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10-4-2023

### How can transformational leadership be uNBound from the gender binary paradigm?

Jody Condit Fagan

*James Madison University, faganjc@jmu.edu*

Michelle Hamilton-Page

*Royal Roads University, gncresearchproject@gmail.com*

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#### Recommended Citation

Fagan, Jody Condit and Hamilton-Page, Michelle, "How can transformational leadership be uNBound from the gender binary paradigm?" (2023). *Libraries*. 238.

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# How can transformational leadership be uNBound from the gender binary paradigm?

Jody Condit Fagan (they/them) and Michelle Hamilton-Page (she/they)  
International Leadership Association Global Conference, October 3-4, 2023

Slide 1



- Hello, thank you for sharing your time with us today.
- [Michelle] is on the unceded territory of the Lekwungen people, also known as Victoria, British Columbia.
- There are more than 500 pieces of legislation in the U.S. in the past year or so against trans and nonbinary identities
- Trickling up to Canada as ideas get exported, but at least Canada has hate speech laws
- Embodying these identities is challenging!
- Some of our presentation today is based on Michelle's doctoral research with 25 non-binary lesbians
- The context is DEI, and so we will talk about definitions but are asking you as leaders to continue education if the terms are new to you - check out GLAAD, Rainbow Coalition, Sherbourne Health
- Also check out TGNC artists: Andrea Gibson, Alok Vaid-Menon
- Cisgender - someone whose gender identity aligns with sex assigned at birth
- Nonbinary - person does not sit within binaries
- Transgender - someone whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth

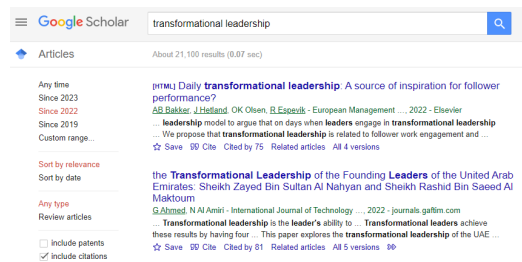
“The Heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’” (Butler, 1999).

“Discrimination against LGBT people is pervasive in the workplace, with estimates between 25% and 66% noted in the career development literature.” (Alderson, 2003, cited in Gedro 2009.)

- “The Heterosexualization of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’, where these are understood as expressive attributes of ‘male’ and ‘female’” (Butler, 1999).
- “Discrimination against LGBT people is pervasive in the workplace, with estimates between 25% and 66% noted in the career development literature.” (Alderson, 2003, cited in Gedro 2009.)
- Butler’s framework show how if we are not propping up ideas of what it is to be masculine and feminine - these are cultural constructs, as is sex
- Biology is normative, not necessarily determining what is normal. It is also culturally bound
- Binary suggests if we aren’t aligning ourselves with these ideas of feminine and masculine in the workplace, then we’re signaling that we’re stepping out of the heteronormative.
- So in research with 25 non-binary, also identified as gay, the workplace became a place where power and control are exerted to bring people back in-line with the binaries.
- Binary expectation reinforcement in the workplace - looks like dress codes, mentoring, safety, new employees coming in have to do education and enforcement of gender and leadership styles and stereotypes
- Out of 25 participants, 23 identified they experienced harassment and discrimination, from misgendering (refusing to use pronouns) to sexual assault.

## Transformational Leadership

- Emerged in the mid-1970s (Burns, *Leadership*); flourished in 1990s (Bass, 1999)
- Responds to transactional leadership theories
- Began in the US but has become international and widespread
- Google Scholar returns over 20,000 results since 2022



- Thank you, Michelle!
- The transformational leadership model is huge in leadership studies!
- It's an international phenomenon, and its use is still going strong, as evidenced by Google Scholar's 20,000 results on the topic since 2022.
- What was and is exciting about transformational leadership is the importance of followers to the leadership dynamic, leadership as a social process.

Slide 4

## Transformational Leadership and the Gender Binary

- Conflating sex and gender
- Male/female participants
- Masculine/feminine contexts
- Masculine/feminine behaviors



8

### Transformational Leadership of Men and Women

...and what about me??

