to superficial empowerment of the individual and her choices" (p. 19). In this neoliberal, and increasingly narcissistic and self-focused culture, feminist goals, Anderson contends, have been depoliticised and collective action rendered largely irrelevant: "Post-feminism is about the individual woman – personal choice, individual expression, and individual career success – and no recognition of the need for a united and collective social movement to liberate all women and enact structural change" (p. 19).

Anderson then goes on to discuss a whole range of current feminist issues, including hyper-sexualisation and pseudo 'empowerment' in Western culture, sexism as part of a wider *system* of inequality, the double bind faced by women in the workplace, popular understandings of the term 'feminism' (i.e. 'man-hating' feminism), and the 'end of men' and the 'boys crisis.'

The key point Anderson makes is that we still need feminism (and *not* post-feminism), and I think she does a fantastic job of explaining why. I particularly like this salient quote:

Feminists tend to see women and men as not very different from each other, and this is threatening to the gender status quo. If, as feminism argues, women can do what previously only men were thought to be able to do, then you can see how some would perceive manhood as under assault and the perpetrator of the assault feminism. Manhood is exclusionary and, to the extent that men's activities can be performed by women, it is no longer a special role, no longer male. If women can perform the men's role, it must mean neither the qualities nor the role are so special after all. (p. 66)

As a result, a whole tribe of anti-feminist authors (for example, Kate O'Brien, Harvey Mansfield, Roy Baumeister, C. H. Sommers, to name a few) have emerged who are not interested in equality but rather "in keeping boys and men at the centre. But not any men, white men in particular" (p. 163). I really like how Anderson alludes to this idea of an identifiable "centre," a centre that has the potential to be deconstructed and re-imagined.

While replacing patriarchy with matriarchy, or male with female, is not my intention, there is definitely room to destabilise systems of inequality by exploring and emphasizing women's narratives that disturb the centre.

We desperately need more self-labelled feminists in business who can see beyond the individualist rhetoric of post-feminism and recognise the need for structural change. As Anderson (2015) argues, feminists need to remain focused on raising women's awareness of continued gender inequity in order to motivate young women to understand that work still needs to be done. Not convinced? Before you disagree with me, I challenge you to read [*Modern Misogyny*](#) (it's at the public library so you have no excuse!).

Novels, Stories, Narratives...

I spent several hours last week trawling through all the women's reading lists I could find and it turned up a few new exciting possibilities (*Year of Wonders* by Geraldine Brooks, *Calling Invisible Women* by Jeanne Ray, *The Ten-Year Nap* by Meg Wolitzer)! At this point I feel I'm abandoning the idea of using short stories...I have found one really excellent short story ('Sur' by Ursula Le Guin) but that's it so far (note to self: Summer reading list = short story collections).

1. *The Women's Room* (1977) by Marilyn French

Applicability Rating: 6.5/10

Relevant Themes: Expectations & perceptions, women's work, feminism

Key Thoughts: Published in 1977 at the end of the 'sexual revolution,' *The Women's Room* sparked outrage for its controversial and forward-thinking ideas on women's rights and desires (addressing the 'what women want' question). Set in 1950s America, *The Women's Room* follows the life of Mira Ward, a conventional and submissive young woman in a traditional marriage, and her gradual feminist awakening. Now considered a 'classic' piece of women's literature (although I doubt many women my age would have even heard of it), French suggests in her opening introduction (written in 2006) that it is just as relevant for today's audiences (think white, middleclass women) as it was 38 years ago. She notes that "despite many easements on female life in the west, the world's ethos

has moved in the opposite direction – toward more hostility between the sexes” (p. xvi). I’m not quite sure this is the case and whether or not *The Women’s Room* transcends time boundaries in quite the manner French intends (there is a fair amount of material which is concerned solely with issues addressed by second-wave feminism), however I did find this novel much more engaging and interesting than Mary McCarthy’s *The Group* (1963) which follows a similar coming-of-age, 'awakening' premise.

One of the best things about this novel are the lively discussions French crafts between Mira and her female friends at Harvard. These scenes make you wish you were part of their dynamic group! Underpinning all their debates is, as Val succinctly observes, the issue of equality between the sexes: “The simple truth – that men are only equal – can undermine a culture more devastatingly than any bomb.” However, I am still a bit hesitant to use this book as part of the literary research section. First of all, it is very long (a mere 526 pages!) and rather than read huge chunks all at once, it’s more a book you want to read in snippets (it took me about 5 days rather than my normal 24–48 hours). Secondly, there is almost an insuperable amount of ideas discussed and contained within the text, from politics, to feminism, to marriage, to racism, to sex, etc... It moves between topics and themes with dizzying speed, leaving nothing sacred. It left me feeling unsettled, but at the same time revitalised. But I can imagine some women absolutely hating it! Nonetheless, French is a witty and observant storyteller who is entertaining and engaging even if she does spend pages and pages discussing women’s domestic work and the trials and tribulations of the middleclass housewife (she actually makes it interesting!).

Would I use *The Women’s Room* then? I think it definitely has a lot of potential as a text which can work to deconstruct patriarchal/male-dominated grand narratives, but I can’t imagine women sitting down to read the full novel in as short a timeframe as they would, say, *The Lifeboat* or *The Invention of Wings*. With this consideration in mind, I may use it as a reference text (there are some excellent discussions in there!) or as a suggestion for further reading.

2. *Lavinia* (2008) by Ursula K. Le Guin

Applicability Rating: 5/10 (or, perhaps 8/10)

Relevant Themes: Gender roles, maternal leadership, crisis situations

Key Thoughts: I love Le Guin so I was very excited when I found she'd recently (in 2008) written a historical novel featuring, and even named for, an 'historical' female character. The novel relates the life of Lavinia, princess of Laurentum, a very minor character from Virgil's epic poem the *Aeneid*. Sounds like a great premise, right? Unfortunately, Lavinia never emerges as the strong, decisive female character you want her to. Instead I found her underdeveloped and rather wooden, as well as unlikeable. She vacillates, cries, makes odd decisions, and is, ultimately, painfully complicit in her 'fate' (in other words, the decisions of men).

There were, of course, a lot of interesting, well-researched details in the story and I can see what Le Guin was trying to achieve by 'completing' or fleshing out one of Virgil's female characters – giving her a 'voice' as Queen of Latium (filling Le Guin's "immense white area"). But somehow the whole story fell flat, for me at least, due to the fatalistic tendencies of its heroine (although I'm not sure I can even call her a heroine – she didn't really *do* anything). In terms of women's leadership, Lavinia does exhibit a form of maternal leadership for her 'people,' but readily abandons her 'power' in favour of her son. Everything she does is vis-à-vis men, even though she has so much potential to break out of their confines and rules. Perhaps this is a good discussion point (e.g. why are women often so complicit in their own oppression?), however, I think Le Guin's 'Sur' makes a better contender for my research project. Although perhaps there is room for simultaneously analysing multiple Le Guin stories? I have her non-fiction book, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (1989) so I will test the potential of this idea further as I read her critical essays.

Other Books...

I've just finished reading *The Boston Girl* (2014) by Anita Diamant (author of *The Red Tent*) and I've also skimmed *Top Girls* (1982) by Caryl Churchill for the third time. They are both possibilities as well but I'll leave my reviews of them for the next entry.

Sometimes it seems that I am reading a lot of women's literature which won't be applicable or useful for my study. However, as Jane Smiley (the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *A Thousand Acres*) points out: "Sometimes the reader has to read novels that don't work for her and think about *why* they don't work – representative lists, unlike "my favourite" lists, have to include uncongenial works" (quote found in *Thirteen Ways of*

Looking at the Novel, 2005, p. 271). I admire Smiley's approach to literature – she read 100 'great' novels over the course of three years and then proceeded to write about her experience and the effect/s the different books had on her as a reader (reflective thinking at its best!).

What else I've read...which won't work:

- *Property* by Valerie Martin (2003)

This short novel won the Orange Prize for women's fiction in 2003 and I can understand why! It's a very gripping tale set in New Orleans in 1828 against the backdrop of civil unrest and slave uprisings. *Property* tells the story of Manon Gaudet, the unhappy wife of a plantation owner, and Sarah, Manon's house slave whom she brought into the marriage. The drama is centred on the fact that Sarah is not only a slave, but also Manon's husband's unwilling mistress, causing resentment on both Manon and Sarah's sides. There is no happy ending to this haunting tale, in fact it is quite grim and heart-breaking in the way it explores humanity's predilection for cruelty. However, it doesn't say anything about the 'women question' or leadership in particular. Its strength lie is in its historical analysis and narrative power rather than in topical relevancy.

- *House Girl* by Tara Conklin (2013)

Conklin's debut novel is a reasonably well-written and mildly interesting story, but overall it lacked finesse and depth. The narrative switched between the late-1800s, where it followed the unhappy tale of a young slave woman, and the 2000s where it focuses on the story of a young, outgoing, annoyingly 'perfect' female lawyer who is trying to 'survive' in a male-dominated law firm. While Lina, the litigation lawyer, makes some pertinent (although rather cliché) remarks on male and female dynamics in the workplace, there is nothing in particular that makes this story stand out. It's more a journey of uninspiring self-discovery for the not very likeable lawyer and a tragically (though predictable) ending for the fictitious slave girl. Ultimately it fails to engage the reader and, I feel, trivialises the horrors of slavery in the way it flits between meaningless details about Lina's contemporary existence and the slave girl's sad story. It's a piece I wouldn't be quick to recommend.

- *How to Be Both* by Ali Smith (2014)

Now, I was very excited about this book when I first got my hands on it. Shortlisted for the Man Booker prize in 2014, and the winner of the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, *How to Be Both* promised to explore gender boundaries and perceptions in a new and exciting way. Unfortunately, I didn't make it even half way through before I became extremely frustrated with Smith's disjointed, overly complicated narrative style. Yes, it is a clever post-modern 'work of art', but I just didn't *like* it. [Note: I actually went back and reread this book several months later and garnered a lot more from it the second time round, in fact, I might venture to say I even enjoyed it!]

- *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley (1991)

On the other hand, I did love *A Thousand Acres*, the 1992 Pulitzer prize-winning novel by Jane Smiley. Following the basic plotline of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Smiley tells the story of an aging farmer (a patriarchal and misogynistic white man) who offers his prosperous Iowa farm to his three daughters. Tragic (although not quite as tragic as Shakespeare's classic), dark and unpredictable (well, unless you're familiar with *King Lear*), the novel explores family power relations and the transformation of Ginny (the oldest daughter and narrator) from a naive and weak pawn in her family's power struggle, to an independent and strong woman. Why won't it work for my analysis? Ultimately, I think the novel says a lot more about trauma and family relationships than leadership, so to reduce it to a 'lesson' on leadership would distort its more salient themes. But I highly recommend this book if you haven't read it already!

I am more than halfway through reading and note-taking for my section on Women and Leadership. A couple more texts to go through and 8-10 journals. The plan is to finish the research by midweek and then work on a comprehensive outline. It may be a little bit ambitious to try and have the whole section written by the end of October, but I least want to have half of it done by then! #goals

Entry 7: Storytelling as the ‘Other’ (Part 2)

Puzzles, Puzzling, Piecing. This is like slowly putting together a 5000-piece puzzle. Before the whole picture begins to materialise (*is it a gorgeous scenic vista or a magical wonderland?*), I have to build the edges. And in this lovely little analogy, the edges are the theory. And since I don’t quite know yet what the puzzle will end up looking like, I suppose it’s more like a Wasgij Puzzle!



In a previous entry, I included this statement by Rapaport (2011): “The theory should illuminate a work, and a work should illuminate a theory” (p. 9). I would like to explore this claim further, investigating how it can be applied to women’s leadership development. What interpretative method/s could I apply to reading literature so as that the text will effectively illuminate issues surrounding women’s leadership? In this post I will take this question into the theoretical realm of post-structuralism and deconstruction, and consider the potential usefulness of these methods for my analysis.

But before answering this question, I want to take a step back and look at how Badaracco (my original inspiration for this project) has structured his analysis of literature in *Questions of Character*. As I’ve said before, I do find Badaracco's style to be a little too neat and idealistic, with the main problem being that he focuses on the primacy of the ‘leader;’ a ‘type’ of objective person who fits into a universal definition of ‘leadership.’ He writes:

The basic challenges of leaders appear so widely, perhaps even *universally*, because they reflect *enduring* aspects of leadership. One is the humanity of leaders – the hopes and fears, traits and instincts of the human nature we all share. The

other is the unchanging agenda, in *all* times and places: developing a goal...and working with and through people to make it real. (p. 6, emphasis added)

The problem with this approach is that it collapses ‘leadership’, a collective process “which encompasses not only leaders but their followers and the context in which they come into contact, into ‘leaders’, into an individually-based unit of analysis” (Ladkin, 2010, p. 5). Subsequently, this ‘great person’ construct only serves to strengthen the widespread tendency in Western society to idealise leaders, implying that only a select few have the ‘right’ traits to exercise initiative (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992) [*Excerpt from my Research Project*].

However, I like the way he raises thought-provoking questions by making well-known novels and plays such as *Death of a Salesman*, *Things Fall Apart* and *The Love of the Last Tycoon* speak deeply about moral issues in a business context, substituting the carefully crafted, prosaic business case study with the multi-layered, messy reality of everyday life.

I’ve chosen to look at Chapter 2: “How flexible is my moral code?” Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, as I’ve recently read this novel (which is excellent by the way! I even managed to get my hubby to read it). The key question Badaracco poses in this chapter is: “Will my moral code help me make the right decisions for my organisation, even as business conditions change?”

The first thing that Badaracco does is problematize the notion of moral codes and the ‘moral compass,’ asking: Should leaders really be as moral as possible in all situations? To counter this popular supposition, he uses Okonkwo’s tragic story, which, in part, can be blamed on the African leader’s intransigent and uncompromising moral ideals. Badaracco points out that Okonkwo’s death raises a very difficult and uncomfortable question: “Should we abandon the familiar idea that good leaders have a moral compass? This is a disturbing question because we want leaders with moral clarity, who can guide and inspire organisations, especially in tough times. But Okonkwo’s moral compass is a liability when Umuofia is fighting for its survival” (p. 32).

Badaracco then goes on to discuss a contemporary case featuring a business leader who was uncompromising on his moral code, and rather than work to find alternative solutions, walked out at great cost to the firm and many of the employees. As an alternative to the popular moral compass trope, Badaracco claims that “leaders need moral codes that are as complex, varied, and subtle as the situations in which they often find themselves. This

does not mean abandoning basic values or adopting moral relativism. It does mean...embracing a wider set of human values” (p. 33).

But *how* do you develop a sensitive, flexible moral compass? In answer to this question, Badaracco uses Okonkwo’s story as a lesson, drawing from it a series of questions which are intended for “honest reflection” on the reader’s behalf. I think what is so gripping about Badaracco’s approach here is that while there is an expectation that you have read the book/play/short story, he retells key moments from the story (and not in any particular linear order), making the narrative come alive and providing compelling and memorable examples. There is no 'obvious ending' or simplified moral lesson, such as those found in traditional business case studies (Boje, 2001). He also briefly considers the intertextuality of the book – the perspective and intentions of the author, the historical setting, the wider social issues the novel addresses, and the reader’s active role in producing and creating meaning from the text.

Badaracco spends the bulk of his discussion on five key reflective questions:

1. How deep are the emotional roots of my moral code?
2. What do my failures tell me?
3. How have I handled ethical surprises?
4. Do I have courage to reconsider?
5. Can I crystallise my convictions?

Each of these questions are explored using examples from *Things Fall Apart* and with the support of current leadership theory (although Badaracco doesn’t cite many, if any, of these ideas or theories). Badaracco is careful not to prescribe answers, but rather attempts to stimulate debate and self-analysis/reflexive thinking. It's a guide to a better ‘way of being’ in the world: “Okonkwo’s life shows the importance of a leader’s moral code and offers several basic ways for leaders to test the soundness of their own deep convictions. It also warns us against viewing moral codes as simple, mechanistic devices” (p. 51).

In summary then, Badaracco takes a popular business concept (in this case a leader's in-built ‘moral compass’), problematizes widespread ideas/norms surrounding individual morality, demonstrates why there are flaws in this way of thinking (using the story of Okonkwo’s downfall), and proposes possible solution/s in the form of self-improving reflexive questions. Essentially, he is providing aspiring leaders with ideas to help them

become better, more ethical, moral leaders. It's like bookclub on steroids basically, but for men.

