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**Theorizing Women Leaders' Negative Relations with Other Women**

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### **Abstract**

In the following chapter we theorize women leaders' negative intra-gender relations with other women and call for a shift in focus from blaming individual women to fuller explanations as to why these social relations emerge. Our theory of women leaders' negative relations with other women explains how these relations take place within gendered contexts where women face gender stereotypes, can do gender well and differently simultaneously and where homophily, homosociality, women's intra-gender competition and female misogyny, operate as complex, dialectic, dynamic interlocking gendered practices and processes. The theory illustrates how threats to women's identity constrain and facilitate negative intra-gender behaviour between women. It also illustrates how women work to negotiate, resist and comply with these experiences and how gendered contexts exacerbate differences between women. In speaking the unspeakable, we hope to raise consciousness to gendered contexts, challenge how such relations can be used against women to legitimize their minority status as leaders and open ways to strengthen women's agency.

### **Theorizing Women Leaders' Negative Relations with Other Women**

This chapter extends our previous work published in *The Handbook of Gender and Organizations* (Mavin, Williams, & Grandy, 2014) where we offered a conceptualization of women's negative intra-gender relations. Here we theorize women leaders' negative intra-gender relations with other women, and we call for a shift in focus from blaming individual women to fuller explanations as to why women leaders experience negative relations with other women at work. We are concerned with women leaders who hold considerable position power. We have begun to address the lacuna of research exploring women leaders' negative relations with other women through our published work on negative relationships between women, women leaders' micro-violence between each other, women leaders' friendships between each other, and how women leaders manage their risk of abjection in organizations through their own and other women's appearance (see Mavin 2006a, 2006b; Mavin, Williams, & Grandy, 2014; Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014; Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Women working for, with, and alongside women leaders is now a reality but has yet to become normalized. We argue here that understandings of women's negative relations with each other in a leader context can offer insights into women's lack of progress as leaders in organizations. Further, as a result of our theorizing, we aim to raise consciousness and to facilitate an increase in women's agency in their ongoing choices of how they relate to other women in leader contexts.

We acknowledge research that reveals how women can be hostile in their social relations towards each other at work (e.g., Chesler, 2001), in contradistinction to men's acknowledged homosociality in organizations (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2005). We are also aware that there are "lazy" stereotypes (Elliott, Stead, Mavin, & Williams, forthcoming) for women's negative relations with other women, such as Queen Bee (Abramson, 1975; Staines, Travis & Jayerante, 1973) and cat-fights (Tanenbaum, 2002). These are active in reinforcing

the status quo for gendered organizations and require challenge by further theorizing of what has been named as female misogyny between women at work (Mavin, 2006a). Rather than focusing upon “fixing the women,” we argue for more comprehensive theories to help explain why women’s negative relations emerge and to challenge the contexts that facilitate women leaders’ negative relations with other women.

In what follows we offer a theory of women leaders’ negative relations with other women. We contribute to a greater understanding of how gendered organizing contexts, which impact upon women’s experiences and advancement, are entangled with their negative relations with other women at work and how such relations emerge through everyday organizing. The focus here is not upon empirical accounts, rather to explain why these negative relations emerge. We begin by setting the scene and offering our theory visually to provide a structure for the chapter (see Figure 1). We progress to theorize how women leaders’ negative relations with women take place within gendered contexts. Contexts where women face gender stereotypes, can do gender well and differently simultaneously (Mavin & Grandy, 2013), and where homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954), homosociality (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2005), women’s intra-gender competition (Campbell, 2004), and female misogyny (Mavin, 2006a) operate as complex, dialectic, interlocking gendered practices and processes.

### **Setting the Scene: Queen Bees, Cat Fights and Sisterhood**

Women leaders can find themselves operating outside a dominant social norm—on the boundaries within a dynamic interplay of holding power while simultaneously marginal—often out of place as women (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Women leaders in senior positions, at the top of organizational hierarchies, hold powerful positions in a masculine order and where leadership takes places in a context of competitive masculinity. They can also face an oxymoron in their social relations with other women (Mavin, 2008); expectations of positive

solidarity behaviors from other women in the organization, while simultaneously being negatively evaluated for performing masculinities as Queen Bees (Mavin, 2008).

Relationships between women take place within gendered contexts that limit potential for women's allegiances. Within these contexts women's intra-gender competition and female misogyny (Mavin, 2006a) emerge as processes that limit women's abilities to accept women's intra-gender *differences*. For us, women leaders are active agents in relationships with other women within gendered contexts where they can engage in gendering processes which both reinforce *and* challenge gender stereotypes.

