Gender and Leadership Issues in the Australian Church: Leadership Effectiveness – Men versus Women

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Abstract

Do men or women make better church leaders? This is the key question explored in this study. Much of the debate about female church leadership is based on anecdotal views on the relative effectiveness of males and females in church leadership, as well as on differences in the interpretation of scripture regarding gender roles in church leadership. This study draws on one of the most comprehensive surveys of church leaders in the world, the Australian National Church Life Survey of church leaders in 2006. Information in this survey was gathered directly from over 9000 church leaders across 22 denominations. This

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data was interrogated using appropriate statistical analysis leading to surprising conclusions.

Introduction

The gender divisions in the Australian society influence the attitudes to women's leadership in churches. In this respect, Australia is similar to many other Western societies. Women in Australia have sought greater equality in the society ever since the colonial period, for example, Edith Dornwell (Burdon 2014) was the first female science graduate from Adelaide University (1885) and women's suffrage groups appeared on the political landscape in 1880s.[3] Since that time Australian society has morphed to become more egalitarian where women's participation has been increasingly accepted across broad sections of the Australian society, culminating in the appointment of the first female Governor General[4] in 2008 and the first female Prime Minister[5] in Australia in 2010.

In the Australian Christian church the first record of the ordination of women in an evangelical denomination was in 1926 (Henderson 1990), although in the Anglican church there are records (Porter 2014) of women being appointed to the position of Church Warden (1895) and of the appointment of the Deaconesses in 1884. In some Australian denominations, the ordination of women to ministry has been a relatively recent development (e.g. Baptist Union of Victoria, 1978)[6] and in others there remains strong resistance to women's ordination at a policy level.[7]

According to the Role Congruity Theory (RCT) of Eagly and Karau (2002), prejudice against female leaders is associated with perceived incompatibility between the characteristics of women and the demands of leadership roles. In the case of the church, this incongruity seems to have been reduced to questions of legitimacy (a theological issue relating to the hermeneutic/interpretation of Christian scripture) and competence. It has been suggested that women do not have the ability to lead as effectively as men in those roles. However, historical records of the establishment of Australian Pentecostal churches, for example, contradict the latter assertion since Grey, Torn Stockings and Enculturation: Women Pastors in the Australian Assemblies of God.[8] Jacqui Grey from Southern Cross College reports that by 1925, 11 of the 18 Pentecostal churches planted in Australia were founded by women, and by 1930 twenty of the 37 churches (for which information is available) were initiated by women. Chant (1973, pp. 34-56) in his comprehensive history of Australian Pentecostalism also records the significant influence of women in the early Pentecostal Church in Australia, citing for example, the key leadership roles played by Mrs Janet Lancaster, the leader of

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[3] http://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/women_and_politics/sa1.htm (accessed 31 May 2017)

[4] https://www.britannica.com/biography/Quentin-Bryce (accessed 31 May 2017)

[5] http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/gillard/in-office.aspx. (accessed 31 May 2017)

[6] http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bq/28-4_159.pdf (accessed 31 May 2017)

[7] http://pastoralmeanderings.blogspot.com.au/2014/03/ (accessed 31 May 2017)

[8] http://aps-journal.com/aps/index.php/APS/article/view/51 (accessed 31 May 2017)

the Good News Hall in North Melbourne (1906), and Canadian-American evangelist Aimee Semple MacPherson who came to Australia in 1922 (pp. 70-79).

But what is the empirical evidence with regard to gender differences in leadership ability at the individual level on the basis of psychometrics and leadership assessment? Putting aside the stereotypes of men and women, there is growing evidence from research discovered in the context of the theory of transformational leadership, that women as a group have more transformational qualities than men (e.g., Eagly & Carli 2003; Riggio 2013) and have therefore greater leadership potential where such qualities are required. Zenger and Folkman (2012) and Sherwin (2012) concur on the basis of the data from a study assessing 45,000 leaders across a wide range of industries. Sherwin reports that the effectiveness of women as leaders appears to change over time so that differences between genders vary according to the leader's age. Bailey (2014) made the astute observation that "...there is no universal rule: different individuals are typically suited to different situations and context is, as ever, king".

Apart from different operational contexts in which leadership may be assessed and the different theoretical perspective employed, the methodologies associated with leadership assessment are continuing to develop (e.g., Assunta & Agostino 2007; Hazy 2006; Kets et al., 2004). At the moment, there does not appear to be any clear consensus about what are the best assessment instruments or what leadership competencies should be included in an evaluation of gender differences in leadership.

