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**THE PARADOX OF POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP:  
GENDER MATTERS**

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This paper explores a number of paradoxes embedded in new models of leadership, which are commonly called post heroic. It argues that although these models emphasize leadership as a social process dependent on social networks of influence, the concepts are often presented as gender- and, to a lesser degree, power-neutral, not only in theory, but in practice. The paper explores this phenomenon, arguing that the concepts are not gender-, power-, or sex-neutral, but instead are rooted in a set of social interactions in which “doing gender,” “doing power,” and “doing leadership” are linked in complicated ways. It explores these dynamics and suggests that theories of leadership that fail to consider the gender/power implications of social interactions and networks of influence may unwittingly undermine organizational efforts to move to these new models and/or result in the co-optation of the models, bringing them into the mainstream discourse in a way that undermines their radical challenge to current work practices, structures, and norms.

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## I. NEW MODELS OF LEADERSHIP

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Over the past two decades, a significant shift has occurred in the rhetoric and theory describing organizational phenomena. Gone are images of the organization as machine, a black box that can be understood by an analysis of inputs and outputs with leaders at the top who direct and control the process. In its stead is the image of an organization as a living, dynamic system of paradox, interconnected relationships, and networks of influence (e.g., Senge, 1990; Seely Brown and Duguid, 2000). This paradigm shift in the very notion of what an organization is has been accompanied by a corresponding shift in the image of good leadership.

New models of leadership recognize that effectiveness in living systems of relationships does not depend on individual, heroic leaders but rather on leadership practices embedded within a network of interdependencies at different levels within the organization (Beer, 1999; Conger et al., 1999; Heifetz and Laurie, 1999; Bass, 1998; Senge and Kaeufer, 2001; Pearce and Sims, 2000; Yukl, 1998). The belief that, in the words of Joe Badarraco (2002), “we don’t need another hero” has ushered in an era of what is commonly called “post heroic” leadership, a new approach to leadership intended to transform organizational practices, structures, and working relationships.

This paper explores a number of paradoxes embedded in new models of leadership, which are commonly called post heroic. It argues that although these models emphasize leadership as a relational process dependent on social networks of influence, the concepts are often presented as gender- and, to a lesser degree, power-neutral. The paper explores this phenomenon, arguing that the concepts are not gender-, power-, or sex-neutral, but instead are rooted in a set of social interactions in which “doing gender,” “doing power,” and “doing leadership” are linked in complex ways. It explores these dynamics and suggests that theories of leadership that fail to consider the gender/power implications of post heroic models may unwittingly undermine organizational efforts to adopt these new models and limit their transformational potential.

## II. POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP: WHAT IS IT?

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There are several elements common to post heroic leadership that distinguish it from more traditionally individualistic models.

### A. SHARED AND DISTRIBUTED

Post heroic leadership is seen as a set of shared practices that can and should be enacted by people at all levels, rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in someone at the top (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Pearce and Sims, 2000). We might see—and even need to see—figureheads at the top. But new models recognize that these visible “heroes” are supported by a network of leadership practices distributed throughout the organization. There are many different images and metaphors that have been used to describe this phenomenon. Peggy McIntosh (1989) talks about the iceberg—the individual achievement we acknowledge and celebrate is but the tip of the iceberg, she notes. Underneath is the collaborative subtext of life, the numerous, countless acts of enabling, supporting, facilitating, and creating conditions under which “tips” of icebergs can break through the surface. Wilfred Draft (2001) uses another, equally compelling image from the sea. He notes that while we might see the white caps in the ocean as leading, it is actually the deep blue sea that determines the direction and capabilities of the ocean and determines, in fact, the limits and possibilities the whitecaps enjoy.

Frameworks and images such as these acknowledge the interdependencies inherent in leadership. They signal a significant shift from a focus on individual achievement and meritocracy to a focus on collective achievement, social networks, and the importance of teamwork and shared accountability (Lipnack and Stamps, 2000; Thompson, 2000; Hosking et al., 1999; Seely Brown and Duguid, 2000; Yukl, 1998; Conger, 1989).

