

Our Leadership Diptych



**Elizabeth Catlett**

“Singing Head”

**Black Mexican Marble  
1980**



Mary Lovelace O'Neal

“Racism is Like Rain, Either it's Raining or it's Gathering  
Somewhere’

**Lithograph  
1993**

## **The leadership diptych: a visual catalyst to problematize leadership as practice**

Kerry Jordan-Daus – Faculty of Education, Head of School Childhood and Education Sciences, Canterbury Christ Church University

Jo Townshend - Senior Partnership Manager (Creative Industries), University College London Innovation and Enterprise

This reflexive paper presents the emerging thinking and positionality of the two white female Doctoral students on a Leadership taught programme in England. At the onset of this reflective practice collaborative writing project (Bolton, 2001), we acknowledged the temporal nature of positionality (Goodson, 1998), differing perspectives of our leadership as practice and welcomed the opportunity to discover the synergies of our roles as female leaders and to problematize this practice.

The authors are experienced leaders in their fields; within the paper they are drawing upon their lived experiences in leadership in different contexts within the Education sector; and the exploration of constructs of power and their situated meanings as new researchers. This paper presents the authors' space to continue a conversation about constructs of leadership and the nature of power, through challenging their own lived experiences; participating in contemporary discourses through the exploration of leadership dynamics, structures and behaviours

The paper presents the authors use of a creative methodology for the study of leadership; the leadership diptych. This creative methodology has enabled the authors to search for meaning within and outside of mainstream heroic writers paradigms and presents where they are now, in the second year of their doctoral programme.

The doctoral studies and research to date has challenged the authors to examine leadership theory, dominant paradigms and engage with critical leadership studies. This paper grew out of a recent residential weekend (July 2018) and a current writing assignment on Research, Self and Positionality reflective practice.

Building on and continuing conversations that began during the residential weekend, the paper uses the living female creative as a provocation for leadership critique; to ensure an inclusive approach that represents our leadership values on delivering agency for all, reaching contemporary diaspora communities in England in 2018. The juxtaposition of our individually selected images encourages inquiry and questions around the structures and embodiment of leadership and is used to support a leadership in practice narrative. The traditional art composition format of the diptych, has been used to frame the starting points for the reflexive discussions about the lived experiences of leadership, to create a means by which the authors can examine their understandings of power as experienced and or practiced by the authors. We, as the authors, suggest that exploring leadership through this creative methodology enables a liberation of thinking, finding new voices and ways of being heard. Equally, that the creative process of practice opens new territories for leadership exploration that challenge existing power hierarchies, challenging depictions and enactments of power; positing disruptive maquettes. Through our paper we are daring to think differently about leadership and how we research leadership.

Our paper will be presented as a dialogic performances, directly addressing the conference's important themes of situated leadership dynamics through the power lens. Our (re) interpretation of power as females practising educational leadership in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, problematizes our position in relation to the concept of power. As actors navigating the forces and outputs of power

through enactments in policy, hierarchies and patriarchies, we juxtapose our differing positions in order to highlight leadership journeys in harmony or dissonance.

As leaders do we embody power? Are complicit in accepting and acting out power constructs? Where is the power coming from in situated leadership?

As women, do we seek to maintain and perpetuate hierarchical systems if we are privileged to have achieved this status? Is it a position that is necessary in order to maintain and sustain that seniority? Our paper will examine the complexity of leadership in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous contexts. Our argument will paint a new construct of leadership which fuses or confuses the traditional binary construct. In our paper we are seeking to portray new assemblages representing the fluidity of gender identities and re-historicizing leadership and its power.

We are advocating a creative methodology to inform a process, deconstructing historical, imperial power constructs and identities. As in the creative process, one can then explore conceiving new identities, eschewing binary, white, patriarchies situated in the historical canon. Here postmodernist theorists (Foucault, Bourdieu) may have already presented deconstruction as an act of archaeology in power revelation, however, we present new alternatives that may offer solutions in our rapidly changing economic, political and social environments. Following these acts of deconstruction, our leadership canvas is conceived to address the needs of our plural communities, shifting focus from the city centric and global to the regional and local; uniting multiple actors in a rhizomatic structure.

The creative methodology will frame a critique of our leadership diptych through the power lens of leadership. We aim to present narratives reflecting our leadership experiences through gender, policy and structure for the good and the bad. Leading to our current thought of how we aim to compose future portraits of leadership, balance power harmoniously and construct critical leadership identities. We are the talking heads.

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Foucault, M (1969) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge

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