Thus, this whole issue requires a clear understanding of what effective leadership actually means and how to measure it. Moreover, Barker (1997) makes the valid point that we need first to establish consensus on what we mean by the term "leadership" before proceeding to discuss leadership training and its assessment. Impacting on the nature of effective leadership in church is also the way religious faith is viewed. For example, Davey (2004) argues that if relationships together with narrative are perceived to be central to religious faith, as claimed by feminist theology, it will then be viewed as a *lived* religion rather than simply a religious belief. This perspective is thought to lead to a better understanding of gender and sexuality as well as religion itself when viewed from a feminist perspective. According to Chaturvedi et al. (2012) relationships, and particularly the ability to build effective relationships, are at the core of the concept of leadership. In contrast Avioli, Walumbwa and Weber (2009) offer a range of leadership styles and classifications[9] which presume a common understanding regarding a definition of the term "leadership".

Our perception is that while the term leadership is used freely in church life there is often a lack of clarity as to what that term means. Clinton (1988, p. 245) provides a helpful working definition of leader and leadership for the church context as follows:

> Leader - In the biblical context, a person with a God-given capacity and the God-given responsibility to influence a specific group of God's people for God's purposes for the group...

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[9] *Authentic Leadership, New Genre Leadership, Complexity Leadership, Shared/Collected or Distributed Leadership.*

The key themes of articulation and influence for particular purposes, are also supported by Weems (2010), who defines leadership in church as:

> Leadership is the development and articulation of a shared vision, motivation of those key people without whom that vision cannot become reality, and gaining the cooperation of most of the people involved.

In leadership theory, leadership is technically defined as a dynamic process over an extended period of time in which a leader (utilising leadership resources and by specific leadership behaviours), influences the thoughts and activities of followers, to accomplish mutually agreed goals for the benefit of the group (Clinton 1988, p. 245). House et al. (2004, p. 15) report on a conference held in 1994 in which 54 researchers from 38 countries developed a working definition of leadership, which seems to concur with Clinton's and Weems' approaches:

> … leadership is the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members.

It follows from this that assessment of leadership effectiveness at the individual level relates to the ability of that individual ("the Leader") to influence others to help achieve the goals of the group (Assunta & Agostin 2007). Many branches of the Christian church have viewed leadership in terms of the Heroic Leadership model (Fletcher 2004), linking it with positional power and authority (e.g. the priest/pastor/senior minister) typically associated with a hierarchically structured organisation, where particular leadership attributes are required of the people at the top. In contrasting the heroic and more recently proposed "postheroic" leadership styles, Fletcher (2004 p. 650) makes the following observation:

> Many have noted that the traits associated with traditional, heroic leadership are masculine. Men or women can display them, but the traits themselves-such as individualism, control, assertiveness, and skills in advocacy and domination - are socially ascribed to men in our culture and generally understood as masculine… In contrast, skills associated with new, postheroic leadership are feminine… Again, men or women can display them, but the traits themselves, such as empathy, community, vulnerability, and skills of enquiry and collaboration - are socially ascribed to women in our culture and generally understood as feminine.

While the heroic leadership model seems to have prevailed historically and publicly, more recently postheroic leadership has been conceptualised as a set of shared practices that can and should be enacted by people of all levels. Implicit in this perspective is a recognition of the relationship between personal and positional leadership. Fletcher (2004, p. 648) argues the new models of leadership recognise that these visible positional heroes are supported by a network of personal leadership practices distributed throughout the organisation.

> Positional leaders have been described as mere tips of icebergs (McIntosh 1989) or whitecaps in the deep blue sea (Draft 2001), visible and important but sustained by larger forces and the numerous,

countless acts of enabling, supporting, and facilitating that make up the collaborative subtext of what is often mistakenly labelled individual achievement.

Frameworks and images such as these acknowledge the interdependencies inherent in leadership. They signal a shift from a single-minded focus on individual achievement and meritocracy to an emphasis on collective achievement, social networks, and the importance of teamwork and shared accountability. Significant in this shift is a blurring of the distinction between the skills of leadership and what some have called "followership".

In this context leadership outcomes can be influenced by a range of factors including the leadership style and the general environment in which the leadership task is exercised.

