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### Women in business and leadership roles - What do we know and where do we go next?

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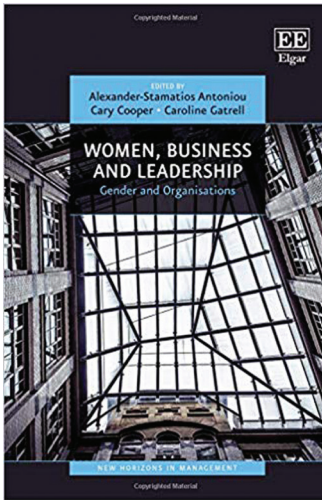
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Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou, Cary Cooper and Caroline Gatrell (Eds.)  
*Women, Business and Leadership. Gender and Organizations* (2019)  
 Cheltenham, Edward Elgard Publishing. 488 pages,  
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## Women in business and leadership roles – What do we know and where do we go next?

Despite various political, social, and cultural movements that focus on gender equality, women in business, and leadership positions, we still face a wide range of challenges that are gender specific. The book *Women, Business and Leadership. Gender and Organizations*, edited by Alexander-Stamatios Antoniou, Cary Cooper, and Caroline Gatrell, provides a comprehensive overview of (some of) these challenges, and highlights what has to be done to achieve equality at work. The book is comprised of three parts, each representing a different perspective. Part 1, 'Leadership and authority: Women at the helm', is about challenges that women encounter when taking up leadership positions, including a range of situations and settings (e.g. family business, educational settings, corporate boards). Part 2, 'Experience: How women in business and management negotiate their position', focuses on the influence of gender on experiences in a leadership position, looking at pregnancy consequences, gender-related expectations, and work-life balance amongst others. Finally, the last part of the book, 'Constraints: Structural and cultural impediments affecting women's career advancement', is about the structural and cultural barriers that slow down women's career development, such as harmful stereotypes and expectations, financial disadvantages, and HR policies. Altogether, the book is a valuable resource for those who are interested in gender research in management, leadership, and organisation studies. In what follows, I will

discuss how this collection fits within existing research, what the main contributions of research and practice are, and what some limitations of the research presented in this book are.

Gender inequality has been recognised as an organisational challenge and, as such, there is a wide range of academic journals and research lines that focus specifically on gender and feminism in organisational contexts. For example, a recent review of articles on gender research published in management and psychological journals revealed that gender research made strong contributions especially in the topics of organisational performance, social integration, well-being at work, and justice/morality (Warren, Donaldson, Lee, & Donaldson, 2019). However, gender topics are still making their way into mainstream organisational research. For example, fewer than a hundred papers that focus on feminism at work have been published across fifteen top journals since 1990 (Bell, Meriläinen, Taylor, & Tienari, 2019). Therefore, gender and feminist issues at work are often categorised as a minority interest aimed at those who are already familiar with these topics, rather than a common theme that is reflected in *any* organisational topic. *Women, Business and Leadership* shows that gender-related challenges at work are relevant to the majority of organisational topics, such as performance, career management, entrepreneurship, networking, authority, and so on. As such, it cannot be simply reduced to a minority interest but should rather become a mainstream topic.

## To be a woman in leadership and business

The most notable contribution of this book is that it offers a comprehensive overview of the body of research that focuses on gender at work. The chapters describe a wide range of theoretical and practical work, looking at different aspects and perspectives on experiences of women in leadership and business. Some of the issues discussed in the book have received attention in research, for example the lack of female representation in some professions (e.g. the financial sector in Chapter 23), harmful impact of stereotypes and gender expectations (e.g. male-type behaviour expectations in Chapter 12 and stereotype threat in Chapter 21), or the impact of gender on networking and career advancement (e.g. Chapters 10 and 11). However, the book also offers important insights into topics that are less prominent in organisation studies but have significant implications for women. For example, in Chapter 15, Valerie Bevan highlights the issue of a 'secret career' amongst women in health care science – women keeping their career aspirations quiet, in order

to conform to masculine environments (i.e. an environment where a woman is *not supposed* to have high career ambitions). As the chapter shows, these mechanisms spill over to the private domain – women tend to also keep their career aspirations a secret from their partners. It was also interesting that the author wrote the chapter from a personal perspective, sharing her own experiences and life events to illustrate and enrich the presented data. This is certainly not a standard in management and organisational research, where the focus is on being objective and impartial to yield ‘valid’ results. By using her own personal story, Bevan enriched and strengthened the presented arguments, making them more relatable as well.