Now, don't get me wrong. I really do like Badaracco's book – it's practical, easy-to-read and insightful, and its depth, in terms of the literary analysis, is something I really appreciate. However, the overall message is that we are all on a self-directed teleological journey towards an elusive future where you/me will have become *the* moral leader. If only me/myself/I work hard enough to develop emotional intelligence and authenticity, then there is no reason I won't succeed as a leader in any environment and in any situation. As Ford, Harding and Learmonth (2008) explain: "Leadership discourses are very much concerned with changing the self so as to become this good leader. In being urged to develop self-awareness, the subject is required to analyse the self as if the self were an object that can be looked at, assessed and then worked on so as to change (p. 21).

At this point it'd be nice to say: 'Well, this method and style works really well – it's interesting, engaging and Badaracco's already proven it works, so let's just substitute male narratives with female ones and discuss (using women's literary examples) how to become more collaborative, relational and authentic leaders.' End of story. A beautifully written, practical thesis tested on a myriad of wonderful female leaders who found it vaguely 'empowering.'

But unfortunately (or fortunately!) I can't bring myself to write something so blatantly post-feminist; buying into the wider discourse of Western individualism and oversimplifying the pressing issues surrounding women's leadership by relegating problems to the 'I/me/you'. And so I would like to turn to feminist post-structuralism, deconstruction and critical reflexivity (scary names, huh?) as potential 'methods' or informing strategies for discourse analysis.

Deconstructing Texts to Story 'Others'

First off, what does *deconstruction* even mean? Although providing a set definition is, as Boje points out, rather contradictory to Derrida's original intentions, deconstruction can be explained "as an analytic strategy that exposes in a systematic way multiple ways a text can be interpreted. Deconstruction is able to reveal ideological assumptions in a way that is particularly sensitive to the suppressed interests of members of disempowered, marginalised groups" (Boje, 2001, p. 19).

According to Derrida, all Western thought is based on the idea of a centre – a Truth, Ideal Form, a Presence, etc... which guarantees all meaning. So deconstruction can be employed as a method of reading/understanding that **decentres and unmask society's 'grand narratives'** or essentialist 'Truths' (i.e. the 'great man' theory of leadership or 'heroic masculinity'), making room for less visible or marginalised voices and ideas (i.e. women's perspectives, leadership as shared process, etc...). By enacting alternative narrative analysis that stories 'Others' and the author, new narratives in organisation studies that are "multi-voiced, rich with fragmentation and lacking linearity" can emerge and, ultimately, work to actively destabilise hegemonic masculinities and taken-for-granted assumptions and stereotypes (Boje, 2001, p. 9).

However, caution is still in order. As Boje points out: "If we just replace one centre with our own authoritative centre, we have fallen into our own trap. The point then is not to replace one centre with another, but to show how each centre is in a constant state of change and disintegration" (p. 19). Several of the novels/short stories/plays I've read do attempt to deconstruct central visions, essentialist concepts and transcendent principles. The play *Welcome to Thebes* and Le Guin's 'The Matter of Seggri' are both particularly interesting in this regard as they explore a reversal of the binary opposition, overthrowing patriarchy with matriarchy. But rather than just replacing one hierarchy for another, both Le Guin and Buffini open up the analysis and encourage the reader to think differently about the adverse effects of socially-constructed, gendered societies.

How does Deconstruction relate to Poststructuralism?

Boje (2001) writes that "for me, deconstruction is a poststructuralist epistemology" (p. 19). But what is *post-structuralism*? In very brief terms:

In post-structuralist perspectives that build on the performative effect of language, there is no such thing as a passive reading of a text or looking at a film: the 'gaze' is actively engaged both in interpreting the text (and thus the reader becomes part of the text) and in the production of the self, or subjectivity, through the very act of looking. Thus reader and text are caught up in one another – the text confers subjectivity. (Ford, Harding & Learmonth, 2008, p. 5).

By taking a poststructuralist stance, one can argue that reading, writing and talking are **not** innocent activities, but are actively productive (Ford, et al., 2008). For example, since popular leadership discourses are impregnated with images of the 'hero', visions

informed by a battle between ‘the good hero’ and its binary opposite, the ‘dastardly villain’ (Ford, et al., 2008, p. 21), the performative effect is such that leader = leadership in the business world. Similarly, “where men have been regarded as logical, non-emotional, aggressive, occupiers of the public world” and women the opposite (nurturing, emotional, empathetic, unstable), “these descriptors not only *create* the genders they supposedly do no more than describe, but become *norms* by which we do not feel we are truly men or truly women if we do not live up to them” (Ford, et al., 2008, p. 132).

So the aim, in terms of leadership development, is *not* to provide people with ideas to help them think through how to be/come good leaders as Badaracco does (although this is still a legitimate and helpful exercise), but instead, as Ford, et al. (2008) recommend to look at “**the demands that have been placed on them** and the ways in which those demands may be influencing who they are, as individuals, as subjects, as people involved in the **on-going process of constructing the persons** who turn up at the workplace each morning” (p. 11).

This critical method of reflexivity, informed by deconstruction and post-structuralism, requires the reader/leader to go beyond the self and embrace wider social, moral and historical contexts, making what was hitherto invisible (stereotypes, expectations, prejudices, ‘centres’ and ‘grand narratives,’ etc...) visible and open to critique and resituation (as Boje would say). I'd like to end with a quote by Ford, Harding & Learmonth (2008), the authors of *Leadership as Identity: Constructions and Deconstructions*, they write:

The encouragement of self-reflexivity and critical questioning of taken for granted aspects of the experience of managers [and leaders] may facilitate a determined critique among managers that can lead to resistance to organisational control. This may be possible through active interpretation of **storied accounts** of peoples’ experiences and reflexive dialogical critique in which many interpretations can be surfaced (p. 184).

And by ‘storied accounts,’ why not novels, short stories and plays which explore the complexity of women’s leadership from multi-dimensional, multi-voiced ‘Other’ perspectives?

Entry 8: Calling All Bookworms

I was in the middle of writing a post on feminism, difference and women's leadership, but suddenly it all felt just a tad too deep and controversial for a rainy Friday afternoon! Plus, I've had rehearsals for the dance show I'm organising, and it's my second to last week at my current job and I'm tying up a million loose ends, so I feel I have a legitimate excuse not to be quite so 'academic' today...or tomorrow.

However, I didn't want to stop writing, so instead I have compiled mini reviews of my latest reading endeavours. Somehow I still managed 2000 words! So without further ado...

1. *Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague* (2004) by Geraldine Brooks

Applicability Rating: 7.5/10

Relevant Themes: Self-actualisation, gender roles, religion, courage in crisis

Key Thoughts: Pulitzer Prize-winning author Geraldine Brooks is a gripping storyteller, and even if I didn't think *Year of Wonders* was applicable to my project, I would wholeheartedly recommend this novel. Her non-fiction book (which I read for a post-colonial literature), *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1995), is equally fascinating, so add that to your reading list.

This particular novel is told through the eyes of Anna, a young woman living in a plague village in 17th century England. During the fateful year of 1666, she and her fellow villagers face the spread of this deadly disease and the burgeoning rise of superstition and witch hunts. Brooks doesn't shy away from recounting every gory detail as she vividly explores Anna's progression from a cautious, unremarkable wife and mother, to a strong, independent female character. As Anna struggles to survive, and one could even say 'find herself and her place in the world,' a year of tragedy becomes instead *annus mirabilis*, a "year of wonders."

Anna is not only engaging and likeable, but she also learns how to take action and, ultimately, determines her own fate, standing up for what is 'right' and making decisions despite the expectations and beliefs of those around her. She isn't defined solely in relation to men and isn't limited by them (whereas Le Guin's Lavinia is largely complicit in her fate and, subsequently, never emerges as a *person* in her own right). In fact, a

comparison/contrast between Anna and Lavinia could bring up some very interesting questions about gender roles, female leadership and self-actualisation. For example: As *women* in positions of marginal 'power' (Anna as a healer, Lavinia as a sage), what expectations are placed on them? What similarities exist? What differences, if any? What dangers do they face due to their 'power'? (i.e. Anna fears being accused as a witch, Lavinia is afraid her son will be forcibly taken away from her).

2. *Day After Night* (2010) by Anita Diamant

Applicability Rating: 6/10

Relevant Themes: Friendship & solidarity, crisis situation, women's experiences

Key Thoughts: I really wish Diamant would write another novel with the same level of depth, scope and imaginative appeal as *The Red Tent*. I've now read two more of her most recent books, *Day After Night* and *The Boston Girl*, which, although well written and interesting, neither have the same complexity or narrative insight as Diamant's dramatic re-telling of Dinah's story. As I've noted previously, while the focus is on motherhood and the bonds between women as opposed to women's leadership, *The Red Tent's* 'universal' themes and linear narrative lends itself to discussion on the 'power of women' and the importance of female bonds. Dinah's grandmother Rebekah is an example of a strong, perhaps almost masculine leader (see pages 147 – 166) who has to make difficult decisions which are often criticised.

Day After Night, on the other hand, is specifically concerned with Jewish women's trauma and displacement immediately following WWII. Held in Atlit, a camp for over 270 'illegal' immigrants to Israel in 1945, four young women struggle to start-over in a new country without friends, family, or, seemingly, a future. Diamant is a compassionate storyteller, and manages to thoughtfully portray the psychological struggles the women face as they are gathered in this 'waiting' place. While not specifically concerned with leadership, one character, Shayndel, a Polish Zionist who fought the Germans with a band of partisans, does take up the 'leader' mantel during an escape from Atlit. I suppose the 'escape' could be analysed in terms of it being a leadership moment (clear context, purpose, leader, followers) but it would require reading the entire book to make any sense

of it, and there just isn't *enough* in terms of 'women's leadership' for it to be very compelling or particularly relevant.

3. *The Ten-Year Nap* (2008) by Meg Wolitzer

Applicability Rating: 5/10

Relevant Themes: Working mothers vs. stay-at-home mothers, female ambition, disillusionment, money, motherhood

Key Thoughts: I was hoping that Wolitzer would be the contemporary version of Marilyn French or Mary McCarthy, especially since her bestselling novels are predominantly concerned with third-wave feminist issues. But unfortunately she lacks the finesse, insight and literary acumen to be considered their successor (I'm still waiting to find a modern female equivalent who writes like French or even, Byatt).

The Ten-Year Nap follows a group of highly educated mothers who have left the workforce for one reason or another (not entirely convincingly) to raise their children (or child) in modern-day New York City. There is so much potential within this broad topic – the double bind of careers and motherhood – but Wolitzer conducts only a superficial analysis of the 'un-triumphant female.' And while some characters are reasonably engaging, others are simply boring stereotypes. The 'grand narratives' of women's work, motherhood, and stay-at-home-mums could have been deconstructed and resituated (and then celebrated) but, alas, this was not to be. All I was left with was a feeling of superficiality and an unresolved dilemma – what is Wolitzer's *point/message*? What is she even trying to say about this topic? I'd hazard a guess that even she doesn't quite know. Furthermore, her characters are too tidy – or too much of a type, and the narrative veers incongruously between differing perspectives and irrelevant 'moments' from the lives of women throughout history. Perhaps as a book of short stories, linked by location or theme, this might have worked, but in novel form it is just so 'meh,' for lack of a better word! As Jill observes near the end of the novel: "This is the ending. It's just not satisfying, that's all." How apt.

4. *The Shadow of the Sun* (1964) by A. S. Byatt

Applicability Rating: 5.5/10

Key Thoughts: Byatt is a marvellous writer! I can't believe I've never read anything of hers in full before (summer reading list = *Possession*). It was a bit of a lucky dip selecting one of her books to read for this study, but somehow I ended up with her very first novel, *The Shadow of the Sun*. Unconventional, beautifully composed, yet incredibly frustrating, are how I would describe this book in which Byatt tells the story of a troubled, (overly) sensitive seventeen-year-old. Anna Severell is the daughter of a renowned novelist, and it is her struggle to discover and develop her own personality and to be/come someone while under the shadow of her father (the metaphorical 'sun') which drives most of the action (or more accurately, it is Anna's continued refusal to act which causes things to happen).

With regards to 'women's leadership,' the topic is not explored in any great depth or detail. However, Anna does make a few succinct observations on what it means to be a man or a woman searching for his/her 'place in the sun' in a world of binary opposites and socially constructed expectations and ideas. For example, in a confrontation between Anna and her Father, Byatt writes:

Anna studied him with a gentleness that was not his, but Caroline's. A sceptical female gentleness. She saw that he had been carried away by a picture of her, having inherited his power, advancing further along his path, and she was touched by a faith in her which she had never hoped to see. But she had thought more about it than he had, and was more aware than he was of the difference there was between his power, and whatever she had inherited from him. She feared that she lacked his bodily strength, that she was not his size, that she could not be prodigal of power as he was, but must husband her resources or be easily exhausted, even when she had found out how to use them. This was partly because she was a woman; also because she was a woman she was constantly tempted as he would never have been, to give up, to rest on someone else's endeavour, to expend her energy 'usefully' at the kitchen sink. **And this, she thought, made it harder to go on looking for ways to go forward, when one had to fight against the temptation – socially approved – to stay where one was.** She thought, he doesn't really know, with a certain scorn. (p. 200)

5. *Top Girls* (1982) by Caryl Churchill

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Women at work, masculinities, agentic leadership, capitalism

Key Thoughts: For reasons which make no sense to me now, I actually hated this play when I first read it. But after watching a screen version and re-reading the text, I've developed a new appreciation for Churchill's witty, yet ultimately tragic insights into the modern (70s/80s) workplace.

The most striking feature of the play is that all the characters in it are women and no men appear on stage for its entire duration. Act I opens with Marlene, the newly appointed Managing Director of 'Top Girls' Employment Agency, formally celebrating her promotion with a group of 'friends.' But these aren't just any friends, they are a curious mix of women from the past, both fictional and real. Marlene opens the evening cheerfully, saying: "We've all come a long way. To our courage and the way we changed our lives and our extraordinary achievements." (*They laugh and drink a toast*). (p. 14). The interplay between all these diverse characters and personalities is both clever and entertaining, as each are given a chance (albeit while constantly being interrupted) to share their [his]story with the group.

However, their individual 'successes' are not necessarily worth celebrating. In describing the premise for the play, Churchill writes: "I wanted to set off, with all those historical women celebrating Marlene's achievement, to look as if it were going to be celebration of women achieving things, and then to put other perspectives on it, it show that just to achieve the same things that men had achieved in capitalist society wouldn't be a good object." Churchill explores this contradiction as she moves into Act II set in the office of 'Top Girls' Employment Agency.

In his commentary on the play, Bill Naismith (2008) observes that "the office women have achieved relative success and independence within a system created essentially by men" (p. xxxv). Within this capitalist economy and blatantly hierarchical company, it is only the fittest who survive (seemingly irrespective of their gender). Marlene and her colleagues are largely dismissive of men ('Men are awful bullshitters' they contend), and they are certainly clever and capable, but they fail to challenge patriarchal authority and have themselves become agentic 'Queen Bees' (determined and ruthless) in order to succeed in a

'man's world.' This is no more obvious than when Angie, Marlene's 'niece,' shows up at her office and Marlene takes a recognizably 'masculine' (cold, distant) stance as she is unwilling to undermine her image or professionalism by giving Angie what she desperately needs - recognition, care, and a helping hand. However, Churchill is still sensitive to the intense difficulties and criticism women like Marlene face in entering top jobs in the workforce.

So yes, while we can celebrate instances the success and achievement of individual women in the workplace, Churchill asks, at what cost? If one still has to mould oneself to fit a patriarchal/masculine model to succeed, then we still desperately need to reform the system.

6. *Calling Invisible Women* (2012) by Jeanne Ray

Applicability Rating: 6.5/10

Relevant Themes: Collective action, middle-aged women, perceptions

Key Thoughts: This is a light-hearted, clever little book, easily read in one sitting. The premise is simple, but enduringly(?) relevant. Women who, after a certain age, are no longer valued for their beauty or intelligence, and have little real 'power' left beyond the private sphere, inevitably start to *feel* invisible. But what happens, Ray asks, when they actually *become* invisible?