It is also helpful to distinguish issues of leadership effectiveness from that of leadership style. A plethora of leadership styles have been identified (e.g. see Assunta & Agostino 2007; Van Eeden, Cilliers & Van Deventer 2004; Avolio, Walumbwa & Weber 2009; Hazy 2006, Kets de Vries 2004) which help identify qualities and factors regarded as being important to the function of leadership. Working on the basis of this perspective there is a need for a holistic approach to the assessment of leadership. Investigation of leadership styles has also led to some interesting findings in relation to differences between genders (Eagly & Carli 2003) and it seems even a person's morphology, i.e. shape (Senior 2012), has been linked to a leadership style. Overall it appears that leadership outcomes can be achieved through employing a variety of different leadership styles and equally some styles may be more appropriate to achieve outcomes (i.e. more effective) in particular contexts.

As noted above, the contextual settings of the leadership functions may also affect leadership outcomes (Stumbo & McWalters 2010), especially as they relate to the gender of the leader. Eklund (2006), noted that congregations have distinct cultures and not all value and accept women's leadership and Wayne et al., (2010), identified the importance of women being given permission (empowered) to express their leadership functions in small group settings. Factors such as church denominational culture may also be important to women's effective leadership in terms of the denomination providing adequate mentoring support to help develop women to become effective leaders/ministers (Newkirk & Cooper 2013). In their meta-analysis of gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker and Woehr (2014, p. 3) propose:

… based on RCT (Role Congruity Theory), that key aspects of the leadership context will affect the extent to which leadership roles are seen as congruent or incongruent with both male and female gender roles, which may help to explain whether men or women are seen as more effective leaders in different situations.

Some of the contextual moderators they cite include time of study, type of organisation, hierarchical level, study setting, percentage of men involved in assessing the leader's performance, and source of rating. Interestingly the

Paustian-Underdahl, et al., (2014) study showed that men tended to rate themselves as significantly more effective than women, while when others undertook the ratings, women were rated as significantly more effective than men, but on the basis of the combined ratings there was no significant gender difference.

It is fair to say that leadership depends on the cultural context, in that its importance and value varies across cultures. There is growing awareness that culture influences leadership and organizational processes. A definition of culture (House et al., 2004, p. 15) employed across cultural studies is

> …shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretation or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations.

Phillips (2010, p. 71) notes that while culture is ubiquitous and an attribute of all societies, we need to be aware of the "trap" of cultural essentialism, in which certain characteristics are attributed to everyone within a particular category (for example, all women are caring and empathetic). Attributing those characteristics to all members of the category, such as by saying all women are caring, may be a way of superimposing on that group false socially created or constructed features, instead of apprehending the real variety in the group because there is an assumption of a homogenised and unified group. In their macro, statistical study of gender equality and cultural change, Inglehart and Norris (2003), found that the type of religious belief (such as Islam) about gender equality was more important than the strength of religiosity in determining attitudes. They found also that secularisation and social modernisation, together with the weakening strength of religious values among young generations, had led to an increase in gender equality. Their analysis demonstrated that the type of religion (for example, Islam versus Christian versus Buddhist) was more important in terms of belief about gender equality, than the strength of religiosity. Research by Ridgeway (2001) established that, more than being just a trait of individuals, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices. The gender system is deeply entwined with social hierarchy and concepts of leadership, because many gender stereotypes contain status beliefs that associate greater status worthiness and competence with men than with women.

> Widely shared gender stereotypes are in effect the "genetic code" of the gender system, since they constitute the cultural rules or schemas by which people perceive and enact gender difference and inequality. Expectation States Theory argues that gender is deeply entwined with social hierarchy and leadership because the rules for the gender system that are encoded in gender stereotypes contain status beliefs at their core. Status beliefs are shared cultural schemas about the status position in society of groups such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, education, or occupation. (Ridgeway 2001, p. 637)