## From horseracing to the Church of England

Another important contribution is that the work presented in the book goes beyond the common focus on white collar corporate jobs: it provides research evidence based on a variety of different settings and types of organisations. As such, it provides different perspectives on well-known issues. For example, Clayton-Hatway and Fasbender, in Chapter 24, look at constraints in career advancement of female leaders in the horseracing industry. Their chapter not only discusses the issue from a perspective based on the existing literature (e.g. the impact of stereotyping, pregnancy, and caring responsibilities), but also highlights the implications of lack of female representation in sports management. There are other chapters in the book that focus on a specific context or environment, such as Chapter 9 by Cruz, Hamilton, and Jack, set up in the context of families in business, which describes the harmful impact of long-held gender norms on family businesses. Women who take over family entrepreneurship are often unprepared and do not receive sufficient support, due to lack of visibility compared to male heirs. There is also a chapter by Gatrell and Peyton (Chapter 18) on the position of women in leadership in a religious organisation, the Church of England. This work illustrates the evolution of a male-dominated, patriarchal institution, transformed by the emergence of women as leaders (i.e. bishops, priests). The authors point out that, in any male-dominated organisation or institution, the emergence of women in leadership comes at a price. The chapter discusses at length the issues that women face when breaking the glass ceiling. Altogether, the book offers a refreshing perspective on gender at work by using a variety of professions and settings and by highlighting the need to go beyond most common samples in organisational research (e.g. white collar office workers).

## Practical solutions are the key

One of the crucial contributions of the book is that the focus is not only on advancing theory but also on offering practical solutions and HR practices that can help organisations to address gender inequality. Most chapters contain either a full section or a table on practical implications or an overview of potential interventions. This is particularly important in organisation studies, where practical relevance of the work we do should be our primary interest. For instance, Chapter 19 by Schlamp, Gerpott, and Voepel describes in detail how tall hierarchical organisations can improve their selection and recruitment process in order to promote more equal opportunities and inclusive environments. The authors provide potential solutions to each stage of the process: attrition (e.g. by using gender-neutral language in the job adverts), hiring (e.g. using a blind review process), promotion (e.g. using gender quotas), and retention (e.g. providing flexible working hours). Altogether, because of the focus on practical implications, the book is an attractive read not only to researchers but also to practitioners.

## Limitations

Though the book offers a comprehensive overview of the topics related to gender-specific challenges at work, there are several minor limitations. The most noteworthy one is that the focus is on women *in general*, without looking at the diversity within (e.g. ethnicity, sexual orientation). The editors acknowledge that issue in the introduction by saying that they remain aware that gender on its own is just a part of the story rather than the entire story. This is an important issue because the majority of the existing research on inequalities at work is based mostly on white, cisgender women in white collar jobs. However, systemic inequalities affect women who are of ethnic minority, transsexual, homosexual, or disabled to a higher degree. Limiting our perspective to gender only should no longer be a standard in organisational research; we must make an active effort to pave the way for intersectional feminism in organisational studies. The last chapter of the book, by Arifeen and Gatrell (pp. 435–447), is perhaps the only one that makes that call explicit, by saying that lack of focus on ethnicity, nationality, or religion is missing in our research. This should be addressed in the work we do: we need to go beyond simply acknowledging that there are sources of inequality other than gender but actively include these in our studies.

## Conclusion

*Women, Business and Leadership* is an important contribution to the literature on gender in organisational settings. The coverage includes important topics, such as work–life balance, consequences of motherhood, gender role expectations, and career advancement barriers, to name a few. The book advances not only organisational theory but also practice by offering concrete, specific solutions that can be applied in organisations. Finally, the most important message that the book delivers is that the change in our policies, attitudes, culture, and expectations needs to come, and ‘we cannot and should not wait for another 50 years’ (p. XI).

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## About the author

**Joanna Sosnowska** is an Assistant Professor in the Leadership and Management section of the Amsterdam Business School, University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She is also a member of the Future of Work and Organizational Psychology movement. Her expertise focuses on dynamics of personality at work, employees' performance, and well-being and systemic inequalities at work.