### B. EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Another important aspect of post heroic leadership is an emphasis on leadership as a social process. Post heroic leadership is portrayed as a dynamic, multi-directional, collective activity—a process more than an individual practice. Human interactions are key in this concept, as leadership is seen as something that occurs in and through relationships and networks of influence. There are many images used to describe these leadership interactions, from bottom-up images of influence such as Power Up (Bradford and Cohen, 1998) and Leading Up (M. Useem, 2001) to “servant” (Greenleaf, 1977; Block, 1993) or “connective” (Lipman Blumen, 1996) leadership. What these images have in common is their emphasis on the egalitarian, more mutual, less hierarchical nature of leader-follower interactions. In contrast to traditional models, which emphasize the leader’s effect on others, the relational interactions that make up post heroic leadership are understood as collaborative, fluid, and two-directional. Followers are understood to play a significant role in influencing and creating leadership (Aaltio-Marjosola, 2001; Harrington, 2000). This focus on the fluidity, mutuality, and two-directional nature of leader-follower interactions suggests a subtle but significant change in the notion of self underlying images of post heroic leadership. Rather than the traditional image of self as an

independent entity, post heroic models seem to require a more relational concept of self, one closer to the psychological concept of self-in-relation (Miller, 1984; Surrey, 1985).

### C. LEADERSHIP AS LEARNING

A third important aspect of post heroic leadership has to do with its expected outcomes. The kinds of social interactions that can be called leadership result in learning and growth for the organization as well as for the people involved (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Beer, 1999; Senge, 1990; Heifetz, 1994; Isaacs, 1999; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Parker, 1993). In other words, the kinds of human interactions that comprise the ideal of post heroic leadership are differentiated from other, less positive social interactions by virtue of their outcomes. These outcomes include mutual learning, greater collective understanding, and ultimately, positive action. Leadership depends on creating this learning environment, and more specifically, on the ability to create conditions where new knowledge—collective learning—can be co-created and implemented. This requires a particular set of skills. Creating a context in which growth-fostering social interactions can occur and mutual learning—especially learning across difference—can take place, requires relational skills and emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, empathy, vulnerability, an openness to learning from others regardless of their positional authority, and the ability to operate within more fluid power dynamics, re-envisioning the very notion of power from “power over” to “power with” (Debebe, 2002; Follett, 1924; Miller and Stiver, 1997; Goleman, 1998; Fletcher, 1994;1999).

In summary, post heroic leadership re-envision the *who* and *where* of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy. It re-envision the *what* of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions and it articulates the *how* of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning.

It is generally recognized that this shift—from individual to collective, from control to learning, from “self” to “self-in-relation,” and from power over to power with—is a paradigm shift in what it means to be a leader. I argue that this shift is even more profound and difficult to achieve than the leadership literature would have us believe, because it is a shift that is related in complex ways to systemic gender and power dynamics in the workplace.



### III. POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP: WHAT DO GENDER AND POWER HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

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Many have noted that the traits associated with traditional, heroic leadership are masculine. Men or women can display them, but the traits themselves—such as individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills of advocacy and domination—are socially ascribed to men in our culture and generally understood as masculine (Acker, 1990; Calás and Smircich, 1993; Collinson and Hearn, 1996).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the traits associated with new, post heroic leadership are feminine (Calvert and Ramsey, 1992; Fletcher, 1994; Fondas, 1997; Fine and Buzzanell, 2000). Again, men or women can display them, but the traits themselves—such as empathy, community, vulnerability, and skills of inquiry and collaboration—are socially ascribed to women in our culture and generally understood as feminine. Indeed, the recognition of this shift has given rise to a body of literature in the popular press that is commonly called the “female advantage.” That is, the alignment between stereotypically feminine behavior and new leadership practices is assumed to give women an advantage in today’s business environment (Helgeson, 1990; Rosener, 1995; Fondas, 1997).

