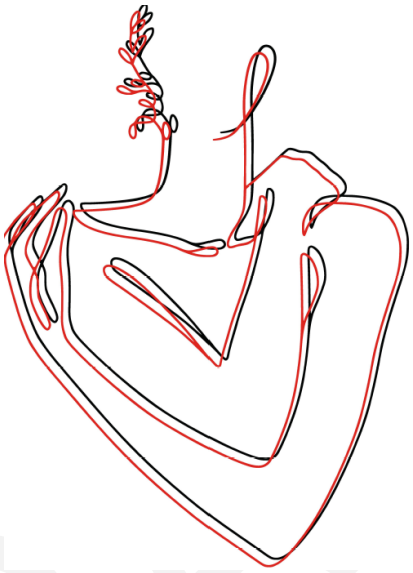
Section 1: Approaching the Narratives



Art by Imani

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"Sometimes leadership isn't about how we lead others, rather the strongest leaders are those developed through leading our own personal narratives."

- Jasmin, CH 14, p. X

Chapter 1

Better Together: Channeling Our Collective Power and Purpose

Brittany Devies, Rebecca Shetty, and Trisha Teig

On a cold afternoon in early December, I (Trisha) found myself telling her the idea, half-formed and hesitant, yet hopeful. It was your average zoom meeting. A recorded interview with my colleague and friend, Julie Owen, as a favor for the gender and leadership course I was teaching. After we'd wrapped up, the usual chit chat ensued. That's when it happened, the ideas spilled out of me. This concept had been swirling around in my head for the past two years – to share the stories of women from the leadership program I directed. The women in the program are wonderful, brilliant, and thinking about leadership in unique ways that needed to be out in the world. It was a simple concept: gather narratives and share them out in some fashion - an article, a blog, a book? I didn't know; besides, I said – "I can do it later". Julie – in her enthusiastic and supportive way – said, "what are you waiting for?". She encouraged me to start the process by exploring the idea with friends and colleagues who were leadership educators focused on gender equity. Emboldened by Julie's advice, I sent out cold emails! Some of the women I contacted I knew, some I knew of but had never really met, and some I did not know at all! At that first meeting, I was a mix of elated and terrified. To my wonder, almost everyone I invited decided to join the project and even the people who did not jump on board were excited about the idea. I realized, after that push from a mentor/friend, I was not alone in wanting to share and learn from stories of women and leadership.

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Overall format may alleviate the first few & more cerebral chapters. For instance, the use of different fonts, spacing, and sizing can help (think Margaret Wheatley's books, specifically her most recent *Who Do We Choose To Be?).* I understand you may have little power over format parameters.

A page could be dedicated to strong short quotes/statements that hone in on the book's intent. Think mostly white space balanced with a quote in the center of the page. (Different aways to keep the reader engaged, breaking up heavy content in first few chapters, and provides a more artistic layout). - We would like to add these at the beginning of each chapter 1-4 and then the beginning of each section after that.

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In the spring of 2021, a group of twelve women met to discuss and dissect, improve and improvise, collaborate and coordinate. As the group contemplated possible research opportunities, we kept coming back to gathering and sharing stories of women as examples of how the dominant narrative of leadership (hierarchical, masculine, western and white-centric) was not true for so many women's experiences. We recognized the capturing and sharing of these narratives could be a purposeful act to disrupt persistent hegemonic perspectives of leadership that seem to persist no matter how much we insist they are no longer TRUE.

From these beginnings, we came to a conclusion: the purpose of this book is to capture and explore women's narratives of leadership across time, space, and generations. From these collaborative beginnings, the team accelerated and expanded. We identified six research sites to collect narratives, implemented a pilot collection and analysis of narratives, submitted and were accepted for a book proposal, and began the process of collecting data – all in spring, summer, and fall of 2021 (see chapter 4 on methods for greater detail on our research design and process). We committed to a deeper collaboration than many edited works. We gathered a collective of eighteen co-authors, researchers, and friends to undertake the adventure, meeting quarterly to touch base, to check-in with each other and the project, and to hold true to our purpose by discussing our own stories. We embraced the messiness this type of process required, including the effort to weave ideas and content across chapters and across the entire work. While each chapter in the book can stand alone, they are better understood in their collective as a collaborative understanding of leadership through the power of narratives.

