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Exploring Feminine Leadership: Case Studies and Contemporary Perspective

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Abstract

Studies on the role of women in leadership roles in business in this area are scarce. In order to increase female involvement in the corporate sector and enable them to attain leadership roles, this study investigates the elements that contribute to the success of businesswomen in Bahrain. This will open the door for more women to pursue high positions and launch their own companies. Two schools of thought disagree on the question of women's power. One affirms that men and women vary from one another. It holds that although males adopt more directive, transactional, and achievement-oriented leadership styles, women are typically more participatory, supporting, and transformational leaders who prioritize communication, collaboration, affiliation, and nurturing. Women and Leadership give business professionals, academics, and any woman who wants to lead historical background and theoretical context. This chapter compares two well-known women leaders: Australian feminist thinker, activist, and policymaker Anne Summers, whose career has included grassroots activism, journalism, and government involvement; and former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who is widely renowned for her compassionate leadership, open crisis communication, and policy focus on the welfare of all. The chapter critically examines how historical-socio-political contexts, institutional positionality, gendered leadership and perspectives in modern world styles interact to influence leadership practices, discourses, and results using a comparative case-study methodology.

Keywords: Women, Leadership, Anne Summer, Jacinda Ardern, Government, Welfare.

Introduction

Women in an Evolving Society examines how gender stereotypes and significant women's values have influenced family dynamics in recent years. We are reminded that progress is still being made and that, although gradually, the progression toward equal treatment of women is on the right track. Women and Social Change look at particular instances of how societies around the world have changed. The book Women in Politics focuses on the challenges women face in assuming more prominent roles in politics, as well as the different paths that women have taken in achieving these positions. Furthermore, it is clear

that one of the core ideas of power in our culture is the sexual dominance of males over subservient women. This is due to the patriarchal nature of our culture as it has always been. Therefore, it is depressing to hear sexist statements like the recent declaration made by Rodrigo Roa Duterte, the president of the Philippines, that women should not hold leadership positions due to their emotional differences from males.

The word "politics" was used in Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* to refer to arrangements where one group of people controls another, or power-structured interactions. It was used while discussing the sexes since a word like that is particularly useful in conveying the true nature of their relative status, both historically and currently (man and female). Thus, politics has anything to do with the concept of power dynamics, according to its traditional formal definition. Interpersonal interactions and relationships between members of separate and cohesive categories, such as social classes, castes, sexes, and groups of people, can be used to describe these power links. Male domination is neither natural nor acceptable, according to feminist campaigners and scholars who have contextualized and contested these patterns. In the framework of sexual politics, it was proposed that a revolution of sexuality was necessary to eliminate patriarchy or to break off this idea of dominance and subordination. The concept of male superiority and the traditional conditioning that upholds it in terms of rank, role, and temperament are the targets of this gender revolution. The globally recognized goal outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is balanced political involvement and power sharing between men and women in decision-making. The systematic components of political leadership, particularly the part gender identity plays in exercising global political leadership, have received little attention in political science. Future studies should investigate these gaps as well as other issues like what female leaders really do with their authority once they are in a position of authority, whether or not women's leadership genuinely affects peace or the interests of women's groups, and the political effects of women's leadership.

As a result, women have created a society founded on feminist ideals, forcing males to live in a community that is significantly different from what it is now. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women produced the "Women in politics: 2025" map, which shows updated statistics for women in national parliaments and executive posts as of January 1, 2025. These figures show how men are overrepresented in global decision-making, which hinders the advancement of gender equality in politics.

Just 25 nations have female heads of state or government, while 27.2% of parliamentarians are female. Less than one in four cabinet ministers worldwide are women (22.9%). According to the 2025 map, males dominate in policy domains such as foreign affairs, financial and budgetary affairs, home affairs, and defence, while women head significant human rights, women's equality, and social protection policy portfolios.

The Chapter employ a comparative qualitative case-study methodology, which consists of the following steps:

- reconstructing each leader's career and signature actions from secondary sources;
- identifying recurrent leadership practices (e.g., rhetoric, decision-making style, institutional strategies);
- evaluating the impact on public discourse, policy, and institutional change; and

- drawing wider implications for theories of feminine leadership (ethics of care, relational authority, normative challenges).

Biographical summaries, significant published works, and peer-reviewed evaluations of crisis leadership are important sources.

Evidence that women's leadership enhances political decision-making processes is well-established and continues to expand. For instance, a study on panchayats (local councils) in India found that regions with women-led councils had 62% more drinking water projects than those with men-led councils. There is a clear causal link between daycare provision and the representation of women on local councils in Norway.

