

Article

Leading the Academic Department: A Mother–Daughter Story

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Received: 28 February 2018; Accepted: 26 April 2018; Published: 28 April 2018



Abstract: This article is based on conversations between a mother and daughter about academic leadership. Both authors served in different time periods and at different career points as heads of departments (“chairs”) in Canadian universities. A literature review suggested that women’s academic leadership is a contested topic, especially in relation to organizational cultures and associated gendered expectations. New directions were identified, as scholars move towards comparative studies, poststructural theoretical approaches, analysis of neoliberal trends in universities, and awareness of variation among women. We noted that “Canada” was largely missing from most of the literature reviewed and that middle management had received less attention than senior roles. Our method was collaborative autoethnography, a means of sharing thoughts about one’s experiences and analyzing them with regard to wider social issues. Quotations are taken from a taped discussion in early 2018 and are organized around similarities and differences in our narratives. The conclusion raises issues about the difficulties associated with performing this particular middle management role; questions around the consequences of chairing for women in different age groups; the implications of increasing reliance on contingent academic labour; apparent differences between the Canadian experience and what has happened elsewhere; and promising directions for future research.

Keywords: women; gender; leadership; middle-management; universities; department chairs; academic work; generational differences; autoethnography; Canada

1. Introduction

This article has its genesis in a continuing conversation between a mother and daughter with a life-long attraction to academe. One of us, Sandra, is now a retired “professor emerita”, having broken or at least challenged several glass ceilings in the past, beginning with her first permanent university position in 1972 in England and continuing in Canada, from 1991, in a large, research-intensive, urban university, including terms as department chair and associate dean. Shortly before Sandra retired in 2011, her daughter Dorie moved from part-time stipend teaching to her first full-time academic position in a small, art and design focused university in the same city, albeit still “on contract”, and, moreover, found herself acting as a one-year head (“chair”) of her program. (Although Dorie’s institution more often uses the term “program” than “department”, for convenience, we use the term “department” in the remainder of this article.) A few years later, she secured a position on the “tenure track”, the path to permanence, subject to a successful review of accomplishments. At the time of writing, Dorie is in the third year of a term as chair and is under review for tenure.

Even this brief synopsis alerts us to the importance of generational and institutional differences and how the creation of a career reflects its social context. We argue that the conventional approaches

to understanding the experiences of women in academic leadership or management do not sufficiently take into account these changing contextual influences. Moreover, the lion's share of researchers' attention has gone to senior management positions, while the gendered aspects of middle or "lower middle" [1] management have been largely ignored. Our approach through interactive personal narratives also contributes to a rather neglected corpus of accounts of women's lived experiences in such roles. Drawing on a recorded conversation from early 2018, supplemented by earlier discussions in 2010–2011 and various artifacts, we focus on our leadership experiences, attending to the similarities and differences that emerge. First, we summarize the ever-growing literature on women and academic leadership and describe our method.

2. Women in Academic Leadership: What Do We Know?

2.1. Leadership, Management, and Leaderism

There is a vast body of literature on leadership in educational institutions, universities included. Leadership, suggesting visionary practice and influence over others in the direction of positive change, is often distinguished from management, the organizational side of getting things done. However, in practice, both functions may be combined within the same position. We shall use the terms mostly interchangeably, noting that the responsibilities on which we focus are usually termed "middle management"—there seems not to be a term, "middle leadership"—yet such positions are increasingly associated with leadership. The spread of leadership discourse seems to have resulted in "leader" being used in preference to "manager" in everyday parlance. The implication that the finding the right leader will produce solutions to deep-rooted problems is now labelled, often critically, as "leaderism" [2–4].

Leadership theorists attempt to categorize different "types" of leadership, such as "authentic" (using self-awareness to improve leadership) or "distributed" (shared across an organization), although not without attracting critique [5,6]. Another persistent theme is the attempt to discover qualities that predict "good" leadership and the combination of such qualities into leadership "styles", such as transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire [7]. Mertkan [8] usefully reminds us that the discourse of leadership that permeates educational reform efforts has been developed in a small number of economically-advantaged countries and thus, may not be universally applicable.

2.2. What Are the Issues?

Intersections of gender and academic leadership have been of interest to feminist scholars since at least the 1990s [9,10] and continue to be so [11–16]. Issues typically highlighted in these texts and elsewhere include the under-representation of women in senior positions, debates over women's leadership styles, contradictory expectations attached to images of "leader" and "women", and organizational structures and cultures that disadvantage women. The notion that women and men fundamentally differ in their leadership styles has been criticized and debunked [12,13] but has arguably entered the realm of common sense and taken-for-granted knowledge.

There have also been many feminist arguments that it is not "fixing" women but changing the organizational context that is required [17]. Bird, for example, described universities as "incongruous, gendered bureaucratic structures" [18] (p. 202), while Benschop and Brouns, citing a Dutch proverb, remarked that "adding women to unchanged academic structures and cultures is like mopping with the tap on" [19] (p. 207). Grummell et al. [20] argued that "care-free" managers, i.e., those without caring responsibilities outside work, men more often than women, obtain unfair career advantages. Emphasizing the organizational context raises questions about the way in which leadership is often conceptualized as an attribute of individuals and something that can be learned or "developed".

In this context, writers such as Deem [21], Bird [18], and others have pointed to ways in which universities differ from other complex organizations. Academics adhere to a range of disciplinary affiliations, which may compete with their institutional identification. In many cases, term limits and turn-taking in middle-level management positions are expected, adding extra pressure on incumbents

as they struggle to keep up their research or their creative practice profiles so that their overall career does not suffer unduly.

Barcan [22] put forth a useful model of contemporary universities in which three paradigms can be seen at work, not independently but as overlays (a palimpsest). The first and oldest is scholarly tradition, often taking the form of a vocation. As the living repositories of knowledge, academics expect they will have a great deal of autonomy and a strong voice in governance, which can put them at odds with administrators and managers, who represent the second (bureaucratic) and third (corporate) institutional forms. Chairs may see themselves as scholars or practitioners with vocations, but their formal position makes them responsible for enforcing others' conformity to the bureaucratic and corporate requirements of the day, as well as for displaying their own conformity, as they too will be accountable to their senior managers.

As Moodie [23] pointed out, there are potentially competing institutional hierarchies, one based on displays of excellence in research and teaching (moving through ranks to full professor or equivalent) and another related to increasing managerial responsibilities (chair, dean, vice-president, etc.). While in some jurisdictions, full professors are expected to undertake managerial roles, in others (including Canada) the two hierarchies are only loosely connected. Moodie contrasted the intensive scrutiny of meritorious performance that informs promotions through the ranks with the relatively informal, amateurish, and collegial process of appointing or electing a head of department or school.

We should also note additional aspects of academia that may influence the work of managers or leaders. There are many types of postsecondary institutions, within and across countries. Similar titles (e.g., head of department, head of school, director) in different institutions and educational systems do not always refer to the same levels of responsibility. Some chairs have a great deal of budgetary oversight, while others have very little, with financial decisions made at more senior levels. Even within a single institution, individual units, such as departments or faculties, contrast greatly in size and complexity. Finally, disciplinary affiliations make a difference to the ethos and expectations of a particular unit.