We hope by sharing and analyzing these stories we can make strides in disrupting a single understanding of leadership and instead embrace the complex, unique, and crucial ways leadership in multiplicity can be articulated through women's voices. We believe this book

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stands on the shoulders of our (often silenced or ignored) foremothers who spoke and practiced leadership in the margins and against all odds. We believe this book serves as a bellwether for needed change in understanding leadership from an alternative and pluralistic view. We believe this book offers future generations the tools to use narratives as sources of truth-telling for dismantling harmful practices and perspectives of leadership. As poet and scholar Audre Lorde (1984) emphasized, we are stronger when we embrace and learn from our differences and in that strength, we can lead change.

Grounding Assumptions

This book is grounded in several assumptions about gender and leadership, many informed by the assumptions laid out by Dr. Julie Owen (2020) and many others formed throughout our collective writing process. These assumptions include:

- Leadership is not defined or restricted by a position. Leadership is a collective process that is socially constructed based on the social, cultural, and environmental context (Billsberry, 2009; Dugan, 2017; Guthrie et al., 2013; Guthrie et al., 2021; Volpe White et al., 2019).
- Gender is also socially constructed (Butler, 2004; Haber-Curran & Tillapaugh, 2018; Owen, 2020; West & Zimmerman, 1987), and "woman" was an identity that chapter authors and narrative contributors self-identified with to opt into this project.
- As a socially constructed idea, understandings and experiences of leadership are affected by our social identities (race/ethnicity, gender, class, religion, etc.) and their intersections (Dugan, 2017; Ospina & Foldy, 2009; Owen, 2020).

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- This book is shaped and formed by the voices of the narrative contributors and authors. Our own voices, identities, and lived experiences have shaped this book into what it is today.

We also want to note some purposeful decisions made throughout the book for the sake of consistency and in alignment with the value-orientation of this work. First, we describe the writers in this book in two contexts – *chapter authors* and *narrative authors*. The chapter authors served as researchers, weavers, and writers within the project. The narrative authors contributed narratives describing their experiences with leadership, and some also participated in feedback within the research process. In each chapter, the *chapter author* writes a narrative, noted in italics, and then *narrative authors'* stories are included in grey boxes. Second, we capitalize identities of People of Color and Queer folx to decenter whiteness and heteronormativity and to honor those who have been historically marginalized; where these identities are not capitalized, the words were written by a narrative author. Finally, in relation to the previous note, we did not edit any of the narrative authors' words after their final submission. This was an intentional choice to ensure we stayed true to their words in their entirety. Therefore, any discrepancies in grammar or mechanics are embraced as the authenticity of the narrative authors' voices and serve as an example of pushing against any expectation of perfection in our knowledge creation.

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Positionality

When our initial group gathered to discuss the possibility of this book coming to fruition, we immediately and easily recognized that the group was predominately white women. This is not entirely surprising given the larger landscape and demographics of leadership educators in higher education, student affairs, and academia; a truth we grapple with and one that we hope changes. We knew we needed to more diverse voices and perspectives in our group and to

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honestly acknowledge the identities of the authors in this text. We understand the privileges many of our authors and editors possess influence the ways we experience life and that our leadership experiences may or may not match the experiences of the narrative authors throughout this book. We do not take this lightly.