Historically, the vast majority of noted leaders have been men. This is particularly true for those labeled charismatic-transformational—Gandhi, King, Mandela, Kennedy, and even the notorious ones, Hitler, Stalin, Bin Laden. By comparison, only a handful of charismatic female leaders easily come to mind: Eleanor Roosevelt, Queen Elizabeth I, Golda Meir. Yet if the elements of charismatic-transformational leadership are analyzed, they suggest that women might be more likely to engage in transformational leader behaviors and be more effective

- Gender and transformational leadership has also been of high interest, but research has taken a gender-binary approach (Fagan & Short, 2023)
- Sometimes research conflates gender and sex as the same variable
- Sometimes even when gender is understood as socially constructed, it's split into male and female, and behaviors and contexts into masculine and feminine.
- If there is an “Other” option, those folks are put aside as they are small in number.
- As Michelle pointed out, however, both sex and gender are not binary. Gender is complex, nuanced, and fluid.

Slide 5

How can transformational leadership be uNBound from the gender binary paradigm?

TGNC = trans and gender non-conforming

- Bringing back our question for today, How can transformational leadership be uNBound from the binary paradigm of gender?
- I'll be bringing in Michelle's research, our own experiences, and findings from a literature review of trans and gender non-conforming leaders – which I'll abbreviate as TGNC.

## Transformational Leadership: two dimensions

### Idealized Influence

- Leaders are role models for followers; demonstrate ethical conduct
- Followers identify with leaders and want to emulate them

### Individualized consideration:

- Leaders develop and mentor followers
- Leader creates learning opportunities and a supportive climate
- Individual differences are recognized and accepted

(Bass & Riggio, 2006: p6-7)

- We are focusing on just **two** dimensions of the model today: Idealized Influence, which focuses on how leaders might serve as role models, as well as how followers identify themselves with the leader.
- And Individualized Consideration, which is how leaders develop and mentor followers, create learning opportunities, and recognize individual differences.

## Idealized Influence

### Behavior

Transgender participants (n=6): **3.17**

Women (n=180): 3.06

Men (n=92): **3.00**

### Attribution

Transgender participants (n=6): **3.00**

Women (n=180): 3.06

Men (n=92): **3.13**

(Serjoie, 2019, p97)

Note: results not statistically significant

- One study found that when it comes to the leader's actual behaviors, transgender leaders scored the highest in one study, compared to men and women
- But when it comes to the follower's attributions about the leader, they scored the lowest
- This points to idealized influence as a strength for trans leaders, but also to the discrimination they face.

## The Idealized influence of TGNC (trans and gender non-conforming) leaders

TGNC leaders' self-reflective practices contribute to resilience and ability to navigate (Bruce, 2022; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023)

TGNC leaders who come out may be seen as risk-taking and authentic (Schueler, 2022)

Benefits from androgynous leadership (Musick, 2018)

TGNC leaders experience with discrimination (Mizock, 2018) gives rise to critical consciousness, empathy, and respect for individual differences (Brewer, 2016; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)

- What are some ways TGNC leaders demonstrate Idealized Influence?
- First, we engage in extensive self-reflection that translates into self-monitoring and interpersonal communication skills (Bruce, 2022; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023).
- TGNC leaders may inspire team members because they are seen as brave for being public about a stigmatized gender identity (Schueler, 2022).
- We may be able to experience the benefits of leading with both male and female behaviors in a way that troubles assumptions about gender (Musick, 2018);
- TGNC leaders' experience with discrimination gives rise to critical consciousness that we use to support marginalized groups and individual differences in the workplace (Brewer, 2016; Mizock, 2018; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)



## Idealized Influence: How is it Bound?

Bodies of TGNC leaders disrupt preconceived notions of followers (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)

Coming out may mean losing relationality with followers due to stigmatized identit(ies) (Adams & Webster, 2017)

Gender binary mindset compels followers to categorize leaders as “male” or “female” (Huelskamp, 2022; Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)

TGNC = trans and gender non-conforming

- How is idealized influence bound to the Gender Binary?
- Our bodies may not align with preconceived notions of followers, which expect men and women to follow gendered norms. (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013)
- TGNC leaders who come out in cisnormative work environments may face a loss of relationality with followers. Followers suddenly don't identify with the leader.
- Even for supportive followers, the gender binary mindset compels many people to conceptualize others into “male” or “female” to make sense of their leadership.
  - If they are trans, then they need to look as male or female as possible
  - If they are nonbinary, people still try to read them as either male or female
  - This is bad for leaders of all genders, because it means people are seen as compliant / transgressive of their gender rather than as just as the person they are.

## uNBinding Idealized Influence (for all genders)

- How might Idealized Influence benefit from more fully “coming out at work”?
- How would a nonbinary understanding of gender alter self-reflection and self-monitoring practices?
- How would androgynous leadership theories change if they were reviewed with a nonbinary lens?
- How does awareness of privilege contribute to leaders’ Idealized Influence?
- How do various embodiments influence our conceptions of leaders?

