

advance business and overall society. Their interviewees give useful input through their life experiences condensing into the ten recommendations the authors offer as practical guidance.

They conclude that this can only be done with great determination and though the exercise of considerable political will.

At no point does this comprehensive book gets tedious in any of the examples and stories that are told, the length and format are truly appropriate.

The reader gets a rich overview on reasons for the unfair balance of power among men and women in Great Britain with barriers for women as well as possible ideas and policies to overcome those. Another core feature of this well-written title is the joint authorship of the two authors for most of the chapters except one, compared to other recent titles which are edited works with a variety of contributors (e.g. Burke and Major, 2014).

At a maximum cost of £45 for the hardcover version this book is realistically priced and provides excellent food for thought and practice, therefore it appears like a good value.

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#### About the reviewer

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#### Gender and Leadership in Unions

*Gill Kirton and Geraldine Healy*

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The overall objective of this book is to explore the experiences of women union leaders in the USA and UK, and to build a network to nurture leadership development and further explore an international women's agenda. Kirton and Healy suggest that women have largely been absent from industrial relations (IR) scholarship. IR researchers have tended to focus on the class struggle, with an analytical emphasis on institutions and structures. The traditional symbol of the male blue collar worker

remains dominant despite a clear shift in membership towards female, white collar professionals. They argue that this lack of representation in research and practice is not only problematic for our understanding of IR, but also “reinforces women’s lower favourability to unions and lesser willingness to participate” (p. 4).

Kirton and Healy are not the first Researchers to publish a book on this topic. In *Unions, Equity and the Path to Renewal*, a group of distinguished union activists and scholars tackle the problem from a predominantly Canadian perspective (Foley and Baker, 2010). For an international perspective see Colgan and Ledwith (2002). However, Kirton and Healy’s approach is unique in that it focusses on leadership and reports the results of a cross-national comparison of women’s union activism and leadership in the USA and UK. They conduct qualitative research that combines semi-structured interviews of 134 female union leaders in the two countries, with focus groups and observation (p. 9). A particularly interesting element of their design is an exchange between ten USA and ten UK participants who engage in training and leadership development activities in each country.

The structure and content of the book will appeal to academics (IR and gender scholars), and women unionists across industries, sectors and levels. It will be useful for union leaders (male or female), who seek to better understand the issues faced by women at work and those that impact their participation in union activities. While the book is not a step-by-step guide, it does offer insights regarding actions the union movement might take to harness the power of women, to eliminate gender barriers and to mitigate global declines in union density. The book is well written and the language accessible. The authors provide theoretical foundations for their work, but rely primarily on simple tables, quotes and stories from their participants to engage the reader.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by introducing the topic and explaining the significance of research examining the role and experiences of female union leaders. A comparison of the gender gaps in pay, employment participation, education, political empowerment and health in the UK and USA show that on a global level the two countries rank surprisingly poor for industrialized nations.

Chapters 2 and 3 review the literature and provide conceptual frameworks. There is a good overview of legislative changes and political ideologies that have impacted union density in both countries, which now sit at 27.4 per cent in the UK and 11.9 per cent in the USA (p. 30). They make a convincing argument that the future of the union movement is dependent, at least in part, upon the ability to organize women. The authors are critical of weak efforts on the part of unions to develop strategies to address the “gender democracy deficit”. Potential paths to eradicating it are the focus of Chapter 3. The emphasis is on inclusion through consultation to achieve genuine voice as opposed to simple numeric equality. It is argued that unions must create leadership opportunities for women by eliminating structural obstacles that make participation difficult including caregiver responsibilities, and time poverty.

Chapters 4-9 present the research findings. Among the most important factors encouraging union involvement for women are family history, the experience of workplace injustice and economic benefits. It would have been interesting to know exactly how and why these factors influenced their involvement, but the authors do not pursue this line of inquiry or compare this rationale for union involvement with other research on propensity to unionize. Barriers to union leadership roles that were identified by the participants included gender stereotyping in leadership, access to mentors, exclusion from networks, lack of training opportunities and perceptions of competence.

Reflecting on the nature of power and leadership in unions, the authors and participants suggested that:

Feminist women should not want to access power and leadership for its own sake or for personal status and aggrandizement, but for the purposes of working towards the type of gendered social change that is possible as women gain access to the various sources of power (p. 112).