According to one study, women are less successful, educated, and politically active than men, and this gender disparity in political engagement has implications for political participation. In contrast, a recent study found that women seem to disregard their own true political preferences in favour of the dominant, male-oriented view of politics. Only 22 of the United Nations' member nations have a female head of state or government, and 119 have never had a female leader, according to the UN Women Report for 2021. This indicates that if current trends continue, it will take another 130 years to achieve gender representation in the highest positions of leadership.

Earlier feminist leadership models often framed “feminine” leadership as naturally empathetic or nurturing, inadvertently reinforcing gender stereotypes. Contemporary perspectives reject this biological determinism and emphasize *intersectionality* — how gender interacts with race, class, sexuality, and culture to shape leadership possibilities. For instance, Ardern's global visibility is enabled by her positionality within a progressive welfare state, while Summers' influence was mediated by her whiteness and access to elite institutions. These observations underscore that feminine leadership is not universal but embedded in particular power structures. Discussions on feminine leadership in the twenty-first century have moved past essentialist ideas of gender difference to emphasize the social construction, intersectionality, and contextual adaptability of leadership styles. Leadership, according to modern feminist theorists, must be viewed as a gendered and politically charged practice of relationship and care.

Case study1: Anne Summers: Feminist Leadership in the State, Media, and Movements

- **Background**

In Deniliquin, New South Wales, Australia, Anne Fairbairn Summers was born in 1945. Being raised in a Catholic, conservative, working-class household, she was exposed to the constrictive gender norms prevalent in Australia in the middle of the 20th century. These early life events had a significant impact on her later feminist awareness. Summers's activism was sparked by her exposure to political discussions and the burgeoning feminist movement at the University of Sydney, where she continued her education.

At this time, second-wave feminism—a movement that prioritized social, economic, and cultural equality in addition to legal rights—was beginning to take shape in Australia. Summers got heavily involved in the women's liberation movement and contributed to the development of its Australian organizational base. One of the key works of Australian feminism is Summers' seminal work, *Damned Whores and God's Police* (1975). The book

analysed the patriarchal dichotomies that influenced Australian gender ideology, drawing on historical and sociological research:

- "Damned whores" stood for women who were disenfranchised due to their sexual autonomy or moral transgressions.
- Reputable, domesticated women who maintained ethical conduct and social order were referred to as "God's law enforcement."

Summers maintained that male dominance in both public and private life was upheld by using these two categories to regulate women's behaviour. By challenging established structures such as the state, church, and family, the book was instrumental in bringing Australian women's history into the public eye. As a fundamental component of feminist literature, it is still taught and discussed today.

In addition to her scholarly contributions, Summers actively participated in institutional reform and women's welfare. She was a co-founder of the first women's refuge for victims of domestic abuse in Australia, the Elsie Women's Refuge, located in Glebe, Sydney, in 1974. This program served as a template for comparable services across the country. Additionally, she helped found *Refractory Girl*, an early feminist publication in Australia that served as a forum for radical feminist activism and theory. Her dedication to tying theory and practice together and transforming feminist concepts into social change was demonstrated by these initiatives.

- **Journalism and Leadership**

Summers' career grew considerably into journalism, where she used media outlets to promote social reform, equality, and openness. She became well-known as an investigative journalist for *The National Times* for her unafraid coverage of political wrongdoing, corruption, and gender discrimination. Her approach to journalism blended an ethical dedication to social justice with empirical rigor.

Later, she was appointed editor of *Good Weekend* magazine, which was a division of *The Sydney Morning Herald*. She changed the editorial tone of the magazine to cover gender relations, social issues, and cultural change. Her entry into the media was a prime example of how feminist leadership could democratize access to public discourse and reframe popular narratives.

Summers had a global media career as well. In New York, she was the chief editor of *Ms.* magazine, a well-known feminist journal that Gloria Steinem founded. Summers was able to share ideas and tactics across national and cultural boundaries thanks to this role, which put her in a global feminist network.

