

Caring and Power in Female Leadership:

A Philosophical Approach

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Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Caring and Power in Female Leadership: A Philosophical Approach
Series: "Schwung"; Critical Curating and Aesthetic Management for Art,
Business and Politics

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This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0771-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0771-5

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PREFACE

This book has not been easy to send out into the world. Many other research topics, writing projects, and life experiences pushed what might have been a related book, in earlier eras, in different frames, to the margins, the periphery, the backburner. The issues, the themes, and the arguments, however, have developed, and been renewed, in various academic and popular discussions, and have not faded as areas of concern. Finding a book series focused on the intersections of philosophy, business, and art and open to notions of relational aesthetics and the “sharing of the sensible,” helped motivate a reframing of my work on power and care. The result is a philosophical argument that takes a firmly interdisciplinary approach. So, in this guise, at this intersection, in this mode, the book is complete. I thank Pierre Guillet de Monthoux, Lewis Gordon, Paget Henry, Jacque Reeder, René ten Bos, Mollie Painter-Morland, David Bevan, the late Sandra Bartky, Ulla Holm, Kelly Oliver, Lynne Tirrell, Paula Gottlieb, Lester Hunt, Noël Carroll, Michael Apple, Ivan Soll, Harry Brighouse, Heather Maxwell, Jane Burchfield, Suzanne Knecht, Alladi Venkatesh, the late Larry Fagin, Connie Kreiser, Shannon Cantrell, Melanie Halpin-Dye, Debbie Beck, Kathy Stoddard, Cindy Gerou, Penny Milliken, Jeff Spaulding, Stephen Geneseo, Jeff Parness, Ralph Davis, Anthony Weston, Frithjof Bergmann, Keith Borgerson, Jane Roland Martin, Regenia Gagnier, John Dupré, Barbara Harris, and my academic advisor, the late Claudia Card. Extra thanks to Jonathan Schroeder. This book is dedicated to my mother, Mary Lillian Earl Borgerson (1929–2017).

INTRODUCTION

LEADING ON THE GLASS CLIFF: POWER, CARE, AND INTERSUBJECTIVE ETHICS

Can philosophical understandings of tensions between power and care—as ethical perspectives as well as aspects of everyday experience—shed light on roadblocks that disrupt the potential of women in leadership? A report from the Rockefeller Foundation entitled *Women in Leadership: Why It Matters* foregrounds the realities that “Across geographies and income levels, disparities between men and women persist in the form of pay gaps, uneven opportunities for advancement, and unbalanced representation in important decision-making” (Rockefeller Foundation 2016). A preconception expressed by 78% of respondents in the report’s survey was quite simply that women are less effective leaders than men. Nevertheless, as an article in *Fast Company* titled, “Americans Don’t Realize How Big the Gender Leadership Gap Really Is,” keenly suggested, “although only 5% of Fortune 1000 companies have a female CEO, they generate 7% of the Fortune 1000’s total revenue and outperform the S&P 500 index during the course of their respective tenures” (Dishman 2016). Female leaders are positive forces in businesses and organizations; but various biases hold women back. Or, push them forward. Psychological research has demonstrated the existence of a *glass cliff*, which describes a phenomenon whereby women are promoted to leadership roles in organizations and corporations that are on the brink of failure (Ryan and Haslam, 2005). The glass cliff casts a shadow over women’s tendencies and capacities that might lend themselves to an interpretation of being “good” in certain situations: for example, capacities that seem to suit women to crisis scenarios, such as, a failing company.

Complications for female leaders often result from traditional, or at least habitual, preconceptions of female characteristics and ways of being (Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2013; Pullen and Vachhani 2018). For example, even on the supposedly positive path of promotion, organizational expectations for the ways in which women’s stereotypically feminine traits, such as caring or empathetic dispositions, may function in

business practice create tensions for female leaders. In other words, at the same time that the glass ceiling keeps women and minorities from attaining top corporate positions, glass cliff processes and practices may place female leaders in compromised circumstances. In turn, female leaders must question the timing and context of their promotions. “Stay vigilant,” declares a *Fast Company* article, “How Women and Minority Leaders Can Avoid the Glass Cliff” (Berhané 2016). Female leaders are cautioned to “know why you are being chosen,” “know what to expect,” and “know who you’re dealing with.” Even with these duties of self-awareness, and admonitions to know, and in part control, the often unknowable, the biases and preconceptions remain.

And what of the call for bringing notions of care, typically associated with female ways of being, more explicitly into business and organizational contexts? Could making a place in leadership scenarios for traditionally associated so-called female characteristics and behaviors increase the chance of failure for female leaders? In recent memory, corporations in crisis from, Hewlett Packard to General Motors, have named women to leadership positions; and some researchers have noted the timing and context of these appointments. Indeed, a broad stream of research has shown that women were often favored over men when choosing a candidate to lead an ailing or scandal ridden organization (Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt 2009; Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2013). Criteria considered crucial in the choice of female leaders for crisis scenarios often included an emotion-related capacity that raised expectations for women’s ability to deal with crisis (Ryan et al. 2007, 271). The glass cliff suggests leadership on precarious ground, and for various reasons and in diverse circumstances female leaders have found themselves managing just such abyss-edge crises (Haslam and Ryan 2008, Ryan et al. 2007). Crucially, glass cliff expectations appear to intersect with stereotypical notions of female tendencies to mobilize stereotypical feminine traits, including concern for relationships, that often are fundamental to what has been called “care ethics” (e.g., Borgerson 2007, Carothers and Reis 2013).

The field of philosophy took up discussion of care ethics in the 1980s, often placing care ethics in contrast with Kantian ethics rooted in notions of duty. Other debates that grew out of these conversations contrasted a *feminine* care ethic with a *feminist* care ethic, and suggested that stereotypical feminine notions—such as emotional attachment and self-sacrifice, often embedded in care ethics—potentially undermined female *agency*, that is, the ability to make things happen, and power, not to mention moral relevance from a Kantian perspective (see also Kuhse, Singer, and, Rickard 1998).

