

Gender, Leadership and Discourse in New Zealand Workplaces¹

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Over the last fifteen years, social constructionist approaches have emphasised the dynamic nature of the process of creating meanings and negotiating the social order, including “the gender order”, and increasing attention has been paid to the specific situational contexts in which meanings are produced. Language and gender research has benefited from the questioning of pre-determined social categories which this has entailed. Social constructionist approaches are also beginning to impact on leadership research. Combining these different research threads, and drawing on material from the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project, this paper describes some of the ways in which women and men construct effective leadership identities in workplace interaction.

Keywords: gender, masculinity, leadership, workplace, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, social constructionist approaches to the analysis of discourse have been increasingly adopted in research on language and gender (eg. Cameron 1995, Hall and Bucholtz 1995, Bergvall, Bing and Freed 1996, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, Mills 2005, Baxter 2006, Cameron and Kulick 2006, Mullany 2007). Social constructionism questions the treatment of social categories and social roles as “given”. Rather than assigning a person to categories such as “elderly” or “lower class”, or to roles such as “mother” or “manager”, this approach entails examining the way an individual behaves in particular contexts, focussing on how they “perform” or enact different aspects of their various social identities. The ways in which people enact age, social status, gender, professional role, and so on, are influenced by aspects of the social context, by cultural beliefs and values, and by individual consciousness (Butler 1990, Unger 1989). Thus a social constructionist approach encourages an emphasis on the dynamic process of creating meanings and negotiating the social order, rather than treating meanings as

¹ This paper draws on Holmes (2005, 2007) and Holmes (fca). I thank those who allowed their workplace interactions to be recorded and the Language in the Workplace Project team who assisted with collecting and transcribing the data. The research was supported by grants from the New Zealand Foundation for Research Science and Technology and the New Zealand Marsden fund. Special thanks to Meredith Marra for careful editing.

pre-determined or pre-packaged. It encourages attention to the specific situational context in which meanings are produced.

Researchers involved in analysing the relationship between language and gender have welcomed the dynamic emphasis of social constructionism. As Deborah Cameron (1995: 43) says,

“one is never finished becoming a woman, or a man. Each individual subject must constantly negotiate the norms, behaviours, discourses, that define masculinity and femininity for a particular community at a particular point in history”.

However, while it is an on-going, dynamic process, the construction of gender identity is also constrained by contextual factors: “Gender...is a self-fulfilling prophecy...Each of us behaves in gendered ways because we are placed in gendered social contexts. Women encounter different social contexts than men” (Crawford 1995: 16). Focussing on leadership, in particular, the social expectations of the wider society often act as constraints on the ways in which both women and men can appropriately enact a leadership role at work. Current theories of leadership and management highlight the importance both of assertiveness and authority, attributes normatively associated with masculine styles of interaction, as well as “well-honed relational skills” (Ahearne, Matthieu and Rapp 2005), attributes associated with feminine interactional styles. Thus both women and men must negotiate a complex path through the social expectations which surround the leadership role to construct a satisfactory identity in their specific communities of practice. In this process, they can draw from a wide and varied discursive repertoire, selecting appropriate discursive strategies in response to particular interactional contexts. This paper explores how New Zealand women and men demonstrate stylistic diversity and sensitivity to context in the ways in which they enact their leadership roles at work.

In order to illustrate this diversity, I first provide examples of how New Zealand men face a double bind which demands that they provide vision and authoritative leadership on the one hand, while also adopting an egalitarian approach, reflecting the highly valued concept of “mateship”, and refraining from appearing to be better than their colleagues.² Faced with this double bind some New Zealand men enact the role of the hero leader in some contexts, while in others they adopt a more collegial, egalitarian approach to leadership. I then provide examples of how New Zealand women leaders manage a different double bind, namely a conflict between the attributes associated with leadership and femininity: if women act authoritatively, they are typically regarded as unfeminine, while if they behave in normatively feminine ways, they are often dismissed as unfit to lead. I will show how some women resolve these conflicting demands by drawing on discourse strategies associated with acceptable feminine leadership roles, such as “mother” and

² See Holmes (fca) for further discussion and exemplification.

“queen”, roles which licence women to behave in authoritative ways in the workplace.³ First, however, I briefly describe the methodology used to collect the data on which the paper draws.