We view gender as socially constructed rather than being the property of a person; gender is always being redefined and negotiated through every day practices and situations (Poggio, 2006). All feminine and masculine subjectivities are jointly crafted in the larger context of gendered power (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006). Gender is a "complex of socially guided perceptual and interactional and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p.126) and, as such, is a routine accomplishment (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Organizations reflect and shape society's gendered power structure where women are subordinate to men, where women who desire status and power in organizations are problematic, and where the relationship between power and resistance is dialectical and mutually defining (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006). As women take up leader roles, they disrupt patterns of social homogeneous interactions and gender stereotypes that support associations of managers and leaders as male and men as "bosses," to which both men *and* women might negatively respond (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b). Within this dynamic there is room for agency; women have learned to resist and shape such normative expectations (Benschop, 2009; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; O'Leary, 1988; Mavin & Grandy, 2016).

Within gendered organizations, men can experience greater opportunities for, and relationships with, others (men), which impact positively on their experiences (Collinson & Hearn, 2005). Contrary to the sisterhood stereotype, women in organizations are often not friends and do not always cooperate or support each other (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) feminist psycho-analytical understanding is that women's relationships are grounded in emotional and psychological processes (i.e., love, envy, and competition) that emerge when women perceive differences in each other. As the lack of women managers and leaders became a subject of research, women's relationships with each other became positioned as either a positive enabler to career capital through assumed sisterhood and solidarity (e.g., Legge, 1987) or as a key blockage through women in senior positions as "Queen Bees" (Abramson, 1975; Staines et al., 1973). Research into women's negative relationships at work has now emerged, which recognizes how women's perceived "cat fights" (Tanenbaum, 2011) can be constructed as an explanation to legitimize women leaders' minority status (e.g., Camussi & Leccardi, 2005, Mavin 2006a, 2006b). Recent research has begun to theorize female same-sex conflict (Sheppard & Aquino, 2014) and women leaders' intra-gender micro-violence and abject appearance (Mavin, Grandy & Williams 2014; Mavin & Grandy, 2016); however, the complexities women leaders experience within gendered organizational contexts facilitate a chasm in social relations between women that requires further exploration (Mavin & Williams, 2013).

Taking these complexities into account, we developed a theory of women's negative intra-gender relations as illustrated in Figure 1. This depicts complex, interlocking, and dynamic gendered practices and processes. In what follows, we begin by outlining what we propose is at the crux of the theory, that is, gendered contexts. Against a backdrop of gendered contexts, we explain the elements of doing gender well and differently, homophily and homosociality, intra-gender competition, and female misogyny.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### **Gendered Contexts: Gendered Society, Patriarchy, Social Contexts, and Power**

We begin with the heart of the theory, developing an understanding of gendered contexts in which negative intra-gender relations with other women occurs. We propose that the gendered contexts of organizations and the prevalence of sex-role categorizations in assessing women leaders contribute to the backdrop of relations between women (Mavin, 2008) by encouraging and exacerbating *differences* between them (Mavin, 2006a). We focus upon the nexus of four considerations: (1) patriarchy as a societal system in which men hold power and women are largely excluded from it as a backcloth to gendered organizational contexts; (2) masculine hegemony, which informs social relations; (3) the double bind experienced by women leaders in organizations; and, (4) the possibility of decoupling evaluations of men and women from the gender binary.

Men are normalized as doing management and leadership work, and this norm contributes to what we understand as a gendered order (Connell, 1987; Gherardi, 1994). Women have risen in numbers in management levels, yet they remain unusual as leaders so that the “ideal(leader)” remains associated with masculinity and men (Acker, 1992); men are argued to be comfortable with organizational cultures as they perceive these as gender neutral (Simpson, 1997). Women’s negative relations with other women take place within these gendered contexts, whereby patriarchy as socio-structural practices (Walby, 1989) shapes gendered social relations. Connell (1987) argues that “women are subjected to direct comparison with men, while being disadvantaged in the comparison from the start” (p. 228) through hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987), understood as constructing a hierarchy of masculinities where some remain more “socially central, or more associated with authority and social power” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846), continues to shape gender relations in organizations.

When women leaders engage with patriarchy they can find their femininities constrained by gendered stereotypes. This can result in women performing “emphasized femininities” (Connell, 1987, p. 228) to comply with hegemonic masculinity and orientate around “accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Connell, 1987, p. 183). This can close down possibilities of alternative femininities that do not comply with hegemonic masculinity. Yet, to accumulate competence and be promoted as leaders, women leaders face a double bind dilemma (Gherardi, 1994). Women have to manage expectations of behavior appropriate to their perceived gender role, and behavior expected of leaders; the former associated with femininities, the latter with masculinities. This can lead to complexity for women in negotiating organizing contexts (c.f., Eagly & Carli, 2007; Martin, 2003).