Some female leaders' experiences with management styles suggest underlying problems associated with female socialization and female subject positions that are commonly related to a caring ethos. If female leadership evokes stereotypical expectations for caring traits and interactions, this often creates disadvantage in contexts which stage leadership as importantly constituted by male-embodied, but also stereotypically masculine, practices that historically have proceeded with no mention of care (Gmür 2006; Meriläinen, Tienari, and Valtonen 2013). Even when successful leadership styles are known to include, or require, care-based values, such as a sense of "us" (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2010), a basic disadvantage persists against females as leaders (Hughes 2009). Simply put, for females, social, intersubjective, and organizational engagement often includes the manifestation of so-called caring traits, which contrasts with varied notions and practices of power, a traditional path to organizational advancement.

The investigations in this book arise from the following concern: caring characteristics and caring interactions when embodied by women at work, and in everyday life, appear to undermine positive perceptions of female agency, reinforcing a general underestimation of female potential, as well as blocking access to true leadership opportunities. Biased perceptions of female leaders form crucial barriers. In turn, women attempting to address and overcome these barriers, and being perceived in this way, discover that these attempts become barriers in themselves. Feminine traits, such as those related to "caring" and often deemed appropriate, and natural, to women in business and the workplace—yet generally determined to be less than effective in a female leader—constrain and undermine female leaders and their leadership styles. Further, the embodiment and employment of "care" appears to suit women in organizations for leading on the glass cliff, not an enviable position.

Care-taking expectations imply a focus upon relationships, a desire to enhance others' potential, and a developed intersubjective awareness—in other words, attention to the way in which interactions between self, other, and environment create new possibilities and make us who we are (Borgerson 2016; Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009). Both power and care can be intersubjectively conceived, that is, generated and located in interactions, not in individual persons. Intersubjectivities of care can be interrogated in light of leadership roles and relationships, and the power these roles and relationships seem to require. Beyond invoking *care* as a set of female-associated feminine traits and characteristics applied in relationships and decision-making (Uhl-Bien 2011), or as a model for individuals within the organization and organizational research (Gabriel

2009; Spicer, Alvesson, and Kärreman 2009), to examine tensions of power and care this book takes up a relational metaphysics (Gordon 2012). A relational metaphysics includes models of interaction and being—often evoked by a caring ethos—that emerge from understandings of intersubjectivity. Interestingly, some would argue that intersubjective understandings are already at play in business and leadership, particularly if one considers how business interactions depend upon relationships of trust, for example (Gustafsson 2005; White 1998).

This book's discussion comprehends a general distinction between sex and gender. By marking the sex/gender distinction, it becomes possible to differentiate some aspects of care from the stereotypically articulated "feminine," self-sacrificing behaviors with which care is often associated. In this way, moreover, a "female" perspective may omit a "caring" perspective. To define further, "gender" is "used as an analytic category to draw a line of demarcation between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviors or competencies, which are then assigned as either 'masculine' or 'feminine'" (Pilcher and Whelehan 2004, 56). To put this another way, behaviors and traits associated with females are often termed "feminine"; and, in turn, males' characteristics and behaviors are often termed "masculine"; yet, masculine traits are not necessarily connected to male bodies, nor feminine traits to female bodies (Hubbard 1990). In sum, essentialisms and determinisms of sex and gender are displaced. Recognizing differently "sexed" bodies and multiple genders does complicate, and help ease, the related oppositions; however, sexual dualism and gender dualism have been strongly and ideologically connected, even imposed, often leading to the opposing of traits and characteristics in dualistic hierarchies that tend to impair female being (Fausto-Sterling 2000).

In other words, stereotypically masculine traits can be prominent in females, and stereotypically feminine traits can be prominent in males. Indeed, many traits and behaviors said to be masculine or feminine have no "natural" or essential connection to either sexed body. Rather, it could be said that male and female human beings learn and adopt these gendered traits, behaviors, and roles depending on the social and cultural requirements of their families, communities, and cultures at particular points in history. In this sense, whereas a color—such as blue—can be "gendered" masculine, and associated with clothing for a baby boy, this is not a claim that blue is a biologically determined "male" color. The term "transgender" in some instances has brought notions of gender back toward sex differences, in the sense that a way of commonly using "transgender" may suggest biological and physiological changes in the

sexed body. Nevertheless, in this book, a more traditional theoretical differentiation of sex and gender will be maintained.

To reiterate the importance of this here, maintaining a distinction between sex and gender allows researchers to separate biological sex such as male and female from traits and characteristics that are often unquestioningly associated with a sex, again male with masculinity, female with femininity. Thus, researchers can see that self-sacrificing caring traits are not naturally occurring female traits, but rather that females in certain places and at certain times for various reasons have found self-sacrificing caring traits encouraged—perhaps, imposed upon them—as appropriate to their sex and sex roles in society (Lerner 1986, 1997; see also Bowden 1997; Grimshaw 1986). As these traits and concomitant roles are enforced and modeled in female lives, the traits and roles appear to be “natural,” and seem to express an essential part of being female. Clearly, such distinctions are important in a discussion that claims for females the desire for, and not unnatural embodiment of, power.