While there are moments of 'leadership', such as when the protagonist, Clover, starts a collective movement to help invisible women become recognised, appreciated and, ultimately, cured of their invisibility, I would shy away from using this book as, at times, it does come across as a bit silly. The metaphor itself is powerful, but I would have preferred to see it used as the premise for a short story. Especially since in some of the chapters it felt like Ray was struggling to make up her word count and many of the characters were frustratingly one-dimensional (such as Clover's daughter).

New on the Reading List:

<i>Flow Down Like Silver</i>	Ki Longfellow	2009	Historical Fiction
<i>White Oleander</i>	Janet Fitch	1999	Novel
<i>Little Black Book of Stories</i>	A S Byatt	2005	Short Stories
<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i>	Karen Joy Fowler	2013	Novel
<i>The Last Runaway</i>	Tracy Chevalier	2013	Historical Fiction
<i>Remarkable Creatures</i>	Tracy Chevalier	2009	Novel

I feel that I finally have the start of an adequate representation of novels, plays and short story collections, enough to provide a meaningful commentary on what could possibly work and what definitely won't. Almost large enough to begin 'grouping' into genres/themes/patterns. For example:

- Historical Literature – slavery, pre-1850, pre-1980
- Modern/Contemporary Fiction
- Feminist Fiction
- Short Stories
- Prize-winning Literature
- Dystopian + Science Fiction

I imagine that by the end of the Christmas break I'll have read (or skimmed in some cases) 40+ books (narrowed down from 100+). I do have some ideas on how I will utilise the myriad options in my thesis, but that's another post entirely!

Entry 9: “I’m not a Feminist, but...”

...I believe in equality” the student stated in her introduction, “Men and women *are* just different.”

It’s no secret that feminism’s relevance today is up for debate, especially on social media (number #1 rule – never try to argue with people on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram!). On one end of the spectrum there is the increasingly popular ‘[Women Against Feminism](#)’ fringe (this is the 3rd most popular webpage to pop-up if you search the term ‘feminism’ in Google!), and on the other, well-spoken young people like [Emma Watson](#) calling for women *and* men to re-embrace feminism and the core ambition behind it – ending gender inequality. [Note: For Watson, feminism is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.]

While my thesis isn’t specifically about feminism per say, I don’t want to ignore the ways ‘feminist’ ideas and the negative (and occasionally positive) popular perceptions of the term ‘feminism’ have informed and shaped my own position in relation to ‘women’s leadership.’ I’d currently label myself as a ‘middle-of-the-road’ (as opposed to ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’) **liberal feminist** who believes that women are entitled to full legal and social equality with men, and that given equal environments and opportunities, males and females will behave similarly (Crawford, 2012). I realise that my ideological position (because at the end of the day, feminism is still an ideology, a way of looking at the world, even an extremist position for some people) will directly influence how I frame my arguments on women’s leadership in my thesis. Of course this is an overly simplistic definition of ‘feminism’ (what about LGBTQ issues, reproductive rights, culture and race, etc..? you may ask), however, I don’t think there is any need to become fixated on the details at this point (it is enough to know they exist!).

Unfortunately, in some (not all) of my social circles, there is more than a hint of resentment, scepticism, and perhaps even anger, when I bring up feminism in an everyday social context. Men and women alike seem to be equally suspicious of feminism’s relevance in today’s ‘post-everything’ society. Take the following comments I’ve personally encountered [I must admit that sometimes I intentionally provoke these responses by asking friends and family challenging (perhaps intentionally subversive, but no less valid) questions about feminism and male/female differences!]:

- “We’re born different. You can’t change nature.”
- “But we’re already equal! Feminism isn’t important or relevant anymore. *I* don’t need it.”
- “Don’t feminists all burn their bras or something? Are you wearing a bra?”
- “Oh, you’re not one of *them* are you? You’ll grow out of it by the time you get to my age.”
- “But I love men! Feminism is all about superiority, it de-masculinises men and undermines them.”
- “Ugh, don’t get all feminist on me.”
- “Women’s brains are so much different than our brains – you have all these connections happening all the time, it’s crazy in there. But us guys, we can compartmentalise, we have a ‘nothing box.’”
- “Women and men have distinct roles and gifts. We’re just naturally better at *different* things.”

Similarly, when it comes to women, leadership and gender inequality as a topic of discussion at university [based on the most recent sample of undergraduate essays I have read], many business students are quick to jump to the conclusion that since men are (perceived as) ‘masculine’ and women are (perceived as) ‘feminine,’ they *must* lead differently. While some concluded that women make better leaders (based on the belief that women are more ‘transformational’ and ‘relational’ than men), others railed against their manipulative, conniving female bosses.

Fragments + Pieces

The most important takeaway for me from these examples is the identification of a default or subconscious assumption - that essential differences just *are*. These are biologically determined, divinely gifted, unchanging differences – Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus. End of story.

This is what sociologist Michael Kimmel [check out Kimmel's awesome [TED Talk here](#)] calls the “interplanetary theory of gender.” It is the popular and, in most cases, subconscious assumption that “the differences *between* women and men are far greater and more decisive than the differences that might be observed *among* men or *among* women”

(Kimmel, 2013, p. 4). Whether we subscribe to the nature or nurture argument, we continue to see women and men as markedly different from each other – “truly, deeply, and irreversibly different” – rather than considering the *human* characteristics both biological sexes have in common (Kimmel, 2013, p. 4). And, unfortunately, it is these claims about fundamental sex differences, which can be framed as 'communal' (feminine) and 'agentic' (masculine), that have often been used (especially in the not too distant past) to justify keeping women in their place (Crawford, 2012).

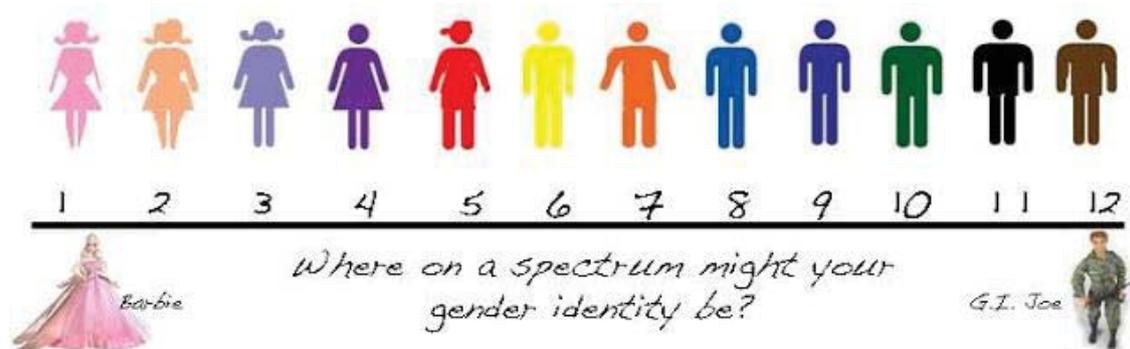
I appreciate, having thought like this myself, that there is a certain comfort or sense of security in having established and clear parameters by which we *know* ourselves and others within a safe dichotomy of oppositions, as either male or female, leaders or followers, heroes or helpers. **However, the problem with such binary oppositions is the tendency to automatically default to hierarchy and entitlement by privileging one term over the other.** Boje (2001) points out that particular binaries have a propensity to exercise ‘power-over’ and dominate in many business and social contexts (in these examples, the left almost always dominates the right): “Central / Marginal, Male / Female, Organisation / Environment, Management / Labour, Capital / Labour, Faculty / Student, US (or the West) / Third World, Narrative / Story” (p. 25).

In terms of the male/female binary, Kimmel proposes what he terms a ‘radical’ idea: **Gender difference is the product of gender inequality.** Rather than male/female differences producing a natural hierarchical order, Kimmel claims that “in fact, gender difference is the chief outcome of gender inequality, because it is through the idea of difference that inequality is legitimated” (p. 4). Thus, gender differences are “the socially constructed product of a system that creates categories of difference and dominance” (Crawford, 2012, p. 120). Judith Butler, a feminist poststructuralist and author of *Gender Trouble* (2004), asks a similar question: Is subjection not the process by which regulations produce gender?:

Thus, a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalises the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption. (p. 43)

Another point I want to touch on briefly is the way feminine and masculine traits are commonly framed as **mutually exclusive**. Again, people want to know themselves by

what they are not – the more masculine (assertive, aggressive, competitive, etc...) you are, the less feminine (compassionate, emotional, nurturing) you will ‘naturally’ be, and vice versa. So we end up with ridiculous spectrums like this which, however ‘logical’ they might look, continue to reassert damaging traditional gender stereotypes:



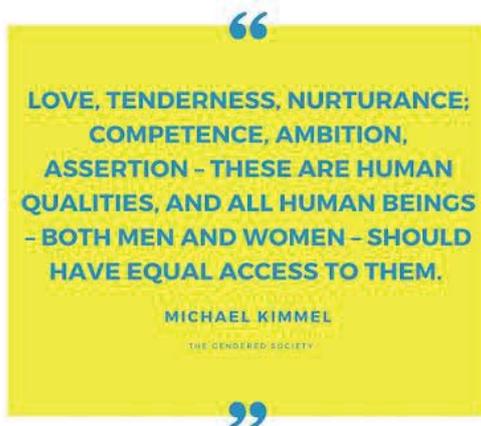
(Really, why can't Barbie be a badass G.I. Joe on her day off? Similarly, is there no room for 'tough' men to care about fashion and presentation or housework and childcare?)

Nicola Walter, author of *Living Dolls: The Return to Sexism* (2010), sums this up nicely: “The way that masculinity and femininity are now so often seen as mutually exclusive, so that the more masculine you are the less feminine you are, **operates against women who seek power**. Because in the eyes of those influenced by traditional stereotypes, a man seeking power enhances his masculinity, but a woman seeking power reduces her femininity. And this can be extremely negative for a woman who goes into politics [or business], as it makes her seem not quite human, as though she has **given up something essential about herself**” (Walter, 2010, p. 211). Obviously this perception/assumption has profound implications for women in leadership, creating a double bind (as Eagly & Carli, 2007, would say) which compels female leaders to walk a tightrope on the identity 'spectrum,' neither entirely losing their perceived inherent femininity (regardless of whether it is natural to an individual woman or not) nor being 'overly' emotional, feeling or nurturing (and thus, not assertive or strong enough to be taken seriously).

I realise this post is extremely fragmented, and I apologise for its ambiguous nature! This is a huge topic and difficult to disassemble and argue convincingly in one short blog post, but I felt that I had to lay out *my* current position and the ideas I've been struggling with and questioning before starting to fully flesh out a well-researched, theoretical argument. It's refreshing to just play with different ideas and perspectives. And hey, you know what,

my position might change as I learn more and consider different viewpoints, but I'm okay with that!

I think one of the most important things for me is to be careful not to frame everything negatively – yes, women face difficulties in the workplace, but it's not necessarily beneficial to constantly focus on the problems. I'd rather look upwards and outwards to *what can be*, opening up a discussion which is not only about women's disadvantage, but encourages 'new,' more inclusive ways of looking at, knowing, and practicing leadership.



And to clarify, unlike the confused student in the introduction - **I am a Feminist, and I believe in gender equality!** Women and women are different. Men and men are different. Women and men are different. But we're all human, and as such we should *all* have access to the FULL range of human emotions and characteristics (both masculine and feminine) regardless of biological sex.

New Books, More Books, Books EVERYWHERE!

More books ordered from Book Depository! I'm very excited about these ones as they are almost all new (published this year) and have fantastic reviews. *The Gracekeepers* is recommended by Ursula Le Guin herself. *The Nightingale* was voted Goodreads top historical novel of the year (over 57,000 votes). I know I'm slipping in one by a male author, but *All the Light We Cannot See* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction 2015, and I want to keep on top of Pulitzer and Man Booker prize-winning novels whether or not they are appropriate for this project.

Entry 10: The Year That Was & The Year That Will Be



2016. I've focused a lot over the last two weeks on reenergising myself. After an extremely hectic 2015 where I tried to fit literally EVERYTHING into my life with predictably bad consequences (the least of it being that I was sick 7 times in 5 months!), I've made time to refresh myself and simply be in the moment these holidays (saying that, the word 'thesis' is constantly hovering on the edges of my sub-conscious). Of course, I haven't stopped ploughing through the reading list (I have nine books to review this week!), but I've also been doing things for myself, whether that be shopping, going to the beach, seeing friends, binge-watching Downton Abbey, and spending a lot of time

with hubby. I realised the other day as Mitchel and I were reflecting on the year that's been that this is the first time in 4 years that I've taken longer than 5 days off over Christmas and the Summer holidays. I find a lot of fulfilment in being busy and achieving goals, but too much is definitely unhealthy, especially if you're like me and just keep going, going, going without stopping for a decent breather. **Note to future self:** Read this post and take note of your own advice!

It's All About the Process + Progress

When I started blogging about the 'thesis process/progress' back in July, the first question I asked myself was: "[How to start?](#)" Starting is tough. Sharing honestly is difficult. Being 'authentic' is nerve-wracking. But here I am - I've started, I've shared, and I've tried to be authentic! I'm proud of what I've accomplished so far. And even though I still have SO much to do to get this thesis off the ground/down on paper/into the world, I feel I've carefully and deliberately considered the complexity of this project, a factor which will (fingers crossed) make it richer, more interesting, and deeply meaningful. The process has been all-encompassing and consuming, the progress challenging and enriching at both a

personal-level, as well as academically. And in July 2016, I hope to be asking myself: "How to finish?"

Reflecting on Awakenings

An important aspect of myself I've wanted to explore in more depth this summer is feminist spirituality, or, more accurately, the 'divine feminine'. Perhaps these phrases sound wishy-washy or unimportant, but part of the journey for me, in terms of what I like to think of as *my* 'feminist awakening' (putting words and theory into action), is discovering what it means to engage with religion, theology, and spirituality from the perspective of the 'sacred feminine,' the 'other' side of God if you will.

And so I was excited when I discovered that Sue Monk Kidd (author of *The Secret Life of Bees* and *The Invention of Wings*) prior to her mainstream literary success had written an account of her spiritual journey from the fundamentalist Christian tradition to a new understanding of the 'sacred feminine.' Unsurprisingly, the ideas she discusses in *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (1996) deeply inform the content of her novels, and it sparked in me a new appreciation for what she is attempting (successfully, I might add) to achieve in her novels - celebrating women who *grow* into their strength and do intrepid things - "sometimes being gentle, sometimes fierce, sometimes waiting, sometimes leaping. But always knowing who [they are]" (p. 212).

While I don't agree with all Monk Kidd's propositions (and she is careful to frame them as her personal 'vision' – only one way to engage with the divine rather than a definitive, unarguable theological stance), I felt refreshed after finishing the book. Permission was granted to simply *be in the moment*, allowing feelings of perhaps anger, confusion, sadness, but also excitement and happiness to be felt in entirety as new ideas were/are discovered, considered, embraced or abandoned. I am starting to ask myself: 'What does it mean and how does it feel to 'awaken' slowly, noticing and moving in time with emerging experiences rather than always trying to be correct or attempting to navigate in an unknown 'right' direction?' I also love the way Monk Kidd emphasises the importance of protecting oneself while in the 'awakening' or developmental stage of change; not everything has to be argued or defended right away:

While I found her spiritual musings thought-provoking (as in 'shelved for future reference') and interesting (heretical to some no doubt!), what I really appreciated was Monk Kidd's careful formation of a solid feminist critique. On several occasions she highlights the

importance of looking at social institutions, the church, and Western culture as a whole, from the ‘bottom up.’ She writes: “This looking from the bottom up is the catalyst for a reversal of consciousness, not only for ourselves but also for the most resistant among us. For when we stop perceiving, assuming, and theorising from the top, the dominant view, and instead go to the bottom of the social pyramid and identify with those who are oppressed and disenfranchised, **a whole new way of relating opens up**” (p. 35). This ties in closely with post-structuralism and deconstruction, methods which I have discussed previously - [here](#).