Recent research, however, argues that this double bind is dissipating in that gendered assumptions around the male norm are fragmenting; hence, women managers may experience congruence with the manager role if they have decoupled the male body (and masculinities) from competencies or values associated with management (Billing, 2011). We argue that while attempts may be made by some organizational members to decouple femininity and masculinity from particular behaviors and values, the gender divisions that shape expectations of what a manager and leader “do” and “look like” remain embedded in organizations. These gender divisions are based upon sex role categorizations (e.g. female-male) (Messerschmidt, 2009). This does not mean that gender binaries cannot be challenged or unsettled, rather that the binary divide continues to constrain and restrict how men and women co-construct gender. In this way, undoing gender is re-doing or doing gender differently (Messerschmidt, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 2009). These gendered contexts and assumptions provide a backdrop for women leaders' relations with other women and contribute to maintaining assumptions of masculine hierarchical superiority (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004) in organizing.

### **The Gender Binary: Doing Gender Well and Differently**

Within gendered contexts women leaders can do gender well and differently (Mavin & Grandy, 2012, 2013), and this impacts their relations with other women in organizations. Of importance to us is recognition that the nexus of sex category and gender plays out in complex ways for women in self-and-other relations with women. Building on West and Zimmerman's (1987) work on doing gender, we have argued elsewhere (Mavin & Grandy, 2012, 2013) that perceived congruence (or lack thereof) between sex category and gender is illustrative of how the gender binary is still pervasive. Here we propose that this complexity translates into evaluations of women's social behaviors in organizations.

Doing gender is a micropolitical contextual activity accomplished through and in relations with others where the individual, consciously or otherwise, navigates what it is to enact being a man or woman, alongside normative expectations of what is understood to be appropriate for males or females (Messerschmidt, 2009; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The "display and recognition of a socially regulated external mark of sex" (Goffman, 1959) results in sex categorization in that, due to some external "mark" of "sex," individuals are perceived to be "male" or "female" (Mavin & Grandy, 2013, p. 234). It follows then that if an individual is perceived to be "male" (sex category), he is expected to do gender in ways that align with being a man (and perform masculinity) (Mavin & Grandy, 2012). Otherwise, there is a perceived incongruence between sex category and gender; gender scripts are violated and this can be used as a means to discredit or accept particular expressions of the doing of gender (Messerschmidt, 2009). To take into account the complexities of doing gender and how individuals might comply, resist, or bend alongside such normative expectations, elsewhere (Mavin & Grandy, 2012, 2013) we propose that gender can be done well and differently through simultaneous and multiple enactments of femininity and masculinity. Doing gender *well* involves doing gender *appropriately* in congruence with sex

category; thus “for a woman to do gender well or appropriately, as evaluated against and accountable to her sex category, she performs expected feminine behaviour through a body that is socially perceived to be female” (Mavin & Grandy, 2013, p. 234). Doing gender differently involves alternative expressions of femininity and/or masculinity, which may be incongruent with perceived sex category.

As it relates to our theory of women's leaders' negative relations with other women, we propose that the use of “lazy” stereotypes (Elliott et al., forthcoming), such as the Queen Bee label given by both men and women, is a sexist evaluation of women leaders performing masculinities (Mavin, 2008). There is a perceived incongruence between the sex category of so called women “Queen Bees” and how they enact leadership (e.g., agentic rather than communal style) (Mavin, Grandy, & Williams, 2014). Further, when women do gender well and differently and are perceived to be the “wrong kind of feminine” (Mavin & Grandy, 2013, p. 224) within gendered contexts, they trigger discomfort and pose an identity threat to other women. This is particularly problematic for women leaders (whose privilege is fragile and unstable), whereby expectations of contemporary notions of acceptable or respectable femininity alongside embedded notions of leadership as masculine constrain and enable embodied leadership and subjectivities (Mavin & Grandy, forthcoming). In managing this identity threat, women leaders may engage in negative relations and behaviors, which separate them from other women. For example, the doing of gender well and differently can be manifested through women leaders' self-and-other bodywork. In our forthcoming work, we theorize and empirically illustrate how women leaders experience pressures from various sources to conform to particular notions of respectable femininity (thus doing gender well) through their body and appearance. This is necessary in order for them to maintain respectability and retain privilege as a credible woman elite leader. While norms around exact expectations of their body and appearance as women leaders are less clear from their