2. Methodology and data base⁴

The material discussed in this paper derives from the Wellington Language in the Workplace (LWP) Project (www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/lwp). The basic methodology adopted by the LWP Project involves an ethnographic approach: following a period of participant observation, we ask volunteers to collect recordings of samples of their normal everyday workplace interactions over a period of two to three weeks. This is followed by debriefing interviews to collect comments and reflections on this process. Some volunteers keep a recorder and microphone on their desks, others carry the equipment round with them in a small carry-case. Where possible we video-record meetings of groups, using small video cameras which are fixed in place, switched on, and left running for the whole meeting. As far as possible, our policy is to minimise our intrusion as researchers into the work environment.

We have found that over the recording period, people increasingly ignore the microphones and the video cameras. The equipment simply comes to be regarded as a standard part of the furniture, and there are often comments on the tapes indicating people have forgotten about the recording equipment. As a result, our database includes some excellent examples of workplace interaction which are as close to ‘natural’ as one could hope for.

The complete Language in the Workplace Project Corpus currently comprises more than 1500 interactions, involving 500 participants from 22 different workplaces which include commercial organisations, government departments, small businesses, and factories. The interactions recorded include small, relatively informal work-related discussions between two or three participants, ranging in time between twenty seconds and two hours, as well as more formal meetings varying in size from four to thirteen participants, and extending in time from twenty minutes to four or five hours. The corpus also includes telephone calls and social talk as it occurred, for example, at the beginning of the day, at tea/coffee-breaks, and at lunchtime. The data used for the analysis below draws on material recorded in meetings in professional white collar workplaces.

³ See Holmes and Marra (2004), Holmes (2005, 2006), Holmes and Schnurr (2006) for further discussion and exemplification.

⁴ See Holmes and Stubbe (2003a, chapter 2) for a more detailed description.

3. Reconciling leadership and mateship at work

I begin by examining two ways in which men at work enact leadership in New Zealand workplaces.

Although an increasing number of leaders are women, the reality is that men still dominate senior positions in most areas of business in many countries. The 2006 New Zealand census indicated that less than 4% of Directors of businesses are female. The CEOs of 26 New Zealand government departments are men, while only nine are women. As the Human Rights Commission Report (2005: 16) noted “the high profile of a select group masks women’s [low] overall participation in senior positions throughout the rest of New Zealand”. Overall, then, the most senior positions in most New Zealand professional white collar workplaces are filled by men.

This male dominance is reflected in the focus of many New Zealand leadership studies. In their book, *The Hero Manager*. Jackson and Parry (2001), for instance, profile seven men and two women, Cheryl Sotheran and Margaret Bazley. Similarly Diamond’s (2006) book on Maori leadership features five men and only one woman. Moreover, the focus of these books is largely on relatively authoritarian and “masculine” approaches to leadership. Consistent with this view of how leadership is appropriately enacted, the two women in Jackson and Parry (2001) are described by public commentators in very negative terms, such as ‘the rottweiler chief executive’, and ‘the Grey Nurse’, a species of shark (Jackson and Parry 2001: 175, 42). There are a number of leaders in our data (both men and women) who adopt a tough approach to problem-solving and decision-making, who criticise others very explicitly, and who disagree very directly and ‘on record’. However, overall, men make use of these normatively masculine discourse strategies much more frequently than the women in our data. In the next section, I illustrate how a number of these men enact leadership in their different workplaces.

3.1. The leader as hero

The traditional leader is authoritative, decisive, inspirational, and charismatic, a conception of leadership which has been characterized as the “hero-leader” (Jackson and Parry 2001). Perhaps the most archetypal expression of the hero leader persona is illustrated by those in commercial organisations who are ‘self-made men’, people like Richard Branson and Bill Gates. In several cases in our data, men who could be characterized in this way had narratives to recount which constructed them as heroes who had, against considerable odds, and at substantial costs of various kinds, successfully established their companies (Holmes 2006; fca). Example 1 is a brief excerpt from Victor’s hero story in which he describes how he and a friend started the company of which (at the time of the interview) he was the Managing Director.⁵

⁵ See Holmes (2006) for further discussion of this excerpt.