Testing Feminist Frameworks

One of the ideas I briefly played with in my last blog entry was the difference/similarity between liberal and cultural feminism and my desire to find a balanced approach between the two. So I was thrilled by Sue Monk Kidd’s eloquent framing of the two as mutually inclusive concepts:

My personal belief is that while differences exist, women and men both have an innate and equal ability to engage in the full range of human experiences. (Men can nurture and women can quest for autonomy.) Neither men nor women should be limited to a narrow category of what’s considered feminine if you’re female or masculine if you’re male. I also believe that men and women contain both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ qualities and that the goal is *to balance, blend, and honour both* within the individual and the culture. **The point, however, is that women have been socialised toward certain choices and experiences, and these experiences need to be valued in a way that is not inferior to men’s experiences.** Indeed, as I made my critique, the problem seemed to me not that there are differences but rather how we value those differences. (p. 62 – 63)

Too idealistic perhaps? Nonetheless, it highlights the complexity of finding a middle ground which takes into account the socially constructed nature of male/female differences and at the same time stresses the importance of not devaluing feminine traits in favour of masculine norms. An increasing *masculinisation* of society, in the sense that over the past 40 years there has been a major shift involving middle-class women’s aspirations and attitudes becoming more like men’s, focused on individual achievement and individual

freedom (Cameron, 2007, p. 175), is not the desirable outcome of minimising differences between the sexes, and vice versa.

As I've been drafting up my discussion on feminism and women's leadership issues I'm starting to realise how valuable and useful a multi-lens feminist approach will be. I quite like how Evangelina Holvino in *Women & Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change* (2007) uses five feminist frameworks (liberal, cultural, socialist, poststructuralist, transnational) in her consulting firm to inform her coaching practices and to come up with specific strategies for addressing issues of power and leadership that female leaders face in everyday organisational life.

For example, Holvino uses poststructuralist feminism to encourage 'Ana' (a senior female director in a large, successful firm) to pay attention to imagery depicting the women in her organisation and to "identify the sources of organisational influence and power that go beyond those expected and sanctioned by the culture for its women leaders" (p. 374). To demonstrate this method, Holvino discusses an image found in the company's internal 'leadership' brochure. In the photo, the highest-ranking female executive in Ana's organisation is portrayed with her arms outstretched & a warm beaming smile on her face as she serves up a platter of lasagne – she is the stereotypical image of a nurturing mother figure and dutiful housewife. By employing a poststructuralist feminist discourse, Holvino is then able to discuss with Ana the implications, both good and bad, such symbolic imagery has for female managers and leaders in the corporate workplace, e.g. what expectations may be subconsciously formed, how do men and women perceive the 'mother' figure in the workplace, etc...

Similarly, Sue Monk Kidd uses symbolism and symbolic imagery to deconstruct patriarchal power. (She also cleverly employs Greek mythology to question and explore the concept of female empowerment). I've picked out this example:

A Divine Feminine symbol acts to deconstruct patriarchy, which is one of the reasons there's so much resistance, even hysteria, surrounding the idea of Goddess. The idea of Goddess is so powerfully "other," so vividly female, it comes like a crowbar shattering the lock patriarchy holds on divine imagery. [Nelle Morton](#) often pointed out that word *Goddess* is so important because it bursts the exclusivity of the old symbol and opens the way to reimage deity. (p. 167-8)

Aside from the fact that it seems a rather New Age-esque trope (just to clarify, I'm not a goddess worshipper, whatever that may mean!), I appreciate the way Monk Kidd and Holvino both manage (in starkly contrasting ways) to use poststructuralist feminist theory to thoughtfully inform their writing and analysis, making it both practical and provocative.

And coming very soon...book reviews!!

Entry 11: In the Name of Reading

Books! So many books! If I was offered a job which consisted solely of reading and reviewing books – fiction or nonfiction – I'd take it in a heartbeat. In fact, while I was on holiday I found the latest BBC list of the [100 greatest British Novels](#), as selected by 82 book critics from around the world. Inspired by this list, I have decided it would be a worthy long-term goal to attempt to read all 100 novels/series over the course of the next 3-4 years (after my thesis is finished of course!). I even created a special [Goodreads list](#) for this exact purpose! I could even blog about it - it would be a sort of creative nonfiction exercise...

But that is all beside the point at the moment (and a tad distracting), so without further ado here are my latest readings and ratings:

1. *The Dovekeepers* (2011) by Alice Hoffman

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Interplay of masculine/feminine traits – ‘doing’ gender, challenging gender roles, leadership in crisis, relationships between women, divine feminine (celebration of the feminine)

Key Thoughts: Love, love, love this book! Although, since I read it over Christmas, it almost ruined my tenuous grasp on the ‘spirit of Christmas joy.’ The story was incredibly sad and, as it is based on true events, disturbingly tragic (I shed more than a few tears near the end).

Set in 70 AD just after the fall of Jerusalem, *The Dovekeepers* retells the tragic story of Masada, a small Jewish stronghold on a mountain outside the Judean desert. Nine hundred Jews held out for several months against the Romans, but by the end of the siege, only two

women and five children had survived. The tale is told from the perspective of four extraordinary women whose lives become inextricably intertwined when they become dovekeepers at Masada – Yael, the unwanted daughter of an assassin, Revka, a baker's wife who has witnessed unspeakable brutality, Aziza, the daughter of a warrior, and Shirah, a wise and powerful woman who some suspect is a witch.

Not only is the story compelling, but it also explores the leader-follower relationship from the position of the female follower. Yael is particularly observant of the charismatic appeal found in the 'leader' figure: "No one wanted to think about Masada without a leader, a body without a spirit" (p. 98), yet she is also somewhat critical of the godlike and masculine appeal of Ben Ya'ir, a man who "shone because others followed, because they adored him and deferred to him and trusted him...there was a light inside him," and why they followed him "to this remote and dangerous place" (p. 99).

In Aziza's section, Hoffman investigates the tensions between traditional gender binaries and what happens/doesn't happen when they are transgressed. Aziza has lived an unconventional life; although born female, to help her survive in the harsh desert as part of a mountain Moabite tribe, her mother brings her up as a boy. But before she arrives at Masada she reverts back to her female 'identity.' However, as the Romans begin their siege, Aziza once again transforms herself into a 'man.' Compared to her sister Nahara who joins the Essene people and lives "as if she was nothing more than a passive and beautiful ewe" (p. 284), Aziza is a force to be reckoned with. The gender interplay alone provides plenty of material for discussion about the 'nature' of masculine and feminine traits, and the ways in which masculinity and femininity are perceived and the expectations they create.

I loved the sense of 'humanity' in this novel and the way it celebrated the feminine. By allowing some characters to move beyond gender boundaries and enact and play with both the masculine and the feminine, the agentic and the communal, Hoffman has created a story which transcends time boundaries.

2. *Flow Down Like Silver: Hypatia of Alexandria, a novel* (2009) by Ki Longfellow

Applicability Rating: 7/10

Relevant Themes: Female leadership in male-dominated societies, women's achievements, perceptions & expectations

Key Thoughts: "Hypatia? Who is she?" I felt I *should* know, so by the end of the first chapter I was desperately wracking my brain searching for a reference point, some long ago cataloged fact. "Nothing...wait, a movie...Yes! Got it, *Agora*."

It's rather disappointing when all you can remember about such a remarkable woman is that she was killed by a Christian mob sometime in 400 AD, and this from a rather poorly executed movie (as my hubby would claim – the best form of historical (mis)information). Longfellow no doubt thought it was disappointing too, which is why she wrote *Flow Down Like Silver*, a novel which celebrates Hypatia's sublime genius in a time period when it was almost completely and exclusively a 'man's world.' Not only was Hypatia of Alexandria a leading Greek mathematician, astronomer, and philosopher in the 5th century, she was also head of the Neoplatonic school at Alexandria where she taught philosophy and astronomy to men – 'pagans,' Christians, and Jews alike – during a time of political and cultural upheaval.

I thoroughly enjoyed this novel and the depth with which Longfellow explores Hypatia's philosophical inclinations (she even has Hypatia debating with Augustine) and bravery in the face of stringent opposition from the leading religious powers. There is no doubt Hypatia deserved to work in the public sphere and male-dominated education system.

However, I feel there could be problems with workability. The narrative switches haphazardly between protagonists. Personally I would have preferred if the story had followed only Hypatia, or at least Hypatia and Minkah. There is a LOT of philosophy/abstract reasoning sprinkled throughout the text, I love that kind of thing, but it could be a bit tiresome for those wanting a quick, easy read (one of the keys I think is having a story or novel which someone could read in one weekend – books like *The Lifeboat* and *The Dovekeepers* are much harder to put down due to the compelling nature of their plots. Saying that, Badaracco still includes more challenging reads like *Antigone* by Sophocles in his selection).

3. *In the Name of Friendship* (2005) by Marilyn French

Applicability Rating: 7/10

Relevant Themes: Third-wave Feminism (in contrast to second-wave), friendship, middleclass women's careers, changing expectations

Key Thoughts: *In the Name of Friendship* is a sort of pseudo-sequel to *The Women's Room* (originally published in 1977). French obviously realised the need to re-visit the status of the 'gentler sex' and relook at the opportunities for (predominantly) white women in the West, and I'm glad she did! I found this novel to be much more relatable (no surprises there!) and in line with the experiences of my own and my mother's generation.

Set in a small Berkshire town in Massachusetts, the novel opens with the formidable, yet kind-hearted seventy-six-year-old Maddy Gold stating matter-of-factly: "Things are entirely different for women today." It is on this premise which French bases her updated exploration into the 'truth' behind women's lives (and to a lesser extent, men's lives) at the turn of the century. The story brings together four unlikely friends of differing ages and with completely different life experiences, and it seems that what French is really wanting to celebrate is the beauty and necessity of multigenerational female friendships. Although there is not much in the way of plot or action (it reads quite similarly to other French novels – a type of thoughtful, but disjointed narrative filled with gems of insight and wisdom; 'real-life' in all its mundane, everyday glory), as Stephanie Genty notes in her afterword: for readers who are searching for a feminist messages in novels, *In the Name of Friendship* offers a clear one: "at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than forty years after the start of the women's movement, at least privileged women can choose to experience 'more life'" (p. 389). So it is, of course, focused on "female experience in the widest and deepest sense: woman in relation to significant others, in relation to her body and sexuality, in relation to work and creative experience, and in relation to society as a whole" (Genty, 2005, p. 391).

Does it examine or say anything interesting about women's leadership? Not overtly. However, it does explore the double-bind women face when it comes to work and family, along with discussing subtle misogyny and sexism in the workplace (there's an excellent scene where Alicia's husband, with Alicia's gentle prompting, comes to the realisation that he has biased perceptions of his female colleagues). As a preliminary text (and by preliminary I mean the type of novel you'd use to kick off the whole discussion of gender and work, an 'awareness raising' type of text) it could be useful.

4. *The Gracekeepers* (2015) by Kirsty Logan

Applicability Rating: 5/10

Relevant Themes: Gender play, feminist science fiction

Key Thoughts: I didn't like this book as much as I thought I would. I now feel I have a love-hate relationship with the (feminist) science fiction genre. But since this is only Logan's first novel, maybe I can find it in me to get over my disappointment (or maybe as the fallible reader it was I who failed to pick up on the subtlety of Logan's brilliance??). But opinions count for something, so in *my* opinion, while *The Gracekeepers* was poignantly elegant, ethereal and magical in some places, overall it lacked the complexity, depth and artistic genius of Le Guin.

The story is supposed to follow the lives of two unusual girls, North and Callanish. They live in a familiar yet mysterious world where the sea has flooded the earth and living on land is a privilege for only the lucky few. North, the circus bear girl, and Callanish, the unwanted gracekeeper, both have secrets which could destroy their lives, and it is because of these secrets that they are drawn to one another. There is a lot of gender play in this book, particularly in terms of androgyny, as well as in a critique of organised religion which is interesting but...there was too much of everything in this short book, too many themes explored, too many characters trying to find a place in the narrative, too many random plot details, and so on. And since the book is only 280 pages long (the font is larger than normal and the margins are wide), the ending seemed rushed and forced.

5. *Remarkable Creatures* (2009) by Tracy Chevalier

Applicability Rating: 7.5/10

Relevant Themes: The 'space between' leaders & followers (moments between Mary Anning and Elizabeth Philpot), psychology of prejudice, female friendship

Key Thoughts: *Remarkable Creatures* retells the true and fascinating story of Mary Anning, a young working class girl in 19th century Britain with a talent for finding fossils (or 'curies' as the locals call them) along the English coastline. To say the least, I learnt a lot about fossils – ammonites in particular, but also Mary's biggest discovery, a huge

ancient marine reptile called an ichthyosaurus. This discovery, and more like it, shook the scientific community, but Mary was barely acknowledged for her significant and difficult work (not only finding and dislodging the delicate fossils from the rock, but also cleaning and piecing the creatures together).

Mary's story intersects with that of another fossil hunter, Miss Elizabeth Philpot, a prickly middle-aged London spinster who has been banished to the small town of Lyme Regis with her two unmarried sisters. Elizabeth and Mary form an unlikely friendship which crosses class boundaries, sharing a unique passion (and at times, rivalry) for finding fossils. Between them they share many 'moments' of leadership as they struggle for recognition in the male-dominated scientific community. It's a charming novel, but underpinned with a kind of haunting sadness or disappointment over the unfair way Mary is treated – *if* only she had been given the same opportunities as men, what more she could have been and done. As Elizabeth observes, as the 'outcasts' of society (female, working class, spinsters) they are only allowed one or two small adventures in an otherwise unadventurous life.

6. *Almost Famous Women* (2015) by Megan Mayhew Bergman

Applicability Rating: 4/10

Relevant Themes: Women's lives, real women, missed opportunities

Key Thoughts: I had really high hopes for this book of short stories, and while it is very well-written and demonstrates the enviable versatility of Megan Mayhew Bergman's writing style, I felt like something ('essence'? depth?) was missing. The purpose of the collection is to give 'life' and attention to a set of unlikely heroines who were born in proximity to the spotlight but, for a variety of reasons, struggled to distinguish themselves or were unjustly relegated to the footnotes of history. Most of the stories are very sad – about unfulfilled potential, reckless decisions and, subsequently, loneliness and bitterness. And while Mayhew Bergman is superb at characterisation, the women she describes are more atypical anomalies than relatable or inspiring examples.

Lists & Classifications

This table [see online [here](#)] is a basic ‘representation’ of women’s literature that I have begun ‘grouping’ into themes/categories (it looks a bit messy because it had to fit the dimensions of this humble blog!).

The criteria for selection emerged as follows:

- At least one female protagonist/heroine who guides or is subject to the majority of action in the story
- Written after 1970 or 1960 by a female author
- Well-reviewed and/or award-winning literature (I've tried to stay away from 'chick lit' as much as possible)
- Interesting/provocative story line
- Universal appeal (suitable for a ‘general’ audience)
- Possible 'leadership' themes

Undoubtedly I've missed some suitable books in my search, so the list will hopefully increase to about 50 odd books by the end of February. At the moment I think it stands at 39 novels/plays/short story collections by 32 authors.

The next round of selection will be concerned with identifying what ‘types’ of women’s stories are appropriate for the study of and deconstruction of women’s leadership. I imagine in this section I will investigate three key criteria for long listing suitable literature. These include, Badaracco’s test of ‘careful reading,’ the ‘Bechdel Test,’ and the presence of identifiable ‘moments’ of leadership within the narrative. Suitable women’s literature should move beyond the actions of a single, heroic leader figure, to encompass complex relationships between followers, purpose and context in the narrative.

From there I should easily be able to long list 8-10 suitable titles, followed by a short list of 3-4 pieces of women's literature which work together to create a unified study on the issues facing female leaders. At the moment, the four interlinked conceptual themes I would like to work with include:

- *The impact of gender on leadership (an exploration into social constructionism, gender & leadership)*
- *Reinterpreting the hierarchy - destabilising grand narratives*

- *Deconstructing popular stereotypes and expectations*
- *Leadership as process (women & post-heroic models of leadership)*

I will leave it at that for now. The plan is to finish up the women and leadership section by mid-February, go on holiday for a week, come back and write-up the women's literature classification and selection by the beginning of March.

Entry 12: The ‘Art’ of Writing

Well I’ve been writing steadily for the last three and a half weeks and so far have produced almost 21 pages of 1.5 spaced content, which roughly translates as 9,000 words. And that’s just for one section (and not including the 51 references)! No doubt there will be a lot of paring down in order to consolidate my argument, but for now, even in all its rough draft glory, I feel an immense sense of relief that I’ve finally started writing. Phew.

But it didn’t start very well...!!