Research, discussion, and questioning around what was called an ethic of care have developed over the past several decades and in a variety of fields. Medicine and nursing, management and organization, as well as philosophy sustain complex and enriching engagements with care ethics (Hamington and Sander-Staudt 2013). Some proponents of continuing work on care may well say that the version of care ethics engaged in this book fails to capture the rich detail of care ethic’s evolution and potential; and to some extent this will be true. Still, the discussion represents crucial, and often forgotten, tensions in the intellectual development of care ethics and demonstrates the philosophical struggles between competing versions of care ethics. This is a needed intervention as care ethics often is applied unreflectively in business and management scholarship and business ethics (Borgerson 2007). The broad aspects of a caring ethos that have appealed to philosophers and those in other fields do emerge here, and, in direct conversation with notions of power, suggest new possibilities, as well as continuing concerns. Nevertheless, care should not be underestimated simply as in opposition to, or a lack of, power. Further, anyone who has lost a person in their life, female or male, who provided care—often invisible, often unacknowledged, emotional and physical support and attention, which may appear to the one cared-for as a naturally existing habitat—will recognize that a future in which no one cares evokes a lonely, even fatal, chill. Certainly, no conceptual discussion captures how truly being cared-for feels, how caring for another feels, nor what caring for another means in terms of generosity, courage, or even energy expended. Nevertheless, recognizing the desire for power, and accessing

power—often seen in contrast to self-sacrificing caring activities and dispositions—remains crucial for many females. Moreover, it is not only diminished access to, and difficulty engaging with, power that emerges as a problem for female leaders (Morgan 1986), but also general perceptions of female traits and dispositions in a patriarchal system (Lerner 1986, 217). In this sense, neither power nor care alone can solve the difficulties of female leadership.

However, exploring intersections of care and power provides crucial insights. A philosophical investigation of care and power in the context of female leadership opens up spaces of understanding, learning, and potential action. Research has shown that in regard to leadership styles, characteristics of female leaders generally are perceived to be less suited to leadership. If power is essential to good leadership, then masculine traits in male bodies have appeared more in line with aspects of power and the ability to influence. Alternatively, lack of influence means lack of access to promotions. Indeed, if women with opportunities to lead have an uncertain or ambivalent relationship to power, or instead tend toward an ethics of care, they almost certainly will struggle in the realm of leadership. Further, if caring intersubjectivities are conceived of as the norm for females in the workplace, perceptions of individual women who disrupt this norm will often fail to harmonize with workplace environments. Thus, it appears that whereas a particular female individual's modes of action might be perceived as successful and acceptable forms of leadership in themselves, an essentialized norm in relation to sexual and gendered embodiment may undermine female leaders (Meriläinen, Tienari, and Valtonen 2013). This book brings philosophical investigations around care and power into contact with interdisciplinary observations on female leadership and the glass cliff, suggesting opportunities for reconceiving features of leadership practice and organization policy. The argument considers the importance of claiming a desire for power—as a desire for agency, risk-taking, and responsibility, or what philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche called “over-coming”.

Experiencing contradictions of caring and power is not uncommon. She was visiting her boyfriend that weekend, coming from her university to his, because that was how they were managing the second (and what was to be the last) year of their relationship. They had been to see an engaging play, *American Buffalo* by David Mamet, and then at an after party she had been discussing with some guy points from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. This wasn't unusual—her conversations, even at university parties, was often about philosophy. Later, as she and her boyfriend stepped out into the icy winter air and walked toward his car, he

announced, “You’ll never be a philosopher. That’s a fantasy. You don’t become a philosopher by studying philosophy. You have to have your own ideas.” “You just have to be that way,” he concluded. She thought of saying that she had known she wanted to get a PhD in Philosophy since she was seven, since before she even knew what a PhD *was*: There must be something in her that related to this philosophical way of being. But rather than launch into the typical dragged out debate such a comment would entail, she didn’t say too much; but at the same time she tried to remain animated and conversational, because a less forthcoming response would trigger his deeper attention to the topic. More than his usual intellectually patronizing remarks, after which she often thought there was a thread of truth in what he said, this discussion made her stop, made her step to the side and reflect, as any arresting existential moment will do.

In a way, as usual, he was right. She would encounter this attitude strongly again in her philosophy PhD program. And after graduate school, whether at various academic conferences, dinner parties, or sometimes even in the courses she taught, numerous males of varying ages who had read a couple of Sartre books, or maybe a couple chapters of Kant, or hell, a quote by Wittgenstein, demonstrated through increasingly familiar strategies of pseudo-clarification, patronizing disagreement, and follow-up mini-lectures the sense that each assumed themselves to be more the real philosopher than she was. On that night, in her first year of university, in her boyfriend’s car in his university town, she thought: This is the end, but I think we can stay friends, I *hope* we can stay friends.

CHAPTER ONE

A CASE OF FEMALE AESTHETIC LEADERSHIP: EXPANDING HORIZONS AND ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Preconceptions and expectations may interfere with female attempts to lead. Even if female roles are de-essentialized—that is, females are understood to develop as they do, not because of some naturally occurring set of sex-based characteristics, but because of the cultures and communities in which they grow up—social expectations emerging from diverse, yet influential, sex and gender role socializations may create perceptions of disjunction between females and the roles that would require leaderly characteristics. To recall, few differences in so-called innate abilities of male and female managers have been found, however, stereotypes persist—portraying female leaders as less capable (Oakley 2000: 327). Uncovering and recalling female figures, their achievements, and instances of female leadership from the past can reveal alternatives throughout the ages to the often undisturbed assumptions of female inaction and weakness that appear to reinforce essentialist leadership-lacking notions of female being.