accounts, and can involve doing gender well and differently, the women still self-and-other discipline women's bodies and appearance to ensure they are "correct" and "proper". It is through this disciplining that they confer, contest and/or defend their own and other women's privilege (Mavin & Grandy, forthcoming). In this research, women elite leaders' who are perceived to be overweight, who present themselves in sexual ways, or who fail to discipline their bodies and appearance (e.g., "unkept" nails or hair), then transgress boundaries of perceived appropriate femininity. As a result, women transgressors are sanctioned by other women through disapproval and loss of status and respect as a leader (and as a woman) (Mavin & Grandy, forthcoming). Therefore, while possibilities for unsettling the gender binary may result from women leaders' doing of gender well and differently simultaneously this takes place within gendered contexts which can reinforce gender stereotypes. When women engage in masculinities or alternative expressions of femininity and resist hegemonic masculinity, it disrupts these gender contexts and may result in ambiguity, discomfort, and identity threats, which provoke women's conscious/unconscious negative responses to other women.

### **Homophily, Homosociality and Homosocial Desire**

We theorize that the concepts of homophily—social processes of friendship (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954) and homosociality (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2005), as the preference to associate with people like oneself in organization—offer additional insights into the complexity of understanding women's negative intra-gender relations. We argue that there are differences in men and women's intra-gender homophily and homosocial social relations. We do not know enough about these concepts, and the concepts of homophily and homosociality have been conflated in the literature. Making such a distinction, while recognizing the inter-relationships of these concepts, may offer more nuanced understanding of women leaders' intra-gender relations.

We propose that women engage differently in homophily and homosociality, and that men's friendships and homosociality are more powerful and embedded within gendered contexts. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) outline how early sociological studies of friendship emphasised "who makes friends with whom" (p. 65)? These studies were supplemented by considering the role of attitudes, values, and social status (e.g., race, sex, class, social standing), the social processes of friendship formation, and how friendships are maintained or disrupted. Our focus here is how "diverse patterns of friendship" (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954, p. 20) emerge through interlocking processes of social relations and cultural values. We want to highlight how different levels of homophily, within particular contexts with cultural values, have gendered consequences that affect relationships with others. For example, we have already argued that excessive levels of homophilous (friendship) relationships between men may lead to dysfunctional implications for an organization (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954); for example, "men's clubs" (homosociality) can skew recruitment decisions in favor of men (Mavin, Williams & Grandy, 2014). However, equivalent intra-gender relations between women in the workplace have received less attention.

Women's friendships outside organizations and work roles are seen to be affectively richer, with men seen as emotionally limited and/or inexpressive and disclosing less than women in their intra-gender relationships (Calwell & Peplau, 1982; David & Brannon, 1976; Pleck, 1976). However, Keisling (2005) challenges this in his project on homosocial desire (i.e., men's social attractiveness to other men) where he argues that men do form friendships and a larger friendship group, and so they must somehow "connect" with one another personally and emotionally. Keisling (2005) argues that men gain power within competitive contexts through friendship (homophily) and "old boys clubs" (homosociality). Homosocial desire emerges through these relationships, and they serve as ways through which men make themselves more attractive to other men. Thus, men's friendships are structurally powerful

and contribute to homosociality (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2005). For example, Fisher and Kinsey's (2014) study of male academics demonstrates that, not only are many men more comfortable with other men, but some are distinctly uncomfortable when outnumbered by women.

Eve (2002) highlights how, in making some friendships, we distance ourselves from others by "marking the social boundary of one's separate identity" (p. 401). This "marking off" process surfaces through gossiping, plotting, and complaining about an individual to keep them excluded. In Morrison's (2009) internet-based study, women were significantly more likely than men to describe the benefits of workplace friendship in terms of social and emotional support in times of stress, while men focused mainly on the career benefits that friends provided them. In contradistinction, Jogulu's (2015) study of women doctors working together found that the comfort women found in working together disappeared as soon as their sense of identity or self-interest was under threat (i.e., in competitive environments such as male-dominated organizations or in elite leader roles). We suggest this limits both women's attractiveness to each other at work and the opportunities to benefit from women to women work-place homophily and subsequent homosociality. The concept of socially sanctioned gender roles becoming more fluid has also contributed to levels of ambiguity and complexity in people's organizational experience (Camussi & Leccardi, 2005). As women move away from traditional sex-role expectations and into performing multiple gender roles (i.e., care-givers and competitive careerists), "structural ambiguity" gives way to complexity and "fears and uncertainties," which construct space for the re-emergence of socially shared prescriptive stereotypes as tools to re-establish order (Camussi & Leccardi, 2005, p. 115). Camussi and Leccardi (2005) conclude that this ambiguity helps to explain how gendered contexts facilitate differences between women—which women can find difficult to accept—and can result in women aligning themselves with men rather than with other women.

