



Women Interrupting, Disrupting, and Revolutionizing Educational Policy and Practice

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Women Interrupting, Disrupting, and Revolutionizing Educational Policy and Practice

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INTRODUCTION

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN? WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Charol Shakeshaft

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the roots of the current feminist focus on women's leadership, examining the themes that have been recurrent during the past 40 years. By probing the intent of researchers and the relationship of research to advocacy and equity, the chapter provides a foundation for the chapters that follow. Because some questions continue to beg an answer, much of the research in the field seems to be covering old ground. However, it is from of that ground that new research has struggled to be recognized, in much the same way as earlier work that often had to overcome publication bias. Current research expands the understanding and definition of women's leadership and provides a link between disruption and progress.

In 1970, when I was 21, I learned a word that explained everything that, up to that time, I had no language to describe. That word—feminism—has shaped my life in the 43 years since. Even without a label, I had struggled with trying to understand why my life as a girl, and then a woman, was so different from my brother's life as a boy, and then a man. The results of one of my first negotiations, way back in kindergarten when I kicked Steven Hutchings for looking up my dress at naptime, was the first of many failed

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protests. Our teacher, Ms. Wells, was not enlightened by my explanation that it was not fair that girls had to wear dresses and boys did not or that I thought it was fair for me to kick Steven since he was invading my space. I was punished, he was not. I transgressed, he did not. And the pattern continued. Girls could not be crossing guards. My petition did not help. Girls could not run in the school track meet. My winning race prior to the track meet against the fastest boy in school did not change anyone's mind. Girls could not wear pants, even in the coldest Iowa winters, walking to school in blizzard conditions. And those cancans—they really scratched my frozen skin. Girls couldn't take shop classes. Girls couldn't, couldn't, couldn't.

Discovering the feminist movement gave me a language. Having a language helped me think and act differently. Betty Friedan was born the same year as my mother and both had an ambivalent relationship with expected feminine behavior. The difference between them was that Friedan graduated from Smith and did graduate work with Erik Erickson at Berkeley. My mother didn't finish high school and lived in rural Iowa. Friedan had an education that helped her negotiate her life. My mother had a husband and five children and no access to these ideas. Her isolation was academic, geographic, and social. And yet, she struggled to make sense of her life as a woman.

Fifty years after the *Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1964) was published, we have a name for "the problem that has no name." But new problems that need new names keep popping up. This volume addresses many of these equity and development issues within the context of educational policy and practice, moving beyond narrow concepts of women's leadership and influence by broadening our understanding of the pressure points that open our female chakras.

Research on U.S. women administrators in schools began to percolate again¹ in the mid to late 1970s. These studies documented the proportion of administrative jobs held by women and the reasons why those proportions were so out of alignment with the 70 to 80 percent representation of women in teaching. This was practical, useful, and activist research, which might have played some role in the dismissal of its importance. The resistance was contradictory: research on women isn't important because women aren't important and research on women's access to administrative positions is dangerous because it might result in more women in positions of power.

Studies of women's competence soon appeared, comparing female processes, values, and outcomes with those of males in similar positions. That those studies tended to show either no differences or that women outperformed men surprised many of the gatekeepers, most of whom were not women. Interestingly, quantitative studies tended to report no difference between females and males while qualitative studies found differences.

While the findings might be an outgrowth of the methods, they might also represent the types of quantitative measures that were used for comparisons. All of them had been developed by watching or interviewing males and then developing a survey that would "measure" how closely or how well female respondents conformed to this male definition of a leader. What those studies told us was that "anything you can do I can do better" (or at least as well).

Inquiries turned to documenting the ways in which women carry out leadership in schools. This focus gained popularity at about the same time as qualitative researchers were pushing for a new paradigm in educational research methods and the two were well partnered. The qualitative studies examined how and why women behaved and uncovered all types of leadership behavior that had been left out of the male defined surveys.

This trajectory, more or less, describes research from the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, and Japan. Research reports from the biennial conference of Women Leading in Education (2013) confirm that, globally, researchers tend to be somewhere on this inquiry developmental path. One large difference is that in most westernized countries, where universal schooling is the law, there is little research related to PreK–12 school attendance by girls. In countries where universal schooling is not required, there is a much greater emphasis on understanding who goes to school and how to increase the number of females who successfully navigate the primary and secondary education systems.