Given so much variation, we agree with Fox-Kirk [5] that context is key and that an individual achieving success as a leader in one setting may flounder in another. In the generally masculinist culture of universities, women leaders might be expected to face obstacles. One such obstacle may be the clash between social expectations for "women" and for "leaders" that means performing as one or the other, risks rejection, for example being too aggressive for a woman or too conciliatory for a leader [24–27]. Women leaders are thought to practice self-surveillance and self-discipline to manage such contradictory expectations [12,15,28].

Not only are expectations likely to be contradictory, but there is some evidence that women (and minoritized academics more generally) may more often be appointed into turbulent settings, sometimes with insufficient preparation or local knowledge—the so-called "glass cliff" [29]. The glass cliff has been discussed in several publications on women in academic leadership [30,31] and appears in personal narratives and popular accounts, if not always by name [32–35]. Along the same lines, Read and Kehm note that women vice-chancellors in Germany are more likely to be appointed or elected when a situation requires "cleaning up" [36] (p. 824).

Conversely, the incongruence may be diminished in certain environments and subfields. Griffiths found that women in middle management in a traditional research-oriented "old" university in the UK told "stories of exclusion and lack of support" [37] (p. 81). In contrast, in a "new" university, a former faith-based teacher training college that had become a university and where women were better represented in leadership roles, they spoke positively about role models, training, and mentoring. Wroblewski [38] presented a case study of a small Austrian university of art where government and institutional policy produced gains for a range of women's equity issues, including, but not confined to, leadership. Yet adding more women may not automatically change the culture, which may have deep disciplinary or institutional roots, as Priola [26] discovered in her study of a UK business school.

2.3. New Directions

Chronic difficulties in approaching questions of women in academic leadership include the tendency to essentialize women; the associated over-generalization that cuts across cultures and countries; the assumption that there is a best leadership practice that can be divorced from its context; the individualization of leadership qualities; and a fascination with women in senior roles that has occluded the importance of middle or lower middle management. Recent scholarship, however, has taken some new turns: a broadened geographical compass; a more post-structuralist theoretical stance; a concern with the “intra-actions” [39] of gender and the neoliberal aspects of academe; and greater attention to ways in which gender intersects with other attributes, including generation, in impacting on leadership performances and others’ responses.

First, while much of the literature on women and academic leadership continues to originate in the US, UK, and Australia, we can now find a broader focus, including studies of European [15,19,20,31,40,41], Asian [24,42–44], and African [45] countries, and comparisons of women’s academic leadership across nations [11,36,46–51]. Looking across country contexts, Morley and Crossouard [24] point to women leaders’ ambivalence about their positions, associations with loss rather than gain, and unhealthy workloads. In some sites, there are additional challenges not featured in Western research, such as corruption and favoritism. A particularly interesting study is Kuzhabekova and Almkhambetova’s investigation of women leaders in universities in Kazakhstan. The authors situated their results in the tensions among three often contradictory cultures, “traditional, Soviet, and Westernized neo-liberal” [44] (p. 183), all of which have some impact on contemporary expectations around gender.

Several scholars have considered what other countries might learn from Sweden, where a legislative and social commitment to gender equity has altered the profile of “manager-academics” [21], creating what Peterson [31] calls “demographic feminization”. O’Connor and Goransson [50] found that Swedish senior managers avoid gender stereotypes about leadership styles and prefer to cite individual variations. Peterson [31] believes that academic management is actually dropping in status in Sweden, in part because of the work overload, and with the drop in status, men are abandoning these positions and leaving them to women.

Second, poststructuralist approaches have reframed the idea of leadership as an attribute to suggest instead that it is “performed” and thus constantly in flux. This idea parallels the notion that gender itself is “an ongoing interactive accomplishment” [52]. Haake explains that leadership is not what a person *is*, but “something that is done or constructed discursively” [40] (p. 292). Consequently, “conflicts and contradictions abound, multiple identities merge and overlap” [53] (p. 633). At a given moment, ways of acting draw from the discourses, or circulating sets of ideas, available. Identities, including a leader identity, are “unstable, contingent and precarious” [26] (p. 22). This approach departs radically from the idea of “women’s ways of leadership”, as it allows performances of masculinity by females and of femininity by males instead of a predictable gender-based leadership style [27] (p. 419). For example, in one article, senior women managers were described as wearing suits, signifying masculinity and authority, but softening the edges with “lighter colours, jewelry, scarves and designer shoes” [25] (p. 421). In different environments, notably home and work, or even in different sites within the university, women leaders may “perform differently” in order to conform to varying social expectations [47].

We can also complicate the (simultaneous) performativity of gender and leadership by questioning what else is going on—for example, do older women leaders tend to perform gender/leadership differently from younger ones? Here, we are thinking of Søndergaard’s description of discursive practices in Danish universities whereby individuals are “read” through “signs on their bodies” [54] (p. 191). While younger women academics can be funny, lively and pretty, she claims, older ones have to find a different way to “do mature academic ... femalewise” (pp. 197–198). Will older middle-managers be expected to respond in motherly ways to the needs of their colleagues—the emotional management work so often undertaken by women in their leadership performances [12]? If so, might they risk the rebellion of the “children” against their “parents” [27]?

Third, many current publications situate gendered management in the context of neoliberal university practices, themselves understood as gendered. Höpfl, for example, described the heightened emphasis on competition of all kinds as “frenetic male posturing” [55] (p. 40), while Thomas and Davies added that the academic job is now to be approached with “single-minded ruthlessness and competitive zeal” [56] (p. 384). Leathwood [57] noted that the pervasive emphasis on science and innovation as the fundamental challenge for nations and universities competing for “world-class” status operates with a hazy definition of what “science” includes, typically putting forward areas usually associated with men rather than alternatives, like eradicating violence against women. While, according to Leathwood, “passion” and “commitment” are acceptable statements for those implementing such agendas, “being emotional” remains forbidden, contributing to the positioning of “science” (and thus “world-class universities”) as objective, rational, and neutral (and with lingering masculine associations). Although there are instances of senior women managers doing well in the neoliberal environment [58,59], most of the literature is less sanguine.

Of the assemblage of changes that have been identified in the contemporary university environment, managerialism (also known as new managerialism or New Public Management) seems to be the one most frequently highlighted in studies of women and leadership. Essentially, this tendency refers to a move away from a system based on rules to one “founded on performance management and measurement, key performance indicators and decentralized decision-making” [51] (p. 521). While advantages in terms of efficiency and systematization have been identified, at its worst, “leadership might not mean much more than the management of a never-ending stream of new bureaucracies due to audits, evaluations, performance targets, multi-annual planning, and daily time-writing” [60] (p. 200), i.e., Barcan’s [22] bureaucratic layer of university work. Under these conditions, what looks like advances for women may simply mean an increase in “demanding administrative and pastoral duties” [51] (p. 523), reflecting the lives of academic women more generally [61].

Another ubiquitous feature of contemporary universities is the extensive use of new technologies, said to have altered the working day and made middle managers into “24/7” workers [62,63]. Drake [33] counted up the emails she sent to colleagues in nine months in her new job as a dean in Australia and found that there were 6269! It is not simply that there is more work, but that the individualism and personal responsibility built into neoliberal approaches encourage a sense of guilt and a perpetual drive to prove oneself worthy [64], despite the fact that no academic (or academic leader) can ever be “good enough” [22] (p. 90). Devine et al. used the phrase “elastic self” to describe the ways in which being an academic manager in Ireland requires “a relentless pursuit of working goals without boundaries in time, space, energy or emotion” [53] (p. 632).

