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Fated Success Stories, what is and ought to be: A dystopian analysis of organisational norms and their impact upon gendered leadership.

What is the problem?

Despite government legislation (Equality Act, 2010) and initiatives including the 'Think, Act, Report' (HM Government, 2017) gender inequity pervades organisational reality. Across Europe, the problem is highlighted with female executive board representation: 27.1% in the UK (EU average 23.3%) (European Commission, 2016). Organisation policies, processes and practices often espouse gender equality objectives; however, organisational reality has not changed to the degree that could be described as true gender equality. This is reflected in persistent research findings, 'the expectations of the workplace culture are masculine heterosexual' (Guirdham, 2011, p. 219) Further cultural evidence is found with 267,572 followers of @everydaysexism (Twitter, 2017) which promotes daily examples of sexist behaviour. The UK Gender pay gap is 'just over 18 per cent' (Government Equalities Office, 2016) and government rhetoric proclaims this figure as a success, 'The UK gender pay gap is at its lowest level ever' (HM Government, 2017). It can be argued that organisational gender equity movements are marginalised at the expense of other business objectives and visions.

The stories organisations tell their employees are of slow, steady progress, but this progress is defined by a masculine business focussed paradigm; 'Organizations tend to magnify the preference of masculine language through embracing organizational values, beliefs, and goals that are inherently masculine' (Kissack, 2010, p. 540). Recent research reinforces the contemporary problem for women adapting to organisational norms, "doing gender for women in organizations still entails *doing a balance* of both femininity and masculinity." (Adamson, 2017, p. 327) A fundamental paradigm shift is required to address what could be described as piecemeal progress and organisational pacification of gender equity demands.

In an increasingly unstable climate, it is more relevant than ever to apply dystopian fiction motifs or "culture-based stories as sensemaking tools" (Callahan, Whitener, & Sandlin, 2007, p. 147) and a lens to analyse or magnify current organisational gender imbalances. The shocking and exaggerated dystopian visions of oppressive future regimes and autocratic control mechanisms may expose and awaken employees and employers from the insidious, normalised gendered behaviours in contemporary organisational reality. By provoking a meaningful paradigm shift from unconscious incompetence of these gender norms to conscious incompetence and, ultimately, conscious competence, genuine change can be brought to bear. Recent theory contemplating dystopian fiction usage expresses this idea succinctly, "the purpose of imagining the end of the world has often been to set the stage for political transformation" (Lothian, 2016, p. 448) It will be this process of examination and reimagining of organisational reality that can set the stage for organisational transformation towards gender equity and equality.

Research Questions

To apply dystopian fiction motifs and principles as a lens to analyse organisational gender imbalances. To do this, the following sub-questions will be addressed:

1. What aspects of organisational policy, practice and procedure can be interpreted and revealed as gender biased by applying a dystopian lens to reveal aspects of organisational control and gender suppression?
2. What can we learn from dystopian fiction as meaningful examples of subversive behaviours to inspire progressive leadership movements in organisations?

Conceptual Framework

My research will draw upon literature associated with gender, leadership, and dystopian fiction with a view to synergising concepts across all three strands. I have summarised my framework based on gendered concepts of success in organisational culture. These concepts could be described as 'an unspoken male or masculine norm and where their success or failure can be explained by their degree of conformity to that norm' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012, p. 418). Drawing comparison with the literary world, examples of repressed femininity can be seen through the history of female writers using masculine pseudonyms to achieve success.

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Their work, often marginalised against a backdrop of masculine literary dominance, may reveal further insights into organisational narratives. An example to consider is "Swastika Night" (Burdekin, 1937) which describes "the cult of masculinity" (Patai, 1984, p. 87) as the means by which power is sustained in the future world.