Clearly, this research pattern is not a straight line. In some ways, it resembles the cloverleaves of an interstate highway, with all of the exits and return ramps. An example of this moving forward toward more understanding and circling back to update old notions sometimes feels repetitious and unnecessary. If we know the barriers to women's participation, why examine this question again? If we know that women are underrepresented, why start all over? We do so because having documented the issues once doesn't mean they have gone away. They may have changed form, but almost all barriers that were identified in the 1970s still exist in some configuration.

Researchers examined proportional representation in the 1970s, 80s, 90s, and into the present. What else is new and what do we still need to know? Using representation as an example, I would argue that this inquiry teaches us more than just gains or losses.

One issue that has plagued accurate scorekeeping on the number of women in administrative positions is the lack of reliable and current data. This has not changed in the past 50 years of the study of women's representation in formal school leadership. Historically, one goal of activist research and practice is simply an increase in the number of women in key positions. And yet, if we have no way of documenting numbers, how do we know the

outcomes? And if we don't know the outcomes of our work, how do we know what to change? Or, more fundamentally, what works?

Risha Berry, a doctoral student, and I have been trying to determine the most recent proportion of women, and particularly women of color, in the principalship in the United States. The relevant data sets are several years out of date and it is nearly impossible to disaggregate so that race and gender are isolated. This failure isn't surprising; I have been commenting on it every year since 1979. What is surprising to me is that there seems to have been no headway made to secure comprehensive and reliable numbers. The U.S. Department of Education's latest School and Staffing (2011–2012)² survey was posted in August 2013 with several tables provided. The number of principals is disaggregated by gender or by race/ethnicity, but not both. In order to be able to disaggregate, a researcher has to be approved for restricted use access, which requires a separate computer used only for analysis. Knowing how far we've come is necessary in the struggle to bring women into school leadership as well as into the academy. It shouldn't be so hard to learn the proportion of Black women high school principals.

In Chapter 1, Margaret Grogan challenges readers to move beyond the theory comfort zone and explore gender perceptions within organizational life. Grogan explores the implications of gendering practices and practicing genders within education workplaces. The former refers to the individual socialized behaviors that were learned from childhood onward, while the latter are the "micro-interactional moments that constitute the gender order." Grogan continues to argue, as do Harding et al. (2013), that three feminist theories may bring further understanding of gendered relations in organizations. Those three lenses—intersectionality, the politics of recognition, and feminist readings of Greek myths and tragedies—will encourage new perspectives for studying educational leadership.

Grogan reminds us that studies of leadership often fail to explain the variance of gender, race, and class. She also reminds us that gender is not just about females. Finally, Grogan challenges us to "expose the harmful effects of the dominant values driving education practice and policy."

Mary Hermann and Miriam David explore, among other things, the question of progress for women in academia and leadership. Hermann reviews the model of male success and its implications and usefulness for women. Her analysis of the "extreme-work model" is useful in analyzing motivation for leadership. Sandberg's (2013) answer to what she sees as stagnation in the momentum to bring more women into leadership positions is for women to be more insistent in the workplace and not let barriers get in the way—or, in Sandberg's words, to lean in to seize more authority in their career lives.

To some degree, this advice ignores what motivates women. The rewards of leaning in, as they are now defined, are more likely to connect to the motivators for males, rather than females. Authority at work is usually associated with more benefits and higher earnings, leading to the hypothesis that more authority might also be related to less stress, particularly because of the autonomy that comes from authority. Studies indicate two differences between women and men who have the same amount of authority in an organization (Schieman, Schafer, & McIvor, 2013). The first is that having authority does not result in the same satisfaction for women as it does for men. Men feel satisfied by authority, job resources, or both. Women feel motivated by a combination of job resources and job authority.

These results suggest that when women "lean in," they may not experience the rewards of authority in the same way as men. As a result, there may not be enough satisfaction or intrinsic reward for women to justify sacrifice of family and friends.