Drake referred to neoliberal managerialism as the generation of “more measurable outcomes with fewer resources” [65] (p. 4). Prevailing concepts of leadership mean that good leadership is expected to result in positive outcomes, but when the news is bad, the manager/leader has the responsibility for the misery of a working environment where resources may be even further reduced. As Drake [65], Morley [3] and others have pointed out, there is an emotional or affective cost to all of this responsibility, or put differently, leaders operate in an “affective economy” [24,66]. For Ahmed, affects are social constructions rather than individual feelings and the affective economy refers to the circulation of these affects, which may include rationality as well as more obvious emotions such as pride or shame [24]. In Morley and Crossouard’s study [24], women leaders spoke of the “affective burden” which dealing with conflict and negativity among former peers placed upon them.

In cases where the academic manager becomes a scapegoat for ills beyond her control or even for mistakes she has made, the result can be symbolic violence [67] and enormous pain. No wonder women looking at leadership may be more likely to equate it with loss than advancement [24,68]. Drake’s description of the deanship as provoking “great emotional conflict the like of which I have never before experienced” [33] (p. 161) is hardly an advertisement for the pleasures of the job. Technology allowed reams of bullying emails to appear on her computer, while the institution merely suggested she should learn to adjust to the “cut and thrust of industrial relations” [65]. This type of

response has elsewhere been called institutional betrayal, when an institution, rather than remediating a situation, reinforces it [69]. What is clear in these cases is that the individualism that is a feature of neoliberalism (and leaderism), whether it leads to praise or blame, skirts around the structurally problematic features of a situation, such as inadequate resources or enforced redundancies, in favour of blaming the leader.

As part of the turn to corporate values in universities [22], academe operates under a search for efficiencies, which increasingly means much of the teaching and the research assistance is done by individuals on short-term contracts who can be paid much less than regular faculty [academic staff] and denied job security and benefits [70]. Because this tendency coincides with more women and racialized individuals entering the academic labour market, the new proletariat overrepresents these groups [71–73]. While there is a growing literature on the plight of precarious academics, managing a department or faculty under those conditions presents challenges yet to be examined.

A fourth trend in recent literature is an awareness that the category of “women” and therefore, “women leaders” should not be essentialized. Studies from a range of countries, as described above, move us toward greater appreciation of differences as well as similarities among women’s leadership experiences. Even within a country or institutional context, writers increasingly recognize that “there are always cross-cutting dimensions (intersections) such as race, social class, or having a disability, which operate together in any situation and can shift for a person over time” [74]. In many countries, including Canada, gains to date for women in accessing leadership positions have gone mainly to white women, while women from minoritized and racialized groups are still fighting for recognition in academe more generally [75]. Accounts of minoritized women in leadership positions are somewhat more prevalent in the United States [76–78]; however, they are largely disconnected from the international literature and difficult to generalize from, given specific features of the US higher education scene, such as the existence of historically Black universities. Notable also is Fitzgerald’s [13] integration of Indigenous academic women’s perspectives into her study of women leaders in Australian and New Zealand universities. Henry’s [79] narrative stands out as a thoughtful analysis of her experiences in three institutions as an African-Canadian woman, with special attention paid to her term as department chair in a Canadian university where both gender and race influenced the responses of others to her decisions and self-presentation.

Generational differences, which of course also reflect societal changes over time, are of particular interest in this article. David [80] compared perspectives of feminist scholars from different eras. Bagilhole and White [81] considered the interplay between gender and generation, its impact on academic careers, and its variation across country contexts. Several authors [64,82–85] have raised the question of whether younger women academics who have come of age in the neoliberal university might respond differently to those who have experienced, and then lost, an alternative academic culture. Generally speaking, these researchers have found that newer academics search for ways to establish an academic identity—more difficult for those without a permanent contract—but also retain a critical view of aspects of contemporary academe such as precarity and managerialism.

Less often explored are generational variations among women academic leaders. Burkinshaw and White [17] contrasted a senior group of women academic managers with a junior one. The former group occupied very senior positions in the UK and generally agreed that they had to learn how to deploy masculine styles of behavior if they were not to be sidelined. The junior women were taking part in a leadership development course in Australia. These women—who had at least considered leadership positions, thus signing up for the course—were unenthusiastic about a future in academic leadership. They were already experiencing stress and overload and were ambivalent, at best, about taking on more of it, a finding paralleling Peterson’s Swedish study [31] and the idea of lower middle management resembling a revolving door [1].

2.4. What is Missing?

At least two neglected elements jump out at us from this review of literature: first, Canada is barely represented; and second, the interplay of structural features and the gendered experiences of individuals in middle management are underexplored. While there have been many Canadian studies and discussions about academics and gender (see, for example, [74,86,87]), there has not been an equivalent focus on gender and academic leadership. Perhaps unappreciated by readers elsewhere is that while there are similarities between Canada and the United States (for example, the tenure system and the professorial ranks), there are also many points of divergence, among them the greater likelihood of working in a unionized environment, the lack of a central government department of education (as provinces are responsible for education), and the better social welfare provision of health and maternity benefits in Canada [88–90]. Canada also differs from most of the countries that have introduced national research assessment exercises. Provincial responsibility for higher education means that there cannot be a nation-wide policy such as Britain’s Research Excellence Framework or Australia’s Excellence in Research for Australia. It may not be a coincidence that comparative studies have found Canadian academics to be more “satisfied” than those in most other countries [91], although the presentation of results without gender divisions may obscure women’s lower levels of satisfaction [90]. Nevertheless, it is arguable that the repeated assessments associated with tenure, promotion, and annual performance reviews do much of the same work of raising anxiety, harnessing affect, and incentivizing performance and performativity [64,92].

There is, of course, relevant Canadian literature on women in academic management, some of which is written by one of us [1,27,30]), but often this is contained in conference papers, theses, bulletins, magazines, or reports that are unlikely to circulate outside of the country. A report commissioned to look at the gender gap in academe concluded that (1) women’s progress in Canadian universities is uneven by discipline and rank; (2) the higher the rank, the lower the percentage of women in comparison to men; (3) the Canadian profile is similar to that of other economically-advanced nations; and (4) there is a paucity of Canadian data [93] (pp. xv–xvi).

A few Canadian studies have suggested, consistent with the glass cliff metaphor, that women in high-level positions, such as university presidents, are at greater risk than men of termination or early departure [94]. Lavigne [95] identified a pattern of non-reappointment for women deans and racialized deans. A recent newspaper report [35] described the situation of Angelique EagleWoman, who, after moving from the United States to Thunder Bay, Ontario, to become dean of law at Lakehead University, resigned after less than two years, alleging systemic discrimination against her as an Indigenous woman. She was quoted as stating, “I have felt constantly challenged by a lack of funding, a hostile environment, and other negative actions directed at me as an Indigenous woman. It has reached a point that I am under such mental and emotional stress that it is untenable for me to stay”.