- **Institutional Engagement and Government Leadership**

The path taken by Summers exemplifies a unique kind of feminist leadership that effectively transitioned from activism into official political institutions. She was Head of the Office of the Status of Women (1983–1986) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet under Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

In this role, she was in charge of monitoring women's employment representation, advising the government on gender policy, and incorporating feminist viewpoints into national

governance. During her tenure, significant reforms in family policy and workplace equity were made possible by the institutionalization of feminist concerns within the Australian state apparatus. She moved from protest politics to bureaucratic advocacy during this stage of her career, a movement "inside the system" that showcased her leadership versatility. Summers demonstrated that feminist influence could transcend oppositional activism and reach into the actual process of policymaking by navigating the conflicts between feminist ideals and bureaucratic constraints.

- **Later Career and Ongoing Influence**

Even in the twenty-first century, Summers is still a well-known author, public intellectual, and activist. Her later writings, like her memoir *Unfettered and Alive* (2018) and *The End of Equality* (2003), examine the advancements and unresolved issues of feminism. These writings highlight her ongoing interest in issues of equality, representation, and power by fusing social critique with introspection. She has also received various accolades, such as: For services to women and journalism, he was named an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1989; honorary doctorates from a number of Australian universities; and continuous acknowledgment as a key player in the feminist history of Australia.

The career of Anne Summers exemplifies a smart and pragmatic example of female leadership. Her journey from activist and scholar to journalist and legislator exemplifies the multifaceted approaches needed to accomplish gender justice in intricate institutional frameworks. Her leadership style is based on empathy, analytical clarity, and the capacity to function in both governmental and grassroots settings. Summers left an enduring legacy for upcoming generations of feminist leaders by turning feminist discourse in Australia from a marginal movement into a national conversation through her writing, activism, and policymaking.

- **Conclusion**

Feminist viewpoints have a significant influence on social change, as demonstrated by Anne Summers' incredible journey from grassroots organization to powerful leadership in the media and government. Her enduring legacy not only transformed Australian discourse on equal treatment for women but also inspired generations after her of feminist leaders to effectively negotiate and modify complex institutional landscapes.

Case Study II: Jacinda Ardern — Empathy and Governance in the Global Spotlight

- **Background**

Jacinda Ardern, born in 1980, became one of the most well-known politicians of the twenty-first century when she became prime minister of New Zealand in 2017 at the age of 37. Her quick ascent to power was indicative of a generational and ideological change in New Zealand politics. Having led the Labour Party to victory following ten years of conservative rule, Ardern embodied an alternative political philosophy based on empathy, social justice, and inclusivity by articulating a vision of "kindness and strength".

Her premiership fell during a period of overlapping crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–21), the White Island volcanic eruption (2019), and the Christchurch Mosque shootings (2019). As a result of overcoming these obstacles, Ardern rose to prominence as a global representation of compassionate leadership, drawing notice for her policy choices as

well as the moral tone and emotional intelligence that defined her political speeches. Her rise can therefore be interpreted as a component of a larger trend toward what academics refer to as post-heroic or transformational leadership, in which the conventional qualities of dominance and authority are replaced by relational ethics, empathy, and authenticity.

- **Leadership Practices**

Many people point to Ardern's response to the March 2019 terrorist attack in Christchurch as a turning point in her leadership style. Her choice to wear a hijab while meeting the families of the victims and her affirmative statement that "They are us" demonstrated solidarity that went beyond political rhetoric. Ardern, who embodied as "ethic of care" in governance, placed more emphasis on unity and collective mourning than on retaliation or securitization. Her method has been viewed by academics as a feminist reinterpretation of political power, emphasizing moral rectitude and emotional resonance as tools for fostering national reconciliation. Jacinda Ardern demonstrated how interpersonal skills can be used as a kind of political capital by transforming compassion into authority and confidence through her sympathetic communication during times of crisis.

Jacinda Ardern demonstrated how interpersonal skills can be used as a kind of political capital by transforming compassion into authority and confidence through her sympathetic communication during times of crisis. Through policy, Ardern aimed to institutionalize empathy in addition to crisis management. Fiscal governance was refocused on social and environmental indicators instead of traditional economic growth metrics with the introduction of the Wellbeing Budget in 2019. With its emphasis on child welfare, mental health, and sustainable development, this framework signalled a paradigm shift toward human-centered governance. The project demonstrated her view that the measure of a successful government should be based on the well-being of the populace rather than GDP, which established New Zealand as a test bed for progressive global economic policy.

Ardern's leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic was notable for its open and regular communication. Her casual live streams from her home and daily press briefings combined scientific advice with human warmth, reassuring the public with her knowledge and compassion. This communication style promoted extraordinary levels of public trust and compliance in addition to demythologizing governmental procedures. Academics have observed that Ardern's candour questioned established power structures, demonstrating relational transparency, a fundamental aspect of authentic leadership theory.

