Think authentic leader, think cis-male? A philosophical reconsideration of authenticity

for all leaders

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In the shadow of various business scandals and societal crises, practitioners take growing interest in authentic leadership (AL). AL puts personal ethics centre stage and these constitute the basis from which to act, with the view to be both ethically responsible and successful in business (George, 2003; George & Clayton, 2022; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). The literature however shows how arduous it is for women and other gender-minorities to come across as authentic (Ladkin, 2021; Ngunjiri & Hernandez, 2017) or see themselves as authentic (Lee, 2020). Indeed, as AL supposes assertiveness and resolve, men are more likely to be perceived as authentic leaders as such behaviours are gender-congruent (Monzani et al., 2015). Moreover, given their ongoing experience as organizational minorities, members of such social identity groups may also have a harder time letting go of the social script, i.e. making efforts to fit in and trying to achieve a sense of belongingness and familiarity with the majority. Lee (2020) for example shows how the self-perception of being an authentic leader varies with majority vs minority sexual and gender social identity such that leaders from a minority group

rate themselves lower. In turn, granted that alignment with followers is viewed as an ideal in AL literatures, minority leaders deploy intensive emotional labour to mitigate their own sense of inauthenticity (Iszatt-White et al., 2021).

For gender-minority leaders who take interest in AL there are thus deep, existential consequences that dealignment with one's surroundings can have and the desire for something we can call 'authenticity' that ensues. Ahmed (2014) draws on Heidegger to argue that there is significant affective work needed for minorities to detach from the prevailing social script and accept that one is 'not in the mood' that is expected from you. I extend this reflection by discussing how not being in the mood, misalignment, ambiguity or even the experience of anxiety may be the states of being that allow for authenticity rather than *in*authenticity. Instead of finding ways to 'fix' the women or suggest them to adopt other, more gender-congruent leadership styles, I interrogate some ground assumptions of AL through the existential-phenomenological philosophy of, among others, Heidegger (2010 [1947]) and de Beauvoir (2013 [1947]) to understand how authenticity in leadership can be seized by *all* leaders.

Instead of seeing authenticity as the outcome of an alignment of one's personal values and leadership action, the skill needed here may be more a combination of contextual sensitivity to how diversity is manifest with a readiness to explore the social-relational consequences of uncanniness. Instead of trying to 'fix' themselves, gender-minority leaders can try and stay with the trouble and cultivate a fundamental openness towards other beings, towards other ways of being and acting, , to how context and practice affect us. In sum, taking seriously the claim that it is impossible to be unaffected when one is associated with a minority group in a particular context (Ahmed, 2014) and develop one's leadership through such affective states. Finding and seizing authenticity *in* leadership thus becomes a quest that is inherently relational, contextual, and potentially available to *all* leaders.

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Poster girls and daddy's girls: Collusion in gendered representations of women's career narratives

It is often asserted that the media misrepresents women professionals and leaders (Marvin et al., 2016). This claim implies two assumptions: a) female subjects do not wish to be portrayed in the manner that the media adopts, and b) the portrayals of women leaders are skewed or false. This study proposes to investigate the systemic nature of language and dynamic construction of business leaders' representations of their personal and professional identities (DeRue and Ashford, 2010) and career choices through career life story interviews. We expand work on print and visual forms of media analysis by exploring radio interviews as auditory cultural artefacts, using recordings of the BBC Radio 4 biographical feature, Desert Island Discs (DID). The voice of public British radio a enjoys a vast worldwide audience and DID is one of its most long-standing and beloved programs, providing first-order insights into life events that shape career choices since 1942. As such, our study adds the aspect of verbal representation of women professionals in the media as opposed to the more common focus on physical appearance (Kelan, 2013), and responds to Broadbridge and Simpson's (2011) call to examine forms of gendered power, practices, and processes embedded in cultural norms. Our project also extends Cohen and Duberley's (2013) article on career narratives in Desert Island Discs (DID) and contributes to the few autoethnographic studies in business management literature.