A second area of neglect is middle management/leadership. For clarity, we note that there are many books and articles that have discussed the work of department heads, often offering advice, but what we are considering is writing concerned with women or gender. There might be good reasons to make more careful distinctions between what Thompson [58] calls “top” and “middle” women. Her research indicated that women in middle management positions emphasize problems, while those in more senior positions appear more successful and more comfortable with “discourses of neo-liberalism” [58] (p. 405). Studies by Kloot [96] and Haake [40] also suggest that women middle managers, such as heads of department, are particularly vulnerable. Of three women appointed to that position as part of an equity initiative in an Australian business faculty, all left before the end of their term [96]. In Haake’s longitudinal Swedish study, male and female department heads spoke very similarly at the start of their terms, but four years later, their perspectives diverged, with most of the women (but not the men) talking about interpersonal problems, the impact of gender, and the time-consuming aspects of their work [40].

While the broader literature frequently points to the difficulties of this particular middle-level position [88,97], sandwiched between desires of colleagues and dictates of upper management [23,27,88],

there seems to be a further twist to the experiences of women in these roles. It may be that those who emerge relatively unscathed are the ones who become Thompson's "top women", while the others return, thankfully, to their faculty roles, disillusioned with leadership [1,30,46]. Certainly, there are examples of women who believe they have achieved success in their leadership roles [30,46,98,99]. In Ireland, O'Connor [59] found senior women academic leaders emphasizing the advantages of their roles; yet they too were also looking forward to ending their managerial assignments.

In the remainder of this article, we draw on our own experiences with middle management (leadership) in the Canadian context to illustrate and question some of the tendencies in the literature. While clearly generalization is limited, our effort is not meant to apply to many situations but to provide a heuristic consideration of some of the subtleties of experience that can be unearthed through narrative. There are some explorations of individual experience of middle management (usually chairs or deans and usually women) that provide some guidance, such as Kolodny's [100] discussion of her days as a female dean of arts in the US battling an invisible disability; Jansen's [34] account of being a Black male dean in a formerly all-white university in South Africa; Drake's [33] story of her trial by fire as a new dean in a new country, Australia; Bagilhole and White's [81] collection of academic career narratives of women across generations and nations; Henry's [79] observations on being a Black woman department chair in an atmosphere of dysconscious racism in Canada [101]; Faircloth's [102] narrative of her efforts to achieve "authentic leadership" as an American Indian department chair; and Sandra's [27] discussion of a Canadian chair coping with a critical incident. Common to these accounts is the exhausting emotional labour described by the narrators [12,103], raising the question of what exactly constitutes the workload in middle management positions.

3. Methods

How do we recover experience? We worked with the concepts of narrative and autoethnography. A narrative places some order on the chaos of everyday experiences [104,105]. Autoethnography, "a genre of writing that involves personalized accounts in which authors draw on their own lived experiences" [106], is a style that has gathered momentum in recent years, as it appears to offer a means of integrating mind and body in tune with postmodern theory [107]. Despite the inward-looking nature of autoethnography, adherents also claim that it is radical and progressive, engaging critically with the surrounding culture [108,109].

In addition, we worked with data generated by discussions with each other, four of which were taped and transcribed, and other artifacts, such as Sandra's materials from a faculty retreat, Dorie's tenure file, university documents, and our CVs. Italics represent our voices speaking directly about memories and ideas. Our process could be labelled "collaborative autoethnography" [110], where "two or more coresearchers . . . collectively use their self-stories as data" [111] (p. 397).

There are both similarities and differences between our institutions. Sandra's university is large and research-intensive, while Dorie's is small and art and design focused, although it also includes a liberal arts component. As both are in the same city and province, there are similarities in governance and the student body insofar as it is drawn from the local area. The subject areas we are associated with—broadly, education and craft—are fields with commitments to social justice, innovation, and diversity. Both have traditionally feminine associations, although historically, the leadership of both the faculties and their institutions has been male-dominated, gradually changing so that now women are relatively well-represented in management positions. Currently, both institutions emphasize the hiring of racialized and/or Indigenous faculty, with gender no longer a priority consideration. Some variations in Sandra and Dorie's chair experiences can be traced to size and scale, a point to which we shall return later.

The first three taped discussions took place in December 2010, April 2011, and June 2011 and were the basis of a conference paper comparing our careers and experiences of work–family balance [112]. In early 2018, we returned to the original paper and decided to update it with another taped discussion, this time with a narrower focus on our leadership experiences. For purposes of

simplification and to keep the focus on leadership, quotations in this article are taken from the 2018 discussion. Readers should note that the discussion was taped prior to the writing of the literature review. While the authors, especially the first author, had sufficient knowledge of the literature to bring its concerns into the discussion, the conversations were open-ended and not organized around specific questions based on the literature. Thus, there is not a perfect correspondence between the areas discussed above and those reported below.

Feminist writing typically aspires to give voice to persons normally silenced, but we cannot reproduce anyone's raw experience, even our own. A (dual) narrative like ours is told in "discourse time" rather than in clock time [113] and further compressed to fit a reasonable journal article length. Thus, it must be understood that there are hidden editorial hands (ours) organizing and reorganizing "experience" into a reasonably coherent account. While we followed conventional qualitative analysis procedures in that we marked up the transcripts with potential codes and identified broader themes, the process involved a greater immersion because of our personal investment in the topic and data. We have also been aware of ethical issues and have blurred or omitted some interesting anecdotes or observations as they might have made other people in our lives identifiable or even unhappy [114]. Perhaps additionally interfering with the purity of the result is Sandra's greater familiarity with literature on women and leadership or the rapport between us as mother and daughter, possibly leaving tacit understandings unvoiced. There is also the impact of timing and vantage point in influencing memory: Sandra's leadership experiences took place over a decade ago, while Dorie is currently living the life of a mid-level manager in academe. Whether any of these points is an advantage or disadvantage is difficult to discern.

The next sections present our discussion-based accounts of leadership experiences, considering similarities and differences that relate to contexts of generation, institution, and place in history, followed by a conclusion that situates these findings in the literature and raises questions for future study.

4. Results

Both of the authors have served as heads of department, or department chairs, as they are generally called in Canada. Writing this article was a chance to compare our experiences and to develop connections and perhaps extensions to the literature on women in academic leadership. While Sandra also completed a two-year term as an associate dean of graduate studies and (later) held a one-year associate department chair position, here, we focus solely on the department chair experiences. Logically, a department chair post might be a prior stage before moving into more senior positions; yet, this progression appears not to be the norm [62], perhaps especially for women [40,96]. We know that in many cases, the chair role is regarded as an interlude for a teacher and researcher, rather than a stepping stone to higher management [2,21,88], although, even then, it is hard to understand why many such positions receive so little preparation and ongoing support, given their critical place in running and representing departments, arguably the building blocks of the universities.

Our immediate interest is in examining our own perceptions and experiences and analyzing them in light of broader social considerations, along the lines of autoethnography, or collaborative autoethnography, as detailed above. In keeping with our emphasis in the literature review on context, we are alert to ways in which different points in history, in one's own career, and in one's location in a discipline, type of department, or institution might alter an experience as chair. Accordingly, we have organized the discussion below in terms of similarities and differences, in order to highlight variations and raise questions about how chairs fit into the leadership of universities. Note that even inside what are similarities, there are disparities of detail, and there are also similarities within what we categorize as differences. As indicated earlier, quotations in italics are taken from our 2018 taped discussion.

4.1. Similarities

Sandra's chair experience began in July 1999 and ended in June 2002. A three to five year term is the norm in her institution, although some chairs leave early or stay longer, occasionally signing on for a second term. Dorie served as chair for one year in 2010–2011, and a few years later began a "normal" three-year chair term in 2015. We spoke about how we were recruited into these roles; what kind of preparation or training we had; the need to define our role; our thoughts about power, caring, and conflict; and our commitment to the role and its consequences. In all of these areas, there was common, if not identical, ground.