We want to immediately recognize that our editorial team (Trisha, Brittany, and Becka) all identify as white, cisgender, straight women. All three of us also have educational privilege. At the time of writing this, two of our editors have doctoral degrees and the third will be defending her dissertation in the coming months. This access to information, diversity of thought, and other academic colleagues certainly informs how we approach this work. Our privilege carries responsibility to put in the work, to remain self-aware and to explore our biases and ways that we personally perpetuate systems of oppression. We must combat our socialized ways of thinking that demean, disparage, or lead to harming those who do not identify as we do. We approach this work humbly with deep gratitude for the chapter and narrative authors who identify as Women of Color or with other historically oppressed identities. We are grateful they would share their voice and relate to one another in ways that we cannot.

Our chapter authors include early career and mid- to senior-level professionals in higher education serving as student affairs practitioners, faculty, aspiring faculty, doctoral students and candidates, researchers, and advocates. We have 18 authors; ten identify as Women of Color (Black or African-American, Japanese, Latinx, Middle Eastern, and multiracial) and eight identify as white. We have one author whose Jewish identity is particularly salient to them. A couple of our authors identify as Queer. For our authors who have historically excluded and oppressed identities, their experiences with marginalization anchor their desire for building solidarity, shedding light on injustice, and working to create a more just society for other women.

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While our authors have varying racial, socioeconomic, religious, and sexual identities, our womanhood certainly brought us all together. Our womanhood unites us through shared experiences of combatting notions of leadership that center men and masculinity. We are proud to be women uplifting other women and sharing the stories of the next generation. At the same time, we recognize and affirm that not all women have the same experiences and shared identities as the identity "woman" does not and never will create a monolithic community. Further, we find strength in our differences and recognize by discussing inequities and distinctions across difference, we can come to a better shared understanding in our efforts for societal change (Lorde, 1984). Each contributor to this book holds distinct identities in race, class, religion, sexuality, and a host of other ways that inform their understanding and existence in the world. These identities directly informed our varied and intrepidly creative outcomes to responding to a shared prompt.

For those of us who have many privileges related to race, religion, socioeconomic status, education, and more, we approach this work with humility, honor, and awe at the courage of both our chapter and narrative authors who chose to disclose raw and vulnerable moments related to their leadership journeys. We also approach this text as a way to center the narratives of women in their authentic form so that their words are seen, heard, and felt. For those of us with privilege, our goal was to decenter ourselves as much as possible to allow the narrative authors' voices to emerge as the creators of knowledge and the trail blazers forging new ways to conceptualize leadership. We hope to honor our narrative authors by amplifying their already powerful voices.

We are proud that our 39 narrative authors are a radically diverse group of women. We asked these authors to self-identify and share with us any identities they felt were salient to them or relevant to this work. Because of this, we do not have the same demographic information or

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same social identity information for all 39 authors. However, we can share what they did provide that demonstrates the identities most important to them as they considered their leadership experiences and journey.

We have tremendous racial and ethnic diversity with women self-identifying as Black/African-American, Asian American (Indian, Japanese-American, Chinese-American, Vietnamese, South Asian, Filipino, Nepalese, Bangladeshi), Middle Eastern (Afghani-American, Arab-American), Latina/x (Cuban, Salvadoran, Columbian, Bolivian, Mexican), Native American, and white. We also have 12 narrative authors who identify as bi/multiracial/ethnic; some of these women also identify with the previous list of racial and ethnic identities and expanded on their mixed heritage rather than just providing "biracial" as their only identifier. While most narrative authors are traditionally college-aged, we have several narratives of women out of college as well as non-traditional students. Sexual orientation varies amongst the collective group with six narrative authors who shared their LGBTQ+ identities with us. While almost all of our narrative others identify as cisgender, we do have one Genderqueer narrative author. We recognize the lack of Genderqueer and Transgender individuals is a limitation of this research and book. We have narrative authors that identify as being from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as first-generation college students (11), as undocumented (2), as first, 1.5, and second-generation Americans (7), as neurodiverse, as living with visible and invisible disabilities, and as having various religious background (though, if mentioned, Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism are more prevalent). The intersectional identities of these women shape everything about their narratives and create the soul of this book.