Some important considerations for this project relate specifically to representations of power. The BBC is a national institution of the United Kingdom with a far-reaching scope of influence. As such, the study also takes into consideration the power and influence of the media giant, BBC, on the audience of one of its most well-established intellectual institutions, Radio 4. We address the extent to which the subjects of the interviews are powerless (Vähäsantanen & Saarinen, 2013) in the context of neoliberal, individualistic, and Western-

centric assumptions, and media representations perpetuate systemic vertical segregation through neoliberal discourse. Using Roberts' (2005) personal image construction model as a framework, the study examines dialogic interactions between interviewer and interviewee that tease out or silence opportunities to contradict or to collude with gendered representation. We explore the co-construction of gendered meaning using content analysis methods (Gioia et al., 2013) with specific focus on interviewer framing. Analysing self-representations and interviewer questions in 40 female and male interviewees in selected professional categories highlights the (mis-) representation of gendered identity via career choices, transitions and struggles. We question whether these women want to be represented as gendered or sexualized, and consider how both parties construct gendered social expectations of choices, whether men are also sexualized (if so to what degree), as well as the collusion of the interviewer in taking up cues from the castaway to reify gendered or sexualized constructions of women (and men), the choices they make, and the rationale for these.

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Postmenopausal careers: The implications of a lack of support for late-career women's development to leadership roles

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Organisations with more women in senior leadership roles outperform those without (Amar, 2023). Yet, the global proportion of women in senior management only reached 32% in 2022. While this is growth (up from 31% in 2021, and 19% in 2004), women are still under-represented in leadership positions (Grant Thornton, 2022). Moreover, younger women (below age 55) tend to be those hired into top positions compared to women over 55 (Sonsino, 2021). One way these statistics can be explained is due to a lack of support and opportunity women appear to receive from their employers in their post-menopausal career. Motivated by preliminary findings from a qualitative pilot study, and a lack of organisational literature which focuses on late-career, post-menopausal women, we argue that without explicit support and opportunity for women, employers are at risk of losing older female talent in their workforce, and thus, progressing to leadership positions.

The pace of advancement for women managers continues to be slow (Davidson and Burke, 2016), with industry research showing that more women leaders are choosing to leave their workplace more than ever before (McKinsey & Company, 2022). This is despite scholars offering several reasons why supporting the aspirations of talented women makes sound business sense (Schwartz, 1992). It would appear that little has changed since Marshall's (1995) exploration of the reasons why a surprisingly high number of successful female executives leave their jobs in the corporate sector. Moreover, organisational research, remains silent about women's post-menopausal work experiences. The little we do know about women's careers in the later stages of their lives comes from a growing body of literature on work during menopause (Beck, Brewis, and Davies, 2021; Brewis et al., 2017; Brewis, Davies, and Matheson, 2022) and a limited line of research on ageing at work (e.g., Keeble-Ramsay, 2018). We argue that a focused effort on post-menopausal women could help better understand why women leaders leave the workforce. In so doing, explicit support for late-career women at work could reduce the risk of losing the talent older women offer.

The paper relies on a qualitative pilot study which explores the experiences, issues, and recommendations that women face in their late, post-menopausal careers. This included 27 semi-structured interviews, five 8-week diaries, and one 2-hour focus group. A total of 31 participants took part in the study. Data was analysed thematically, and several key findings support our argument. Firstly, a struggle with menopausal symptoms can lead to some leaving the workplace during the menopause (and then not returning): "*Previous to being self-employed I slaved away in the professional world working long hours as a solicitor in London. Around 18 months ago I quit, back then I thought I was burnt out, but I was actually experiencing the menopause and it completely f***ked with my body and mental health. I couldn't concentrate, I was bursting into tears in front of clients, and I lost all confidence in my own ability to be a competent solicitor… I never returned*" (self-employed yoga instructor - diary entry*)*.

Secondly, 25 of 27 interviewees experienced their post-menopausal career with renewed enthusiasm, greater energy, greater ambition, stronger confidence: "I*'ve got lots of energy because I am not longer in menopause now, so that energy drain that you get has gone. I've got lots of energy and I'm really happy… I feel that I can do more*" (Administration office-based role - interview*)*. Thirdly, participants shared experiences where they found they were

faced with continuation of peri-menopause symptoms, ageism, invisibility and changing demands at home (including caring pressures for elderly parents and grandchildren). Yet all participants also expressed that their employer did not have any explicit support for women in their late-career, with others sharing a frustration for lack of opportunity to progress their career beyond the age of 55.

In the discussion we will offer an explanation to why women are still leaving senior roles, nearly 30 years on from Marshall's (1995) pioneering work on understanding this phenomenon. We argue that a lack of explicit support and opportunity for late-career women continues to constrain older women from career progression (Sonsino, 2021). Hence, we call for employers to actively acknowledge late-career women, to prevent losing talent from their workforce, and take advantage of the renewed enthusiasm, restored energy and greater confidence women often have to give to leadership roles after they go through the menopause.