David, in her exploration of feminism in the academy, interviewed women whose experiences have been much like mine, and they report that "My whole adult life is lived as a feminist and it has shaped everything I have studied and written" or "My entire life has been shaped by feminism." The narratives reflected the experiences from three waves of feminist academics: those born before 1950, those born from 1950 to 1965, and those born in the late 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, many experiences run throughout all three groups of women. For me, an interesting observation by David is that her group—despite traditional socioeconomic status—was mostly first in the family to attend university. This is very different for men, where family university attendance is highly related to family income and prestige with the first in the family more likely coming from working class or minority ethnic backgrounds. This has implications for the way we use socioeconomic status in studies of academics.

Four chapters examine leadership from the perspective of students: Mansfield, Welton, Brock & Perry, Gasman, and Bryant each approach the disruption of educational policy through studies of student leadership practices. Traditionally, the voices of students have been absent in discussions of revolutionizing educational policy and practice. In her study of an allgirls' 6-12 school, Katherine Mansfield explores the concept of safe space as girl-only space. There has been considerable research that supports the benefits of same-sex schools for girls. The literature on same-sex schools for boys is more mixed. For privileged boys or majority race boys, the effects tend to be negative. For boys from racial/ethnic groups that have been oppressed, the research tends toward a positive experience. For both females and males from racially oppressed groups, these arrangements are safe because they prevent the entrance of either males of all races or white males and all females. While the literature on single-sex schools supports the quotation from one parent in Mansfield's chapter—"This is more than a school. They're preparing you for life"—it begs the question of what it would take to provide safe spaces in a school that is not segregated by race or gender. The attributes that Mansfield identifies are all behaviors and pedagogies that could be done in mixed classrooms—but they aren't. Thus the choice to move out, not change within.

Anjalé Welton, Brooke Brock, and Mercedes Perry provide a critical analysis of participation in V.O.I.C.E.S., Verbally Outspoken Individuals Creating Empowering Sistahs. Brock and Perry were high school students in the program, and Welton served as facilitator. These experiences are examined through a variety of lenses that are seldom used in traditional leadership research: youth activism, Black feminist thought, and hip-hop feminism. The authors celebrate a core of their history that is not emphasized in most schools:

The only storylines from our history that we were exposed to in our K-12 schooling were that of enslavement, segregation, and Dr. Martin Luther King.... Black women beyond Rosa Parks getting on the bus were portrayed as tertiary, not necessarily instrumental to pivotal moments in our history. Now that we are greater architects of our own knowledge and have found epistemologies that better align with our experiences as young Black women, we have come to realize that activism is very much a part of our history and is an innate component of our moral core.

Their hip-hop feminist analysis includes activism and represents the "everyday identify politics that we as young, Black women faced resisted, and acted upon in high school settings." The members of V.O.I.C.E.S. clearly demonstrated that activism can occur anywhere and pushed adults to accept young, Black women as authentic leaders.

What is the place of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in what many have termed as a post-Civil Rights era? Marybeth Gasman leads the reader through the history of female students in HBCUs, describing the sexism and racism by White missionaries, the hidden role in the 1960s campus and civil rights protests, and a discussion of how women in HBCUs encounter their education and place in the world. Gasman points out that of female Black graduates, 20% of whom attended an HBCU, the HBCU graduates account for a disproportionate number of degrees in STEM areas: "38% in the biological sciences, 41% in chemistry, 40% in computer sciences, 40% in math and 40% in physics." This is a powerful example of an activist feminist agenda—conscious or not—within HBCUs. And, like Mansfield's work, it begs the question: Why doesn't this happen in mixed-race universities?

Cathy Brant reminds us that "simply taking a gender-neutral or sexuality-blind stance not only perpetuates the status quo, but also weakens education reform efforts that claim to strengthen student outcomes." This is particularly relevant in schools, where 75% of teachers are females. In studies

of preservice teachers, half condemn homosexuality, and female teachers have been found to have more negative attitudes than male teachers. While these studies are somewhat dated, teacher attitudes about addressing gay and lesbian issues in schools continue to be problematic.