Misinterpreting Female Leadership

Aesthetic leadership has been discussed and developed in the context of management and organization (Guillet de Monthoux, Gustafsson, and Sjöstrand 2007). As visual culture scholar Jonathan Schroeder has written, aesthetic leadership

need not refer merely to creativity or vision, rather aesthetic leadership may emerge from insight into cultural, political or interpersonal issues; aesthetic statements on social injustice or crucial cultural concerns; or, at a more general level, provide alternative ways of seeing problems, history or received wisdom. In this way, aesthetic leadership may either complement or contradict more traditional leadership forms, such as politics, religion or

management. It may be that aesthetic leadership draws some of its power from the position of the aesthetic producer outside conventional leadership positions. (Schroeder 2008, 6)

Schroeder has also discussed female aesthetic leadership, for example, in the work of sculptor and designer Maya Lin, who designed the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington DC (Schroeder 2008). However, historical acclaim for women's productive action, or women's insight into crucial issues of the day, has often been eclipsed by the reproduction and nurturing of, and caring for, humankind (Lerner 1986, 197). In other words, women's leadership frequently appears, and may be lauded, in the realm of mothering. Understanding women's work, and the role of the female in and out of the domestic sphere—including work she has inspired, or for which she has served as patron—may be limited by interpretations created through a patriarchal, even misogynistic, gaze. In the realm of art and aesthetics, philosopher Hilde Hein writes, “Feminist critics and theorists often revert to [. . .] works that have been discarded and neglected in order to find in them insights that will yield new interpretations [. . .] seeking understanding by probing the interstices and relations between situations, asking questions that are not asked and wondering why” (Hein 1995, 453). Indeed, taking a step back, to an earlier era, to consider women who stood outside the patriarchal family sphere, at times by turning to a dedicated religious life, has provided interesting medieval examples of female agency and leadership (Borstein and Rusconi 1996; Gilchrist 1994; Jantzen 1995; Lewis, Menuge, and Phillips 1999). As oppressive and ruled by particular worldviews and practices as such a life could be, instances of women challenging and changing the world in which they lived do emerge.

Following this path offers an opportunity to unearth examples of female aesthetic leadership. In some cases, such studies have focused on female religious figures, often “mystics”, that while giving insights into exceptional women's lives have tended to present the female mystical body as “an inscription in which the liberation of the body meets with its annihilation”—not an uncommon scenario for martyred saints—or to concentrate “on the negative stereotyping of women's sexuality and their lack of sacerdotal authority” (Antonopoulos 1991, 188).

Nevertheless, these religious women often held responsibility for others, for organizing them and guiding them; and whether bound for sainthood or not, they fed the poor, wrote music, and even commissioned works of art. Providing a broad historical reflection of female aesthetic leadership, the case of Angelina da Montegiove presents a female leader whose ideas and actions offered the context for production of an art

masterpiece that in turn emerges from the shadows through a feminist reinterpretation.

Angelina da Montegiove and the St Anthony Altarpiece

Angelina da Montegiove founded a monastery that commissioned an altarpiece from the early Italian Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca (1415–1492) whose renowned frescos are celebrated today for their calming, but vibrant, blues and pinks, their mystical stillness, and their strong central female figures. The story that ties Angelina da Montegiove to the Piero altarpiece goes like this: Angelina da Montegiove spoke out against marriage. For this, she was charged with heresy and banished from Central Italy. She traveled north to Assisi, and founded a female branch of the Franciscan Tertiaries (the third, or lay, order of the Franciscans), establishing their first monastery in the city of Fogliano. She is credited with several miracles, including multiplying food to feed her city's poor and bringing a dead child back to life.¹ Of course, as with all biographical studies, especially of women, that depend so fundamentally upon the writings of others, including male hagiographers (Antonopoulos 1991; Frugoni 1996, 152), it is important to recall that Angelina da Montegiove's life history has been recorded not by da Montegiove herself—who as far as we know left no writings—but by a narrator with his own biases and purposes. What da Montegiove herself would have chosen to document remains a mystery. However, beyond Angelina da Montegiove's reported teachings and miracles, she left traces in material culture. Let's look a bit more closely.

Angelina da Montegiove was born in 1357 in Central Italy's Umbria district. Her life, documented in a 1627 manuscript by Ludivico Iacobilli, contains numerous accounts of an independent young woman devoted to God—her hard-headed dedication to virginity, her journeys though the countryside to convert other girls, and her general disobedience to patriarchal authority. According to Iacobilli, Angelina da Montegiove's intelligence and desire to serve God had been lifelong qualities; and, shortly after her mother died, the twelve-year-old Angelina da Montegiove dedicated her life to God. Still, at fifteen, contrary to her expressed intentions, she was promised in marriage to the nearby Count of Civitella. The Count's wealth, power and beauty were held out by her father as inducements heavily in the Count's favor; but Angelina da Montegiove

¹ Several images that capture these tales appear in the published version of Ludivico Iacobilli's hagiography (Iacobilli in Filannino and Mattioli 1996).

refused to be married.² So provoked were her father and brothers by her response that they locked her in a room, giving her eight days to come to her senses or be left to die of hunger.

During this imprisonment, she experiences “demonic” visions that tempt her to accept the marriage, claim the life of a Countess, and give up her Heavenly spouse. Iacobilli also stresses that Angelina da Montegiove had comforting visions of the saints associated with virginity—such as Elizabeth, Anne, Cecilia, John the Baptist, and Joseph. At last, Angelina da Montegiove agreed to obey her father, but retained an unquestioning faith that her virginity would be preserved.³ In justifying her position, Angelina da Montegiove conjectured that in the distant past God perhaps needed human beings to marry and have children; but with the earth’s plentitude of people, many could remain virgins and childless (see also Lerner 1986, 40–41). The virtue of virginity could make women immortal and eternal, she reflects, and this state would be better for their overall well-being, “making those on earth as the angels in heaven” (Iacobilli, 60). This virginal state was not only for women: With a plea of dedication to spirit over matter, Angelina da Montegiove convinced her new husband that he should remain a virgin as well; and he concedes, saying, “We will live together until death not as spouses, but as brother and sister” (Iacobilli 1996, 46).⁴

The Count died only a year into their marriage, and Angelina da Montegiove joined a local order of uncloistered Franciscans. She proceeded to walk the countryside speaking to the young women and converting them to a life of virginity, apparently disrupting the practice of using marriageable daughters as instruments for political and wealth-related

² In response to this and her father’s furious insistence that the marriage take place, Angelina replies, “I have taken Jesus Christ as my Heavenly Spouse, and he has infinitely more riches and power and beauty than the one you propose. I prefer the Heavenly to the earthly. Why would I want the created when I have the Creator?” (Iacobilli 1996, 35–37). Here Angelina da Montegiove acknowledges and articulates the dualism that guides her life. God, the divine, the infinite starkly contrasts with the finite, corruptible and human level of existence. In dedicating herself to this unearthly realm, she has moved away from human and earthly instantiations of the qualities her father mentions.