This paper argues that the gender implications of post heroic leadership go far beyond the issue of sex differences in how men and women practice leadership. The gender implications affect the theory and practice of post heroic leadership at a deeper level, because to make the paradigm shift to post heroic models depends not simply on a shift in sex-linked attributes but a gender- and power-linked shift in the very *logic of effectiveness* underlying business practice. More specifically, I argue that the logic of effectiveness underlying heroic images of leadership is a logic deeply rooted in masculine-linked images and wisdom about how to “produce things” in the work sphere of life, while the logic of effectiveness underlying post heroic leadership is a logic deeply rooted in feminine-linked images and wisdom about how to “grow people” in the domestic sphere.

These two spheres or bodies of knowledge, like the separate spheres of work and family (Acker, 1990; Rapaport et al., 2001; Fletcher, 1999; Bailyn, 1993; Williams, 2000) have three distinguishing characteristics: they are separate (i.e., skills in one are assumed to be inappropriate to the other), sex-linked (i.e., men and images of idealized masculinity are associated with one and women and images of idealized femininity are associated with the other), and unequally valued (i.e., labor in the work sphere is assumed to be skilled, complex, and dependent on training, whereas labor in the domestic sphere is assumed to be unskilled, innate, and dependent on personal characteristics). Together, these three characteristics interact and reinforce each other such that the spheres themselves can be considered “gendered.”

While this notion of “separate spheres” is important for an understanding of the gender implications of post heroic leadership, it is important to note that *in practice*, the separation of the two spheres of work life and domestic life is more myth than reality. Men are active participants in the domestic family sphere and women are active participants in the work sphere. Nonetheless, these idealized images of sex-linked attributes and inclinations, while they may not match reality, have a powerful effect on how we enact—and are expected to enact—our gender identities. Indeed, the very definitions of masculinity and femininity are rooted in these beliefs

about the characteristics of these two spheres of life and account for how readily we attribute the label “feminine” and “masculine” to certain attributes.

At the level of mental models and assumptions about what constitutes “good work” in each sphere, the gendered effect is even more profound. Society, especially Western society, has located in men the knowledge of what it means to produce things in the work sphere and has conflated images of “doing work” with displays of idealized masculinity (Martin, 1996; Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000; Schein, 2001). In a similar fashion, the knowledge of what it means to “grow people and living systems” is located in women and is conflated with displays of idealized femininity (Fairbairn, 1952; Winnicott, 1958; Miller and Stiver, 1997). Thus, the fact that post heroic models of leadership recognize leadership as a relational process dependent on creating conditions under which people can learn, grow, achieve, and produce together has significant gender implications. It means that adopting the relational stance and putting into practice the relational wisdom required to enact post heroic leadership will be unconsciously associated with *femininity*.

In addition to the gender/power dynamic noted above, there is a more general power dynamic implicated in the move to post heroic leadership. As noted, practicing the new leadership requires relational skills and knowledge, and a more mutual, self-in-relation stance toward social interactions. However, in systems of unequal power (e.g., inequities based on race, class, organizational level, sex) it behooves those with less power to distort their sense of self-in-relation to be ultra-sensitive and attuned to the needs, desires, and implicit requests of the more powerful (Miller, 1976). In other words, in systems of unequal power, one of the markers of the more powerful is the entitlement of having others adopt a self-in-relation stance that allows them to anticipate your needs and respond to them without being asked; what marks one as less powerful is being required to do the anticipating and accommodating without any expectation of reciprocity. The fact that those with less power need to develop a distorted, non-mutual self-in-relation stance in order to survive may inappropriately associate the stance, and the relational skills it takes to engage it, with *powerlessness* (Miller, 1976).

In the rest of this paper I explore how using this notion of two different logics of effectiveness—with their gender and power implications intact—can inform three questions that underscore the paradoxes inherent in the practice of post heroic leadership: Why, if there is general agreement on the need for new leadership practices, are the practices themselves not more visible in the workplace? Why, if these new models are aligned with the feminine, are not more women being propelled to the top? And finally, why, if there is transformational potential in these new models of leadership, are organizations not being transformed?