Now I love the library. Massey has a beautiful modern library in which I’ve spent many hours perusing (or frantically searching) the book shelves and participating in group meetings. So I decided it’d be a good idea to sit myself down in the library to start writing the first weighty paragraphs of the Women & Leadership section. I’d packed up my laptop, a stack of hastily scrawled notes and references, and a couple of books, thinking this was going to be an extremely productive morning. I was prepared, focused and ready to produce some serious...academic writing. But as I purposefully strode into the library foyer I made my first crucial mistake.

Mistake #1: I was going to start writing straight away but my weakness for flat whites propelled me towards the café. I pulled out my phone as I waited for my coffee and started skimming the latest trending Mashable and BuzzFeed articles. Once you get hooked into reading this kind of stuff it’s hard to stop, especially if your coffee is ready in 2 minutes (you feel ripped off, caught in mid-article, unsatiated by mindless, yet entertaining drivel). Thirty minutes later I was finished with that (and the coffee) and ready to get started, happily fuelled by caffeine (maybe that wasn’t such a bad mistake then?).

Mistake #2: I hate lifts, absolutely hate them. Someone almost has to hold my hand to get me on one. So in the library, of course, I avoid them like the plague. Now usually I would

go up to level 4 or 5 if I wanted to study quietly, but the thought of climbing at least two flights of stairs carrying my laptop, handbag, books and notes wasn't appealing, even with a coffee buzz. So I went downstairs instead and found a cosy corner spot facing the wall. I set up my laptop, earphones, notes, water, etc. and after the required amount of time fiddling with sound, finding music I actually wanted to listen to, and checking the internet was working, I finally opened up a brand new Word document. It was at that point I realised my choice of location was incredibly poor. A loud intermittent clanking noise emanated from behind a nearby maintenance cupboard, a light was faintly flickering overhead, and people were chattering away in the pods. By now it had been almost 60 minutes since I'd arrived at the library and I hadn't committed one word to virtual paper yet. Since moving upstairs would definitely push me over the hour mark I decided the best course of action, despite the disturbances, was to turn up my music and just start writing.

Mistake #3: At home I usually leave my smartphone in my bedroom in an attempt to counter its tantalising siren-like "pick me up and check Facebook" call. No such luck at the library where it's only half-hidden in my bag. The first buzz to let me know someone has messaged me and can't resist checking who it is.

Mistake #4: Forty minutes into writing I'd managed about 300 odd words. I felt rather disenchanted with these sentences, they weren't quite fitting together and I wanted to figure out why. But I was quickly distracted by a pressing need to use the bathroom. The problem with coffee is that it has a tendency to move through you very quickly. And so I was faced with The Toilet Dilemma. Everyone knows those stories of poor unsuspecting students who just needed to use the bathroom quickly, left their laptop, phone, etc. out because it's such a hassle to pack them up and returned to find them 'disappeared.' That coffee probably wasn't such a good idea after all.

I did manage to sneak off to the toilet without losing any of my valuables, but obviously by this point the whole library-writing situation really wasn't working for me. So it made perfect sense to leave after two hours to go shopping with my sister, with only a measly 600 words in that Word doc. And when I got home that afternoon I ended up scrapping them all. It was, for lack of a better expression, a lose-lose day. Thesis – 0, Lydia's ego – 0.

I know this is quite a silly story! Ok, a *very* run-of-the-mill, hurry-up-and-finish, is-there-any-point kind of story. I will openly admit – it lacks profundity. But I wanted to explore

the writing process honestly and the inevitable struggles, however inane, along the way (especially since family and friends often set me up on a pedestal as an example of the perfect, truly dedicated study-freak. And while I do, at times, have an incredible capacity for concentration, I'm still a fallible human being!).

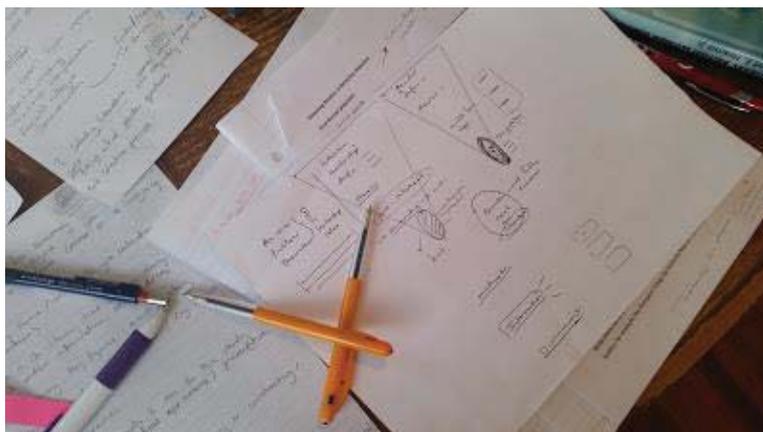
On reflection, I managed to blame literally everything else but myself for getting off to a bad start (isn't it incredible the human capacity for directing fault onto something/someone else other than oneself?) And for some reason this disastrous attempt at getting started put me off for the rest of the week (off writing at least, I *did* keep researching and reading!). After a few moments of soul-searching I eventually came to the realisation that the real problem was with me – my notes for the Feminism segment were poor and difficult to use. So the moral of the story is twofold: (1) I'm a creature of habit – home is *always* where the best writing happens (aka the dining room table!), (2) my writing is only going to be as good as my notes and research are. Such obvious points but so easy to ignore sometimes.

Let's get serious now...

Since the Women and Leadership (W&L) Section is more of a summary or evaluation (or in academic speak, a 'literature review') of the current issues women are facing in the contemporary workplace, it feels a bit like I'm working with a puzzle. I have 40+ references from which to craft my argument. The difficulty is always keeping in mind how all seven (yes 7!) sections of the thesis are inextricably linked to the arguments I make in this crucial middle piece. And yes, that does seem rather counter-intuitive doesn't it? I'm sure that's a rule from *English 101* – don't start writing your essay in the middle.

Women and leadership is the crucial central idea from which all other claims, ideas, and speculations evolve. Of course, doesn't that still mean it should be the first topic to be addressed in the thesis? The way I like to think of it is concentrated analysis versus a broad 'birds-eye-view'. Leadership itself is such a huge and often contentious topic, so before I can even begin explaining how gender influences/is-part-of leadership (the concentrated analysis aspect), I have to give a rundown on the perspective I'm adopting in relation to leadership as an academic discourse (the 'big picture,' the 'ideal form,' the 'best practice'). But rather than write extensively on leadership with little to no direction, going back to this 'big picture' will ensure its relevance to the arguments I am making in the W&L section.

To give a brief explanation of the term, *leadership*, as I conceive of it in a business context, is the process of mobilising people effectively and efficiently so as they can work collectively towards a common purpose, goal or objective. But rather than being something that occurs through the agency of a single ‘leader’ figure; followers, context and the purpose to which effort is directed, all contribute to leadership’s occurrence (Ladkin 2010). And the part I’m honing in on is what goes on between leaders and followers during leadership ‘moments.’ More precisely, what does ‘gender’ do to leadership, or conversely, what does leadership do to gender? As much as some theorists would like to remove the ‘leader figure’ as the primary topic/subject for analysis, because the social world and society’s power structures are arranged to give meaning to the binary classifications of male and female, and the tendency in most people’s minds to equate the term ‘leader’ with ‘leadership,’ gender identities and gender relations (men/women, masculine/feminine, etc.) continue to exert an immense amount of influence on how we conceive of and practice leadership in all variety of contexts and situations.



[Image: *Inverted Triangles. The inverted triangle exemplifies for me the 'honing in' structure of my thesis*]

Another one of the important yet subtle distinctions I’ve been trying to make in the W&L section is the difference between the terms ‘women *and* leadership’ and ‘women’s leadership.’ Why is this significant? Here is a short segment from my discussion which sums it up nicely I think:

“Although the idea of finding a female advantage or a particular set of traits which allow women to compete on equal terms with men is appealing, a note of caution is in order. Promoting the idea of ‘women’s leadership’ as separate and distinct from ‘leadership’ places female leaders in a comparative position to be assessed against a pseudo-model of

universal or neutral (aka male) leadership/power. Stead and Elliott (2009) explain that “women, we might conclude from this, are caught in a gender trap in which they are ‘constructed and reconstructed’ in order to make them appear suitable for managerial labour” (p. 26). If the workplace is established to reproduce and sustain masculinity, whether or not real differences and styles are identifiable in women leaders or not, traditional gender stereotyping will no doubt continue to influence how behaviours are perceived and rated (Whelan, 2012), perpetuating a ‘psychology of prejudice’ by which gender discrimination continues to be legitimated.”

So the aim is not to facilitate the feminisation of leadership, but instead a “loosening up” of management being “culturally connected to men and, in particular, masculine men and given a masculine meaning” (Billing & Alvesson, 2000, p. 155). Based on this premise I've developed a set of guiding questions for the methods section, questions which point to the usefulness of engaging fictional texts written by women: *What can we learn about women and leadership by studying it in alternative, non-organisational settings? What methods will be employed to better reflect women's experiences of leadership in the field of leadership development? How will these methods promote approaches that attend to the social and are concerned with leadership as well as with individual leader development?*

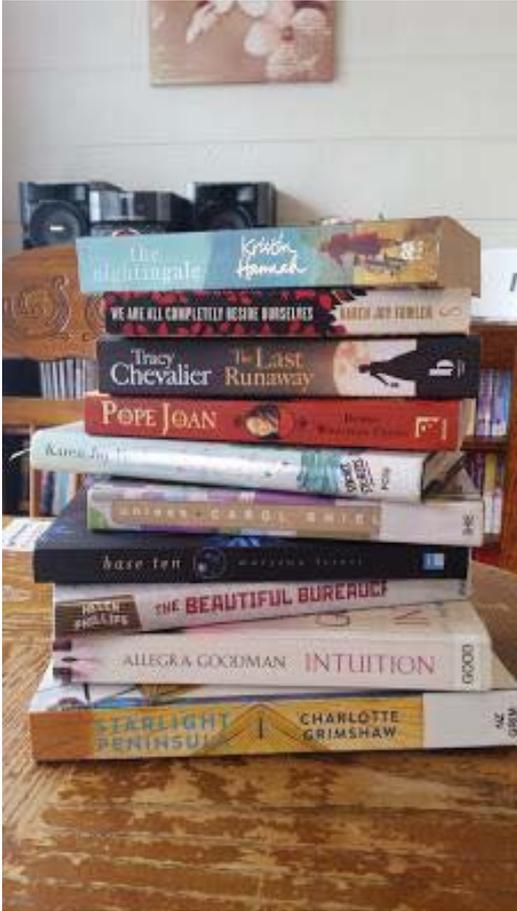
Engaging Imagination: Is the Process of Writing ‘Art’?

Imagine with me for a moment a beautiful large white canvas lying flat on your living room floor. Right next to the canvas is an assortment of paints, all manner of colours and shades, carefully emptied from their tubes and arranged expertly on a palette. And a little further over to the left, a set of clean paintbrushes. A toddler crawls into the room and pauses, awed by the size of the spotless, empty canvas. She spies the paint and makes a quick beeline for the uncovered rainbow of colours, a squeal of excitement on her lips. Tentatively dipping a finger into the sky blue she draws a squiggly line across the white space. It looks lonely, so she places both hands into the paint and swirls them around before drawing them enthusiastically across the unsuspecting canvas in a myriad of waves, dips and circles. The result, as perhaps you can well imagine, is something less than perfect. But perhaps, you might dare wonder, there is some kind of underlying order and beauty to it.

At the moment I feel a bit like that toddler. And if we substitute the canvas for paper, paint for theories and academic perspectives, and the excited toddler for the graduate student, then perhaps we can indeed call the writing process an ‘artistic pursuit’ in its purest, most literal form (brush to paper; hands to clay; keyboard to screen). Or, at least, collaging?!



Entry 13: Straight from My Bookbag



We just got back from our Summer beach holiday. And as I reward for all my hard work over the last couple of months I decided to take a week-long break from all texts study related, including novels. Instead I chose to read *Atonement* by Ian McEwan, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *The Stone Diaries* by Carol Shields. I enjoyed all three of these novels immensely and would highly recommend them for those who enjoy ‘slice of life,’ deeply thoughtful literary works. Harper Lee’s classic had been on my ‘must-read-eventually’ list for quite some time (as in several years), and it was really by chance that I ended up throwing it in my bag as a last minute option in case it rained on holiday (which it did, quite profusely). So it almost seems like some strange

stroke of fate or coincidence that I finished the book on the very same day she passed away (Feb 19).

[Image: The last stragglers from my hypothetical bookbag!]

1. *Pope Joan* (1996) by Donna Woolfolk Cross

Applicability Rating: 8.5/10

Relevant Themes: Women in power, ‘doing’ gender, masculine vs. feminine traits enacted by leaders, male and female leadership differences, leadership in crisis situations

Key Thoughts: In this dramatic page-turner and book club classic, Donna Woolfolk Cross realistically envisions and brings to life the legend of Pope Joan, a talented ninth-century woman who allegedly disguised herself as a man and unexpectedly rose to become the first, and only, female to preside on the papal throne. Regardless of whether or not Joan the Pope did in fact exist (although the evidence Woolfolk Cross provides in the ‘Author’s

Note' is quite convincing), Joan is an unforgettable character who defies convention and rises to the highest echelons of official power (during this time period, the papacy was one of the most coveted leadership positions in all of Christendom).

What happens when a pseudo-male wields power greater than any other man (or woman) in Europe? Would 'she' lead differently? The back cover tries to emphasise the fact that Joan is a 'woman' in power, but I would disagree with this as Joan *always* presents as male, which problematizes labeling Joan as a 'heroine' or as a legitimate female leader example. As a 'man' to all but a very select few, Joan is free from the negative perceptions and expectations which are naturally afforded to the female sex. In fact, she never has to face the double bind that women are generally confronted with – should she employ communal behaviours and be well-liked but not respected or use agentic behaviours and be respected but not liked. While some members of the papal court are deeply suspicious of his/her more egalitarian leanings and communal caring behaviours, the majority accept and respect these 'feminine' attributes as long as they are presented in the guise of the normative masculine body. So even though Joan enacts a more post-heroic, transformational leadership style ('women's leadership') than previous papal leaders, without the cloak of masculinity would her 'leadership' and authority ever have been taken seriously? The answer is clearly no – in fact, it is because of her female biological organs that she is killed without remorse by a raging crowd; her 'innate femininity' makes her unacceptable as a leader or religious figurehead in the public sphere.

After finishing *Pope Joan*, I began to ask myself what I consider to be an interesting set of questions. For example, why does Woolfolk Cross choose to have Joan practice more 'feminine' leadership traits? Joan's vision for a cleaner, safer, more inclusive, compassionate and moral nation-state is in stark contrast to her competitor Anastasius's aggressive, authoritative and individualistic political goals. Is Woolfolk Cross constructing her view of female leadership through a cultural feminist lens? Is the novel suggesting that because Joan is a woman, even though she's posturing as a man and has only had agentic leadership behaviours modeled for her (there are no strong female role models in her life), she will naturally opt for more communal and participatory leadership behaviours? And what wider implications do these assumptions about innate female behaviours have for women and leadership more generally? How would the story be different if Woolfolk Cross had portrayed Joan as an 'iron maiden' instead?

The other notable topic Woolfolk Cross highlights is the oppressive social restrictions forced on women, social ideas that she hints have not completely disappeared. This is epitomised in a conversation between Pope Joan and Jordanes, a member of her synod:

“Holiness,” he said, “you do great injury in seeking to educate women.”

“How so?” she asked.

“Surely you know, Holiness, that the size of a woman’s brain and her uterus are inversely proportionate; therefore, the more a girl learns, the less likely she will ever bear children.’

Better barren of body than of mind, Joan thought dryly, though she kept the thought to herself.

“Where have you read this?”

“It is common knowledge.” (p. 366)

Woolfolk Cross wants to challenge ‘common knowledge’ in all forms, and Joan’s quick wits are readily devoted to this task throughout the novel (these clever confrontations are excellent!). While I found the romantic undertones of the story rather frustrating and, at times, unnecessary (although Joan had to get pregnant somehow I suppose!), the novel provides a rigorous examination of the root causes and assumptions of misogyny (in religion and society) and has multiple examples of leadership ‘moments’ with feminist undertones which would serve as lively discussion points in a book club setting.