Four chapters examine the experiences of female administrators. Noelle Witherspoon examines the way in which a Black female principal turns labels constructed for her around. The labels of "nice" and "bitch" are used within organizations as a form of gender entrapment. The principal in this study addresses appearances head on, taking pride in her beauty and sexuality. She rejects advice to tone down her beauty and femininity. Rather, she used them to her advantage. Witherspoon reminds us of the tyranny of niceness in conceptions of women's leadership and provides a discourse on how we might expand acceptable professional identities of women leaders.

Cosette Grant addresses the difficulty of transforming turn-around schools, particularly the experiences of African American female principals. Studies indicate that African American principals are more likely to be placed in schools with the most challenges, rather than in high-income and/or high-achieving schools. Grant explores the role of mentoring in helping African American women principals negotiate the complexities of high need urban schools. The women she studied benefitted from mentoring, particularly mentoring that focused on student achievement.

In her research, Kerry Robinson seeks to understand the lived experiences of women superintendents. While she initially began a study of why women leave the superintendency, she also learned about why they chose the position to begin with. Robinson's work reaffirmed the research that women educators choose the work because they want to make a difference. They enter the profession as change-makers, even if they have little understanding of how this occurs. As the women superintendents in her study worked their way up the ladder, they most often took jobs because they saw them as opportunities to increase student learning, particularly for those students who had not been well served by the educational system. Many didn't aspire to be superintendents but entered the position because of their beliefs that the position offered a chance to change what happened in the classroom. Unfortunately, many were disappointed in the limitation of the superintendency in areas of curriculum reform. These women were frustrated by the belief of school boards that curriculum and instruction was not the purview of superintendents. Instead, superintendents were supposed to be about "bigger" things. The traditional male model of what a superintendent does was problematic for many of the women superintendents and, at times, put them in conflict with their boards. This conflict took a heavier toll on these women than has been reported for men in areas of health, family, and economics.

The stories the women superintendents told were often stories of microaggression, small annoyances where the whole is much bigger than its parts. They reminded me of the studies that compared Black and White women professionals with similar family, educational, and career backgrounds. Black women experienced more microaggressions than did White women, and their higher stress and poorer health reflect these differences.

Whitney Newcomb challenges us to think about leadership of women through mentoring. She focuses on the relationships between junior and senior professors in university academic departments. She describes an amazing two-year collaboration of five tenured and untenured faculty members and a doctoral student from four institutions in two states. These women ranged from 30 to 70 years old and were either White or Latina/o. These women came together at research meetings and at times outside of professional commitments to share research, to work on their writing, and to plan and carry out publications and presentations. As a colleague in the same department, I know that Whitney, a member of this collaborative, is known not only for her research on mentoring, but also for her outreach to and support of women, helping them make connections and inviting them to collaborate on work that both helps them build their curriculum vitas and offers mentoring experiences. The collaborative described in this chapter is unusual because it consists mostly of junior members who work together to help everyone move forward. It's an important model to consider, particularly for women who reside in institutions where there is no mentor available.

The collaborative network developed by these women offers an alternative to traditional mentoring relationships that often require the mentee to become like the mentor. Those relationships, while powerful, can also be limiting, and studies indicate that they come with their own issues.

It is instructive that many of the obstacles that these women faced in their academic departments are similar to the ones those in my generation faced more than 30 years ago, a finding that is both distressing and unacceptable. When I was a doctoral student, there were no female professors and only two or three women doctoral students. While the male students would spend time in the offices of the professors, talking about research and who knows what else, the women were required to stand in the hall when we had an appointment with a professor, a practice that reduced the interactions between professors and students. I had no mentoring from my professors or from colleagues in my department. My research on women was discounted as irrelevant for many years. While none of the women in Newcomb's study had to stand in the hall, many of them experienced the isolation of not being valued by department members and/or professors in their doctoral programs. Thirty plus years has seen many improvements in

the lives of women academics, but the women in Newcomb's collaborative remind us that we aren't there yet.

Newcomb's study also reminds us that we still need to understand more about how women can mentor other women. In her collaborative, many of the members were relatively equal in stature. As a senior woman, I am reminded that what worked for me might not work for these women. What I haven't understood, but am beginning to, is how often my behaviors telegraph messages that I don't wish to send to junior women in the academy. While they do need to make a comfortable space for themselves, I want them to be able to say "No" to unacceptable expectations without harming their reputations. That's a very complicated transaction to pull off successfully. For the most part, I did not do that. Instead, I did the things I didn't want to do rather than the things I did want to do and ended up with the unreasonable workload that Newcomb's collaborative addresses.