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Organizing, Resistance, and (anti) Feminism on /r/Wallstreetbets:
A Leadership-as-Practice Perspective

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Organizing, Resistance, and (anti) Feminism on /r/Wallstreetbets

The widespread denunciation of the /r/wallstreetbets (WSB) Reddit community during the events of the January 2021 GameStop (GME) short squeeze focused on two central elements of the community's financial finagling: its absurdity and its vulgarity. As an online collective of retail (or non-professional) stock market traders, the WSB forum has become a space for doing the good work of resisting perceived abuses of the powerful institutions that dominate the overlapping political and economic spheres embodied by Wall Street financiers (Chohan, 2021). In response to both acute (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) and systemic (e.g., stagnant wages and rising inequality) injustices, members of WSB have organized resistance to the violence of financial capitalism through the exaggeration of the very logics upon which it rests (Marazzi, 2009). Contrary to the insights from previous organizational communication work on resistance (e.g., Mumby, 2005), the WSB community organizes resistance not through the direct denial or subversion of dominant logics (as in the carnivalesque, Bakhtin, 1981; Boje, 2001a); or through the negotiation of new futures through crafting new, alternative practices and discourses (Buzzanell, 2010; Hintz et al., 2021; Pal, 2015).

We consider this form of organizing as an expression and practice of leadership (Raelin, 2017). Leadership-as-practice (LAP) is a growing movement in the study of leadership (Collinson, 2018; Raelin, 2011, 2017, 2020) that is interested in and focused on how leadership is *done* by shedding light on the constructionist and relational orientations of leadership as a form of discursive organizing–what Carroll and colleagues (2008) describe as uniting "the micro ('the situated doings of individual human beings') and the macro ('different socially defined practices')" (p. 366). Put differently, a practice perspective highlights "immanent collective action emerging from mutual, discursive, sometimes recurring and sometimes evolving patterns in the moment and over time among those engaged in the practice" (Raelin, 2017, p. 216). Here, Raelin's conceptualization is apt in our focus on WSB as we explore how the members of the community engage in a form of subversive affirmation (Žižek, 2006) whereby the ironic overidentification with capitalist logics communicates both the warrant for and methodology of organizing resistance. In other words, by embracing the bad, WSB aims to practice leadership as an act of resistance for the good.

However, motives notwithstanding, the online performance of scrupulously capitalist logics can breed the types of violently sexist discourses for which online communities, mainly Reddit, have a documented propensity (see Eddington, 2020; Eddington et al., 2023; Jarvis & Eddington, 2021). Despite the outward emphasis on economic and financial issues, the WSB community embraces language akin to those used in anti-feminist forums. These linguistic choices are often brushed aside by both members and founders of WSB (Rogozinski, 2020) and researchers (Boylston et al., 2021) as necessary humor that fosters solidarity. However, the community's adoption of the language of perceived sexual deprivation to indict experiences of economic deprivation echoes the fatalism of online anti-feminism (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2016). These are the same discourses that feminist economists (e.g., Berneria, 2007; Berik, 1997) deride as stifling to their discipline. In that they perpetuate contemporary capitalist social arrangements (Federici, 1998, 2018), this language is more than ugly; it actively distorts the work of resistance. Nonetheless, this online organizing offers a unique opportunity to examine how these discourses shape leadership practice vis-a-vis resistance movements as they seek to reorganize political, economic, and social worlds (Ford, 2016).

It will be the project of this study to interrogate the social interplay of these varying aspects of /r/wallstreetbets resistance organizing with the dual aims of (a) highlighting the

emancipatory potential in mediated resistance work and (b) unpacking how misogynist discourse limits anti-capitalist organizing. To this end, we propose a mixed-method analysis of online discourse collected from the /r/wallstreetbets community through the Pushshift.io API (2021). First, we will analyze the data using text-mining and semantic network techniques (Lambert, 2017). This first stage of the analysis will allow us to visualize conceptual hierarchies (Lammers et al., 2016) and uncover networked concepts that might otherwise be obscured in a large textual corpus. Following this initial analytic phase, we will closely read the corpus guided by the network analysis. During this reading, we will analyze narrative deconstruction (Boje, 2001b; Derrida, 1967/1997) to disentangle the discursive interplay between resistance organizing and anti-feminist discourse. In sum, through these analytic techniques, this study can provide unique insight into the resistance practices of online communities, critique the anti-feminist logics, and restory new logics for imagining economic and social possibilities.

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