Gendered organisational leadership reality is described in research as the construction and maintenance of 'heteronormative, homophobic and misogynist workplace culture.' (Colgan & McKearney, 2011) Though this may be an extreme generalisation, it does describe a broadly accepted principle of male dominated workplace culture. Contemporary research has highlighted "the collective character of workplace masculinity and the interlocking prejudices" (Connell, 2003, p. 99) inherent in corporate reality. Organisational reality is understood as gendered contemporary research, "gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other…there is no gender without this reproduction of norms" (Bulter, 2009, p. 1) The concept of "Doing Gender" highlights the separate roles people play within organisations "individuals do not possess gender; rather gender is something individuals do in interaction with others." (Mavin & Grandy, 2013, p. 234) In a similar vein, Butler contends that performativity is crucially tied to and impacts upon gender as a lens for individual agency. This is explored in her exploration of the effects and consequences of performativity and the role of gender, "whether there is a stable gender in place and intact prior to the expressions and activities that we understand as gendered expressions and activities" (Bulter, 2010, p. 147) Such a conceptual understanding underlies a foundational assumption of gendered leadership that this research seeks to provide evidence for and relate to fictional tropes in Dystopian fiction.

One of the most prominent theoretical concepts has been founded on the "glass ceiling" (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) which identified an organisational reality whereby women are halted from progressing to senior leadership roles. Exploring this concept in a recent study found "women in the population have significantly different values than women who obtained their director positions in the competitive market for directors." (Adams & Funk, 2012, p. 221) A development to this seminal concept has been the more contemporary "the glass cliff" (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, p. 87) whereby women are chosen at times of crisis and therefore doomed to fail. The glass concept is also explored in the "Glass Walls" concept (Rowe, 1990) with women discouraged and isolated from certain occupational routes.

I will investigate the common traits of female leaders and how their behaviours fit with the expected organisational vision of a leader, their 'fated success story'. I will argue that women assimilate with masculine idea of success to achieve corporate progression. This conceptual understanding aligns with Kissack's muted voices, 'subordinate groups must assimilate their communication styles to the dominant group in order to be heard.' (Kissack, 2010, p. 451) Organisations create success narratives which permeate the workplace and define how employees can succeed.

I will argue a binary decision is necessitated; to conform to core business masculine leadership norms, or resist and follow a peripheral pathway where feminine leadership attributes are more valued. I will also explore whether a perceived binary choice is reinforced by social constructionism in organisations to create a degree of expectation and influence upon female agency and leadership success.

Originality: *The dystopian lens*

Dystopian fiction predominantly speculates that society will advance towards authoritarian constructs which subjugate a population. Dystopian control is usually based on an ideology or belief system which imposes behavioural and attitudinal expectations. These control routines reward compliance and punish apostasy. Prominent dystopian stories highlight methods of control such as surveillance, language restriction, propaganda, fear, indoctrination and emotional suppression.

Utilising dystopian fiction, this research aims to 'blur the distinction between data obtained empirically and materials produced creatively' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012) By doing this, its aim is to expose corrosive masculine control routines as suppressing true gender equity in leadership. Hochschild discusses 'emotional labour' as 'the silent work of evoking and suppressing feeling - in ourselves and in others.' (Hochschild, 2003)

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Dystopian control exploits similar emotional suppression and can be applied to feminine emotional behavioural norms.

In my research, a dystopian fiction lens will interpret organisational policy, process and practice in light of enhanced fictional parallels. Using fiction can 'offer a way of challenging, as well as colluding in, dominant constructions' (Phillips & Knowles, 2012, p. 417) and this research speculates that dystopian visions can be interpreted as a mirror (perhaps exaggerated) to some organisational realities. I want to identify examples of gendered opposition and adversarial action to subvert prevailing masculine organisational narratives. Analysing such examples through a dystopian filter will highlight converging approaches between fiction and reality and critical differences hindering meaningful pathways to creating new stories of female success. These new stories can rewrite the fated success stories and inspire organisations to rethink what leadership could, or perhaps should, be.