- **Impact and Legacy**

Modern expectations of executive leadership in liberal democracies were redefined by Ardern's reputation as a kind and emotionally astute leader. She showed that empathy can be a political strength that can mobilize collective resilience rather than being viewed as a weakness. However, Ardern's government faced ongoing difficulties in addressing housing affordability, inflation, and infrastructure bottlenecks—structural issues that tempered her reformist agenda. On the international stage, her leadership sparked a renewed conversation about feminist governance, the ethics of care, and the role of emotional labour in politics. For instance, Ardern's regular use of live streaming on Facebook sessions promoted a close

relationship between the government and the people, which is an innovation in democratic governance that matches current changes in political communication.

The personal costs of maintaining empathetic leadership in a highly visible, media-intensive environment were highlighted by her resignation in early 2023, which she attributed to exhaustion and a desire to "make room for someone else with the energy to lead."

- **Conclusion**

Ultimately, Ardern's tenure underscores both the potential and the precarity of compassionate governance in an era of global uncertainty. Her leadership invites ongoing scholarly reflection on whether emotional intelligence and moral clarity can be institutionalised within democratic systems without overburdening the individuals who embody them.

The leadership of Jacinda Ardern challenges conventional ideas of political power by demonstrating a revolutionary approach to governance in which emotional intelligence and empathy are not only accepted but institutionalized. In addition to highlighting the personal costs such an approach may result in in a demanding political environment, her legacy is a potent reminder of the potential for compassionate government to promote resilience and inclusivity.

The Prospects for Female Leadership

In the future, feminine leadership becomes increasingly seen as a revolutionary approach that can tackle difficult global issues like inequality, climate change, and the deterioration of democracy. Researchers emphasize the necessity of hybrid models that include structural competency, relational empathy, and tactical decision-making. Thus, a wider worldwide trend toward leadership ideologies that prioritize compassion, inclusivity, and moral clarity above dominance is foreshadowed by the cases of Summers and Ardern.

Conclusion

Women exhibit political leadership by advocating for issues of gender equality, such as the abolition of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform, and by working across party lines through parliamentary women's caucuses—even in the most politically contentious settings. Although there has been a global increase in the symbolic potency of feminine leadership models, their institutional adoption is still unequal. Compared to "masculine" attributes like aggressiveness and control, "feminine" traits like empathy, teamwork, and vulnerability are still underestimated in many parliamentary and professional contexts. Both Summers' and Ardern's careers demonstrate this ambivalence: while their leadership approaches were widely praised, the media frequently framed them via gendered storylines of emotion, parental responsibility, or "softness."

Therefore, modern feminist theorists contend that leadership should be redefined as an ethical practice that incorporates caring, justice, and responsibility as essential components of power rather than as a gendered performance.

Through a comparative analysis of Anne Summers and Jacinda Ardern, the changing roles of women are examined, highlighting the complex nature of female leadership and its significant social influence. A pragmatic leadership style that unites theory and practice, Summers' journey from grassroots feminist activism to prominent positions in the media and government has reshaped the conversation in Australia about institutional reform and gender

equality. The strength of advocacy ingrained in established institutions is demonstrated by her ability to negotiate and alter deeply ingrained patriarchal structures. A contemporary, transformational leadership style that places a premium on social justice, emotional intelligence, and the welfare of the group during times of crisis is demonstrated by Ardern's compassionate and inclusive governance in New Zealand. Her focus on relationship openness and a care ethic reignites the discussion of feminism in politics, bringing to light the potential and difficulties of this strategy in demanding political environments.

All of these portraits show how gendered leadership styles can have different but complementary effects on institutional culture, public discourse, and policy because they are shaped by particular sociopolitical contexts. They serve as a reminder that achieving gender equality and understanding governance calls for a variety of approaches, from Summers' journey from activist to policymaker to Ardern's exemplification of kindness and tenacity at the highest levels of government. Crucially, their contributions encourage continued consideration of how to maintain feminist and moral leadership without compromising the welfare of those in positions of authority.

Summers and Ardern's lessons encourage a more inclusive leadership vision that prioritizes empathy, pragmatism, and transformative action as societies continue to change. Their efforts set the stage for future female leaders as well as anyone wishing to rethink governance and power in ways that prioritize social progress, equity, and care. This comparative study concludes that even though there are still obstacles to overcome, the way these leaders have paved the way brings us one step closer to a society that is more equitable and compassionate.

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