

# Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations

---

*Gender and STEM*

---

2016

## A Critical Feminist Perspective on Leadership Excellence and Gender

Carol Watson  
watson@rider.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgg>

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#), [Human Resources Management Commons](#), [Organizational Behavior and Theory Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Watson, C. (2016). *A Critical Feminist Perspective on Leadership Excellence and Gender*. Paper presented at Closing the Gender Gap: Advancing Leadership and Organizations. DOI: 10.5703/1288284316069

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This article examines leadership excellence and gender through critical and feminist theory lenses. Now is an opportune moment to consider the theoretical underpinnings of women's leadership development insofar as women remain under-represented in positions of leadership even in countries where they have achieved equal rates of participation in labor markets (e.g., the US and other western industrialized nations). Winning women's equal access to jobs was a major accomplishment of the women's movement of the 1970s; it has changed the role of women in public spheres profoundly. Yet women's inability to break glass ceilings and walls remains a puzzling and troubling phenomenon. The explanation that has implicitly gained most ascendancy within the management and leadership arenas is that women evidently lack leadership skills or knowledge that training can fix. A counter proposal offered here is that it is overly-narrow, modernist conceptualizations of leadership itself that need to be fixed, not women per se. Equally important is making feminism "speakable" again in the business world, business schools, and the field of management leadership. The liberal feminism that drove the women's movement in the 1970s needs to be re-examined in terms of postmodern feminist theories of oppression. The suggestions offered here focus on the enhancement of leadership excellence and the achievement of gender equality in leadership by understanding the systems that disempower women and other oppressed groups and then training men and women to work together to dismantle them.