³ In an oration to God she says, “I no longer have a mother who has already died; or brothers, or a father—a horrible, cruel tyrant who demands that I can no longer be yours. *Essere sempre vostre* . . . to always be yours. You would never abandon me, unless I abandoned you first” (ibid. 37).

⁴ A similar tale is told of Elena Duglioli dall’Olio—considered a living saint—who in 1487 gained fame for convincing her older husband “not to consummate their marriage” (Tinagli 1997, 167).

alliances. Large numbers of girls, we are told, began to refuse all marriage. In the following year, Angelina da Montegiove was called to court by the reigning king.⁵ She was charged with heresy, “because she criticizes marriage and detests the Matrimonial state, instituted by God and one of the six Sacraments of the Sacred Church” (55). Moreover, Angelina da Montegiove insisted that women had access to the realm of Spirit, an opinion not favored by those in power. In the face of death by fire, she performed a miracle, holding burning flames in her hands before the king. Proclaiming her position on virginity, she was released, and returned to converting more girls than before. Ultimately, Iacobilli writes, the wealthy men of the region threatened the king with revolution if da Montegiove’s teachings were not stopped, and she was banished. At this juncture, Iacobilli reports, Angelina da Montegiove gave away her possessions and heard a voice from heaven that sent her north near Assisi to find her vocation (69). Founding the first cloistered order of female Franciscan Tertiaries, she arranged to have their monastery built, and went on to found many other such institutions that followed her rule.

When we turn to commentary on Angelina da Montegiove, we can perceive how an aversion to recognizing female agency in interpreting the stories surrounding her life causes commentators to misread salient points. For example, mainstream interpretations tend to erase traces of her considered judgments, underestimate the level of hostility da Montegiove undoubtedly faced as a result of her teachings, and underestimate as well, the power of the “threat” she posed. For example, in evaluating the claim that Angelina da Montegiove was banished from the region of Napoli for her “propaganda” against marriage, historian Mariano D’Alatri writes dismissively, “the region of Napoli threatened by depopulation because some girls are choosing not to marry!” (D’Alatri 1996, 207). In other words, D’Alatri finds this aspect simply ridiculous, rather than trying to understand the intricate contexts involved in the stories. D’Alatri feels compelled to give us a “good alternative motive” in the place of divine inspiration for Angelina da Montegiove’s active mission and the founding of her order in Fogliano. He turns her into a “widow” who must flee her

⁵ He states, “Little Angel is her name, but diabolical are her effects” (Iacobilli 1996, 55). Angelina da Montegiove was accused, specifically, of convincing wealthy, and “attractively formed,” young women to disobey their fathers and refuse offers of marriage from the powerful, wife-seeking princes of the area, thereby “depriving the illustrious families of succeeding generations which are the core and glory of the dominion” (ibid, 55). Though girls from non-noble families were also converting, they did not seem to be of concern.

dead husband's land to avoid political upheaval.⁶ In so doing, D'Alatri reduces the import of Angelina da Montegiove's sense of a higher purpose, her choices, and her power by suggesting her motives are of "concrete" necessity and practical decisions related to her husband's status. He fails to contemplate even basic understandings of the daily life conditions for women and girls at the time and gives Angelina da Montegiove's phenomenological status no weight. This mode of reading motives and causes as satisfactorily external to da Montegiove's own desires, and thus, lacking the awareness that a feminist perspective might bring, reduces the likelihood of explanations that focus upon this female's practical and intellectual abilities, her vision, and her attempts to bring that vision to fruition. That is, the commentators fail to unveil her commitments, her agency, and thus any sense of her female leadership.

Beginning to comprehend what is often missed may prove useful in considering women's roles and female leadership, particularly around issues of feminine characteristics often credited to women as "natural" to them, as female beings. Such assumptions regarding female traits often cause confusion around women's agency in relation to so called caring behaviors and power. Indeed, feminist scholars have recognized the threat of women choosing—and being allowed to choose without negative consequences—to stand outside the institution of marriage. Angelina da Montegiove's success in convincing her husband, a Count, to refrain from sexual relations must have seemed immensely dangerous to those whose power, wealth, and laws of lineage required controlling women's sexuality, including situations of pregnancy and childbirth. Thus, even if the details of Angelina da Montegiove's life are uncertain, as D'Alatri suggests, the very existence of such a disruptive force challenges the narrative orderliness of historical understanding to the point that even modern commentators pronounce the events surrounding her persona inexplicable, even absurd, rather than attribute agency to her.

Angelina da Montegiove apparently did not follow the reigning "nature of woman" rhetoric of the time, a rhetoric that viewed women as essentially child bearers and mothers. She suggested that these roles were pragmatic, rather than essential. Angelina da Montegiove did not deride the body as a site of evil or sin; nor did she insist that the purpose of virginity was to provide a physical site for the next incarnation of God. Rather, she focused upon the power and agency of women who could be free from the matrimonial and maternal state to focus upon self-attained

⁶ Scholars have noted similar phenomena in the interpretation of mystic and scholar Hildegard von Bingen (e.g., John 1996, 22).

merit and work in, and on behalf of, the larger human community (see also Lerner 1986).

When Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 C. E., newly forming centralized structures of authority and governance within the church promoted the patriarchal belief in women's essential disorder, proneness to sin and heresy. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, an influential early Christian collection of teachings, purportedly from the twelve apostles, explicitly stated that women could only agree with men's interpretation of scripture, not formulate their own (MacHaffie 1992, 28). Yet, as celibate and unmarried women devoted their lives to God, the Church was forced to accommodate these ascetic lifestyles. Yes, the early Christian church tended to blame women for sinful sexuality—that entered into the world and led to expulsion from Paradise; however, this opened up to women the Church-supported possibility of revoking a life of sin, bodily mortification, and corruption associated with reproduction and motherhood—through ascetic celibacy and a life devoted to God.⁷

Nevertheless, the threat of the unmarried female who places her energies, usually governed by the demands of marriage and child-bearing, into arenas such as concern for the well-being and prayers of women and other non-familial members of the community, created ambivalence then; and indeed remains a site of contention.⁸ Women without men often are seen as unnatural, perverse, inexplicable, “in disorder”; and attacks on an “unhusbanded” life are profoundly meaningful (Raymond 1986, 74). The

⁷ Beginning in the Fourth Century, the Church was required to consider the value of the ascetic life and recognize those who chose celibacy in a life of devotion to Christ over traditional marriage and family, even as this threatened women's domestic subservience and social order (Clark 1994, 140). Virginité had divine origins, after all, and worked against Eve's paradigmatic sexual corruption.

⁸ Feminist philosophers have discussed this issue extensively. For example, Janice Raymond's treatise on female intimacy *A Passion For Friends* (1986) and Claudia Card's essay, “Against Marriage and Motherhood” (1996b) bear witness to continued hostility toward women without men. Marilyn Frye uses the phrase “willful virgin” to express a historically based image of a female living in an “impossible” space outside male possession (Frye 1992). Though we expect to find different, perhaps even opposing, reasons given by various thinkers for maintaining virginité, for focusing on women, or against marriage and motherhood, in general, some basic and important elements connect these disparate critiques. Raymond writes, “attacks on virginité specifically betray that the detractors understood virginité in much more than sexual terms. As a consecrated state that legitimated an “unhusbanded life,” virginité carried the germ of female independence, integrity, and intimacy that would give women freedom from men and male dictates” (Raymond 1986, 74).

Christian Church hierarchy has often found necessary the imposition of rules and regulations upon its female congregation. This may partially explain why for centuries the Catholic church tried again and again to gain control of activities within female religious communities by creating legal injunctions to force cloistering upon them, instituting various levels of “orders” among the nuns.

Female Art Patronage: The Legacy of Piero della Francesca’s Saint Anthony Altarpiece

Piero della Francesca’s *Saint Anthony Altarpiece* (c. 1467), no longer *in situ*, now rests in the National Gallery of Umbria in Perugia. This Renaissance masterpiece has been clouded with uncertainties that, I argue, are based in ascribing disorder and chaos to what has been perceived as a feminized aesthetic vision. Such an insight helps us interrogate the assumptions ensnaring Piero’s *Saint Anthony Altarpiece*, the monumental legacy of Angelina da Montegiove’s aesthetic leadership known to have been commissioned by Angelina da Montegiove’s nuns after she died.

Writing on the gendering of aesthetic categories, theorist Naomi Schor observes that certain characteristics in art, particularly detail, but also the ornamental and the everyday, are feminized and contribute to a feminization of works in which they appear (Schor 1989; see also Pollock 1988). It is not surprising, then, that art historians would infuse discussion and criticism of the *Saint Anthony Altarpiece* with feminized stereotypes and assumptions of the commissioning body—a community of women, specifically, an order of nuns. Indeed, a discourse of feminization and disorder arose around this piece of material culture, contributing to longstanding misinterpretations of the St. Anthony altarpiece. There is a parallel between the interpretation of autonomous, willful women as “in disorder”—their comprehensibility, legitimacy, and right to existence questioned—and the critical appraisal of Piero della Francesca’s altarpiece as “unwieldy,” “perplexing,” and “discordant” (Cole 1991, 37). Interestingly, taking seriously the details of Angelina da Montegiove’s life, her commitments, and her choice to take certain actions helps us reassess continuing controversy surrounding the altarpiece.

Piero della Francesca, one of the early Renaissance’s most influential artists, painted the altarpiece for the church of the convent of Saint Anthony’s in Perugia—built for Angelina’s nuns in 1455. Many of Piero della Francesca’s works have been the source of debate (e.g., Lavin 1972): Is the painting previously known as *The Flagellation* really *The Dream of Saint Jerome*? How are we to interpret the position of the soldier

awakening at the moment of Christ's reemergence in the resurrection fresco? Piero della Francesca often painted and centered historically powerful women in his work—for example his pregnant Madonna in the fresco from the chapel in Monterchi (1465), or the Queen of Sheba and her attending women in his *Legend of the True Cross* (1459–1464). In this sense, his portraits and themes for Angelina da Montegiove's nuns might not have seemed surprising. For example, his altarpiece in Perugia featured female saints. The *Saint Anthony Altarpiece*, though, is a particular case, causing inordinate confusion and agitation among art historians for centuries (Battisti 1971, 22–75).