Leadership Effectiveness

Goktepe and Schneider (1988) assessed leadership effectiveness by asking 120 emergent leaders in a United States university to rank their effectiveness on a Likert-type scale (1= *extremely ineffective* –.> 7= *extremely effective*). They found

there were no significant differences in effectiveness evaluations between male and female leaders in small mixed groups, nor among ratings received by leaders with masculine, feminine or androgynous gender role orientations. Certainly, *leadership styles/behaviour* are known to be different between genders, but this does not imply a difference in *effectiveness* since different leadership strategies can produce the same result for the group in achieving agreed goals/outcomes. Assuming that men and women can, in principle, be equally effective in the leadership function, and putting aside for the moment the debate about the theological legitimacy of such a role, the question arises as to what inhibits more women from coming into leadership functions within the church? Hastings and Lindsay (2013) found that elite women (those in senior leadership positions with major institutions of US society) are less likely than men to report religion as being important in their lives. Rating religion as of low importance was especially true for successful women with graduate degrees displaying a high commitment to their work. Hastings and Lindsay suggest aspiring women leaders may not benefit from religion in the same way as men do and that religious systems fail to provide equitable levels of support across genders. Given the difficulty women have in achieving leadership in religious environments, a negative environment ('glass ceiling effect') may inhibit women from being fulfilled in their leadership functions in religious contexts, diverting their efforts to find such fulfilment elsewhere (i.e. why bother?).

The whole logic surrounding the issue of leadership effectiveness and its assessment, especially in the context of religious communities, is one that might benefit from further enquiry. For example, if it is agreed that leadership is influencing others to achieve the goals of a group, then *defining the goals* is an important first step to discovering whether a leader (or group) has been effective. In a commercial context, a fairly hard-nosed approach might be taken to assessing the leader (Avioli & Quisenberry 2010) in terms of return on the leadership investment against the salary costs of leadership, where training and development are concerned. It follows that if the goals vary with the operational context of a group, then both criteria and relevant methodology for assessing effective leadership should change also.

In the Australian church, contextual settings for leadership functions vary widely in terms of the denominational position or policy where women-in-ministry is concerned and sadly historical prejudice against women still persists, with some men contending that they lack the skills/traits to successfully function as leaders (e.g. Henning & Jardin 1977; Yarkum 2008).

While numerous methodologies have been proposed to assess leadership effectiveness (e.g., Aviolio, Avey & Quisenberry 2010; Kets de Vries 2004), the 2006 Australian National Church Life Survey (NCLS) leadership questionnaire database provides empirical evidence to evaluate self-rated leadership effectiveness between genders across a range of some 20 denominations (Protestant, Catholic, Pentecostal, Independent, etc.). Various leadership categories within churches were distinguished in the NCLS questionnaire. This allowed the researchers to investigate the self-rated leadership effectiveness of the female and male leaders in churches based on this substantial body of empirical data.

Methodology

Collectively around 400,000 attenders in 7000 Australian churches in 22 Christian denominations have participated in 5-yearly National Church Life Surveys, inaugurated in 1991[10]Co-operating denominations included Catholics, Anglicans and Protestants, who collectively embrace a large network of churches for sharing practical resources to help churches. In 2006 two separate self-assessment questions invited church leaders to assess their effectiveness in leadership. The questions were:
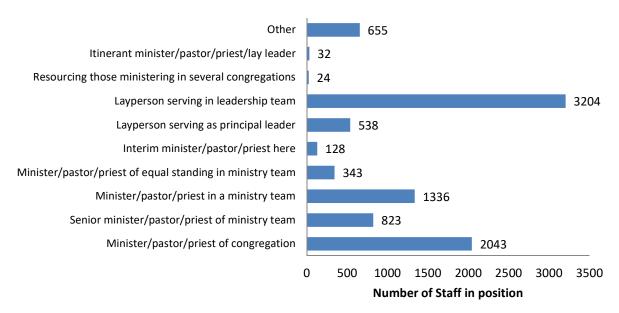
1. How would you rate your overall effectiveness in your present role here in the last few months?
2. How would you rate your overall effectiveness in ministry?

The responding church leaders were able to rate their effectiveness on a ten-point scale from Very Low (1) to Very High (10). Those answering the questions were separated into different categories by *age*, *gender*, *denomination* and the *nature of the leadership function* performed by them (classified as one of: *"All Respondents"/"Not Ordained" /"Ordained"/"Senior Leader"*). NCLS was commissioned to undertake analysis of leadership effectiveness between genders, drawing upon the 2006 voluntary self-reporting survey of these church leaders. This study is possibly the first Australian broad scale empirical evaluation of the perceived leadership effectiveness of Australian church leaders across the genders using the NCLS data.