## IV. THE INVISIBILITY OF POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

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While the rhetoric about leadership has changed at the macro level, 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 behavior—remains stuck in old images of heroic individualism.

Heifetz and Laurie (1999: 65), for example, note that despite all the data supporting the need for new leadership practices to facilitate organizational learning, “managers and leaders rarely receive promotions for providing the leadership required to do [this] adaptive work.” Michael Beer (1999: 133) observes that in recounting the story of their successes, leaders themselves tend to ignore the relational practices and social networks of influence that accounted for those successes, and instead focus almost exclusively on individual actions and decision points. Rakesh Khurana (2003), in support of these findings, notes that despite documented evidence to the contrary, people consistently exaggerate the effect the individual actions that heroic, charismatic leaders have on the success—or failure—of an organization.

What is going on? What accounts for the invisibility of many post heroic leadership practices? Beer (1999) suggests that because of the nature of identity and ego, once we have achieved a goal and some prominence for having achieved it, it is natural to disappear the help we have been given and reconstruct our behavior—in our own minds as well as in the perception of others—as individual action. Others suggest causality in the other direction: that followers’ need for heroes exerts pressure on both formal and informal leaders to comply and re-tell their stories to meet this implicit expectation and need (Hirschorn, 1990; Sinclair, 1998). The work of Meindl and Ehrlich (1985) suggests as explanation a related form of social construction they call the “romanticizing” of leadership. This occurs when a series of causally unrelated, ambiguous events are reconstructed in retrospect as intentional action and then described as “leadership.”

A gender/power lens suggests that there are additional phenomena at play and that these explanations, while important, do not go far enough in exploring the issues underlying the invisibility of post heroic leadership. Whenever we interact with others we enact our self-image and social identity (Goffman, 1959; Foldy, 2002), a good part of which is our gender identity. Thus leadership, like all social processes, is an occasion to “do gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1991). The fact that heroic leadership is associated with masculinity and post heroic leadership with femininity means that the process of “doing gender” may disrupt the move from old to new models of leadership in powerful, albeit often unconscious, ways. This helps explain why images of heroic leadership are so resilient; it is not just that new images of leadership violate traditional assumptions about individualism and business success; it is that they violate *gender-linked* assumptions about these concepts and practices. Although new models of post heroic leadership implicitly acknowledge that relational wisdom about “growing people,” (i.e., wisdom about creating conditions in which people can learn, achieve, and produce), is critical to business success, they do not take into account how enacting these relational principles is linked—unconsciously but surely—to femininity.

But gender isn't the only dynamic present in the disappearing of post heroic leadership. Enacting the practices of post heroic leadership requires enacting a model of "power with," as opposed to the more common association of leadership with "power over." Again, the relational skills, attributes, and stance required to enact a model of "power with" leadership, such as fluid expertise and the willingness to show and acknowledge interdependence or need for input, are likely to be incorrectly associated with "powerlessness," rather than a new, more adaptive exercise of power.

What this analysis highlights is that the social interactions that make up leadership are opportunities not only to "do gender," but also to "do power." However, because the skills, beliefs, and self-in-relation stance needed to enact post heroic leadership are incorrectly associated with femininity and powerlessness, these occasions translate into "doing femininity" and "doing powerlessness," displays which are not, to put it mildly, commonly associated with leaders. Thus, these gender and power dynamics may complicate the story of leadership that both followers and leaders tell, exerting pressure to reconstruct the story to maintain the status quo association of leadership with individual action, masculinity, and hierarchical power.

This suggests that it is not enough for organizational theorists to call for new types of leadership or write books about the need for change. Deeply embedded gender- and power-linked aspects of self-identity are highly charged, emotional issues. Cognitive attempts to change behavior without a recognition of these deeply embedded, emotional issues are unlikely to have much effect because gender- and power-linked images may exert potent—albeit unrecognized— influence on leader and follower behavior, experience, and expectations. Indeed, it is the hidden under-explored nature of these gender/power dynamics that may account for many of the paradoxes people experience in trying to implement post heroic leadership and may account for how long it is taking for this model to achieve widespread adoption. Theorizing leadership as a social process embedded in networks of influence without acknowledging these effects and how to address them is likely to result in theories that are inadequate to the transformational task and promise of the new models.

