Paula Burkinshaw
Lancaster University, UK

'Fitting in': women Vice Chancellors' experiences of higher education gendered leadership cultures (0270)

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Background

Morley (Morley, 2005) writes about the silences around what I propose as higher education leadership communities of practice of masculinities, and data from my eighteen research participants suggests that these silences are embedded and go unchallenged. Bagilhole and White (2011) found that their respondents disliked the 'macho, boys-club' style of management teams and wondered why it is that the people who dislike this behaviour do not challenge it. Although they recognise that women who are assertive and challenging in this way risk being labelled 'trouble makers', what they could not understand is why it is that men who find these types of leadership styles unacceptable do not challenge them. My theoretical framework around 'leadership as communities of practice of masculinities' helps explain this conundrum, for these communities do not include men per se, nor are all women excluded. Instead, leadership communities of practice of masculinities prevail because they endorse and reward certain types of masculinities. The hegemonic type, most simply, and people (whether women or men) not 'fitting in' with this frame of *source of coherence* of the leadership community in which women (and men) have to embrace mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of performances will be excluded and ultimately at best remain in 'legitimate peripheral participation'.

Thus I am arguing in this paper that higher education leadership communities of practice of masculinities perpetuate because: full participants are able to act as definers of reality and thus identity; members are constantly regulated mutually, panoptically, symmetrically and asymmetrically; and because power relations and knowledge forms are integral to them (Paechter, 2006). Paechter argues that femininities and masculinities are performative, socially constructed and temporal which means that there is a multiplicity of femininities and masculinities inhabited and enacted by different people and by the same people at different times. This is apparent from the findings of my study where my participants talk about the leadership practices of themselves and their colleagues within a fluid spectrum spanning femininities and masculinities.

Theoretical Framework
Paechter uses the idea of communities of practice (sites of learning) as a way of thinking about the formation and perpetuation of localised femininities and masculinities and argues

therefore that femininities and masculinities can be treated as communities of practice. So I argue that leadership in higher education constitutes communities of practice because people learn how to do leadership through these leadership communities of practice. Moreover, leadership operates as communities of practice of masculinities because learning leadership in higher education means, for the most part, learning masculinities leadership.

Knowing that one fits in to a particular community of practice is an important aspect of understanding one's identity (Wenger, 1998), and Paechter applies Wenger's work around identity (together with his criteria for communities of practice) to her theoretical perspectives about communities of practice of masculinities. I extrapolate both their theoretical perspectives to underpin my theoretical framework of 'leadership as communities of practice of masculinities'.

First, I address the negotiation of meaning whereby communities of practice of femininities and masculinities are involved in the constant production, reproduction and negotiation of what it is to be a woman or a man. Here I argue that there is also negotiation of meaning in higher education leadership communities of practice because women and men are learning what it is to be leaders and are learning that being leaders requires performing masculinities.

Second, I address the issue of practice as a source of coherence which results in a shared repertoire of practices which are acceptable to communities of practice of femininities and masculinities. I argue that there is a shared repertoire of leadership practices which are acceptable to leadership communities of practice and that these invariably involve masculinities practices, and my research participants provided many examples of this.

Third, I focus on communities of practice as a learning process. Paechter (2003) interprets this to mean that communities represent dynamic shared histories of learning where at no point is practice fully learned, and where most people are members of several communities simultaneously. Consequently femininities and masculinities are in perpetual learning. I argue that higher education leadership communities of practice are in continual flux, are changing and being made and done throughout time. Equally, members of higher education leadership communities of practice are also members of several other communities of practice at the same time in both their public and private spaces and therefore that leadership represents a state of perpetual learning.

Fourth, practice as a boundary suggests that femininities and masculinities are defined in part by the 'othering' of outsiders, and although femaleness and maleness are clearly marked on our bodies (making it more likely that communities of practice of which we become members will be correspondingly feminine or masculine) this relation is neither direct nor straightforward. In relation to my theoretical framework of leadership as communities of practice of masculinities, although I am suggesting that they too operate as a boundary, I argue that this boundary is not created by whether one has female or male bodies but is determined by performance: whether or not one is performing leadership

masculinities. Clearly the boundary works in leadership communities of practice by 'othering' leadership femininities.

Last, I address the issue of practice as local, which Paechter (2003) interprets as meaning that power/knowledge relations within and between localised feminine and masculine communities of practice contribute to and underpin power/knowledge relations within and between wider practices. Thus there are symbiotic relationships between the local nature of communities of practice and their relationship to wider communities and social structures. Similarly, although leadership communities of practice are necessarily local in form, culminating at the micro level across institutions, they are also seeped in the context for leadership across higher education and the wider context of leadership in society.

Summary

In summary, members of leadership communities of practice of masculinities have to work hard all the time on earning their membership and 'fitting in', as all memberships are temporally-determined. Consequently, masculinities have to be repeatedly demonstrated to maintain the status quo and to keep the community 'intact'. This paper analyses the data generated from the hitherto 'silent and strange' voices of women VCs in relation to my theoretical framework around leadership as communities of practice of masculinities.

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