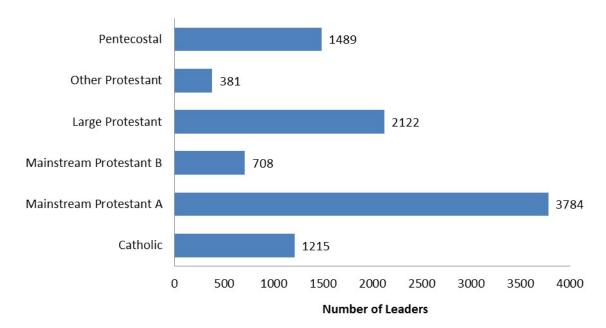## Description of People Who Participated in the Survey

The profile of those who responded to the NCLS survey is shown in the Figures 1-3, and Table 2.

Figure 1: Leadership Profile for 2006 in Survey According to Leadership Category (N=9126) diversity of NCLS leadership categories is seen in Figure 1, with the predominance of lay leaders indicating their importance to the effective function of congregational and Church life nationally.

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[10] http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=4539 (accessed 31 May 2017)

Figure 2: Denomination Profile of the 2006 NCLS Leadership Sample (N=9422)

The 22 denominations included in the national NCLS sample were organised into seven categories as indicated in Figure 2, in order to respect the confidentiality requirements of the survey participants. The composition of the denominational clusters is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Denominational categories used for statistical analyses of 2006 NCLS data

Denominational category	Member Denominations
Non-Protestant	Catholic
Mainstream Protestant A	Anglican, Uniting Church of Australia
Mainstream Protestant B	Lutheran, Presbyterian
Large Protestant	Baptist, Churches of Christ, Salvation Army
Other Protestant	Reformed, Congregational, Vineyard Fellowship, Missionary Alliance, Nazarene, Brethren, Adventist, Wesleyan Methodist, Westminster Presbyterian, House Churches/Communities, Independent, Methodist
Pentecostal A	Christian City Church, Apostolic, Assemblies of God, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian Outreach Centres
Pentecostal B	Christian Life Churches, Foursquare Gospel, Other Pentecostal, Bethesda

Figure 3: Gender Profile of Ordained and Not-ordained 2011 NCLS Leadership Sample
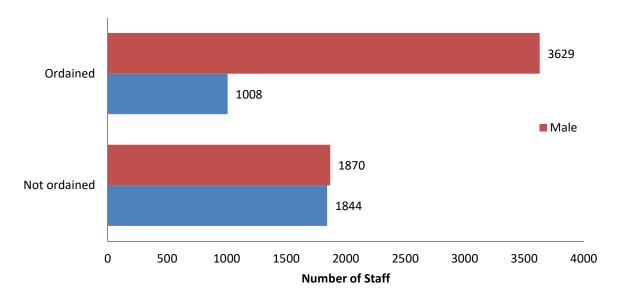

Figure 3 shows that while there was a good gender balance among the non-ordained portion of the survey sample, there was a marked imbalance (about 3.6:1 ratio of male to female) in the ordained gender sample with a predominance of men over women. The lack of gender balance in the ordained leadership sample is possibly indicative of historical gender barriers to the ordination of women in the Australian church.

Results

A summary of the survey findings for leadership effectiveness ratings between various leadership and gender categories are summarised in Table 2.

Effectiveness category	Gender	Leadership category							
		All Respondents		Not Ordained		Ordained		Senior Leader	
		Sample Size (N)	Sample Mean	Sample Size(N)	Sample Mean	Sample Size(N)	Sample Mean	Sample Size(N)	Sample Mean
Overall effectiveness in ministry	Female	823	4.96 ***	426	4.84	251	5.27	162	5.18
	Male	1445	5.11	447	4.78	886	5.30	683	5.24
Effectiveness in present role last few months	Female	3277	4.99 ***	1763	4.93 *	987	5.12	652	5.11
	Male	5806	5.07	1790	4.86	3550	5.18	2766	5.17
2-tailed t-Test significant between Gender Sample Mean Values (* P < 0.05; *** P < 0.001)									

Table 2: Summary of Leadership Effectiveness Values According to Gender, Leadership and Effectiveness Categories

If the results are marked by either of the two asterisk designations, "*" or by "***" the differences are significant at either the 5% or 0.1% level according to the t-tests. (The t-test assesses whether the means of two groups are *statistically* different from each other, e.g. see Research Methods Knowledge Base 2006). Thus men rated themselves slightly higher in overall effectiveness and effectiveness in their present roles than women for the leadership category "*all respondents*" ($P<0.001$). On the other hand women rated themselves slightly higher than men in effectiveness in their present role for the *non-ordained leadership* category ($P<0.05$). The data was analysed to see whether different leadership encodings/categories also showed significant differences. In the table 2 "Senior Leader" means senior minister/pastor/priest/layperson serving as principal leader of a congregation. Although there are small, significant differences in leadership effectiveness detected between the genders in terms of the t-tests with some leadership gender category comparisons, the differences are quite small compared to the standard deviation.