Below is a non-inclusive list of the dystopian fiction I will draw upon as source material:

- **The Handmaid's Tale** (Atwood, 1985)
- **Swastika Night** (Burdekin, 1937)
- **1984** (Orwell, 1949)
- **Brave New World** (Huxley, 1932)
- **Never Let Me Go** (Ishiguro, 2005)

Method

My primary method will utilise critical ethnography to "ask what could be" (Thomas, 1993, p. 4) with a focus on the female gender subgroup in organisational leadership. The core principle of this approach is "to negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups." (Thomas, 1993, p. 4) I will synthesise critical ethnography with dystopian fiction to expose the boundary between fiction and reality, "there are no absolute distinctions between what is ``real'' and what is 'Fiction'…" (Foley, 2002, p. 473) This approach is promoted as a constructive force to disrupt masculine dominance, "working with difference challenges the legacy of science that perpetuates masculine privilege" (Phillips, Pullen, & Rhodes, 2014, p. 325) The central justification of seeking the boundary between fiction and reality is to identify the confluence of theory and practice where gender dominance can be diminished.

By identifying and applying dystopian tropes as an analytical lens through which organisational gendered leadership 'reality' can be reinterpreted, "there is something else there that will take us beneath the surface…and reveal the darker oppressive side" (Thomas, 1993, p. 34). Using dystopian fiction as a method for analysis goes beyond typical qualitative or quantitative approaches and enables a fresh impetus to the change agenda, "resistance entails wildness" (Thomas, 1993, p. 7) Critical Dystopian Ethnography is an ideal platform for a unique analytical perspective, "unchaining ourselves from our own assumptions…" (Thomas, 1993, p. 9)

Contemporary examples of fiction informing reality promote the perceptive insights that fiction can provide, "Stories transmit fundamental understandings and experiences from the writer to the reader in a way that can be lost in more academic or scientific forms of writing." (Jefferies, Horsfall, & Schmied, 2016, p. 25) Fiction has been used in organisational research to illuminate and explore organisational reality "…narratives, stories and even fictional accounts – can all be considered legitimate." (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). The tropes common in dystopian fiction present a unique opportunity to learn from speculative dystopias what can be recognised and applied in organisational reality. Dystopia offers an unfettered glimpse into magnified human nature; these insidious visions can be traced back to their comparatively covert ancestors in modern organisation reality, especially with gendered leadership.

This project will utilise the data collected through the Higher Education Gender Audit Tool being developed by Kelly and her collaborators (Kelly, Callahan, CohenMiller, Lewis, & Apusigah, 2017). Document analysis will examine evidence of institutional and departmental variances in policy, process and practices that should

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enable a gendered interpretation. Coding the data and finding ethnographic dystopian themes will inform the topic focus and "reframe them as something new" (Thomas, 1993, p. 43) Analytical focus will be upon equitable experiential evidence from a gendered perspective. Aspects of gender equity analysis will include data such as employee progression, shared parental leave, environmental safety and criteria for guest speakers at events on campus. This data will inform a gendered overview of the current status for HE organisations. I will draw comparison to identified dystopian tropes of organisational policy, process, and practice used to control populations and maintain organisational norms.

The second phase will be to interview senior and aspiring leaders to identify gendered discourse models. Interviews will focus on perceptions of how individuals achieve or plan to achieve leadership success in context. Incorporating dystopian concepts into the identification of 'fated success stories', a discourse analysis method will be utilised to capture these models, 'discourse models are "storylines," families of connected images, or (informal) "theories" shared by people…' (Gee, 2005, p. 95) Data will be analysed for 'situated meaning' (Gee, 2005, p. 95) of concepts such as 'leadership', 'success' and 'gender' and will identify common occurrences and variances across institutional and national contexts. Discourse analysis will also inform my research question for individual ideas of how change might be inspired and achieved and whether there is an appetite for active engagement in change action.

Supervisor: Professor Jamie Callahan

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