Homosociality, as the preference to associate with people like oneself (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2005), has informed gender and organization studies as a way of explaining how men reproduce masculine hegemony and gendered organizations (Gregory, 2009). Leadership studies have yet to fully explore these gendered social processes. Homosociality can be likened to processes of osmosis and can be “seen” through how competence and hierarchy is normalized and “understood” (i.e., a preference for certain types of men and the exclusion of others and women) (Holgersson, 2013, p. 1). However processes of homosociality for women are more complex. Women may have preferences for homophily (friendship) and motivations to network with other women (Cohen & Huffman, 2007), however they are constrained in these relationships by the limited numbers of other women at the same hierarchical level or above (Ibarra, 1992; Ely, 1994). Further we argue, these relationships between women are constrained by gender role stereotypes in that powerful women leaders do not meet other women's expectations of women. Therefore women leaders are less socially attractive to other women at work in terms of homosociality and homosocial desire. Women's potential for homosociality can also be constrained by processes of competition and female misogyny, which facilitate differences between women.

To summarize, the similarities and differences in men and women's intra-gender homophily and homosocial relations are under explored in leadership studies. Men's homosociality contributes insights into how masculinities are reproduced. It is understood that men experience more positive intra-gender relations at work because, while there is competition between men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) which is instrumental (Collinson & Hearn, 2005), men's friendships are perceived as absorbing varying levels of simultaneous cooperation, support, and friendship (Collinson & Hearn, 2005), interconnected with homosocial desire (Keisling, 2005). Men therefore remain largely socially “attractive” to other men at work. Women leaders' homophily and homosociality is complex and under

researched, and even where it can be “seen” it can dissolve when women’s social identities are threatened. There is a research agenda to explore how women leaders engage in friendship (homophily) and solidarity behavior (homosociality) with other women while engaging in the competitive masculinity of leadership. While our recent research has highlighted micro-violence between women leaders, there is still more work to be done to understand how these women maneuver the dialectic of doing gender well and differently simultaneously as women leaders while making themselves socially “attractive to” other women at work. Next, we consider women’s intra-gender competition to further explain women leaders’ negative relations with other women.

### **Women’s Intra-gender Competition**

Competition is an inescapable feature of human relationships (Ruben, 1980), yet it remains under researched in leadership studies. Singleton and Vacca (2007) tell us that interpersonal competition is a dynamic ongoing process between two people—initiated by social comparison and motivated by self-evaluation—as individuals vie to out-do each other on various tasks, abilities, and status dimensions. It is the desire to maximize self-evaluation that drives competition (Singleton & Vacca, 2007). Competition between women, particularly at work, is seldom a focus for study. Yet, it is not that women do not compete with another; instead women actually have more difficulty than men in acknowledging competitive feelings (Rubin, 1985). The argument is that competition is a male norm and, having been “taught to believe it to be a destructive force in human relationships,” women “have learned to abjure competition” (Rubin, 1985, p. 86). Further, Rubin (1985) reported that women seldom acknowledged competition with their friends. Understanding women’s friendships and competition with each other at work is an area we have identified for further research.

Social processes of competition are important in explaining women's negative relations with women. Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987), in their feminist psychoanalytical study of love, envy, and competition in women's friendships, outline how competition is core to a capitalist society and how competitive structures are embedded in social relations. Women, however, "have been constrained in expressing competitive strivings clearly so that they become distorted into petty rivalries, jealousies and envy that infect their relationships with other women" (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987, p. 104). Their thesis is that competition spurs the process of differentiation for women and competition is an act of self-hood that undermines women's search for the self through connection with others. In comparison men search for the self through distinguishing themselves from others. For men, competition is often about attending to difference, while for women it threatens relations with the other; in fact, women often feel "bad" when competing (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). This thesis is highlighted through the dialectic of women's search for social connections as part of their developing self and their social relations with other women at work. Despite the need for social connection, women's homophily and homosociality with other women can disintegrate when their identity or self-interest is threatened in competitive contexts.

From an evolutionary psychology perspective competition is an inherent part of biological status, and women are less likely to move to competition and direct aggression as natural selection has rewarded those who have avoided these behaviors (Campbell, 2004). Historical studies have shown how men competed with men through superiority, promiscuity, intensity, and popularity, while women competed through appearance (Tooke & Camire, 1991; Cashdan, 1998). In Werking's (1997) study, when asked about the sources of competition between women friends, women mentioned "men, clothes, monetary things, looks, lifestyles, weight and credit cards" (p. 55). Our recent research with 81 women elite leaders begins to unpack the complexities of women's competition with each other through

embodiment and leadership (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). We outline how, when asked about competition in an intra-gender context, some women leaders responded with talk of women's bodies and appearance. For example, Alison responded with "'I don't have a size 8 figure,'" illustrating how women's attractiveness appears to be the currency of women's competition "even when no mention is made of what the competition is about" (Campbell, 2004, p.19)" (Mavin & Grandy, 2016: 22). Further examples of women's indirect competition include gossip about sexual reputation (Milhausen & Herold, 1999) where girls "bitch" and discuss other girls' reputations (Laidler & Hunt, 2001). This type of competition is a form of social control (Laidler & Hunt, 2001) and enables girls and women to distance themselves from each other while reaffirming their own identities. As raised earlier, we propose this intra-gender competitive strategy is inter-linked with homophily when women "mark the social boundary" of friendship (Eve, 2002, p. 401).