When the size of the gender leadership effectiveness in the different categories of leadership was assessed by calculation of the partial eta (η_p^2) statistic from analysis of Chi-squared variance (which is considered to be a more suitable test for large sized samples than t-tests), there were no significant differences in perceived leadership effectiveness between genders. The t-test results were not considered suitable for distinguishing the differences between men and women for leadership effectiveness, because they are statistically unsuitable for dealing with the large numbers of respondents in these surveys, even though they are a common test of significant differences due to the risk of a type I or type II statistical error[11].

It is therefore concluded that while the differences may be statistically significant if t-tests are used, they are probably not of any practical significance, as the effect sizes obtained by the calculation of the partial eta (η_p^2) statistic are too small, i.e. below 1%. As noted earlier, this apparent anomaly is a consequence of the large sample sizes which, using t-tests, can lead to even small differences in mean effectiveness ratings between genders registering as statistically significant (Walker 2007; Richardson 2011). As a result, the key findings and conclusions are summarised in Table 3.

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[11] For testing the statistical significance of differences between small samples the t-tests are a common, robust test. But when the sample sizes get large, even insignificant and spurious differences appear to be important if t-tests are used, i.e. the t-test gives statistically significant results, when in reality there is no substantial difference. In that case it is important to use a better test, a test that suits large samples, in particular the partial eta (η_p^2) statistic from analysis of Chi-squared variance.

Table 3: Summary of leadership effectiveness analyses and conclusions on the basis of Partial Eta squared (η_p^2) results

	All respondents	Not ordained	Ordained	Senior leader
Overall perceived effectiveness	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.002	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.001	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.000	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.001
Perceived Effectiveness in present role last few months	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.006	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.001	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.001	No gender difference (η_p^2) = 0.001
Note: Differences are only noted in the table as significant if the effect size exceeds a minimum threshold of partial eta squared (η_p^2) = 0.01. That is, if the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable (leadership effectiveness) is at least 1%.				

The differences in perceived leadership effectiveness in different denominations was also investigated on the basis of the responses from leaders in their different denominational groups. We found that there were no interaction effects between denomination and gender, which is to say that denominational affiliation made no difference to the finding that there was no difference between men's and women's perceived effectiveness in church leadership.

Similarly, we investigated whether age made a difference to genders in perceived leadership effectiveness. We found that overall, age was not related to leadership effectiveness, therefore age was not included in the remaining analysis. However, a weak negative correlation (Pearson Correlation (ρ) = 0.105, 2-tailed P < 0.01) was detected between Overall Leadership Effectiveness and age amongst non-ordained respondents. This means, amongst non-ordained survey respondents, the overall perceived leadership effectiveness tends to be higher in younger people compared to older people.

A report by Sherwin (2014) of a study undertaken by Folkman[12] indicated that differences between the gender leadership effectiveness ratings changed with age, women being perceived as more effective with age than men as they got older. For this reason, the leadership effectiveness data for the non-ordained NCLS participants was segregated into three age categories (less than 40 years age/40 to 60 years age/greater than 60 years) and mean effectiveness values for those categories calculated and compared via two-tailed t-test (assuming unequal variances). The results are shown in table 4 and show that the mean effectiveness rating of leaders under 40 years of age was significantly greater than that of leaders over 60 years of age (t [380] = 2.75, P < 0.01). There was no significant difference between other mean leader effectiveness rating comparisons between these age groups (P> 0.05).