Christa Boske provides additional insights into the continuing need for safe space that Mansfield described in her chapter. Boske has turned her attention to preparing women to lead for social justices through the senses. The stories of the marginalization of women's experiences in organizations often focus on the practice of identifying women's truth as emotional and, therefore, irrelevant. Women are all too often commanded to "stick to the facts" as if facts have no emotional context or foundation or as if emotions are not facts. When women disagree, they are often marginalized by describing the disagreement as a "cat fight" or as something personal between the women, instead of accurately acknowledging that there is a disagreement about substance.

Because leaders are often constructed as rational and without emotions, those who are identified as emotional are, by definition, not leaders. While it is true that we often turn to women to build community and tend to the needs of those in the organization, we do not identify these services as leadership. Having lived long in this profession, I have many stories in which I have been marginalized because of my emotions. At one point in my department chair tenure, we had a particularly difficult and challenging meeting, one that caused me, and others, to cry. After the meeting, an old hand and former White male superintendent stopped me in the hallway. He put his hands against the wall, one on each side of me so that I couldn't get away without physical pushback and said, "Let me give you some advice. Never cry. Leaders don't cry. When I'm upset, I turn to my friend Johnny. Johnny Walker." And then he walked off, leaving me with all sorts of emotions—anger, frustration, scorn, and sadness for a man who had to drink instead of feel. It also made me think about the usefulness of tears as a way to cleanse the body of toxins and to further reflect that when women cry in organizational contexts, they are often experiencing anger, not sadness. Male anger, although not encouraged, is not seen as unleader-like. When a man becomes angry and yells, rarely would he be told that "Leaders don't yell." And yet, when a woman cries, her emotions are trivialized. Moreover, if she were to exhibit anger in a traditional male format, she would be equally at risk for negative descriptions.

My recent experience in building community among department members was not identified as leadership, but rather something that took us away from our real work at the university. Departments don't need to be communities, I'm told. Rather, they should be organizations for individuals to pursue their work, which does not include community building. Again, the message is that real leadership is rational and product driven, not the fuzzy stuff of emotions or process.

Many of us who have been socialized in these "rational" institutions suffer from something like the Stockholm syndrome. We begin to accept the institutional definition of what counts as leadership, what counts as "real work." We lose our capacity to connect to our emotions. For us to reconnect, Boske argues, we need approaches that disrupt our paradigms and expectations. Her chapter examines how artmaking can be used to prepare women "to lead for social justice through the senses—ways in which school leaders perceive their lived experiences and relation to others."

Boske explains that "women are traditionally prepared to understand their roles as managers of systems rather than deepening their empathic responses and connections with school communities." Artmaking can lead to the release of creativity and understanding that other forms of reflective practice might miss. The women in Boske's study report that their experiences in artmaking allowed them to get in touch with what they feel and then to connect what they feel with what they think, a process that often led to the realization that what the women really believed was something different after the experience of artmaking than it was before. Boske reports:

The reflective process invited the cultivation of an internal dialectic. It became a call to examine personal responses to interactions, scholarly readings, colleagues, and community at large. Their sensibility exhibited their new sense of self as a vital position to understanding and realizing the need to be firm, unyielding, and strong. The examination of their histories and origin of life, they formulated new understandings of self, which led to discovering the nature of intellectual development and the need to actively engage in imaginative possibilities. The reflective process utilized audio/video tools, which encouraged them to venture toward uncharted territory in an effort to better understand the impact of their lived experiences.

Katherine Mansfield, Anjalé Welton, and Margaret Grogan argue that policy and organizational studies have too long been embedded within research methods that claim neutrality, thus positioning studies that are cultural and race responsive outside the bounds of science. They offer alternative ways of framing policy problems from a feminist perspective, noting that a critical perspective is more likely to result in methodologies and questions that "disrupt the status quo and revolutionize the field."