The internalization of patriarchal values (Campbell, 2004) is one way of understanding women's intra-gender competition, as this can result in "raging misogyny" [or female misogyny] where women belittle "themselves and disassociate from other females" (Tanenbaum, 2011, p. 47). We extend this line of thinking to further understand women leaders' negative relations with other women. Despite women struggling with "being" competitive, Warning and Buchanan (2009) contend that women employ numerous strategies to gain competitive advantage at work. Our own work highlights more hidden intra-gender micro-violence illustrated through women leaders' accounts of intra-gender rivalry: competition, competitiveness, and competing with other women when they do gender well and differently (Mavin, Grandy & Williams, 2014).

Connell (1987) also explains this and argues how in some femininities in different contexts and constructed in a dynamic relationship with hegemonic masculinities, may result in complex resistance (i.e., women performing masculinities by "doing competition," and/or

do gender well and differently simultaneously) (Mavin & Grandy, 2013). When performing resistance in the shape of opposite behaviours to expected gender stereotypes women can be responded to negatively by other women. Further, competition for scarce career opportunities and advancement for women contributes to negative assessment of other women in leader positions. For example, Ely (1994) studied women law partners where women were critical of other women's credentials as women and as lawyers.

Discussions of why there is competition between women in organizations are rare, and performing as a "competitive woman" remains a negative construction. Women leaders risk negative responses from men and women when they express that they are competitive and/or ambitious. Moreover, while there are unconscious and conscious competitive strategies between them, women are generally unaware of why this happens in gendered contexts or of the implications. Including women's intra-gender competition into our theory of women leaders' negative social relations with other women, there is now a research agenda; this builds upon Campbell's (2004) call to further explore women's competition within alternatives sites and Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) feminist approach to reveal and deconstruct women's discomfort with competition. Further research is needed into how women's competition with other women emerges when gendered hierarchies are disrupted by women leaders who do gender well and differently simultaneously. As the final element in accounting for women leaders' intra-gender negative relations, we now turn to the concept of female misogyny (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b).

### **Female Misogyny**

Mavin (2006a, 2006b, 2008) originally conceptualized female misogyny in her research into experiences of academic women in UK business schools, and then she extended into studies exploring women's relationships with each other in organizations, management, and leadership. Her argument is that, as women in powerful positions attempt to navigate the

complexities of being both women and managers/leaders, they face female misogyny and negative assessments from other women in management whose expectations of solidarity and assistance in progression into senior roles are not met (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b). Female misogyny is understood as socially, culturally and contextually constructed. It takes into account social processes, behaviors, and activities that women engage in—consciously or unconsciously—when they suppress, undermine, exclude, and stigmatize other women. In definitional form, female misogyny denotes women's "hatred," dislike, mistrust, or entrenched prejudice against other women as a sexually defined group.

Relational female misogyny (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b) between women in organizations is facilitated by gendered contexts. It is a means by which women are reminded of their subordinate positions. Mavin's (2006a, 2006b, 2008) thesis is that, as women disturb the gendered order by progressing up the organizational hierarchy or by expressing desire for power, they can invoke negative responses from both men *and* women, who are enculturated to associate power with masculinities and men. Women who *desire* power then fail to live up to gendered feminine communal stereotypes associated with women generally (Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010). Female misogyny, therefore, emerges from the complex way in which gender order is embedded and the underlying assumptions and behaviors that socially construct and impact everyday experiences for women.

It is possible to see female misogyny in women's assessments of other women who perform as leaders counter-stereotypically (Mavin, Grandy & Williams, 2014). As successful women in men-dominated roles set a high benchmark for the assessment of other women within organizations, women can strategically reject these women to prevent unfavorable assessments of themselves, (Parks-Stamm, Heilman & Hearn, 2008). Women become "socially unattractive" to other women (Rudman & Phelan, 2008) when they engage in activities with women where the outcomes have implications for their own evaluations at

work. Rudman and Phelan (2008) argue that this is unconscious self-oppression, in that even when women are seen as competent, they are unattractive to other women. Competition between women, therefore, restricts possibilities for women leaders' friendships and solidarity behavior, and it constrains women's social attractiveness to other women.