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[12] http://zengerfolkman.com/media/articles/ZFCo.WP.WomenBetterThanMen.033012.pdf (accessed 31 May 2017)

Table 4: Summary of leadership effectiveness ratings according to leader age category

Variable	Leader Age Category (Years)		
	x < 40	40 <= x < 60	x >= 60
Count (N)	161	438	277
Mean Effectiveness	4.957	4.829	4.675

This finding is consistent with the negative correlation detected between self-rated leadership effectiveness and leader age and indicates that here is a phenomenon worth further investigation. On this basis, the data was further interrogated for gender-age linkages and the results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Leadership Effectiveness rating according to Gender and Age Categories for Non-ordained Church Leaders

Age Category (Years)	Female		Male		
	Mean	Sample size	Mean	Sample size	P (T= t)
< 40	5.04	78	4.90	78	0.37
40-6	4.91	220	4.75	216	0.12
> 60	4.60	126	4.75	149	0.26
t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances					

The analyses shows that while there was no significant difference in self-rated leadership effectiveness ratings between gender for each of the age categories (P> 0.05), the perceived leadership effectiveness was significantly greater for women in the < 40 age category compared to women in the > 60 age category (t[178] = 1.05, P < 0.01). By contrast there was no significant difference between the male age categories (< 40 vs, >60) for the same comparison (P(T<=t) two-tail > 0.05). Further research is needed to better understand this finding but possibly cultural/generational change for women may be contributing to this difference across the age categories.

Given the breadth of sample across the Australian church, the results provide support for the proposition that there is no overall difference in self-rated leadership effectiveness between men and women, both genders assessing their leadership effectiveness with equal confidence.

Discussion

It seems that there are wider issues to consider if leadership effectiveness is to be addressed in a fashion more closely approximating the present-day reality of worshipping congregations embedded in their local communities. The different leadership classifications explored in the NCLS surveys indicate that the effective function of a church congregation in its local community is very much a community process, embracing a team of leaders (of various categories) and does not in reality devolve to the activity or function of just one person, typically the ordained minister. It can be argued that some of the long-established denominations have historically been inclined toward a transactional leadership

style which involves a social exchange process, the leader clarifying what followers need to do on their part of the transaction in order to receive or avoid punishment as contingent on the transaction (Bass 1990). By contrast contemporary society seems to be more responsive to a transformational style of leadership which is interpersonal and more visionary; lifestyles, work and social ethics are emphasised, with transformational leaders setting a challenging expectation and enabling others to achieve high levels of performance (Lievens, van Geit & Coester 1997, p. 417). Transformational styles are more inclusive and embracing of the congregational members and stakeholders.

On this basis, the *Post–Heroic Leadership* model discussed by Fletcher (2004) needs to be considered along with the Multilevel Complexity Theory approach of Hogue and Lord (2012), where the concern is to take a holistic approach embracing shared leadership (transformational processes at work) across a learning community working together to achieve agreed goals and outcomes over time. In this situation leadership is shared among a team and congregation, and assessment processes ideally should reflect that. Clearly the assessment of this process in achieving outcomes is complex indeed. It seems however that Clinton's definition of a leader still applies in principle here, except that the "leader/leadership" (influencing others to achieve agreed goals) now becomes more a shared responsibility of the congregational community, however it is structured to function. Wang, Waldman and Zheng (2013) reviewed the complexities of shared leadership and found that there is a moderately strong, positive relationship between shared leadership and team effectiveness, confirming the importance of examining shared leadership and teams. Given the voluntary nature of community church attendance and involvement, and the general social trend demanding transparency and accountability for the management of community resources, it seems that in many Australian church congregations there is a degree of sharing of the leadership function amongst congregational "stakeholders", which implies the need for a new methodology to evaluate leadership effectiveness.

A constraint imposed upon this study by the historical structure of the database is that factors such as leadership context and expectations of leaders cannot be considered due to their exclusion from the survey questionnaire. Similarly, complementary data gathering methods were also excluded, for example, the use of validated scales of leadership assessment, and surveys of peers and followers to assess leadership effectiveness in order to help build a more accurate picture.