Our narrative and chapter authors were asked to describe the ways in which their gender and other identities informed an experience of leadership. Our positionality as women leaders is

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central to this work. We write raw, unfiltered words filled with beauty, pain, and longing. Our identities are intricately woven into our narratives, and our identities cannot be separated from our experiences with leadership. Our narrative authors, experiencing marginalization for their womanhood and other identities, weave a new perspective of leadership that pushes, tears against, and rages against current, dominant narratives of leadership.

Overview of the Content

This volume is intended to provide better insight into how women have learned leadership throughout their lives. This book is divided into three major sections. In Chapters 1 through 4, you are introduced to the project and topic of women's leadership learning. Chapter 1, as you read it now, orients the book and our shared aim in writing it. Chapter 2 provides an overview of leadership as a process, in particular leadership learning in the college context. Chapter 3, co-written and researched by Michele Tyson, Shenhaye Ferguson, Brittany Devies, Becka Shetty, and Valeria Gomez, sets out to enrich understandings around women and gender development in college, including the history of women's education in college. Trisha Teig and Maritza Torres developed Chapter 4 as a theoretical and methodological overview of qualitative narrative methodology, which was used to collect and analyze the many narratives included in this text.

The following sections are the primary focus and majority of the book: the narrative chapters. These chapters are structured similarly: they will open with a relevant narrative from the chapter author(s) on the chapter topic, explore related literature to the theme, weave together three to five narratives, and conclude with reflections and implications for practice from the narratives. These narrative chapters are grouped in three sections: context, growth, and enactment. The first group of narrative chapters are focused on themes around the contextual and

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environmental elements of leadership learning. In Chapter 5, Sharrell Hassell-Goodman, Aoi Yamanka, Kristen Pender, and Neda Kikhia weave together narratives around systemic oppression, disruption, and justice in women's leadership learning journeys. In Chapter 6, Trisha Teig explores stories of harm and violence in women's leadership journeys. Lauren Contreras writes in Chapter 7 about the experiences of family in women's narratives. In Chapter 8, Simone Gause explores the influence of role models and mentors in the leadership processes of women.

The next section of narrative chapters focuses on growth. These narratives are inherently focused on the development, overcoming, and perseverance of women in their leadership development experiences. Chapter 9, written by Adrian Bitton, examines imposter syndrome in women's narratives of leadership learning. In Chapter 10, Brittany Devies captures moments of women's growth as leaders. Becka Shetty in Chapter 11 considers how women within the project began to conceptualize leadership throughout their journeys.

The final collection of narrative chapters focuses on enactment. These were narratives focused on how women grew and developed from engaging in the leadership process. In Chapter 12, Julie Henriquez Aldana and Lauren Contreras weave together narratives around authentic leadership. Chapter 13 by Julie Owen and Adrian Bitton explores the leadership identity development of women. Paige Haber Curran in Chapter 14 focuses on how women enacted leadership within their narratives. Finally, in Chapter 15, Sasha Taner reviews the role and import of collegiate leadership programs centered in feminist, women's leadership learning.

The final section and Chapter 16 of this volume focus on how we move forward. We explore the lessons learned from this book for theory, for practice, and for our own development. We are excited for you to move forward in exploring this beautiful and disruptive collection of narratives and encourage all readers to consider the power and purpose of your own narrative of

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leadership. We are humbled and privileged to share the voices of our narrative authors, for whom without this book would not be possible. We honor you: Pam, Mia, Isabel, Camiya (chapter 5), Prasamsha, Maddie, Ariana, Amna (chapter 6), Bianca, Kat, Negin, Sophia (chapter 7), Faith, Ameena, Emma, Anahi (chapter 8), Katherine, Stephanie, Nicolette (chapter 9), Jessie, Kat, Deya, Mollie (chapter 10), Skye, Mio, Alea (chapter 11), Imani, Melanie, Sam (chapter 12), Andrea, Renuka, Jocelyn (chapter 13), Jasmin, JoAnne, Cathy (chapter 14), Lien, Hadiya, Sadia, Laila, and Acela (chapter 15).

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