## V. POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP AND THE “FEMALE ADVANTAGE”

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One of the most interesting paradoxes made visible in recognizing the gender dynamics underlying the move to post heroic leadership is the question of the female advantage. We might expect that since “doing gender” and “doing post heroic leadership” are aligned for women, they would stand to benefit from this move to new models of leadership. If not catapulted to the top of organizational life, we might at least expect that they would be the new leadership’s most prominent proponents. And yet, if we look at the architects and spokespersons of post heroic leadership, there are few women among them. Some suggest that the discrepancy has to do with the fact that hypothesized differences in how women and men enact leadership have not borne out empirically (Vecchio, 2002). Others note that even those differences that have been documented, such as women being more likely to enact a transformational leadership style and men a transactional style (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001), have not advantaged women. And others observe that even those women who have made it to the top are unlikely to claim that a “feminine” leadership style contributed to their effectiveness (Burrows and Berg, 2003). I would like to add another perspective. I suggest that the reason the female advantage has not materialized is not related to sex differences per se. Instead, it is rooted in a more complex process that can be understood by exploring the way the association of relational practices with femininity and powerlessness is likely to play out for women in the workplace.

Descriptions of the behavior, skills, and organizational principles associated with post heroic leadership are generally presented as gender neutral *in practice*, i.e., as if the sex of the actor is irrelevant in how the behavior is understood, perceived, and experienced by leaders and followers. At a practical level, we all know this to be untrue. The body in which we do something influences how it will be perceived. Indeed, as social cognition theorists (Fiske and Taylor, 1991) remind us, the interpretation of events is always contextual and is influenced by many factors, including the social identity (sex, race, class, organizational title, etc.) of the actor. A boss saying “drop by my office” is interpreted quite differently from a peer saying the same thing. A white man slamming his fist on the table during a meeting is perceived quite differently from a man of color—or any woman—doing the same thing. We filter behavior through schema that influence and determine what we see, what we expect to see, and how we interpret it.

Gender schema (Valian, 1999) are particularly powerful and suggest that the experience of putting post heroic leadership into practice is likely to be different for women and men. Because of gender schema, men who do the new leadership, while they may be in danger of being perceived as wimps, may have an easier time proclaiming what they do as “new.” Women, on the other hand, may have a harder time distinguishing what they do as something new, because it looks like they are just doing what women do (Fletcher, 1999).

But there is another, even thornier problem women encounter related to gendered expectations and post heroic leadership. As the earlier discussion of separate spheres of knowledge suggests, in Western society women are expected to be the carriers of relational skills and attributes. Importantly, they are expected to provide the collaborative subtext of life that enables individual achievement, but to do it invisibly, so the “myth” of individual achievement is not challenged (Miller, 1976; Jordan et al., 1991; Miller and Stiver, 1997). Thus, at a deep—perhaps even

unconscious—level, we tend to associate these practices with invisibility and the kind of selfless giving associated with mothering and other “labors of love.” Indeed, it is the invisibility, the not calling attention to what is being done, that marks one as especially worthy and womanly (Bellah et al., 1985).

What this means is that when women enact the kind of leadership practices that share power or enable and contribute to the development of others, they are likely to be seen as selfless givers who “like helping” and expect nothing in return. In other words, when women use their relational skills to lead, their behavior is likely to be conflated not only with femininity but also with selfless giving and motherhood (Fletcher, 1999).

This confusion is problematic. Selfless giving is, by definition, non-mutual. And post heroic leadership—whether practiced by men or women—depends on conditions of mutuality. People who put post heroic leadership into practice have every right to expect that this stance of mutuality will be met and matched by others, i.e., that others will join them in co-creating the kind of environment where these conditions can prevail. In fact, the positive outcomes of post heroic leadership such as collective learning, mutual engagement, learning across difference, and mutual empowerment *cannot occur* under conditions of non-mutuality (Jordan, 1986). On the contrary, post heroic leadership must have embedded within it an invitation to reciprocate in kind. But gender expectations—and more explicitly, the conflation of post heroic leadership with mothering and selfless giving—constrain this possibility for women.