2. *The Nightingale* (2015) by Kristin Hannah

Applicability Rating: 6.5/10

Relevant Themes: Women’s courage in times of crisis, female leadership in male-dominated contexts, challenging popular expectations and perceptions, self-actualisation

Key Thoughts: Voted as the Goodreads ‘People’s Choice Awards’ top historical fiction novel for 2015 (with over 57,000 votes), *The Nightingale* is a rather typical women's WWII novel which follows the stories of two sisters whose lives are thrown into disarray after the Fall of France in 1940. Vianne, the elder sister, lives near the French border with her small family and tries her best to keep her daughter safe by complying with the

Germans, especially after a Nazi officer is posted to her house. Isabelle, on the other hand, desperate to fulfil De Gaulle's call-to-arms and stand up to the German invaders, flees to Paris and joins the French resistance. Brave almost to a fault, she leads countless missions across the Pyrenees, smuggling downed air pilots to safety right under the Germans' noses.

I really struggled to get into this novel and, I have to admit, almost gave up 100 pages in. There is little in the way of subtly or literary acumen in this book. Maybe it was the predictable 'chick lit' tag line on the front cover ('*In love we find out who we want to be. In war we find out who we are*') which made me sceptical of the over-the-top portraits of the annoyingly naive Isabelle and painfully bossy Vianne which made the reading experience less than engaging to begin with. Nonetheless, two-thirds in, as Vianne and Isabelle courageously stand up to the Germans in their own unique ways, I began to pick out some important women and leadership themes. For example, Isabelle, a very pretty young woman, struggles to deal with and counter the prejudices she experiences leading American and British pilots to safety. With some of the soldiers unwilling to listen and follow a young woman, Isabelle must navigate that unsteady bridge between communal and agentic behaviours, showing that she is both compassionate *and* capable. Saying this, *The Nightingale* is definitely a novel which falls into the popular fiction category, and is nowhere near as clever or expertly crafted as other works of literature in the same WWII genre, such as Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*. For this reason, no matter how popular it was last year, I doubt it will stand the test of time as a canonical 'great read.'

3. *The Last Runaway* (2013) by Tracy Chevalier

Applicability Rating: 8.5/10

Relevant Themes: Relationships and 'space between' women (follower and leaders), power-with others, ethical and moral decision-making, female role models and mentors, self-actualisation & empowerment

Key Thoughts: This was a nice and easy, fast-paced read. Set in the 1850s, *The Last Runaway* tells the story of Honor Bright, a sheltered and overly timid Quaker girl who impulsively decides to immigrate to America with her sister Grace. Her sister dies unexpectedly from yellow fever soon after their arrival, and Honor sets off on her own to a

small pioneering Quaker community to break the sad news to Grace's intended groom. Opposed in principle to slavery, Honor is forced to test her beliefs when a runaway slave shows up on her new husband's farm. As the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 comes into full force in the North, Honor is faced with a difficult moral dilemma: protect her new family or help the runaways who keep appearing and risk losing everything. Honor doesn't act alone – she becomes friends with the indomitable Belle, the local milliner and a free black woman known as Mrs Reed, both 'station masters' for the Underground Railroad. These spirited women challenge and encourage Honor, acting as 'leaders' and role models in their interactions with her.

What I particularly liked about *The Last Runaway* is that all the female characters are diverse and multi-dimensional. Honor's transformation from shy and reticent to bold and courageous is well-done and believable. It is due to the influence of Belle and Mrs Reed that Honor is able to change the sense of who she is and what she is capable of, giving her a new understanding of the world and mobilising her for collective action. And there are plenty of examples which allow for questions, such as: what goes on between women when leadership occurs? Or, how is leadership between women portrayed and experienced? How can growth and development be facilitated and supported among women?

The novel also demonstrates how leadership has the ability to move fluidly between people, rather than solely being limited to conventional 'leader' and 'follower' dichotomies. There is a particular scene where Honor runs away with a slave woman called Virginie. At first, it seems that Honor is the one 'leading the way' towards their destination, but it quickly becomes evident that Virginie is also, at times, 'leading' Honor, who knows next to nothing about navigating a dark forest at night or hiding from slave catchers. In this context, the *task* of escaping becomes the 'invisible' leader, guiding how Honor and Virginie relate to each other and achieve their end purpose.

4. *The Lady Cyclist's Guide to Kashgar* (2012) by Suzanne Joinson

Applicability Rating: 7/10

Relevant Themes: Bad/immoral leadership, follower's perspectives, 'spaces between' women (followers and leaders).

Key Thoughts: This novel reminded me a little bit of *The House Girl* by Tara Conklin – a captivating historical narrative punctuated intermittently by a sub-par present day story that tries just a bit too hard to connect with the past. So I was always a little bit disappointed when Evangeline English’s fascinating diary that records her calamitous missionary trip to Kashgar was interrupted by Frieda and Tayeb’s lacklustre observations of London life.

I’m not going to bother re-hashing Frieda’s rather unconvincing story here, but I really did enjoy her great-grandmother, Evangeline’s, 'A Lady Cyclist’s Guide to Kashgar – Notes'. In 1923 Evangeline, a ‘fake’ missionary who wants to write a piece of creative non-fiction about her travels, and her passionately religious sister, Lizzie, set out to establish a mission station in the Middle East. The sisters are under the direction of an overbearing and conniving missionary leader called Millicent, a woman who is not all that she seems. Along the way they rescue a baby from a dying teenage mother and, accused of the young mother's death, the women end up under house arrest in the unfriendly desert city of Kashgar. In no time at all, Millicent puts all three women in extreme danger, firstly by converting a local Muslim girl (who is subsequently drowned by her angry father) and then by distributing inflammatory tracts throughout the restless and hostile city with a rogue Italian priest. Evangeline is soon forced to flee for her life across the desert with the rescued baby, Ai-lien. In her journal entries, Evangeline is an acute observer of the leader/follower dynamic and the sway a corrupt leader like Millicent can hold over her followers. It is Evangeline’s apparent obsession with Millicent that fuels most of the tension in her journal entries – she is at once repelled and drawn to Millicent’s ‘power-over’ her and Lizzie. Even once she is free from Millicent’s immediate influence, Evangeline continues to be haunted by her presence, frequently asking “what would Millicent do?” This dangerous relationship between the ‘leader’ and ‘followers’ would definitely raise some interesting discussion points, however, due to the frustrating hopping and skipping between plot lines and narrative voices, I’m not convinced this novel deserves a place on the short list.

5. *Sarah Canary* (1991) by Karen Joy Fowler

Applicability Rating: 5/10

Relevant Themes: Female absence and ‘Otherness,’ ‘voicing’ and ‘silencing’ of the feminine, minority experiences (racial, sexual, political, mental, etc), reluctant ‘leaders’/‘invisible’ leaders

Key Thoughts: By virtue of the fact that the majority of protagonists and narrators in this book are male, *Sarah Canary* should be immediately disqualified from my list. However, some of the themes (listed above) are particularly fascinating and, I believe, quite relevant and worth investigating at least briefly. Most importantly, Sarah Canary, even though she never speaks an intelligible word, could be labelled as a leader. Why? Quite simply, people follow her, in a literal as well as metaphorical sense. In fact, for Chin she emerges as a type of silent charismatic leader/goddess who is leading him, perhaps against his better judgement, towards some unidentifiable purpose/knowledge/discovery.

Something I love about Karen Joy Fowler is that she remains tantalisingly on the fence between genres; playing with science fiction and otherworldly experiences, but not quite indulging in an alternative universe. The alien-like behaviour of Sarah Canary is unsettling, and yet she is still familiar. And because she lacks a ‘voice,’ she is vulnerable to myriad interpretations. In fact every character in the story constructs, and subsequently projects, a different narrative background onto her – abused woman, wild woman raised by wolves, goddess/spirit, mental health patient, etc...

Subsequently, the questions about gender, perceptions, projection, culture, and leadership which the novels raises are quite endless, and could include: What if the female heroine is silent? Who speaks for her? How is she voiced and silenced by those around her? And to what effect? What happens to the ‘leader’ when the ‘followers’ are the ones who ‘hold power’ even if they feel ‘powerless’ (e.g. Chin and BJ)? I’ll leave it at that for now since realistically I’m not going to use this book further. However, it is an interesting interrogation of a ‘leader’ figure from the followers’ perspective, and it also calls into question the desirability of setting strict criteria on my literature selection.

6. “What I Didn’t See” (short story) (2010) by Karen Joy Fowler

Applicability Rating: 6/10

Relevant Themes: Female perspectives, group dynamics between men and women, expectations and perceptions, the female body, ecofeminism

Key Thoughts: I've been on a bit of a Karen Joy Fowler binge recently! While I'm not a great short story reader, this entire collection was surprisingly engrossing with its dashes of science fiction-esque mysteries, alternative historical narratives and dysfunctional family and community tales. The second to last story, and the one for which the entire collection is named, is concerned with providing a feminine perspective on what would normally be considered a masculine (and very white) African adventure story (think classic H. Rider Haggard type narratives).

It is not until all the other group members (one woman and five men) are dead that the narrator feels comfortable voicing her take on what *really* happened during that ill-fated trip to Africa in 1928, although 'truth,' as she points out, is completely subjective: "We seven went into the jungle with guns in our hands and love in our hearts. I say so now when there is no one left to contradict me" (p. 170). Their mission is to hunt down and kill a single sacrificial gorilla in order to save as many gorillas as possible in the future from big game hunters. The women are vital to this endeavour as "If one of the girls should bring down a large male," he [Archer] said, "it will seem as exciting as shooting a cow. No man will cross a continent merely to do something a pair of girls has already done" (p. 174) (a rather dubious utilitarian and pragmatic approach to environmentalism!). The title of the story, 'What I Didn't See,' seems purposefully ironic. The omnipotent 'I' is in a much better position to critique the entire misadventure than any of the men ever were, especially since she is subjected to the full range of gendered expectations one can expect to find in 1928.

In a recent interview, Fowler explained how this short story was actually a forerunner to her Man Booker shortlisted novel, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) (which I also read for this study): "They're both based on actual events in the checkered history of human/non-human animal relationships...exactly what it means to be a primate. I think of that story as a sort of primate study where the subjects are my small troop of humans." Although I haven't found any sources which link Karen Joy Fowler officially with the ecofeminism movement,²⁶ she appears to be deeply concerned with questions of sustainability and sustainable development, equity, and social justice in her writing,

²⁶ "Ecofeminism sees a connection between exploitation and degradation of the natural world and subordination and oppression of women, drawing from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activity on the non-human world, and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women" (Haynes, et al., 2015, p. 59).

themes which can be conceptually linked with gender equality empirically through the experience of women, and usefully analysed through the lens of feminism (Haynes & Murray, 2015). For example, 'What I Didn't See' is deeply concerned with both the impact of human activity on primates in Africa (the massacre of the gorillas by 'rational' men) and the silencing or alienation of the two women included on the trek (one disappears and the other doesn't speak on the issue for decades). Both the gorillas and the women are construed of as 'others.' In this way their plights run parallel to one another - there is a "connection between exploitation and degradation of the natural world and subordination and oppression of women" (Haynes, et al., 2015, p. 59).

Why only a '6' applicability rating then? While it critiques gender roles and unsettles the reader with its women/nature exploitation, in this particular case, I'm not sure the text says enough on its own about leadership to make it a truly useful piece for extended analysis.

Other book I read that aren't very applicable for this study:

- *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (2013) by Karen Joy Fowler
- *Unless* (2003) by Carol Shields
- *Possession* (1990) by A. S. Byatt

Currently reading:

- *Base Ten* (2009) by Maryann Lesert
- *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (2015) by Becky Chambers

Entry 14: Keep Calm & Write On

Oh the veritable joys of longlisting and shortlisting (and decision-making in general)! I am tempted to throw my hands up in the air and shout: "I WILL JUST USE ALL OF THEM!" Every relevant book, theory, and framework.

But this, unfortunately, is an unrealistic goal. Besides the obvious fact that this would make my project an unreadable tome, there is a little ticking clock situated right on the edge of my sub-conscious constantly reminding me that “*tick* you *tock* are *tick* running *tock* out *tick* of *tock* TIME!” I swear, it’s starting to drive me a little bit insane.

And so I am faced with a series of decision-making dilemmas – there seem to be no clear right or wrong ways to work this, it is a toss-up between a myriad of right and right decisions. What I really need to do is pull out the proverbial weighing scales and balance the options against one another: Do I shortlist *The Lifeboat* or *The Dovekeepers* or *The Invention of Wings*? (I love them all equally!) Does *Welcome to Thebes* or *Top Girls* say more about power, inequality and benign sexism? (They’re both so rich I almost don’t know where to start!) Do I cut my longlist down from 10 stories to 8? And if so, which ones do I strike off the list? Is a transformational learning approach too idealistic? (Am I kidding myself with how much you can actually get out of a good novel?) Do I read my selections through a feminist *and* a deconstructionist lens? Or am I stretching myself too far? What about Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva and feminist poststructuralism? Am I just another over privileged white feminist making a huge mistake by ignoring intersectionality (i.e. race)?

I suppose there *are* better choices versus a few not-so-good ones, but all the options seem so full of potential – from this distance the 'fields of completion' all appear to be full of flowers. And yet I could unintentionally stumble into a hypothetical quagmire if I’m not careful.

It’s panic inducing stuff I tell you! Panic partially brought on by the fact that I’ve had a nasty chest infection for the past month. I have to frequently remind myself to slow down, breathe and just:



I know my project isn't world changing, like finding a cure for cancer or alleviating poverty, but the more I read and learn about gender, feminism and leadership, the more I see a desperate need for fundamental changes across the board, in organisations and in wider society. As the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie writes in *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014): "Today, we live in a vastly different world. The person more qualified to lead is not the physically stronger person. It is the more intelligent, the more knowledgeable, the more creative, more innovative. And there are no hormones for those attributes. A man is as likely as a woman to be intelligent, innovative, creative. We have evolved. **But our ideas of gender have not evolved very much**" (p. 18). [Check out her excellent TED Talk on the same subject [here](#)].

We *must* have more conversations about gender and leadership. Rather than sweeping the 'woman question' under the table because it is too controversial, too provocative, too emotional, let's talk, debate, disagree, agree, reflect on and, maybe, even transform our thinking. Let's disrupt habitual patterns of thinking, discuss in detail the everyday dilemmas women face as they practice and experience leadership, make meaning from these dilemmas and stories, and achieve some level of insight. And if I can facilitate, or at least provide what I like to call 'the scaffolding,' for a discussion which has the potential to explore a wide array of women and leadership issues, then perhaps I am starting to accomplish something worthwhile. (At least that's what I like to tell myself after a sleepless night worrying over my thesis!)

Transformative Change

Of course, these aims all tie into my methods section which I'm frantically working on at the moment (panic, sleepless nights, frantic scrawling...I'm beginning to sound like a broken record! Although it's rather cathartic to voice my self-doubt, and by doing so, start

to release it). I'm kicking it off with a brief literature review on women's leadership development, focusing on the specific ways educators and scholars are addressing more 'sensitive' topics (i.e. those that garner the most resistance and reactance), such as double binds, stereotypes, myths, expectations, gendered social structures, etc... However, the research in this area is rather scant. Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, and Bilimoria (2008) have found that the topic of women's leadership development remains underrepresented in both the business and psychology literature, and very little is written on teaching women and leadership as a potentially sensitive subject (Shollen, 2015). The result is that educators and practitioners "lack a coherent, theoretically based, actionable framework for designing and delivering leadership programmes for women" (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011, p. 475).