Example 1⁶

Context: Interview with the Managing Director of a steadily growing successful IT company.

1. Vic: we went away and in our discussions said
2. actually there's an opportunity for someone else to go and do that
3. and why shouldn't it be us +
4. so we spent a few months devoting most weekends
5. to planning of whether it was feasible
6. or how we should do it what we could do
7. and then decided it was worthwhile
8. and in the meantime during that period of planning er
9. we'd been saving frantically
10. so that come the day when we stepped out
11. er we didn't need to take anything out of the company
12. for a period of time ...

Victor here presents himself and his business partner as people with vision; they were the ones who saw an opportunity to develop a new company *why shouldn't it be us* (line 3). He describes the careful planning that they undertook to work out whether their vision was feasible (lines 4–8), and the saving they undertook to provide the safety net they would need to launch onto the market (line 9–12). Their pro-active role is evident in the repeated use of the agentive *we* (lines 1, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11). Victor thus presents a hero story in which he and his partner established what has now become a very successful IT company through their careful planning, hard work, involving *most weekends* (line 4), willingness to save hard, and also to do without any financial reward initially *we didn't need to take anything out of the company for a period of time* (lines 11–12). In other words, this can be considered a typical masculine narrative of contest, where the heroes succeed despite formidable hurdles (cf Coates 2003, Johnson 1997). And it clearly constructs Victor as a visionary, decisive business leader.⁷

Hero leaders, typically make use of a very controlling interactional style. However the way in which this is instantiated may vary. For some leaders such control was evident in the way they structured meetings. Kenneth, for instance, the Head of the IT Department in a large organisation, always had a very explicit and carefully structured agenda which he rigidly adhered to. Discussion of items followed a strict, linear structure (Holmes and Stubbe 2003a); Kenneth introduced each new topic and then invited specific people to speak to it. He was also the one who decided when there had been suf-

⁶ See transcription conventions at end of chapter.

⁷ Moreover, Victor's senior management team contribute to this construction as evidenced in a range of ways, such as a humorous exchange in which they compare him to Harrison Ford in the Star Wars films.

ficient discussion of a topic. He did not encourage digressions, being prepared to cut people off abruptly if they appeared to be developing the discussion in directions he judged irrelevant (see Holmes, Schnurr and Marra 2007), Kenneth was also the person who asked most clarifying questions, and who answered the questions of others. Thus through explicit and careful control of the way an interaction develops, a leader can assert their authority.

Another way in which leaders construct a heroic and authoritative identity is by adopting a challenging and confrontational discourse style. This feature is especially evident in meetings where the leader questions and contests statements and decisions made by others. Example 2 is an excerpt from a meeting in a commercial company where the Managing Director and owner of the company, Seamus, generally attempts to play a back-seat role during meetings.⁸ In interview, he claimed to be just a participant in meetings, and to leave his general manager to handle matters relating to the day-to-day running of the business. Consistent with this stance, he sat not at the head of the table but along the side. Nonetheless, a discourse analysis of what is going on suggests that, despite the managing director's assertion, it is not the general manager in the chair but the managing director-company owner who has most influence on proceedings. This is most evident from the frequency and focus of the managing director's questions (see Holmes fcb). So, for example, from a total of 76 questions in half an hour of meeting talk, Seamus, the Managing Director, asked 31, almost twice as many questions as Jaeson, the chair who asked 16. No one else asked more than 7 questions.

Example 2 illustrates how this dominance of the discourse is exercised through Seamus's questions. Preceding this excerpt, Jaeson, the general manager, introduces the topic of the selling off of old photocopiers and the purchase of new ones. After expressing surprise (*is that all*) at the price Jaeson is expecting for selling an old photocopier, Seamus begins asking about the purchase of a new one (his questions are in bold type).

Example 2

Context: Meeting of ten people in a commercial organisation. Jaeson is the meeting chair and general manager. Seamus is the company's managing director. (Questions are in italics)

1. Sea: Tommy that's *did you buy that photocopier*
2. Tom: no
3. XM: [voc]
4. Tom: oh the
5. Sea: we were talking about buying a photocopier down at
6. Tom: we are buying it () oh we have bought one
7. Sea: *you have bought one?*
8. Tom: yep

⁸ This discussion is based on material in Holmes (fcb).