In the chapters and monographs on Piero's work that routinely lavish praise on his otherworldliness and luminous color (e.g., Lavin 2002), few words are spent on the St. Anthony Altarpiece (see e.g., Arte 1999). When the piece is mentioned a previously absent genre of words, including “disharmony,” “disunity,” and “discordant,” appears in the description (Cole 1991, 37). The various levels and parts of the work are said to have been taken apart and reconstructed (Cole 1991). The critics note that the colonnade containing the annunciation scene appears oddly clipped and constrained by a progressively narrowing gold frame that extends up into a point. Incomprehensibly, the art historians write, two round female portraits of apparently unknown identity, but perhaps saints, were painted and added considerably later (Cole 1991, 39). Why these female saints and not John the Baptist? Why would Piero choose to insert such unusual subject matter—a dead child brought back to life—for the lower predella?

Art historian Bruce Cole's (1991) influential and prestigious monograph on Piero della Francesca implies that we can understand what is disorderly and wrong about the Saint Anthony Altarpiece by assuming that the nuns who commissioned the piece were more interested in domestic decoration than painted masterpieces. This, he claims, explains the altarpiece's gold background that serves more as an imitation of fashionable fabric, than heavenly golden light (Cole 1991, 41). Further, the presence of children in the predella narratives can be explained because, the nuns, as women, naturally must have been concerned about children (40). In addition, some art historians in attempting to explain the unusual pointed shape of the Annunciation panel have suggested that Angelina da Montegiove's nuns, clearly ignorant of the unity and order of an art work, probably demanded that the altarpiece's original rectangular form be cut, so that the altarpiece could be fitted up into the church's roof peak.

Such suggestions admittedly were more popular prior to the revelations of modern restoration: we now know that the entire panel remains as originally constructed. Whereas understanding the context of Angelina's

nuns—the stories of their founding saints, including Angelina, their iconography—is surely crucial in understanding the figures who appear in the altarpiece, Cole seems uninterested, and employs a patronizing and undermining gaze. Typical sexist themes—women in disorder, with limited abstract and spiritual understanding, determined by essentialist traits—map onto the nuns, as female, as women, and their aesthetic choices. Such unexamined assumptions and interpretive lenses feed into the familiar discourse on this altarpiece. This is not simply an issue of giving a different interpretation to images of women, as subject matter, as they appear in artworks; rather we must understand that the interpretation of the altarpiece *as a whole* has been affected by its feminization (see e.g., Tinagli 1997). To put this another way, if the analyst or critic thinks he understands the nature of women, or accepts principles about the purpose of female nature, and then uses this approach to interpret their work—or art work they have commissioned, collected, or appeared in—one can imagine how easily certain words find their way into description and evaluation. Indeed, scholars have noted that “restoration of institutional order meant a rejection of eccentric female models, a remasculinization of religious images” (Bornstein and Rusconi 1996, 7). In this case, the altarpiece instantiates the interpretation of women in disorder, and the genealogy of disorder is not difficult to follow. Any notion of aesthetic leadership, from Angelina da Montegiove and her nuns, apparently has been proscribed. Reinserting agency—female, artistic, leaderly—is key here, because by recognizing actions as purposeful, understandable, and powerful we can provide a comprehensible, and more accurate, interpretation of the altarpiece, as well as, see the reasons for the misguided interpretations.

Reinterpretations: Seeing Agency and Order

Art historian Creighton Gilbert wrote, “*Nacita e crescita di un polittico*”, or “Birth and Growth of a Polyptych” (1993), as part of a larger project in response to the restoration of the *Saint Anthony Altarpiece*. Challenging the edifice of interpretations just discussed, his essay argued persuasively that the altarpiece formed an artistically unified, comprehensible whole—just as it was. Suddenly a century’s worth of art historical presumption—of disorder and discordant elements—seemed bizarre and extreme. Gilbert’s informed connections between the particular convent context and the subject of the polyptych, or multi-part altarpiece, allowed a coherent interpretational approach to emerge.

Although he does not trace the connections between a sexist, even misogynist, vision and the interpretative history of the piece, Gilbert

performs a reinterpretation based upon new data and, more importantly, a presumption that there is nothing wrong with the construction, the composition, or the choice of content: The composition takes a rare form, yes; and the inclusion of Saint Agata and Elizabeth may require context-informed explanation, yes. Gilbert writes, “An incongruence seems to exist here, as well, but it is the same incongruence that exists throughout and which we know to be original. A unity where once was proposed a disunity. That is, the disorder cannot be explained internally. The design is purposeful—incoherent, because we don’t know the purpose” (Gilbert 1993, 83). He notes that the “dissonance” ascribed to the work could be reconsidered as an “insufficiently profound examination of the work” (Gilbert 1993, 79). The lack, previously seen as situated in the work itself, could be shifted onto those who have examined the work and the methods and assumptions they used in doing so. Thus, much as Socrates in the *Phaedo* turns the fault of misanthropy back onto each of us, because we do not know enough about human relations and behavior to have appropriate expectations for others, Gilbert asserts that the judgments of disorder and disunity, in this case at least, lie in the eye of the beholder.

For example, Gilbert recognizes that one of the round portraits, agreed finally to be part of the original design, is of Saint Agata. Importantly, Saint Agata was associated with a cult of virginity and was martyred in defense of her virginity. We can without too much speculation—knowing what we do about Angelina da Montegiove—understand why Agata would be included among the inner circle of saints. Yes, some elements in the work are in fact quite rare, such as the double predella—including both the two round portraits of Saint Agata and Saint Chiara, and the three portrayals of Saints Francis and Elizabeth—but, Gilbert argues, this does not decrease the value of the work, nor justify accusations of modifications and disunity. Gilbert perceives the necessity of placing the work in the context of the convent, with its particular everyday realities and historical narratives that move beyond simple sexist assumptions, to understand the iconography. For example, in addressing questions of why otherwise unusual saints’ stories, those of Agata and Chiara, are portrayed in the altarpiece, Gilbert replies that we must consider the fact that “the two saints attend to women’s prayers, similar to those that occupied the days of the tertiary order in the monastery” (Gilbert 1993, 82). As well, we can look to the lower predella narratives, particularly those that represent bringing the child back to life, and consider the importance of miracles in the tale of Angelina da Montegiove, and appreciate this aspect of the altarpiece.