As is typical, according to the literature [21,23], neither of us had gone out of our way to become chairs, nor had we seen the position as part of a career plan or as a promotion. Deem [2] (pp. 111–112) identifies three paths to higher education leadership: career track, good citizen, and reluctant manager. We were both good citizens. Dorie says,

The first time I became chair, I was the only option. At the time I was a contractually limited teaching appointment, a CLTA, and as such would not normally become a chair of my department, but as there were so few people who had tenure or an interest in being chair, I was somewhat eligible and the actual choice of the associate dean who thought that I would be the right person for the job. I was chair just for one year, and then was done and went back to my appointment.

While Sandra was not "the only option" in her department, it had become clear to her that it was her turn. In her mid-fifties at the time, she thought, "It would be an interesting challenge. It would be a good time in my life to do it. I wasn't raising my hand saying 'yay, appoint me,' but I was amenable to it". Several years after her first chairing experience, and now in a tenure-track position (i.e., likely to lead to a permanent academic appointment), Dorie was again asked to be department chair. She agreed, due to feelings of altruism, knowing that "someone had to lead the department" and wondering if it would be a "strategic advantage" to her as a pre-tenure faculty member "to have a voice and a role in leading the department".

Neither Sandra nor Dorie had official leadership training before becoming chairs, which is not unusual in these positions [62], although some countries have expanded their efforts in this regard [115]. Dorie had closely observed chairs with whom she had worked and had management experience outside the university. Sandra met several times with her predecessor, but found his decontextualized advice too abstract, retaining only "don't upset the [administrative] staff" and "be very careful about confidentiality". For both of us, "a new culture of training" (Dorie) with topical workshops began later in our terms. But what stood out was the self-motivation involved in learning what to do.

When I was learning to be a chair, maybe the first time, the first year, I had questions every day. I couldn't answer any student questions. "How do I do a mobility exchange?" "I don't know". "How do I replace a course for the transfer credit?" "I have no idea". "I'm having trouble in this course, is there any way I could do something else, or what do I do about this instructor?" "Well, I don't know, let's talk about it". And I would have to go to my predecessor at that time on a weekly basis, really, and say "what do I do in this situation?" . . . until I really understood it myself, and I would say that I had to get to a deep forensic level, a forensic relationship with my own program, so that I basically know every single thing about it, at this point.

Sandra agreed, "It was exactly as you say, I didn't know what questions to ask. I didn't know what I didn't know". We frequently turned to career administrative staff for help.

There was a whole web of women administrators who did a lot of the work in this place. The dean's assistant was very experienced and she would answer all kinds of questions, because I did not have anything on paper that told me how to do things.

(Sandra)

No one really explains it to you, but over time, you start to understand so-and-so works with curriculum. So-and-so works with finance. So-and-so does scheduling for courses. You begin to know over time who to talk to, because there's a lot of that investigation [necessary].

(Dorie)

Fellow chairs in our faculties were also important:

It helped when I started meeting with other chairs. I actually set it up that we should meet together and talk and we met informally for breakfast or whatever. And everybody had problems and issues and things like that.

(Sandra)

It is notable that the individualism that is valued in neoliberal contexts appears to have carried into the process of learning to lead. The rather vague definition of the chair's job responsibility contributed to the initial uncertainties. Dorie has made considerable progress since that time:

In my own tenure application, I tried to identify the types of work I do as chair, separate from service, which has been interesting, because there's a bit of a myth that chairing is sort of service even though it's posted as an actual appointment. So I feel that, I mean, I shouldn't have to define my own job, but I have. I've tried to identify the types of groups of people I work with, the types of work I do with each group, the type of objectives I set, the goals I set, and the things I'm responsible for, because it hasn't been really clear to me. So if it's not clear to me, how is it clear to anyone else?

Sandra related an anecdote about a colleague phoning her at home at 10 p.m. when she first became chair, asking for help with a problem not normally in the chair's bailiwick: "I was thinking I'm supposed to know the answer to this?" Dorie responded,

I'd like to say that you're supposed to know everything as chair. And the other side of people not knowing what a chair does is that you do everything . . . To be honest, that's not bad. You are the front line of the program, in my mind.

What we were talking about combines and perhaps confuses knowledge and power. For colleagues, the chair, from Day 1 of their term, knows everything (or perhaps it is a fantasy in which all participate?); moreover, the chair, who yesterday was a mere colleague, is suddenly imbued with power. Yet neither of us believed we had real power over colleagues. In keeping with Deem's [116] description of university management as "herding academic cats", Sandra lamented that, "sometimes I would be treated like I had a load of power and other times when I wanted somebody to do something I had to beg and plead and they still wouldn't necessarily do it". Here, we begin to see ways in which the academic setting is not fully corporate, at least in Canada. As Dorie noted, "In a normal job outside academe, you wouldn't be asking someone to do their job, you would be telling them". Neither of us had significant budget responsibilities, although Sandra's institution has since that time given chairs greater control over budgets. Thus, we lacked monetary incentives to encourage or reward colleagues. While in Sandra's university, chairs are involved in decisions about annual "merit pay", they usually delegate it to a departmental committee. Chairs can advertise and hire temporary faculty, subject to university procedures. They are not "bosses" and have no authority to hire or fire at will. Important decisions, and to a large extent, the distribution of funds for most matters take place in the dean's office or even at more senior levels. The extent to which chairs' decision-making is constrained is not always understood by departmental colleagues.

Short of alternative incentives, and in keeping with some of the literature on women's leadership, both of us prioritized "caring" in our interactions with others. Caring can be problematic, as in the "affective economy" [24,66] of chairing, reciprocity could be lacking, i.e., the caring goes only one way and at times is not even noticed by its recipient. The need for confidentiality that Sandra's predecessor mentioned plays out as a prohibition on pursuing close friendship in the department and a loss [68] of sociability. But Dorie was still passionate about this aspect of her work:

It's really important to me to make people feel valued and to give them a voice and take them seriously. I actually think everyone has a voice and this is everyone from our tenured faculty to our class

assistants. I would equally sit down with any of them and I do—any of them, who have a concern, a question, or want to talk. I think that it's really important to value them and show support on a personal level too.

A companion for power and caring, that is, conflict, was difficult for both of us to handle. Sandra explained, “People were angry with each other a lot . . . and as chair, the most difficult part was when that anger was directed at me, which happened a couple of times”. The more disturbing incidents tended to loom large in her memory, even years later. Another area where there were commonalities between us, and consistent with the literature [31,33,37,53], is the heavy workload we experienced, combined with the all-absorbing nature of the job, which turns into an intense sense of commitment, a concern with detail, and a potential neglect of one's personal needs. Like Devine et al.'s [53] participants, we were perpetually crafting our “elastic selves”. A segment of dialogue illustrates this point:

Dorie: One thing I feel we haven't necessarily touched on that I feel is prevalent is this feeling of personal responsibility for the department and that is something I struggle with, because I actually feel, and I know you did too, because I observed you being chair and how you felt very personally, like it's all resting on your shoulders.

Sandra: I did . . . I felt very responsible like that, that's right. But I also felt that I learned over the years that you can love an institution, but it doesn't love you back.