9. Sea: okay *it's about fourteen wasn't it*
10. Evan: and *who's that are we buying it from xerox*
11. Tom: yeah
12. Evan: *are we leasing it or are we buying it*
13. Tom: I don't know you and Deb sorted that out
14. Sea: *has that deal been done*
15. Tom: pretty much /(\)\
16. Sea: /okay so\ *is it a programmable photocopier does it have*
17. Tom: yeah
18. Sea: okay *so it's got a movable back gauge and all of that?*
19. Tom: yeah
20. Sea: okay *how physically big is it*
21. Tom: oh it wouldn't be more than a metre square
22. Sea: *and how much did it cost*
23. Tom: probably about I thought I thought it was about twelve

In this excerpt, Seamus asks 8 of the 10 questions, and they progress from questions requesting confirmation of information that he wants to check, to questions requesting new information; in other words, the questions become increasingly demanding of the addressee. It is quite evident that even in this exchange about a routine matter, Seamus controls the topic and the development of the discourse. In later exchanges, his dominance is even more explicit. So, for example, commenting on something he disapproves of (the use of a rusty and dented truck for deliveries), he is explicitly challenging *who's letting this happen ... why wasn't it fixed initially*. Such questions force others to be explicit about complex issues, or about the thinking which has led to a decision. Such contestive and challenging questions are, then, another distinctive discursive feature of the normatively masculine management style of authoritative hero leaders.⁹

This section has identified a number of discourse features which contribute to the construction of a powerful, authoritative persona typical of the hero-leader's interactional style. These features are available for both female and male leaders to draw on (Holmes 2006), but in our data, they are more frequently used by men in leadership positions, though of course, not even these men make use of such features all of the time. Playing the hero-leader is, like other aspects of professional identity, a context-dependent activity, most often observed in relatively formal settings. The hero leader inspires respect and provides followers with someone to admire (Jackson and Parry 2001). By contrast, the stance illustrated in the next section plays down status differences and emphasises the equality of the leader and his "followers".

⁹ Schnurr (2005) illustrates how contestive humour can also contribute to the construction of an authoritative leadership style.

3.2. The leader as a good mate

A second way in which leaders may 'do masculinity' at work is by constructing an identity as a good mate, or a stereotypical Kiwi or New Zealand bloke, emphasising the egalitarian ethos which is so pervasive in New Zealand society. The 'tall poppy syndrome' is the Australasian label for a rather aggressive commitment to equality and the tendency to try to 'cut down to size' those who excel in any way—whether intellectually, in status or wealth. Jackson and Parry (2001: 27) comment that 'it would be difficult to find a nation that has institutionalized and ritualized...wealth and envy status' or 'lack of reverence for big business' to the extent that Australasians have. Consequently, those in leadership positions are vulnerable to criticism for acting in ways which indicate that they consider themselves a cut above others, an unforgivable offence. This is the double bind that male leaders face in many New Zealand communities of practice. In response to this conflict between being authoritative and being egalitarian, leaders often seek ways of reducing status differences and emphasising equality with their colleagues. For men, one option is to adopt behaviours which indicate they are 'just one of the boys', or to "do masculinity" in the form of mateship.

Donald, the leader of a small IT company (pseudonymed A&B Resolutionz) is a quintessential example of this approach to reconciling the demands of leadership, masculinity and the egalitarian Kiwi philosophy. Though decisive and direct, and the founder of the business, he only occasionally in our recordings enacted the role of authoritarian hero-leader. Rather, in most of his interactions, he typified the good Kiwi bloke, emphasising what he shared with others in the team, and playing down differences. His typical office-wear of shorts and sandals further contributed to this masculine identity of 'the good joker'.¹⁰ Example 3 makes overt reference to this while also illustrating his friendly relationship with his staff.

Example 3¹¹

During a job interview Donald explains to Michael, a potential new employee, how A&B Resolutionz works.

1. Don: things are looking like this year will probably be
2. our best year ever
3. um but it does come on the back of you know
4. fairly tight fairly lean times we're just now
5. there's four main shareholders um so it's you know
6. it's however deep our pockets are and
7. you can see the quality of my suit /[laughs]\

¹⁰ 'Joker' is a New Zealand term referring to a friendly person, usually male, who has a very relaxed approach to interaction.