We have argued previously (Mavin, Williams & Grandy, 2014) that female misogyny emerges when successful women are perceived to be unlikeable "norm violators" (Parks-Stamm et al., 2008, p. 245) and thus become an identity threat to other women (Parks-Stamm et al., 2008), threatening the status quo and gendered order. Women, rather than finding themselves attractive in organizations, distance themselves from each other through competitive strategies and intra-gender micro-violence (Mavin, Williams & Grandy, 2014) and/or reject other women as threatening their identities. These social processes can also inter-relate with a friendship boundary marking highlighted earlier (Eve, 2002), facilitating distances between women and constraining women leaders' opportunities for *positive* relationships with other women.

Integrating female misogyny into a theory of women's negative relations with other women enables a richer understanding of how women negotiate organizations and leadership. Female misogyny is dynamically interconnected with women's doing of gender well and differently, intra-gender friendships, homosocial relations, and competition. It is constructed and reproduced within the prevailing patriarchal social order. Therefore, female misogyny offers a further contribution in understanding women's negative relations with each other.

### **Why the "Dark Side" of Women Leaders' Relationships?**

The elements we have discussed in explaining women's negative relations are interlinked, fluid, simultaneous, at times contradictory. The elements highlight the ambiguity, ambivalence and struggle women leaders experience in gendered contexts. When women leaders attempt to secure self-coherence women can engage in negative social relations with

each other and re-cast traditional gendered norms (e.g., Queen Bee and women as unsuitable for leadership) (Mavin, Grandy & Williams, 2014). Our theory of women leaders' negative intra-gender relations is grounded in women's relational, socially constructed experiences within complex, dynamic, interlocking gendered practices and processes.

Through the interlocking elements of our theory, we begin to see how threats to women's identity constrain and facilitate negative intra-gender behavior between women as active subjects. Differences and fragmentation between women, which threatens women's identity, have emerged throughout the elements we have discussed. This fragmentation between women and divisions in social relations constrains challenges to the status quo (Mavin, 2006a) and critically constrains normalizing processes for women leaders. For example, women engage in female misogyny when they respond negatively towards women leaders who do not meet expectations of the gender binary (e.g., through emphasized femininity or solidarity behaviour), and they are unaware of or fail to acknowledge the complexities of the gendered organizing context. These relations overly emphasise individual women's behavior, or non-behavior (e.g., naming women as Queen Bees) as the root of the problem (Mavin, 2006a, 2006b, 2008). In doing so, women contribute to the maintenance of the "individual woman as problem," which perpetuates gendered hierarchies in organizations.

Such negative relations between and among women leaders can also facilitate intra-gender micro-violence as they negotiate elite leadership in competitive masculine contexts (Mavin, Grandy and Williams, 2014). A further example is how women's embodiment in elite leader roles can be constrained in a context of intra-gender relations (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Thus explaining why women's negative relations occur in gendered contexts also helps us understand how, as a consequence of the reproduction of gender, women are reminded of their subordinate position by themselves, by men, and by their women colleagues (Fotaki, 2011). Women fragment and separate from each other through processes of negative social relations, which can limit positive allegiances between women and reaffirm women's alliance with men in gender dynamics. Yet, dialectically, as women develop a sense of self in relation with others, the threat of their separation from other women also facilitates negative relations between them. This highlights how subjectivity is fragmented, unstable, and constructed dynamically through relations (Mumby & Ashcraft, 2006). From our theorizing, we argue that knowing more about women leaders' social relations with other women at the nexus of friendships, solidarity behaviours, competition, and collaboration is a fruitful research agenda to progress women leaders' normalization in senior positions.

A further contribution in theorizing women's negative intra-gender relations is to talk of the dark side of women leaders' relationships with each other at work. If, despite complexities in relations between men, their intra-gender relations can be characterized by competition, cooperation, friendship, and support—albeit potentially instrumentally (Collinson & Hearn, 2005)—then the academy could usefully explore women's intra-gender relations in organizations and raise consciousness to gendered contexts possibly strengthening women's agency. Raising consciousness of men and women as to why women's negative intra-gender relations emerge can also circumvent the ways in which these

relations are subsequently used against women to legitimize their minority status as leaders (Sheppard & Aquino, 2014).