Perhaps most interesting, and a piece of the puzzle that confuses even Gilbert, is the presence of Saint Elizabeth, a married woman and mother. Why, Gilbert asks, in the altarpiece of an order so seemingly committed to virginity would we find a representation of a married woman, even if she is holding lilies, the symbol of purity? According to the Biblical narrative, Elizabeth was an older relation to Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus. Elizabeth gave support to Mary, serving as mentor to the younger woman. Such a historical role model may have appeared important to a community of women who themselves, and those they sought to convert, may have faced disdain and alienation from their families and communities. Mary lived with Elizabeth in the first months of her pregnancy, at the same time that Elizabeth was experiencing a miracle of her own—giving birth to a son, John the Baptist, very late in life. Angelina de Montegiove was herself married, of course. Arguably, then, the presence of Saint Elizabeth further supports the possibility of miraculous defeats of conventional roles for women to which Angelina da Montegiove and her nuns aspired.

By interrogating the interpretative frames around Angelina da Montegiove and her nuns, to whom aesthetic leadership apparently has been proscribed, connections emerge between attributions of value and philosophical understandings of being, knowing, and other life contexts. In other words, accomplishments, ambitions, and achievements of female being, female knowing, and female practices are often overlooked, underestimated, or pushed to the sidelines. In addition, women have been understood through repeated dualistic correlations of the female with the material and the bodily realms, rather than with the often more highly valued mental or spiritual realms. Given this tendency, even with her intense spiritual commitment, it is not surprising that Angelina da Montegiove's legacy emerges in material culture: she established a monastery and founded an enduring institution in the tertiary Franciscans. And, as a gift of her aesthetic leadership, we have Piero della Francesca's *Saint Anthony Altarpiece*, a celebrated, though controversial, Renaissance masterpiece.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMALE LEADERS AND THE DAMAGE OF AN UNDERMINING ETHOS

Might some manifestations of being conflict with a particularly influential leadership ethos? Bringing these concerns into conversation with issues of leading on the glass cliff creates an opportunity to investigate the ways in which a traditionally-associated female ethos, particularly care, frames women's possibilities in tension with an ethic of power. Power, an essential factor in leadership, invokes notions of influence, responsibility, and agency—the capacity for action and making things happen—that intersect with the values, decisions, and actions of oneself and others. If care-based characteristics, understood as certain ways of being, undermine female potential to lead, then female leaders participating in care ethics may derail their leadership opportunities (Pullen and Vachhani 2018). Furthermore, if those with a care ethos are perceived as better equipped to cope with conditions and contexts of crisis and failure, they may find themselves leading on a glass cliff.

The word ethic, derived from the Greek *ethos*, refers to the disposition, character, or fundamental value peculiar to a specific person, people, culture, or movement; and often in philosophy an ethic is conceived of as a set of principles of right conduct, or a theory or system of moral values. In their social expectations and perceptions of themselves, and in the eyes of others, female leaders seem to manifest aspects of care ethics loosely understood; and this care ethos, as a gendered alternative to typical organizational power, often fails to provide a positive path for female leadership.

Care-taking is a traditional female role (Carli and Eagly 1999). A care-taking focus often involves multiple role responsibilities, and, interestingly, a related sense of self-sufficiency. In a classic double-bind, female leaders' self-sufficiency may fail to function positively in certain organizational contexts. For example, self-sufficiency may influence women's lack of involvement with informal workplace networks—in the sense that women feel that they can or should strike out on their own path, or given lack of

flexibility and time, simply ‘do it on their own’. In parallel, Carli and Eagly (1999) argued that men often find themselves as informal leaders in groups due to their behavioral styles, and they are more common as leaders in organizational settings: In turn, their advancement in organizational hierarchies seems to proceed almost organically, unlike paths for women. Further, a typical understanding of the career versus family divide suggests that if women have others that they care for outside organizational requirements, then they may focus less on work and take on less developmental assignments than men. In contrast, men were seen to experience a “family bonus” (Greenhaus and Parasuraman 1999, 404), whether or not they were perceived as needing to focus upon family or other demanding relationships.

The key to leadership in business is being able to influence the members of an organization to follow. However, research has found that “men resist influence by women more than women resist influence by men” (Pugh and Wahrman 1983; Ridgeway 1982; Wagner, Ford and Ford 1986, cited Carli and Eagly 1999, 208). Furthermore, if the same information were presented by a man and a woman, the man’s information was more often used: In other words, even at a basic level of who receives credit for putting forward ideas and suggestions, or demonstrating expertise, men exert more influence than women (Carli and Eagly, 1999; Hughes 2009). How females are perceived, or remain unperceived, becomes a barrier. As Hughes (2009) has noted, whereas females may seem content with male leaders, who thus face less of a battle regarding influence, women commonly have their leadership and leadership style questioned by men. This is an ethos in which women generally are interpreted in ways that do not cohere with certain leadership expectations and competencies. The previous chapter presented an example of this in the misjudging of the Saint Anthony Altarpiece—as association with female patrons and female contexts led to centuries of sexist misinterpretations and underestimations of an early renaissance masterpiece. Even while female leaders’ characteristics help facilitate desired outcomes—for example invoking aspects of an intersubjective ethic, and a sense of ‘we’, that may prove an effective, desirable, and much needed leadership contribution—women’s leadership styles, especially those that express care, often associated with feminine traits, are deemed less successful (see also Lugones and Spelman 1993).

Seemingly, organizations see female leadership styles as “management” and male leadership attributes as “leadership,” suggesting that whereas women are accepted at mid-level management positions, they may struggle to reach the top of the hierarchy and hold leadership roles