However, not all is bleak! During my research I identified three key learning frameworks that are being successfully utilised for women-only leadership development programmes. These include consciousness-raising and emancipatory techniques, experiential learning, and transformational learning. It's also exciting because scholars have noted an increasing demand among women for interdisciplinary approaches which combine social sciences and humanities perspectives, such as women's studies, communication concepts, and sociology, with leadership studies. Ruminski and Holba (2012a) claim that interdisciplinary methods offer much richer possibilities for "scholarly analysis, functional praxis and constructive social change" (p. 6). But the real golden key, I believe, is Debebe's (2009, 2011) transformational learning model for women's leadership development (based on Mezirow's (1991) model). I'm not going to go into too much detail in this post, but here is a figure to illustrate the transformational process in its most basic form:

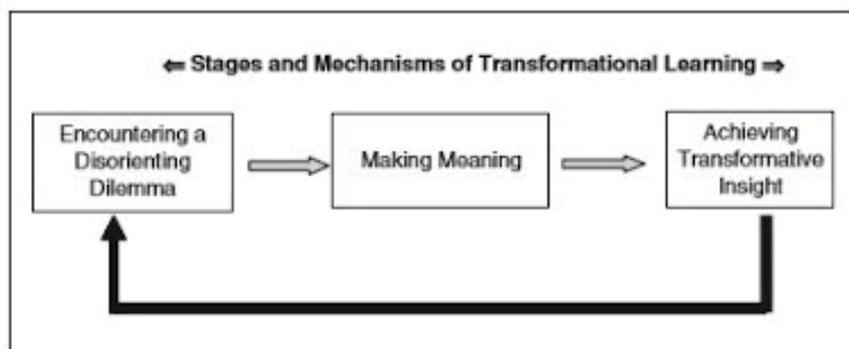


Figure 1. The process of transformational learning

Working within this framework offers clear guidelines and a proven method for effecting change. And the real clincher – in terms of developing course content for a ‘transformational’ women’s leadership course, growing attention is being visited on arts-based transformative learning approaches, in particular, the power of literary fiction to invoke meaningful transformative insight (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence, 2008; Jarvis, 2006). In a qualitative study with 131 undergraduate and graduate students in the US, Hoggan et al. (2015) found that reading fiction for a specific purpose or learning activity (that is, directed reading as opposed to casual reading) has the "potential to arouse strong emotional responses and to encourage critical reflection on habits of mind" (p. 22).

Even though Badaracco (2006), Sucher (2007), and McManus and Perruci (2015) don’t explicitly state their intentions in such theoretical terms, their respective goals appear to be transformational in nature. They are, as Sucher stipulates, “harnessing the power of literature” to raise serious questions about what it means to practice moral and ethical leadership, and to illuminate the complexity of leadership as a multi-faceted process (and by doing so, completely change how leaders, followers, and students understand leadership). And so it's not a question of "will my methods work?" but rather, "what are the best ways to *apply* my methods?"

Of course, this has prompted me to take a step back and ask: Have I personally experienced transformative changes in my attitudes and values as I've critically read and reflected on various stories and characters? I think the resounding answer is 'Yes.' I definitely feel like I've adapted some of my ideas and I feel that I have a greater sense of agency and a much deeper understanding of women's leadership issues and, most importantly, *why* they continue to exist. But what forms has this learning taken exactly and what particularly has stood out? Have any of my practices changed? What am I doing differently?

I wish I had a smidgen more time to keep going with this blog post and explore these questions in detail. But time really is of the essence right now and that methods section is practically crying out for attention. I promise, however, to return to these questions at a later date. So for now, Happy Easter!

Entry 15: “That’s a Wrap!” A Book Review Finale

Now that I’m well into the writing stage, I’ve pretty much finished reading novels, short stories, and plays (although I may manage to sneak in a couple more if I’m lucky!), but there were a few stragglers which didn’t get included in my [last book review post](#). So, in this ‘finale’ book review blog, I have three books to appraise, a long list of ‘what-I-wish-I-could-read-if-I-had-time,’ a short reflective vignette on how my reading experiences have evolved over the last 7-8 months, and ‘My Feminist Bookshelf’ recommendations. There is just so much great information in this post!



(The massive pile of books I currently have out from the library! I'm still trying to work out how on earth I'm going to get them all back to uni - a wheelbarrow or three?!)

1. *The Help* (2009) by Kathryn Stockett

Applicability Rating: 8/10

Relevant Themes: Collaborative leadership, women’s stories & perspectives, intersectionality/racial issues, authentic leadership & engagement

Key Thoughts: I don’t usually make a habit of reading a book *after* I’ve watched the movie, but *The Help* is a real gem, even if you already have the inside scoop on all the best spoilers. Set in the deep-south in 1962, Stockett’s well-loved novel is narrated by three extraordinary women – twenty-two year old Skeeter, a privileged yet ambitious white girl,

and two black maids, the wise and regal Aibileen and her best friend Minny, the sassiest maid in all of Jackson, Mississippi, but also the best cook. In terms of leadership, the whole story is concerned with addressing what Keith Grint would no doubt call a ‘wicked problem’ – the ill treatment of black maids, and more widely, racism in 1960s America. Using Ladkin's leadership 'moment' framework, a general outline of this overarching leadership theme might look something like this:

Leadership ‘Moment’	Context	Purpose	Relationships between leader/s & followers	Relevant W & L Themes/Issues
‘Wicked’ problem Solution: writing a book to encourage social justice	1960s Mississippi Racism Oppressive rules (Jim Crow Laws) Women in sole charge of households (domestic sphere)	Starting a social movement for change. Addressing the ways black and white women view and treat one another (with reference to wider society)	Power-with Authentic engagement Collaboration on a joint project	Leadership moving between women Women's leadership in times of crisis Intersectionality

While the novel could be examined holistically (as a ‘whole’ rather than ‘parts’), this framework can also be applied to more specific ‘moments’ within the story. For example:

Specific Leadership ‘Moments’	Context	Purpose	Relationship between leaders & followers	Relevant W & L Discussion Questions
Skeeter & Aibileen working closely together to write and publish a book. Examples from text	Expectations & perceptions – Skeeter is white and Aibileen is black Fear of discovery Social stigma Skeeter expected to marry, start a family & fit in with the social set	Collecting stories from black maids to show what <i>really</i> goes on in white households, and by doing so, expose & address the terrible racial issues in Jackson	Task as the ‘leader’ Collaboration Power ‘with’ Developing trust Support networks	What goes on between women when the task acts as the ‘leader’? What expectations do Aibileen and Skeeter bring to their leader-leader relationship? Etc...

My infatuation with this book was subdued somewhat after I read an essay by Roxane Gay in [Bad Feminist](#). As a black woman herself, Gay claims the book and movie both do a rather poor job of dealing with racial issues (there is a shorter version of this article online: [‘Bad Movie, Worse Book’](#)). She specifically takes issue with the typical stereotypes Stockett (who is white) adopts for her black characters – the selfless and loving nanny, the

abusive black husband, the sassy, big-mouthed maid who's always getting into trouble. And whereas Skeeter, the young white protagonist, gets to 'follow her dreams' as a result of publishing the book, Aibileen is fired from her job and her future hangs in the balance. It's really tricky because I think the temptation here, for me at least, would be to use the story for its excellent examples of leadership but ignore race (and more specifically, black women's leadership experiences) since it complicates, and even overshadows, what could be termed the more useful 'all-women' or 'universal' lessons. I'll add this book to my long list, but I think until I'm more up-to-the-play with racial issues, critical race theory and intersectional analysis I couldn't do it real justice.

2. *Base Ten* (2009) by Maryann Lesert

Applicability Rating: 6.5/10

Relevant Themes: Work-life balance difficulties for women, navigating the double-bind, women in male-dominated fields, agentic vs. communal behaviours

Key Thoughts: I branched out a bit with this book as it's definitely not on any bestseller or prize-winning lists. In fact, it seems to have flown largely under the radar and is not even available in New Zealand (I had to order it off Book Depository). Published by The Feminist Press in 2009, *Base Ten* deals with some very topical – though largely invisible – issues to do with women's careers versus traditional family responsibilities. Although somewhat heavy on the details and perhaps 100 pages too long, I did find the story quite fascinating, particularly in the very human way it approached the double bind most women will face at some point in their lives: a highly rewarding and brilliant career or motherhood. For astrophysicist Jillian Greer who has always dreamed of going into space, the tensions between the real and all-encompassing (but equally frustrating) love she has for her children and the inevitable consequences motherhood has for her once brilliant career in the male-dominated realm of the sciences, is almost enough to drive her mad. She could have achieved so much and *yet...* While the novel is not so much about leadership as it is about self-discovery, it also interrogates the underlying social structures which govern how the workplace is currently organised - Why are women still a minority in some industries? Why are women still being confronted with having to make a 'sacrificial

choice' between a fulfilling career and family? Why hasn't society and the workplace adapted? What can be done?

However, I have mixed feelings about recommending this book. It's not overly gripping or exciting. Yes, it's clever and thoughtful, but realistically, as a book club recommendation, participants would struggle to get the whole way through. Sadly, I can see most people designating it to the category of tedious and onerous 'should reads.'

3. *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) by Sheri S. Tepper

Applicability Rating: 8.5/10

Relevant Themes: Matriarchal societies, women in power, male/female leadership differences, ethical & moral decision-making

Key Thoughts: This is one of those books that you either simply love or hate (or love to hate as the case may be). Personally, I was equally enthralled and horrified...I couldn't get it out of my head and I just *had* to keep reading in every spare moment until I'd made it to the unsettling and surprising end. It gives me goosebumps just thinking about it! In summary, the novel is set in a post-apocalyptic dystopian world where only two extreme political alternatives exist: an oppressive, in-bred polygamist faction that subscribes to patriarchal religious fundamentalism which disconcertingly is not so far removed from some religious sects that could be found today, and a closely controlled matriarchal dictatorship known as Women's Country. In an attempt to avoid another devastating world war, most of the men in Women's Country are only allowed to live in closed military garrisons outside the cities. They provide protection from bandits, thieves and other garrisons. While men may leave the garrisons between the ages of 15 to 25 to become peace-loving 'servitors,' only a very few choose to do so. The women, on the other hand, manage the economy and are entirely responsible for the government, as well as agriculture, industry, learning and science. The ensuing story is narrated primarily from the perspective of Stavia, the devoted yet errant daughter of a leading councilwoman, as she comes to terms with her place, and the place of others, in Women's Country.

Although Tepper seems to hold that male and female differences in temperament and nature are primarily biological, I think she leaves enough room for the reader to challenge her conceptions of gender. Women's Country is by no means a utopian society even

though women do hold most of the power, and there are vast consequences arising from such a rigid social system. A fact which is not lost on the leading Councilwomen, who call themselves the ‘Damned Few’ as a result. So with its thoughtful application of cultural feminism and a healthy dose of Greek mythology, this story can be labelled both provocative and memorable, raising manifold questions about the nature of male and female differences, both as leaders and followers, in a world completely at odds with itself.

4. *The Long Way to a Small, Angry Planet* (2015) by Becky Chambers

Applicability Rating: 5/10

Relevant Themes: Follower-leader dynamics, crisis situations, gender fluidity (play)

Key Thoughts: I picked this sci-fi novel up because it’s been longlisted for the 2016 Baileys Women’s Prize for Fiction. And I also found it fascinating that Chambers financed this book (both the final writing stages and the self-publishing costs) by successfully campaigning through Kickstarter, a popular crowdfunding website. A fantastic idea, no?

I’m not overly familiar with the sci-fi genre, it seems that the label encompasses a wide variety of different styles and content. Whereas Le Guin’s sci-fi is serious, thoughtful and dystopian, Chambers’ style is much more comic, contemporary, and...teen fiction-y. Imagine a fictional galaxy something akin to Star Wars and you’re halfway there. It’s set in a post-apocalyptic era; the human race has escaped their dying planet (which has been devastated due to humanity’s propensity for rampant self-destruction – I’m looking at you America!) and resettled on Mars. But out in the galaxy there’s a whole plethora of different intelligent species and advanced civilizations (and it almost goes without saying, much more intelligent than humans). On a tunnelling ship captained by a human we meet at least five different varieties of these diverse galactic species. Chambers goes all-out explaining what these fantastical creatures look like – colourful feathers, boneless goo, shimmering scales...I couldn’t help but think of something akin to the cast of characters from *Monsters, Inc.* And after that funny unprompted mind-association, I completely lost my ability to take this novel too seriously.

While the story *is* entertaining and clever (Chambers has a vibrant and fun imagination), personally, I think she is trying to achieve too much in this novel. There’s some form of

critique and/or message for literally EVERYTHING. Sustainability, the environment, climate change, war & peace, terrorism, racism, acceptance, corporate greed, LGQBT, the political system, colonialism, body modification, artificial intelligence, *inter-species* sex...that one weirded me out a little bit to be honest. Chambers appears set on trying to take on the entire world, or should I say, galaxy (except for feminism, oddly enough). And I'm not saying that these aren't all important issues, but can a 300-odd page book really do them any sort of justice? While the key female character, Rosemary, is subject to a lot of the action, she fell short of my personal requirements for an interesting and engaging leader/follower. Furthermore, because of all the 'messages' Chambers is trying to get across and drill into her audience, the story/plot feels diluted; simply a vehicle for a political agenda. I really wanted to like this book, but I just couldn't. In one word: frustrating.

So why even bother reviewing this novel? I decided to include this review because it demonstrates how finding appropriate stories is always a matter of trial-and-error.

I *thought* this would be a great choice as according to the summary and reviews I read it featured a decent female lead, controversial/topical issues, an interesting leadership setting, had been nominated for notable prizes...but it just goes to show, until you have a book in your hands and start reading, looking at reviews and summaries is always going to be a hit-and-miss process. In this way it hints at the sheer amount of time and effort it has taken to read and then reflect on almost 50 books and short story collections (as well as read reviews and summaries for well over 200+ books) in order to create a high quality and workable long list.

Listomania

While I'm probably not going to get a chance to read them this time around, on my "if-I-didn't-sleep-and-just-studied" list I have:

- *The Stargazer's Sister* by Carrie Brown
- *The Women's Pages* by Debra Adelaide
- *People of the Book* by Geraldine Brooks
- *The Story of the Lost Child* by Elena Ferrante
- *Little Aunt Crane* by Geling Yan
- *Sister Noon* by Karen Joy Fowler
- *Everything I Never Told You* by Celeste Ng

- *The Green Road* by Anne Enright
- *Starlight Peninsula* by Charlotte Grimshaw
- *Kindred* by Octavia E. Butler
- *Impossible Saints* by Michèle Roberts
- *Cleopatra's Shadow* by Emily Holleman
- *Penelopiad* by Margaret Atwood
- Everything and anything by Alice Hoffman, Ursula Le Guin, and Charlotte Rogan
- More short story collections – like *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology* (almost finished this one actually! A captivating, spine-tingling collection).

Also missing from my 'top 50' list are New Zealand authors. I hate to admit that apart from Patricia Grace, Eleanor Catton and Katherine Mansfield, I've read very few NZ women writers. But unless I set out on another reading mission, I'm not sure how to rectify this in the short term. It may be something I need to redress if I did a PhD (I could spend 2-3 months researching and reading 10-15 novels/stories by NZ women writers) and it will be a limitation for this study.

A Few Reflections on Reading

As my blog and thesis have developed, my 'reviews' have concurrently evolved from short, almost timid summaries, to (mostly) thoughtful critiques and detailed appraisals. As a point of comparison, consider my review for *The Secret Life of Bees* which I wrote back in August 2015:

A clear work environment (the honey business) where there is leadership and followership between women. August Boatwright exemplifies authentic leadership in its fullest sense, i.e. heart leadership, solid values, passionate engagement, self-discipline. Since the story is told from perspective of Lily, I could investigate how women respond to authentic leadership and female support.

This is still a good summary, it's all extremely relevant information. But I can't help but feel there was a certain reticence which marred my textual analysis when I first started this project. I also wasn't entirely sure of *what* I was looking for or *how* I should talk about the texts.

Turning my gaze back, I can identify changes in how I read and think about my selected stories. My critical thinking skills (for this subject at least) have improved, and I feel that I can more easily recognise leadership 'moments' and what is going on in the 'spaces between' people/characters. But it's not only a matter of practical skills-based improvements, reading fictional stories in tandem with leadership theory has provided me with so many deeply engaging and memorable examples and case studies of women's leadership in action. There are two particular 'case' examples I keep returning to again and again. Firstly, the story of Sarah Grimke in *The Invention of Wings* [my review says it all [here](#)]; I still feel that I can identify with Sarah (the 'reluctant leader') as her story is a 'real-to-me' case study. Secondly, I often find myself reflecting on *The Lifeboat* and the epic leadership 'crisis' and subsequent power struggle it portrayed (hmm, I might need to rethink my short list...).

In addition, as a young woman myself, reading well-written women's stories that feature complex and diverse characters has given me more confidence in my own leadership capabilities (personal agency), as well as greater awareness of the pitfalls and problems within the leadership 'labyrinth' (as Eagly and Carli would say) and how I might navigate them in the future. I have been my own experimental guinea pig!