This is interesting because it burdens female leaders with expectations not faced by their male counterparts. The view that female leaders ought to be selfless is clearly supported by the participants who see female leadership and power as distinctly collective and supportive rather than authoritarian. These women expect female leaders to behave differently than male leaders, making leadership itself an inherently gendered process.

Ten of the most senior leaders in the group were interviewed separately to solicit their perspectives on the key themes of the book: what attracted them to union leadership positions, how they rose through the ranks, what barriers they faced and what philosophies and strategies of leadership they employ. Perhaps the most interesting contribution of the chapter is with respect to leadership styles and philosophies. In general, the UK leaders in their study are categorized as visionary, empowering and participatory, while US leaders use more instrumental, service oriented and individualized approaches. The authors suggest this reflects broader social and cultural differences between the UK and USA, where the USA is culturally less collectivist and where bargaining historically tends towards a business unionism focus on economic benefits for members (Mandel, 1954). They also suggest that given the systematic and embedded nature of gender exclusion in unions, a leadership philosophy or strategy similar to that described by the UK leaders is more likely to result in the necessary structural changes that reduce gender marginalization in unions overall.

Turning to the efforts of women working towards union transformation on the shop floor, the authors ask their participants “Do women make a difference to the union?” Not surprisingly they hear that they do. It was believed that women are less likely to be political and more likely to focus on specific issues they want brought to the bargaining table. Bargaining structures become relevant as centralized or decentralized bargaining models affect how much influence women may have. Participants suggest that women need training to get to the table in the first place, and to ensure women’s issues get on and stay on the table.

Chapter 8 begins the discussion of separate organization structures intended to increase the presence of women in unions representing a wide range of occupations and industries. These include women’s committees, women-only training and education programs, and women’s conferences. Kirton and Healy’s research highlights that women’s organizing structures are controversial among women unionists. Many participants were supportive and felt separate organizing structures were necessary to effect change. Others felt they were more likely to be divisive, relegating women’s issues to a lesser status than issues affecting men. In general women in the USA were less supportive of separate organizing than women in the UK and women’s committees were the most controversial. Clearly not all women’s issues are important to all women, nor is there agreement about the best ways to achieve gender equity.

The theme of discord carries through to Kirton and Healy’s analysis of the overall success of the exchange programme. In general, the women who participated found the process valuable and invigorating. However, there is also an honest appraisal of challenges that influenced interaction among participants, including the development

of sub-groups, alliances and pre-existing power relationships. Early enthusiasm for creating an e-network waned quickly after the exchange. This was disappointing and due, in part, to a lack of leadership and structure for the e-network, but also affected by the same issues that restrict women's ability to participate in union activities – time poverty and difficulty achieving balance among competing work and home obligations.

The book concludes with a reflection on the economic and political climate existing at the time of the exchange. Unions on both sides of the Atlantic were struggling during the economic downturn and suffering the effects of conservative public policy initiatives. The participants highlight the disproportionate impact that the attack on public sector unions has on women. Ironically, at a time when unions should be most focused on reducing structural barriers to participation, these problems take a back seat to more pressing bread and butter issues.

*Gender and Leadership in Unions* is good participatory action research that is well-written and of interest to academic and non-academic audiences in the labour movement. Like all research there are limitations. The quotes are somewhat thematically repetitive, and additional detail would have been helpful on some topics. For example, it would have been beneficial to include detailed analysis of bargaining issues that particularly affect women. Race is raised frequently as a factor compounding gender inequities, but is insufficiently explored. A separate chapter dedicated to this particular topic would have enabled the authors to highlight the uniqueness and gravitas of the experience for women of colour. Also noticeably absent is a discussion of conflict and preferred conflict styles. Given that unionization often involves managing or being in conflict with the organization, this may be a gendered factor affecting attraction to union leadership roles. Kirton and Healy's book is also more expensive than some other books in this category. Despite these limitations, this is a book that will make readers think more carefully about union structures that perpetuate gender bias. It makes an important contribution through a unique methodological approach that enabled the authors to compare and contrast the experiences of women union leaders in two developed countries with similar IR systems. It paves the way for additional work in this area, and for development of strategies to eliminate gender barriers and increase participation rates for women in the union movement.

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