- Here are some questions we feel could draw on the experiences of TGNC leaders to unbind the gender binary
- We believe that people of all genders constrain their behavior to gender norms; no one is “fully out”. For example, cis men who feel they can’t show emotions.
- Leaders who adopt a nonbinary understanding of gender might expand their understanding of their own gendered behaviors
- Androgynous leadership theories could dramatically change with a nonbinary view
- Understanding how privilege contributes to Idealized Influence is par for the course for leaders from marginalized groups (Alimchandani, 2016). But cis people, white people, can still go on a similar journey.
- Finally, what skills, perspectives, and visions are we missing out on because we make superficial judgments based on people’s bodies, voices, and presentations?

## Individualized Consideration

Focuses on development and mentoring of followers and their individual needs:

- Leaders develop and mentor followers
- Leader creates learning opportunities and a supportive climate
- Individual differences are recognized and accepted

(Bass & Riggio, 2006: p6-7)

Moving on to individualized consideration... just as a reminder this focuses on the development and mentoring of followers and recognizing and supporting their individual differences.

## Individualized Consideration

Transgender participants (n=6): **3.21**

Women (n=180): 3.18

Men (n=92): 3.06

(Serjoie, 2019, p97)

Note: results not statistically significant

- In the same study as before, transgender leaders had the highest mean for individualized consideration (Serjoie, 2019 p97)
- Why might this be?

## Individualized Consideration of TGNC leaders

TGNC leaders educate others in the workplace

(Joksimović, 2020; Hamilton-Page, 2021)

TGNC leaders' activism

(Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022; Gamboa et al., 2021; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023; Huelskamp, 2022; Joksimović, 2020)

TGNC leaders training and coaching

(Bruce, 2022; Schueler, 2022)

The empathy of TGNC leaders

(Alimchandani, 2015; Bruce, 2022; Huelskamp, 2022)

TGNC = trans and gender non-conforming

- First, the everyday activities of TGNC leaders require us to collaboratively navigate spaces where we are often simultaneously experiencing harassment and discrimination, and where we must both take up space and share space (Hamilton-Page, 2022).
- So we must educate others as part of daily life as well as in being asked to help write policies and advise on LGBTQ+ questions
- TGNC leaders often become activists in their workplaces, motivated by discrimination to use our leadership positions and skills to work for safer, inclusive, and affirming environments (Alimchandani, 2015; Beck, 2020; Bruce, 2022; Gamboa et al., 2021; Hamilton-Page, 2021, 2023; Huelskamp, 2022; Joksimović, 2020).
- TGNC leaders were found to take a training and coaching approach with employees as part of their leadership style (Bruce, 2022; Schueler, 2022)
- Finally, we can ask ourselves how we can expand our empathy for people from backgrounds different than ours, and use that in the workplace

uNBinding Individualized Consideration (for all genders)

- How can leaders of all genders share space?
- How can leaders of all genders be activists?
- How can leaders of all genders help educate?
- How can leaders of all genders expand their empathy and support?

- UNBinding Individualized Consideration from the gender binary has benefits for everyone
- We need to think of sharing space not just as a men/women thing, but as a way to allow men to be feminine, and women to be masculine, and TGNC people to be their genders, without their behaviors being seen as transgressive or compliant.
- We need to recognize the role of all leaders to be activists in their workplaces
- And to carry some of the weight of education
- Finally, we can ask ourselves how we can expand our empathy towards people of backgrounds different than ours, and use that to shape more inclusive workplaces

**Join Us!**

UNbind Leadership!

<https://www.nbresearchproject.com/>

[mhamiltonpage@gmail.com](mailto:mhamiltonpage@gmail.com)

[faganjc@mu.edu](mailto:faganjc@mu.edu)

*My New Gender Workbook*, Kate Bornstein

Is YOUR workplace gender-binary?

Leadership pedagogy

Gender and leadership scholarship (Ilac, 2021)

2. How do you describe your gender?

1. Man/male
2. Woman/female
3. Non-binary/genderqueer/gender-fluid
4. I use a different term [open box]
5. Prefer not to answer

- Hopefully you are now motivated to help us UNBIND LEADERSHIP for people of all genders. What are some things we can do as leaders or ask our leaders to do?
- If you've not thought recently about how your own gender influences your leadership experiences, you might want to check out a resource like *My Gender Workbook*, by Kate Bornstein
- When you see the gender binary in your workplace, question it.
- Review leadership education and leadership development programming for gender-binary assumptions, even well-intended ones.
- If you do leadership scholarship with a gender variable, review your constructs and ensure they support all genders.

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