One important limitation of this research to note is that while leadership effectiveness has been self-assessed in the NCLS process and, although this is not without precedent (Chaturvedi 2012; Goktepe & Schneider 1988), it raises the question as to whether the respondents all have the same concept in terms of what constitutes effectiveness (as opposed to self-confidence, for example), and the risk of a divergence between their views and the perceptions by members of the congregations and other governing authorities and stakeholders. While an independent assessment may avoid such conflict of interest issues, given the scope and depth of the sample across a credible cross-section of denominations in Australia, the analyses support the conclusion that there is no practical difference in leadership effectiveness between genders in the Australian churches that were

sampled. Given the gender imbalance in favour of men in the 2006 NCLS survey respondents, and the fact that men tend to rate themselves more highly than the women for leadership effectiveness (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr 2014), the finding of no practical difference between men and women in perceived leadership effectiveness in this study may indicate that women are somewhat more confident of their leadership ability in the Australian church settings. Since in this age of accountability, many leaders undergo a degree of peer evaluation for their continuing function, it is likely they would be aware of any dissatisfaction with their services, given the generally assertive culture of Australian society and the church in general.

Another aspect of the merits or otherwise of self-assessment methodology is the finding that the gender of the person evaluating leadership effectiveness may introduce biases as a consequence of their gender paradigms (Hoyt & Burnett 2013; Bosak & Sczesny 2011). They found traditional attitudes towards women in authority significantly predicted a pro-male gender bias in leader evaluations, while progressive attitudes predicted a pro-female gender bias, with the evaluator's theory of leadership also exerting strong effect on evaluation outcomes. Gender bias in leadership assessment processes and organisations (including in recruitment, performance evaluation and appraisal) has been identified as a reason for lack of women in top management positions (Alimo-Metcalfe 2010). What the literature is suggesting is that any panel assessing leadership effectiveness should be balanced in gender composition and also with regard to the views of the panel members regarding their theories of leadership formation and gender roles. Regrettably there is a general lack of empirical studies of this nature conducted in the Australian churches to provide comparisons.

The weak negative age correlation with overall effectiveness ratings amongst non-ordained respondents, along with the difference in self-rated leadership effectiveness detected with age are something worthy of further enquiry, given the seniority of leadership age (averaging 52.3 years) in this sample. Added to this are the cultural differences across the generational mix embraced in the survey, with younger people (generations X, Y etc.) likely to have a different outlook and skill-sets to the "baby boomer" generation comprising the majority of the older church leaders.

A profitable area for further investigation would be to examine shared leadership and team effectiveness in the church, since the nature of church culture and the core issue of leadership function are highly relational, group-orientated, and ideally consultative and community-focussed in implementation. In the words of Wang, Waldmann and Zang (2013), who meta-analytically cumulated 42 independent samples of shared leadership and examined its relationship to team effectiveness:

> Future research might also address the interplay of vertical and shared leadership. For example, shared leadership may partially mediate the relationship between vertical leadership and outcomes. Through the transcendence of self-interest and articulation of compelling vision, transformational leaders may foster a collective sense of identity in teams, as well is a motivation among team members to exercise collective influence (p. 192).

Ethical/theological Implications of Findings

While the argument for the legitimacy (ordination) of women being appointed to senior church ministry and leadership positions in the church tends to centre around theological issues, particularly the hermeneutics of scriptural interpretation where gender roles in the church are concerned, the finding of no practical difference in church leadership perceived effectiveness between men and women from this study raises an additional consideration. Given that God is the giver of every good and perfect gift (Jam. 1:7) and that we will be held individually accountable for the use of our gifts to ensure that they are profitably employed in God's service (as in the Parable of the Talents - Mtt. 25:14-30), the question arises as to whether church institutions which by their structure and governance inhibit women from contributing to their full potential or applying their gifts fully in God's service, will be held accountable for judgement? Are such institutions at risk of quenching the life and vibrancy of the Holy Spirit in church life?

Equally, why would God gift women with leadership ability for church ministry and service but frustrate that expression and gifts via scriptural injunction (contextually embedded in early church history) being extrapolated to create institutional structures and cultures which restrain that expression in contemporary society today? Is it possible that some theological constructs of gender roles in the church are misinterpretations of the scripture as well as incompatible with empirical research findings such as the ones unearthed in this study?

Conclusion

It is concluded that from a practical viewpoint, there is no difference in self-rated leadership effectiveness between men and women evidenced in the Australian National Church Life Survey of 2006. Analyses also indicate that a change is taking place with younger women where self-rated leadership effectiveness is concerned, and further investigation of cultural and generational issues could make a helpful contribution to the discussion of gender equality in the church and community leadership generally. The findings of this study also suggest it would be useful to further interrogate the 2006 and 2011 NCLS databases to probe the influence of denominational and other contexts upon leadership effectiveness as perceived by the respondents.

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