Dorie: I told you that. I told you those exact words when you were chair. I said “the job doesn't love you”. That's what I said to you. I tried to get that through to you.

The tendency for the work to creep into every crevice of one's life made it difficult to continue to do outstanding teaching, research, and practice, which can impact upon one's future career when eventually no longer a chair. The literature affirms this anxiety and attributes it partly to the “turn-taking” that is often characteristic of this particular role [21,62]. Dorie recalled discussions with another woman who was about to become chair of her department:

We were both talking about the negative effect it would have on our own practices, and going in really with our eyes open, knowing that most people who become chairs notice a sharp decline in time for practice. This is creative practice. And that we had really never met anyone who had been able to avoid that kind of impact.

As Dorie concluded, “you are never not the chair”. And what are the consequences? Morris and Laipple surveyed 1515 deans, directors, associate deans, and department chairs in the United States and reported that “a striking proportion” of participants felt that their managerial role frequently interfered with family, social life, eating well, exercising and sleeping [62] (p. 247).

The chairs I know . . . really put their programs first, and I've seen people really struggle with the challenges of supporting their programs and being just so passionate about trying to support all their people in the community, the faculty, and the students, and so on, but not themselves, maybe to the detriment of themselves . . . It isn't easy to talk about your personal life as a chair, because who do you talk to?

(Dorie)

4.2. Differences

In this section, we consider areas where differences in experience or perspective arose, related to the changes over time in the representation of women in the academy and in leadership positions, different cultures related to discipline and institution, the timing of the chair responsibility, the encroachment of managerialism on the work of today's academics, the associated rise in contingent faculty, and, finally, our personal sense of whether we are (or were) actually leaders.

As noted earlier, “generation” makes a difference in the experience that someone has in a given academic position [17,80–85]. When Sandra began working as a lecturer in Britain in 1972–1973, women comprised about 11% of full-time academics [117] (p. 63). Leadership positions, such as head of department, dean, or pro-vice chancellor were almost exclusively held by (full) professors, the highest academic rank, and professors were almost exclusively men. Improvements were gradual. Sandra and her family left Britain for Canada at the end of 1990. In Canada, in 1990–1991, women made up 20% of full-time faculty but still comprised less than 8% of full professors [118].

Over the years, women faculty have become better represented in Canadian universities, so that by 2016–2017, they constituted almost 40% of full-time academics and 27.7% of full professors [119]. We could assume that Dorie and her peers are now working in a more female-friendly environment, at least in a numerical sense, compared to Sandra at an equivalent career point.

Figures on leadership positions are difficult to find in Canada. Sandra’s university reports that the proportion of academic administrators (chair, dean, and above) matches the proportion of faculty who are women at 35%. Interestingly, chairs have the lowest percentage at 29%, compared to associate/vice deans (42%) and deans and above (42%). When Sandra was chair, women were closer to 20% of that group. In both of our institutions we have noticed some feminization of the upper management structure, much as Peterson [31] reported in Sweden. In the context of discussing our “intense commitment” to the work of the chair, we thought about what difference it might make to have more women in leadership roles:

I wonder if we have a gender issue here, when we’re describing this intense commitment, because I’m thinking of some of the men who were chairs that I knew who just didn’t seem to operate that way. They didn’t seem so bothered, and things kind of seemed to not get them agitated in the same way.

(Sandra)

Sandra contrasted what she had observed as women doing “all the work” with the greater willingness of men to delegate, or perhaps it was the greater willingness of support staff to assist them. But Dorie questioned this analysis, “Well, of chairs I have known, I would say the men are, on the whole, as equally committed and passionate and affected by some of the concerns we’re [talking about]”. Sandra referred to the glass cliff phenomenon [29,31]:

Both in my institutions and elsewhere I have seen that women in these upper positions get heavily criticized . . . It almost seems to go along with the job . . . and it fits the theory of the glass cliff, that women are hired for jobs that are really difficult to do . . . It would also fit the idea that they are not given much leeway, that they are criticized for things that maybe men would be allowed to do, and it also fits the idea that there is a tension between the idea of management or leadership and of being female. If the image of a leader is masculine, how do you perform leadership if you are not male or masculine? You [Dorie] may not feel that as strongly in the environment you work in.

Dorie responded, noting that historically, her institution had been male dominated, although there had been changes in recent years:

It’s true, I mean, there’s something that should be said for context. I work in an art and design institution and so it’s possible that there is more flexibility in terms of identity, in terms of outward presentation or I would say there’s a history of creativity in, I guess, in just the very nature of its founding and its personal expression. So it’s possible that that isn’t quite the same.

The interesting suggestion here, in line with the poststructural trend we discussed earlier, is that in certain environments, men (or women) may be enabled to “perform” both gender and leadership differently than they might elsewhere, given a particular culture and disciplinary ethos. Dorie’s observations are also reminiscent of Griffiths’ [37] finding that some types of institutions are better than others at allowing female leaders to flourish (see also case studies in [120]).

However, Sandra's faculty of education also has a reputation for allowing flexible identities and (perhaps related) for cutting-edge work.

An advantage for Dorie was that her prior work experience had included leadership responsibilities and perhaps contributed to the confidence her superiors showed in her ability to be a chair, even prior to tenure. Less positively, as has been pointed out by Armenti [121], such elongated early career years in academe can be problematic for women as the biological clock competes with the tenure clock. Sandra did not become chair until she was a full professor, tenured, and in her mid-50s, a time when she no longer had childcare responsibilities. While Dorie benefited from the more generous maternity leave provisions available in Canada, her early career years and chair work also co-exist with parenting responsibilities.

Other differences between starting a career in the 1970s and in the 2000s might be attributed to the increasing corporatization and managerialism found in today's universities. Features of Dorie's job and her university that had not been as apparent during Sandra's career resemble the literature's descriptions of neoliberal universities—more policies, more monitoring, more technology: *"There's a lot more control these days, actually, with websites for courses and things"* (Dorie). Dorie mentioned that policies on respectful workplaces, accommodation, diversity hiring, and freedom of information *"have changed the climate"*. The provincial government has also introduced more requirements for reporting and for prioritizing certain areas versus others. However, in contrast to the descriptions of the consequences of managerialism and corporatization found in most of the literature, individual faculties *"on the ground"* are not directly affected by many of these external requirements beyond relatively simple matters, such as adding learning outcomes and policy information into their course outlines. Some of the requirements of leadership may have changed, however. Chairs are involved in producing periodic reports and receiving visitations by evaluators doing quality audits, for example. We saw reflections of a new era in the titles of associate deans, who now tend to have responsibilities for internationalization and outreach as well as more traditional areas like programs and research. Dorie commented that an associate dean position that had in the past been concerned with studios and facilities now carries responsibilities for research, outreach, and strategic projects, a move from being *"really grounded"* to a *"let's go out and see what's out there role"*.