We acknowledge that women leaders' negative intra-gender relations are not experienced by every woman or every woman in the same way. We also recognize that power is intertwined with the construction and enactment of the consequences of these social relations as part of the gendering of organization. This theory gives regard to the gendered contexts within which social processes and co-constructed experiences take place, including agency, structure, culture, patriarchy, and hegemonic masculinity. Our theory also accounts for ambiguity, instability, and fluidization of gender roles; the doing of gender well and differently simultaneously; and the continued evaluation of men and women against gender binaries. Power is positioned as key to gendered contexts in that women leaders' structural positioning, and the power they hold and ways of doing gender they perform, influences the differential social relations between women. These gendered contexts are salient in how women's socially constructed intra-gender experiences are shaped, constructed, and constrained within them.

### **Conclusion**

Women leaders' negative intra-gender relations are an under researched area worthy of exploration. We acknowledge that, in speaking the unspeakable, we run the risk of perpetuating practices that blame women for these relations. However, in taking into account the complex and dialectical gendered contexts, practices, and processes through which these relations unfold, we offer an opportunity to raise consciousness and challenge ways of being, knowing, and doing. We are aware how these negative relations can be used against women to legitimize their minority status as leaders. Through our theory we see how (1) women work to negotiate, resist, and comply to dialectical experiences and (2) how women's

negative intra-gender relations take place within gendered contexts that exacerbate differences between women.

As researchers we recognize that social constructions are neither arbitrary nor the product of consensus among social groups; rather they are grounded in power and “reflect the ability of the powerful to ‘fix’ meaning in ways that privilege those forms of reality that serve the interests of the powerful” (Mumby, 1998, pp.167-168). Our contribution is a theory of women leaders’ negative intra-gender relations that offers new insights into gendered organizing processes, and it explains these social relations as grounded within gendered contexts where women engage in a dynamic interplay: a nexus of doing gender well and differently, homophily, homosociality, intra-gender competition and female misogyny.

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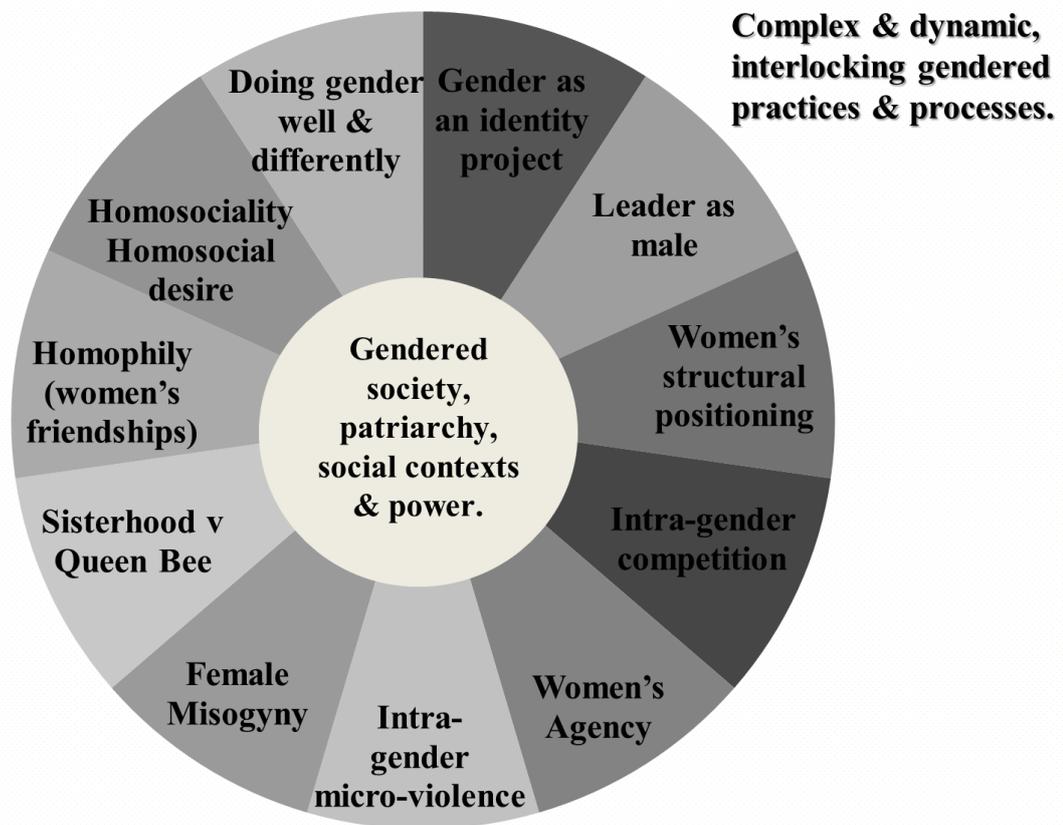
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**Figure 1. Women Leaders: A Theory of Women's Negative Intra-gender Relations**