A woman intentionally enacting the new rhetoric and putting new leadership behaviors into practice is not, of course, mothering or giving selflessly.<sup>2</sup> She is attempting to create an environment where collective learning and mutual engagement can occur. When her attempts to “do leadership” are misunderstood as “doing mothering,” the expectation of reciprocity embedded in the practice is rendered invisible. This puts her in a bind. First, she is in danger of being exploited. If someone “likes” selfless giving, why would anyone deny her that opportunity? Or do it for her in return? Thus, as I note elsewhere (1999), women often experience being expected to: teach, enable, and empower others without getting anything in return; work interdependently while others do not adopt a similar stance; work mutually in non-mutual situations; and practice less hierarchical forms of interacting, even in hierarchical contexts. In other words, the conflation of relational practices with mothering “disappears” the invitation to reciprocity embedded in the practice. Thus, women may find they are expected, and even relied on, to practice many of the relational aspects of post heroic leadership, but to do it without a recognition that this is leadership behavior and without expecting similar behavior from others.

This analysis helps us understand why women are not as visible as we might expect and why they are not benefiting more from the move away from masculine models of heroic leadership. It suggests that when men practice post heroic leadership, they are more able to do so in a way that carries with it subtle expectations of reciprocity, i.e., the expectation that this type of self-in-relation stance in interactions is one that should be distributed throughout the workplace. When the behavior is conflated with mothering, the notion of reciprocity is much more difficult to communicate.

## VI. POST HEROIC LEADERSHIP AND ITS TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL

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Post heroic leadership is touted as a vehicle for transformation, a way to create learning organizations that are able to manage dynamic processes, leverage the learning from diverse perspectives, and accommodate the interests of multiple stakeholders. Indeed, the essence of the new organization, transformed by post heroic leadership, is one in which potential is unleashed by tapping into the expertise of the collective, establishing more fluid, two-directional patterns of influence and power and using difference—whether on cross-functional teams or difference that comes from social identity—to challenge assumptions, learn, grow, and innovate (Bailyn, 1993; Thomas and Ely, 1996; Meyerson, 2000; Ely and Thomas, 2001).

The transformational piece of the new model is embedded in its notions of mutuality and more fluid power relations, where leadership practices—and influence—are distributed throughout the organization rather than located in a few at the top. But as we have noted, post heroic leadership is largely invisible in the leadership narratives of both leaders and followers, with leaders themselves ignoring many of the post heroic practices that account for their own successes and effectiveness. While the rhetoric has been around for nearly two decades, old, stereotypical images of leadership continue to dominate the unconscious (Schein, 2001; Rudman and Glick, 2001). Moreover, theories of post heroic leadership do not give enough practical information on how to engage this transformational process in a way that would address these deeper issues and unconscious processes (Fletcher and Kauefer, 2003).

This paper argues that the reasons post heroic leadership is not living up to its transformational potential are related to the complex gender and power dynamics we have been exploring. More specifically, it suggests that the transformative potential of post heroic leadership is in danger of being incorporated into the discourse in a way that co-opts and silences (Diamond and Quinby, 1988) its most radical challenges: the challenge to organizational systems of power (Walker, 2002), to the privileging of managerial and hierarchical knowledge (Calás and Smircich, 1993), and to the distribution of rewards based in beliefs about meritocracy (Scully, 2002) and individual achievement (Jordan, 1999).