As noted earlier, both women experienced chairing as carrying a very heavy, almost open-ended workload. However, when we probed more closely, we could see some differences attributable to the size and scale and type of our positions, some of which are similar to the differences between pre-1992 (old, established) and post-1992 (new, former colleges or polytechnics) universities in the UK, as described by Deem [21]. She commented, *"The careers of those [manager-academics] working in the post-1992 universities tended to be dominated by teaching and administration, while research played a much larger role in the careers of those working in pre-1992 universities"* [21] (p. 244). While Sandra was able to decide for herself how much teaching she did, usually teaching one or at most two graduate courses a year, Dorie was teaching three undergraduate courses. Sandra had both an associate chair and an executive assistant, while Dorie had no associate chair and shared a program assistant with others. Dorie also has responsibility for technicians. Although Dorie's department is actually bigger than Sandra's was, in a tradition consistent with art and design institutions, it has a far larger proportion of faculty on temporary contracts. With more permanent faculty, Sandra could distribute to colleagues much of what might otherwise become chair responsibilities. Dorie is doing far more detailed curriculum planning and student advising than Sandra did. When Sandra was chair, email was already ubiquitous, but the university website had not yet developed into a resource that would aid chairs in finding policies and people. Reflecting the technological changes in recent years, Dorie works digitally in a way that Sandra did not:

I've actually moved from a physical archive to an almost entirely digital archive, because I simply cannot bear all the paper. If you were to print out every decision that's been made, every policy, every outline, every history of every student or every faculty member, you would be drowning in paper. So, I organize it all digitally which is a job in itself because it's this entire kind of personal archive.

(Dorie)

Her example also points to the difficulty of delegating much of the management work, paralleling the ways in which advancing technology has meant that academics now do for themselves what in the past had been considered secretarial responsibilities. In terms of workload, Dorie commented,

I'm actually in the trenches, teaching the students, as well as working with them weekly on various concerns, as well as hiring and assisting and mentoring faculty and working with technicians. I have many different people I work with all the time, but I would say, I have learned through this immense workload and I have decided at some point in my chairship that there are certain things that I need to push upwards and I shouldn't do them myself . . . I have had to find out what my boundaries are, and my boundaries tend to be issues with colleagues.

So, perhaps over time, chairs learn to be less “elastic”.

An important point of difference concerns job security, itself related to the search for efficiency in the neoliberal university. While Sandra had some delays at the start of her career, including three years of temporary posts, she was able to secure a permanent position before she completed her doctorate. Since that time, universities have experienced serious financial cutbacks and developed an ethos of doing more with less—and with fewer permanent staff. Now, a would-be academic may have to run the gauntlet of contingent academic labour before landing (if ever) a tenure-track and then a tenured position [70,122].

Dorie's career contrasts with Sandra's in reflecting that extended period of uncertainty. She spent eight years studying for two degrees and working in an arts administration position (including leadership responsibilities), after which it took six more years of part-time work in arts administration, community college teaching, museum research, and jobs at her current institution as a teaching assistant, marker, and sessional instructor before she secured a contractually limited teaching appointment in 2009, and, after an additional four years, a tenure-track position in 2013. In most Canadian universities, a tenure-track appointment is considered the *beginning* of an academic career; it can be converted to a permanent position after about five further probationary years and a searching and successful review of one's teaching, research, and service. Thus, assuming Dorie receives tenure in 2018, she will have been working towards establishing a stable academic career for 15 years after her highest degree, or 23 years since starting her undergraduate studies. While this trajectory may sound extreme, in another contemporary study of doctoral graduates, lengthy winding pathways were also common, some of which led to an academic career after many years of contingent positions, while others ran aground [122].

As noted above, historically, reliance on contingent faculty has not been unusual in art and design institutions, as individuals working there usually have an art or design practice as well, which may be their main interest. However, as these institutions have upgraded to university status, they still appear to rely heavily on part-time academic labour, reflecting the scarcity of tenure-track jobs more generally. Asking pre-tenure (or contingent) faculty to take up leadership positions is not a phenomenon explored in the literature, yet it may be more widespread than we realize. Presumably, there are consequences for the extent to which the individual feels free to take up controversial positions or express disagreement with senior management.

Were we “leaders”? Sandra was not sure that the descriptor worked for what she had experienced. But perhaps, because of her varied positions in and out of academe, her current immersion in the job, and her relative youth, Dorie had no difficulty with the designation:

I'm definitely a leader. I think my role is to lead in a lot of complex ways. It's to look out for the department's future. It's to consider the needs of all the community members in the department and to try to create a really cooperative supportive environment for them. I've thought a lot about this, what the role is, over time. I thought a lot about how I speak to them, correspond with them, how I bring them together and how I communicate and how I create smaller teams among them to do different

kinds of work. I think teachers are leaders in their own classrooms, but when you're a chair, you're a leader in lots of actual functional ways, because you are leading the development of, say, curriculum, of the space . . . So, what do we need in our studios that helps our students learn? How do we stay relevant? How do we think about the future? How to incorporate, say, new technology into our structure, both our spaces and our curriculum? So I'm leading, because I'm kind of visioning all that stuff, but at the same time I'm kind of leading on a day to day basis, like making sure our schedule works, like making sure the students aren't overburdened with workload. I see all of that as leadership . . . a leader chairs meetings, a leader looks ahead, a leader creates a tone for their program, and I do all those things.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

After a brief opening, introducing the authors, this article has taken a more conventional turn by reviewing literature on women and academic leadership. While this literature has become so voluminous that a complete review would require an alternative method of capturing material and much more space, outlines of an argument came through in the choice of sources and organization of the section. We identified issues typically raised in writing on our theme, such as the chronic under-representation of women in senior positions, questions around leadership styles and how they might relate to gender, and the ways in which organizational structures and cultures and everyday expectations in academe work against (or less often, for) women's advancement and well-being. It also became clear that universities differ from other complex organizations in major respects, as well as differing from one another, suggesting that a thorough understanding of a particular context is necessary to understand how leadership might be situated within it and perhaps also predicting which women will go on to greater heights, or fall down the glass cliff, or simply enter the revolving door and return to everyday academic life.

Recent work has moved to broaden the geographical coverage; take up a more poststructuralist view of leadership as a constantly changing performance rather than a fixed individual characteristic; recast leadership as it is currently understood within neoliberal university environments that emphasize managerialism, accountability, and performativity and along with new technologies extend demands on managers' time, abilities, and affective capacities; and point to varied experiences related to attributes such as class, race, and generation. In addition, we noted that the international literature generally ignores Canada and has underplayed middle management.

Drawing on methodological innovations around autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography, we set out to record discussions between the two of us, some three decades apart in age but both deeply immersed in the academic world. Excerpts from our latest discussion, from early 2018, are presented in this article. This discussion focused on our respective experiences as heads of departments or "chairs", the term commonly used in Canada. In keeping with our focus on context, we organized the results around similarities and differences—which we thought would relate to time in history, individual career point, and institutional and disciplinary settings, among other contexts. The focus on the middle-management position of chair is important too, as it has been overlooked, with some exceptions, relative to the importance placed on understanding the experiences of women at more senior levels. Yet, it is not only a potential recruitment point for senior management, though apparently frequently flawed in that respect [40,96], but is also a critical site for good university management, "*the front line of the program*", as Dorie remarked.

Our method is clearly limited in terms of allowing generalization, but it can capture some of the detail and emotion of experience that other forms of study neglect and thus, provide heuristic directions for future research. We explore some of these themes below, noting areas where universities might improve the experience of leadership and those where further research is advisable.