The 'Feminism' Shelf

It's one thing to say you're a feminist, but another to *know* and *understand* what that really means beyond "Yes, I believe in gender equality" (not that that's wrong by any means!). 'Feminism,' as a concept/theory/ideology/method (etc!), is extremely multi-faceted. It's something to struggle with and make sense of over a protracted period of time, maybe even your whole life. In fact, for me at least, learning about and engaging with feminism discourses and theories has been a transformative experience.

When I started my thesis I didn't fully comprehend the definitive differences between cultural feminism and liberal feminism, let alone what the terms 'gender binary' or 'intersectionality' meant. And I was absolutely clueless where poststructuralist feminism was concerned. I thought I knew a little bit about first, second, and third-wave feminism, but post-feminism? Not really. And sociological perspectives on 'gender' and 'sex' – why on earth didn't I take a sociology paper at undergrad level?! I've tried hard to improve my understanding and knowledge of feminism over the last 8 months (a 'crash-course' approach to learning), so I am by no means an expert, but as part of "That's a Wrap!" I

couldn't pass up the opportunity to recommend a few feminist books I've found particularly enlightening, entertaining, and inspiring.

These books are easy to read and easily accessible from the public library. For me they made feminism more relatable and applicable to daily life experiences, without getting overly theoretical or contentious about it:

- [*We Should All Be Feminists*](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- [*The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*](#) by Sue Monk Kidd (I've written about this book [here](#)).
- [*Bad Feminist*](#) by Roxane Gay (oh wait, Gay is quite contentious!)
- [*The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?*](#) By Deborah Cameron (Cameron's blog, [language:a feminist guide](#), is really interesting too!)
- [*Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism*](#) by Natasha Walters
- And I'm just about to start reading [*Feminism is for Everybody*](#) by bell hooks

I tried to read Caitlan Moran's very popular, part memoir, part manifesto – *How to Be a Woman*, but I found it to be too flippant. Similarly, while *Full Frontal Feminism* by Jessica Valenti had some good points, overall it lacked depth and made feminism seem overly simplistic (and she swears like a trooper...I mean there are only so many expletives you can handle in a non-fiction book before it becomes annoying). Both these books take a decidedly liberal feminist stance. For your coffee table: Jacky Fleming's [*The Trouble With Women*](#). This clever and satirical illustrated book will be sure to get some good conversations/arguments started!

But for the more serious reader:

- [*Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminist in a Post-Feminist Era*](#) by Kristin J. Anderson

This has got to be one of my all-time favourites! I won't go into any detail here since I've already written about this book in an earlier post [check it out [here](#)]. But I will say, even if the title sounds negative, Anderson does an excellent job of exploring the current *mainstream* attitudes towards feminism. An eye-opening read!

- [*Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*](#) by Cordelia Fine

I'll admit it – I had trouble understanding everything in this book. It's dense and filled with 'science-speak,' and since I have little background in science, or more specifically, neuroscience and psychology, it was a tough read for me! Saying that, it's still worth the effort. Fine is relentless in her close analysis of the current research on the brain, working hard to disprove or at least seriously bring into question claims that we have either a 'male' brain or a 'female' brain from which all behaviour in society eventuates. You know *that* argument – 'Women are too intuitive for math, and men are too focused for housework.' For me this book is freeing - too often we come up with excuses for our behavior or other people's behavior along the lines of 'oh well, she's a woman so...' or "you can't expect a guy to...because he just isn't wired that way." And sure, you can't throw out the baby with the bathwater, there are *some* small differences in biological brain make-up. BUT...as Fine points out, direct correlations between male/female brains and what would stereotypically be considered male and female behaviors aren't scientifically proven, and the experiments which have been done are full of holes. I mean really:



While this image makes the idea of female/male brains seem silly and ridiculous, I can recall multiple occasions when I've been complicit in reinforcing these stereotypes! It reminds me of what bell hooks has said about the need to constantly confront and critique our own **internalised sexism**, and then, only then, can we as women (and men) begin to change society.

Last but not least, I really enjoyed reading Michael Kimmel's comprehensive sociology textbook titled *The Gendered Society*, along with *Transformations: Women, Gender, and Psychology* by Mary Crawford.

And, at long last, we've finally made it to the end of this ridiculously long finale book review post! *applause*

Entry 16: Making Ends Meet

Well, I've written, or at least blocked out, almost everything except for the final discussion and recommendations chapter. And I'll admit, I've held off on writing this part. Not because I don't have enough material, but because I have too much! In fact, the amount of data I've collected and organised as a result of rereading all ten of my short listed texts is enough to construct an interesting discussion for an entire book.

The title for this post seems rather inappropriate then, doesn't it? But for me, "making ends meet" means connecting all the individual threads which make up this thesis to create a unified whole; the ends *must* meet. And it's just a little bit scary trying to imagine how the finished product will/should look as I'm working with so many ideas and texts and themes. I think the scale I'm aiming for might exceed what is possible in a Master's thesis (in fact, I've already written 30,000 words without the discussion and recommendations. And these blog entries together are also over 30,000 words! That's 60,000 words I've written in just over 10 months. Eek!). Saying that, I'm very pleased with my Methodology and Choosing Stories chapters, even though I did have to remove the segment on Derrida's deconstruction (always another time though, right?).

The difficulty lies in capturing the depth and potential of my ten shortlisted texts in the very limited word count available. Subsequently, I've spent quite a lot of time thinking about *how* to format the discussion. I want it to work *for* me, not against me like it did in my research project (I've written about that [here](#) and part of my apprehension is tied in to the fact that I didn't quite achieve what I set out to do in that project). And since qualitative/textual content analysis is a highly interpretive and mutable method for data collection and analysis, there are quite a few possible options:

Pick only three stories to analyse in detail as standalone essay-length discussions:

- **Advantages:** Reasonably fast to do, considers the entire story, significant depth to analysis
- **Limitations:** Implies there is only one way to read each text in terms of leadership theory, lack of breadth and scope to analysis, difficulty in walking the line between literary theorist and leadership practitioner, lack of focus over entire discussion

Analyse all 10 short listed stories individually in light of one key theme/idea/question on women's leadership (similar format to Badaracco, 2006):

- **Advantages:** Plenty of scope to analysis, clearly highlights a wide range of relevant key points found in each text
- **Limitations:** Time-consuming, difficult to stay within word limit, lack of depth, potentially repetitive

Treat segments of the books like interviews and pick and choose relevant excerpts for protracted discussion:

- **Advantages:** Similar to a normal qualitative interpretive discussion, reasonably quick to put together, plenty of scope to analysis
- **Limitations:** Lack of depth to analysis, disjointed discussion, bad practice in terms of using literature (it makes the literary theorist in me shudder!)

Create an integrated analysis using key examples from a range of texts and that uses a conceptual theoretical framework to logically structure the discussion (similar to Knights & Willmott, 1999):

- **Advantages:** Balance between scope and depth, clear structure, opportunities for integration between theory and examples, productive
- **Limitations:** Easy to get lost following rabbit trails, possibly quite time consuming to form a unified discussion which builds on each part to create a comprehensive whole

At various points in my research I've considered all these possibilities, but I'm tentatively choosing to go with the final option. Based on my literature reviews of leadership and women's leadership, along with what I've identified as the key themes women's literature raises, I've already developed a sound and closely interlinked conceptual framework (each concept progressively builds on the other). This is so that if/when I take this research further I already have a workable framework by which to organise a women's leadership development programme or book club.

So, what will this look like? I have my five key concepts and ten short listed novels/short stories/plays. And roughly 6,000 words to work with, maybe 6,500 at a stretch. I imagine at this point that I will organise my discussion into five separate sections and devote 700-800 words to examining and discussing examples from one primary text for each concept, with an additional 200 words to make additional comments on how other stories are also concerned with that 'theme.'

What I hope to achieve in each segment of close analysis:

1. Briefly define aim (key concept/issue) and explain why it's important (linking back to discussion points in lit. reviews).
2. Clearly demonstrate how the texts provide opportunities for critical theorising and illustrative analysis by using an example/s (doesn't have to be overly long but must clearly communicate the potential for the 'theory to illuminate the work, and the work to illuminate the theory').
3. Provide a few possible critical reflective points/questions/ideas (for the purpose of problematizing issues and inspiring transformative insight).

If I can successfully do this then the textual analysis is *productive* as well as being interpretive as it opens up "peripheral spaces for new understandings and embodied ways of thinking" (Savin-Baden & Wimpenny, 2014, p. 51) about women's leadership.

Dancing on the edge...

Reflecting on everything I've done so far, I like to think of my thesis, and especially the methods, as 'dancing on the edge of inquiry.' That is, my research is experimental, fun and playful. And while it may seem to some that reading and analysing novels is an affront to traditional management scholarship, as leadership and humanities scholar J. Thomas Wren (2009) observes, "the creation and study of art yield a bountiful harvest of skills and deep

insights that are inescapably linked to the human interactions we call leadership” (p. 29). When it is phrased as beautifully as that, how can you dare to disagree?!

Entry 17: How to Finish?

It makes me feel just a little sad and wistful that this is the closing journal entry. The final reflection; the last words; the concluding summation. Without trying to sound too cliché (or maybe I am), it’s like a long, long physical journey almost completed – *tired, a little bit worn-out; not stopping to take a break, but not wanting to either, the destination so close the air itself feels like it’s starting to change*. But oh what an experience it has been! And so rather than focusing on the finishing just yet, I will spend a moment or two re-evaluating and reflecting on myself; the traveller.

There have been some definite ‘moments of crazy’ during the last couple of months (my sister can attest to the fact that to combat ‘writer’s block’ and inspire short bursts of literary brilliance I would listen to ‘The Circle of Life’ from *The Lion King* on repeat for...well, hours really). But, as I hope has been evident throughout all my posts, there have also been ‘moments of insight.’ And by purposefully engaging with the works of so many incredible scholars, theorists and authors, I feel absolutely at bursting point with fresh ideas and new, more complex ways of looking at and understanding the world.

To begin with, I want to revisit my own feminist position. I’ve noted previously that I’d “label myself as a ‘middle-of-the-road’ (as opposed to ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’) liberal feminist who believes that women are entitled to full legal and social equality with men, and that given equal environments and opportunities, males and females will behave similarly (Crawford, 2012).” I also acknowledged that this is an ideological position. However, when I was writing my discussion segment on Sheri S. Tepper’s dystopian novel, *The Gate to Women’s Country*, I was struck again by the inadequacy of either liberal feminism *or* cultural feminism (as the two most common ‘understandings’ of feminism) to describe the problems women face and prescribe any sort of overarching solution. But at the same time I want to be able to say “I am this” or “I am that” with a good dose of conviction and a sense of my own rightness. While it might be a sweeping generalisation, Western society appears to place a lot of emphasis on the importance of taking a decisive side wherever there is room for an argument. And once you’ve

subscribed to a particular camp, remaining solidly on your side of the line at *all* costs: don't sit on the fence, don't vacillate between ideas, don't listen to the other side. Make *yourself* and your experiences right and brook no room for disagreement. It's so tempting to subscribe to this way of thinking about everything, from feminism to religion and politics to sexuality. It's as if we forget our own subjectivity, our mutability, and our predilection for contradiction, and conceive of ourselves as these objective, all-knowing godlike entities (to over-exaggerate only slightly!).

I'm including this observation from [Le Guin](#) (1986) because I think she gracefully sums up the problem and proposes a much better alternative:

Early this spring I met a musician, the composer Pauline Oliveros, a beautiful woman like a grey rock in a streambed; and to a group of us, women, who were beginning to quarrel over theories in abstract, objective language - and I with my splendid Eastern-women's-college training in the father tongue was in the thick of the fight and going for the kill - to us, Pauline, who is sparing with words, said after clearing her throat, "Offer your experience as your truth." There was a short silence. When we started talking again, we didn't talk objectively, and we didn't fight. We went back to feeling our way into ideas, using the whole intellect not half of it, talking with one another, which involves listening. **We tried to offer our experience to one another. Not claiming something: offering something.**

Maybe learning to say "I'm not sure, but this is my experience" or "that's an equally valid philosophy/perspective/idea" with some conviction once in a while would be a very good thing. As *The Gate to Women's Country* demonstrates, different feminist perspectives can look like equally valid alternatives depending on the circumstances you examine them under, and from what position you're in at that moment. And so while I'm not 100% sure which 'camp' of feminism I should subscribe to, or even if there is much benefit in doing so (not *feminism* in general, [obviously I'm still a feminist!](#)), as Ladkin (2010) would say, my feelings of unease indicate I'm still in the midst of 'questing' for the right questions to ask myself when it comes to engaging with feminist theory at a deeper level, and, ultimately, that's a very good thing!

Of course, I haven't underpinned my thesis on unanchored whims and unfounded theories! By taking a multiplicity of approaches – liberal, cultural, and poststructuralist feminism (and a good dash of sociology) – in my thesis, I think I am *offering* rather than claiming

something: A particular way of looking at women and leadership that is broader, richer and, I hope, raises many more questions than it answers; expanding on possibilities rather than narrowing them.

Shaping or Being Shaped?

A couple of weeks ago I finished writing the discussion. It was hard work! I'd meticulously taken notes from all ten of the short listed texts (which took forever, I might add!) with all these grand ideas of how I was going to shape them into tidy little 'lessons' and illustrative examples to 'fit' my conceptual framework. I had my favourite examples that I wanted to use but I struggled in vain for several days trying to achieve the 'fit' that I wanted.

Of course, this was all very naive of me. As Sucher (2007) points out, stories have a life of their own. While the reader is integral in co-creating and drawing out 'meanings' from a narrative, the text itself cannot be re-written to suit our own purposes (and nor would it be ethical to try and do so). So it wasn't until I consciously let go of my desire to control the stories and started instead to work alongside and with them that the words began to flow. In fact, once I became 'less precious' about which books and examples to use in the extended discussion, they essentially self-selected themselves. The theory which guided the conceptual framework and the fictional stories began to work together to illuminate one another and produce a set of fascinating guiding questions and 'answers' (I'm putting this in quote marks as these 'answers' served to produce more questions rather than neat solutions!), such as: *Should I exercise 'power-over' or 'power-with' others? Am I aware of my own and others' absent but present gendered expectations and their impact on the 'leaderly' engagements I participate in? How am I 'storying' myself as a leader?*

While I, as the researcher, am directly involved in interpreting and creating meaning (and by no means perfectly), this 'letting go' also allowed the ideas being drawn out from the texts to shape me. I spent many nights lying in bed reflecting on *The Lifeboat* and asking what gendered expectations are shaping my perceptions of others, whether or not I'm asking the 'right' questions like Sarah Grimke in *The Invention of Wings*, or, as mentioned above, struggling with feminist theoretical perspectives on leadership after reading and writing about *The Gate to Women's Country*.

And so there is no doubt in my mind that actively reading and engaging with women's novels, plays and short stories can be transformative, if only we're willing to look a little further, read a bit more carefully and examine ourselves with a touch more honesty.

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

How should I finish? Well, that's quite simple really, with 'thank you's' of course! I know there's an acknowledgements page in the thesis, but it seems almost more appropriate to end with a special thank you to all those who have been very closely involved in this project from its inception right up to its completion. (And, as an added bonus, I don't quite have to be so formal here!).

To begin with, I feel immensely privileged that I was given the opportunity to try and make sense of just one tiny corner of the universe by writing a Master's thesis. I couldn't have done it without the tireless support and encouragement from my supervisors, Margot and Janet. Thank you Margot for always being so positive, encouraging and full of good ideas! After every meeting I always felt 10x more energised and ready to tackle any challenge. I would not have been able to write this thesis without you, so thank you for believing in me. Thank you Janet for encouraging me to really stretch myself and explore new ideas. Your comments and feedback have been invaluable.

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But most of all, thank you to Mitchel, my amazingly supportive husband, who has had to (amidst the moments of achievement and excitement) wipe away tears, navigate mini-breakdowns, and spend many, many evenings and weekends without my company. Who has always made an effort to celebrate what I'm doing by reading my blogs, explaining my thesis to anyone who asks (and fending off many a critical remark!), and has tirelessly listened to and responded positively to my catchphrase: "But I still have so much to do!"