The current discourse on leadership in the wake of terrorist attacks and corporate scandals is a good example of these dynamics. The ambivalence and contradictory images we as a society hold about leadership are especially apparent in articles and books in the popular press, where post heroic principles are simultaneously reinforced and undermined. On the one hand, there is evidence of a resurgence in the reification of traditionally heroic behavior (Giuliani, 2002) and the shame associated with not assuming this role (Useem and Wheat, 2001). On the other hand, there is a recognition that the individualism, bravado, and assumed invincibility that is characteristic of charismatic leaders has contributed to scandalous corporate behavior (Byrnes, 2002). This has resulted in the search for a different kind of hero—a post heroic hero, if you will—who leads quietly and who displays fewer of the characteristics associated with heroic leadership (Badarraco, 2002; Sellers et al., 2002), but who, interestingly, continues to enjoy the same hierarchical powers and godlike reverence for individualism associated with traditional models. This paper argues that continuing to focus on the individual characteristics of

hierarchical leaders—regardless of their particular personal style—is problematic because it undermines the real shift that is needed.

Achieving the transformational outcomes of post heroic leadership goes well beyond skills and personal characteristics, as important as those are. Practicing post heroic leadership depends on adopting a different stance in one's workplace interactions: a stance of "self-in-relation" as opposed to "self-as-independent-entity." Enacting this self-in-relation stance in one's interactions with others requires relational skills. But not only skills; it requires a set of beliefs and principles, indeed a different mental model of how to exercise power and how to achieve workplace success and effectiveness. When this alternative logic of effectiveness is dropped, the essence of post heroic leadership is in danger of being co-opted and its transformational aspects castrated (Fletcher, 1994). That is, the skills and behaviors are described, but the basic, relational beliefs about human growth and interdependence that would present the most serious challenge to individualistic notions of human development and achievement are cut off. In other words, the new leadership is in danger of being incorporated into the mainstream discourse according to the rules of the old individualistic discourse. The result will be yet another idealized image of heroic leadership—post heroic heroes.

This analysis suggests that to truly capture the transformational promise of post heroic leadership would require theoretical framings that acknowledge, recognize, and name the radical nature of its challenge and the gender and power dynamics inherent in it. This would mean acknowledging and further theorizing the way post heroic leadership challenges current power dynamics, the way it threatens the myth of individual achievement and related beliefs about meritocracy, the way it highlights the collaborative subtext of life that we have all been taught to ignore, and the way it engages displays of one's gender identity. Without such an explicit recognition, it would appear that the transformational potential of this new model of leadership is unlikely to be realized.



## VII. CONCLUSION

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There are three things that a “gender/power lens” highlights about new models of leadership. First, although the move to post heroic leadership is often presented as a gender-neutral concept, it is not. On the contrary, it is a shift that engages significant gender- and power-linked aspects of self-identity. These dynamics are highly charged, emotional issues that may unwittingly undermine organizational efforts to move to these new models of leadership, despite general agreement that such models are key to success in today’s competitive, knowledge-intensive business environment.

Second, the new leadership is not gender- (or more accurately, sex-) neutral in practice. The body matters. Because gender schema are powerful filters that influence how behavior is understood and interpreted, the experience of practicing post heroic leadership is likely to be different for men and women and to have a differential impact on their ability to have their leadership behavior seen as such. This is one possible reason the “female advantage” is not advantaging females.

Third, the transformation promise of post heroic leadership is in danger of being co-opted. New models of leadership that are rooted in a different, more relational and interdependent belief system—or logic of effectiveness—about what leads to business success cannot flourish in structures and systems organized around beliefs in individualistic meritocracy. Without acknowledging and further theorizing the powerful shift in the underlying belief system inherent in these new concepts, there is a danger that this new model will be co-opted and brought into the mainstream discourse on leadership in a way that will undermine its radical challenge to current work practices, structures, norms, and operating systems. The result may be a simple reconstitution of the old model, with new language.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms masculine and feminine are used here to refer to a set of traits, skills, and abilities socially ascribed to men and women. These traits are not essential aspects of masculinity or femininity, and indeed may not reflect the experience of most men and women. Nonetheless, these idealized images exist and exert subtle, but very real, pressure on women and men to “do gender” by defining themselves in relation to these stereotypes.

<sup>2</sup> This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that someone—male or female—would confuse the rhetoric of new leadership with maternal images of selfless giving and enact these practices in ways that are not leadership but *are* mothering. The dynamics described here, however, refer to a practice that’s intention is misunderstood.

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