In another chapter, Rachel McNae asks the reader to think about ways in which organizations can help young women develop as global citizens and to provide spaces where women are active contributors to change. While giving voice to female students is an approach that might bring them into these spaces, McNae argues that such an approach has the potential to essentialize young women's voices. She reminds the reader that adults and students must continue to ask such questions such as: Whose voices are heard? Who listens to what voices? What voices are ignored? What happens when young women say things that we don't want to hear? and What action comes from such dialogue?

There is relatively little research on ways to create student-adult partnerships in making organizational decisions in schools. McNae describes such a partnership, named Revolution by the students, and the complexities that arise if it is to be authentic. All too often, leadership programs for youth are developed and then youth are invited to participate in what has been decided by adults as appropriate. In this case, the program was co-constructed by McNae and the young women who elected to participate. Unlike many "ready-made" programs, this one resulted in the young women feeling rewarded and valued in the process of co-constructing the program. However, co-construction is complex and difficult, which is only one of the reasons why most adults don't attempt it. Very few writers have accurately documented the process of co-construction, instead leaving the impression of linearity and camaraderie. McNae is not one of those researchers. She helps us understand the process, not only for her but also for students who, as much as they might want co-construction, have been socialized into a traditional teacher-student paradigm. The majority of students in any PreK-12 classroom, whether in New Zealand or the United States, are not prepared to take ownership and leadership of their own learning. We often fail to understand that scaffolding is necessary to move from one paradigm to another.

McNae writes about the delicate balance of student voice, particularly when some voices are louder than others and some voices aren't easily heard. Moreover, McNae concludes that "I learned that simply having a voice might not be enough to create change. When those sharing voices are not in a position to make decisions, it is difficult for change to happen."

Co-creation takes considerable teacher time and student commitment. While we voice democratic processes in schools, the reality is that these types of initiatives often take too much time and their value is questioned. We talk about the importance of content, as if democratic process is not content. This observation holds true in universities as well as PreK–12 schools.

I'm always dismayed when I hear a chairperson or a dean assure the faculty that the faculty won't be troubled with meetings or decision-making that takes them away from their "real" work of teaching and research. I'm even more dismayed when colleagues accept this division of power that does not count creating and sustaining a democratic organization as the work of academics, even academics whose research is social justice. McNae's conclusion that "there is an obligation for school leaders and students to critique the traditional leadership structures of our schools... and to model democratic practices within these structures" is equally important for academic departments.

In closing, Autumn Cyprès tackles the nexus of politics and identity called "fit" and the relationship to leadership, career politics, and change. One of my first battles with fit came in a superintendent's search in the high-income White district in which I lived and my daughter went to school. One of the candidates that I nominated was an outstanding Black male. The search committee chair thanked me for my suggestion, but noted that my candidate wouldn't "fit" in our district. Although I knew what he meant, I pushed him, asking why? I pointed out that, with a PhD, he was of the same educational and professional background of the community. I also shared that his class background was probably somewhat higher than many in our community, since he had been born into a prestigious and upper-class family. The search consultant nodded but repeated that he just wouldn't fit in and that the community would never accept him. I asked the consultant how he knew that, to which he replied, "I just know." Case closed. Fit is not just about how we see our own identity, but how that identity is framed by others.

Cyprès illustrates how the convergence of identity, hegemony, and social construction plays out in the politics of an organization as well as the effects on individual leadership. If fit were a perfect construct, then fit within an organization or group would not result in disruption, unless, of course, the nature of the group is to disrupt. As academic players, we often portray ourselves as disruptors who ask questions, shoot down theories, and offer new paradigms of discourse. And yet, it has been my experience that academic workplaces are often very traditional when it comes to who fits and who doesn't. Autumn provides examples of this incongruity and the tipping points that move organizational members forward.

This book reminds us that much has changed for women and girls but that we still have not achieved equality. The authors of the chapters in this volume explore ways in which women and girls disrupt organizations to move toward equality while exploring just how difficult disruption is. Leadership is always a form of disruption and is always risky. Flowing through all of these chapters is a continuous message: disruption is dangerous, disruption is necessary, and disruption is the only way forward.

NOTES

- 1. There were quite a few articles written about women teachers and principals between 1900 and 1930.
- 2 The survey is administered every four years. The last survey provided data from 2007–2008.

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