First, chairs, including ourselves, others we have observed, and those described in the literature, appear typically to struggle, caught between contrary expectations of upper management and their departmental colleagues, and are usually under-trained, heavy with responsibility, and prone to

neglecting their own health and happiness. While some middle managers enjoy their responsibilities, the overwhelming impression, both in the feminist and in the traditional leadership literature, is of the chair position as a site of struggle. Barcan built on theories of gender performance to comment that academic performance can never be “right”, as “correct performance is contingent, externally determined, and varies with context”, requiring self-policing [22] (p. 90). While this argument readily applies to academic chairs as well, we are nevertheless reluctant to give up the idea that the experience of chairing can be improved. For example, are there cases where the pressure has been reduced by careful planning and mentoring or even rethinking the responsibilities, rather than perpetually increasing them?

To take one aspect, how can the sink-or-swim entry into chairing, commented upon frequently in literature on academic management [123], possibly be good for an institution’s well-being and future? Wolverton and colleagues [123] described a pilot program at the University of Nevada where a course in professional development for potential chairs was designed around the information provided by current chairs and senior managers. Courses in leadership development for women have a long history in Australia; some recent interventions are attempting to take a more sophisticated approach to transforming organizations as well as increasing individual capacities [124]. Wolverton et al. [123] pointed out that professional development is not the same as topic-based workshops; while we have found workshops helpful, we agree that they are insufficient to fill the gap. In our conversation, Dorie suggested that some serious early identification of prospective chairs, combined with shadowing of the serving chair “*over weeks, if not months*”, should replace the conventional last-minute appointment of chairs who, like us, do not even know what they do not know. She imagined it to work “*like a medical student [who] walks behind the doctor*”. Another idea might be finding a way for departmental members who are *not* chairs to be educated about what they can, and cannot, expect from a chair. Institutions might also consider whether there are better sites and methods for resolving conflict, rather than expecting untrained chairs to manage that particular affective burden.

Second, there are unresolved dilemmas around the best career point for someone to move into leadership positions as they are currently structured. Although Sandra subsequently spent two years in another managerial role, an associate deanship with responsibilities in the broader university, she did not see any possibility of a leadership career opening at that time in her life, even had she wished for it. Dorie’s chair experiences have come much earlier in her career, which opens up other options; however, she has had to cope with taking on such demanding work when not yet in a secure university (tenured) position and while parenting a young child and establishing her own art and design practice. Henkel commented on the way in which young women, in particular, are affected by the way in which “time” in academe has been elongated in the search for a permanent position as well as in the requirements of the job, where “women . . . often interweave domestic, child care and professional work in the same time-space” [125] (p. 202). As an “older” woman chair, different dilemmas surfaced for Sandra, as Søndergaard [54] would predict, such as an expectation that she (like a mother) could sort out squabbles and conflicts, while being a potential target for hostility when things were not going well.

Chairs usually think of themselves as faculty members who want to teach and to keep their research or practice moving along. While the need to find a balance in this sense is a notable aspect of these positions, our literature review and our autoethnography suggest that there is more at stake, including threats to health and happiness. Contemporary descriptions of *non-managerial* academics typically evoke tremendous stress and exhaustion; for example, Pereira wrote about “how utterly drained and profoundly depleted the interviewees seemed to be . . . pressured exhaustion was conspicuous in their tone of voice . . . punctuated by tired sighs and despondent pauses” [126] (p. 184). What happens, then, when complex and difficult managerial responsibilities are added to (somewhat reduced) teaching and efforts to continue one’s research or practice? Moreover, the extended pathway now common for young academics striving to gain some form of academic job security means that there can be incongruities among age, experience, job security, and leadership options. We also

noticed that the chair's job now includes managing large numbers of staff on precarious contracts, a responsibility that likely adds further complications to the role and befits further investigation.

Third, there were 13 years between the end of Sandra's chair appointment (2002) and the beginning of Dorie's three-year term (2015). Was 13 years a sufficient time to see a heightening of managerialism and corporatism in the universities that impacted upon their work? We see some obvious changes over this period, such as the tightening of provincial control over institutions, together with incentives to differentiate their purposes; more frequent internal and external reviews; expectations that curriculum materials and individual course materials will include stated objectives and be available online; more policies on adaptations for students with special needs; elaborate institutional ethical review procedures for all research; much greater use of technology and of digital record-keeping; and larger numbers of non-academic administrators to manage these developments. There has also been a renewed emphasis on increasing diversity and Indigeneity in Canada's universities in the past few years. There is a perpetual sense that resources are not keeping pace with expectations, which links to greater pressures to bring in external research funding.

While our experiences (both of them) match the literature's descriptions of work overload and difficulty in finding any leisure time or "me time", we do see differences between our accounts and those from countries like the UK where central government has dictated (and frequently changed) policy positions that directly impact on academic work, leaving academics and academic managers constantly scrambling and under pressure. Canadian universities are partly shielded from some of the worst excesses seen elsewhere by the lack of a central government education ministry, along with a strong tradition of unionism and a functioning tenure system, yet it has been argued that the slow pace of such changes simply obscures the reality of their direction and impact [127,128].

Finally, our article leads to many areas where further research would be useful. Our emphasis on context suggests that detailed ethnographies, although relatively rare in higher education and perhaps raising ethical problems, could expose more details of how leadership is performed. Pereira's [126] account of the ways in which epistemological boundaries have been drawn around women's studies and changed over time is one model. More investigations of the experiences of those from groups who are minoritized in a given setting would certainly give us a broader sense of what leadership might mean under certain circumstances [79]. Hampton reminds us that the academic institutions in which we work have their own gendered and racialized histories [129].

We have also argued throughout that more attention needs to be paid to middle management, specifically, as detailed in this article, the chairs of academic departments. We would like to see that attention expanded to what has elsewhere been called "lower middle management" [1] and to other manifestations of middle levels of leadership such as associate deans. Deans, too, are of interest as they are sometimes described as part of middle management and sometimes senior management. Also, many of the glass cliff stories pertain to women deans and/or racialized deans. As deans are more likely than chairs to be external appointments (with exceptions), we may need to zero in on what happens in situations where expectations are high but local knowledge is low. In this article, we have made some comparisons between generations and institutions, but comparisons could be taken further, into disciplinary cultures, for example. Both glass cliff stories and instances of the affective economy of chairing could be more deeply and systematically investigated.

Finally, we are aware of the analytical tension between structural factors and individual actions. In general, we have argued that aspects of the structural setting, such as the increase in bureaucratic and neoliberal university practices, have to be highlighted, in comparison to the traditional emphasis on individual attributes of leaders being the key to "effectiveness". However, our very reliance on personal stories suggests we should not lose sight of individuals either. Barcan wrote (and we can substitute "leadership" for "academic work"):

Academic work is ... boundless and potentially infinite, and therefore, it is always a matter of *determining* and *managing* one's workload as well as simply *doing* one's

work. This puts academic work squarely in a terrain where individual psychology meets collective norms. [22] (p. 93) (*italics in original*).

Yes, we have more women leaders now in academe, but can we say that women academic leaders are thus doing “better”? The academic career has become more tenuous; individuals need to figure out complex conundrums of balancing “work” and “life” while demonstrating what seems to be endless performativity; departmental leaders tolerate an “elastic self” and carry an “affective burden”. Yet Dorie’s pride in her leadership abilities suggests that there is hope that the younger generation of leaders will not be defeated by the complexities and contradictions of the role.

Author Contributions: The authors shared equally in planning and conceptualizing this article; both authors participated equally in the recordings and discussions that were used as data; the first author wrote the initial draft and it was edited by both authors.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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