¹¹ This example from our data is discussed in Schnurr (2005).

8. Mic: / [laughs]
9. Ann: he's got shoes on so he must be having /a good day\
10. Don: / [laughs]\ oh yes we try and run a relaxed atmosphere

Donald outlines the current financial state of the company for Michael and ends his description with a self-deprecating humorous comment *you can see the quality of my suit* (line 7). Donald's comment, which clearly serves as status-reducing, is further supported by Ann's teasing response in which Donald is the butt of her humour, *he's got shoes on so he must be having a good day* (line 9), stressing that this degree of formality is abnormal for Donald (Schnurr and Chan 2007, Schnurr 2005). Donald's final comment indicates he takes no offence at Ann's teasing, and also underlines the fact that informality and friendliness are important components of the egalitarian workplace culture that he nurtures.

Collaborative humour and banter are common in this workplace and Donald is frequently the butt of his colleagues' teasing comments. Schnurr and Chan (2007) discuss in some detail, for example, another excerpt in which Donald's stomach is the focus of teasing remarks. As they comment 'Donald's reaction to this teasing humour is clearly positive: he not only replies by laughing loudly, but he also plays along and produces more humour'. In this way, Donald constructs his identity as a good bloke, indicating he is one of the team, and is not above being included in teasing and jocular insult.

In another organisation, Daniel, the CEO, also plays down his authority in formal contexts. He manages meetings with a light hand, and generally avoids being 'heavy' in the way he operates as a leader. Interestingly, he uses a high number of explicit linguistic devices to emphasise informality and mateship. In particular he makes extensive use of the New Zealand pragmatic tag, *eh*, a feature associated with informality, masculinity and Maori ethnicity (Stubbe and Holmes 2000, Meyerhoff 1994), and he uses swear words much more frequently than others in professional white collar workplaces.

Daniel is Maori and he works in a Maori organisation so his use of the pragmatic particle *eh* could be regarded as very appropriate. However, he is the CEO of the organisation, and one would therefore not expect him to use this particle so extensively in formal contexts such as staff meetings. His usage is marked, even in a Maori workplace.

Example 4

Context: Meeting of Senior Management Team of commercial organisation, three men and two women senior staff present as well as CEO.

1. Dan: okay just have it for wednesday /um\ eh
2. Fra: /yeah\
3. Fra: ... knowing how I feel about them
4. making time to go and have the games and various
5. other things but not doing the stuff that we'd
6. promised to do by thursday
7. Dan: oh well shout at them a bit eh +

8. cos it's all fun it's great to have fun and get dressed up
9. but it's gotta fit in with everything else eh

Daniel's frequent use of *eh* (lines 1, 7, 9) in this excerpt clearly contributes to the informal, egalitarian style that he cultivates, even in formal meetings of senior staff.

Swearing has a similar effect and is even more marked in workplace meetings since it is so rarely used by others in professional contexts. Daniel's utterances are peppered with strong swear words, as illustrated in example 5 from a large formal meeting of the senior management team.

Example 5

Context: Meeting of the Senior Management Team of a commercial organisation. Three men and two women senior staff present as well as CEO

1. Fra: Company V got a new chairman they just got sick of him
2. Dan: oh yeah + fuck that's the sort of article
3. we got to send out to keep on [company] eh
4. so that they don't think that fiddling around with the board
5. won't do that you know

Thus even in formal contexts, Daniel uses swear words to emphasise his points and thus constructs himself as a good Kiwi joker, or in American terms 'a regular guy'.

As Jennifer Coates notes, swearing performs hegemonic masculinity. 'Swearing and taboo language have historically been used by men in the company of other men as a sign of their toughness and of their manhood' (2003: 46). Coates specifically quotes the New Zealand historian, Jock Phillips concerning the function of swearing among early male settlers, as a signal of 'the colonial man's readiness to live a hard and physical life, and his unconcern for the genteel formalities of civilised life...[and] contempt for the female world of manners' (Phillips 1996: 32). Swearing still undoubtedly performs masculinity in current times, and in the professional workplace context it also carries shock value, suggesting this is a down-to-earth person who does not stand on ceremony or emphasise status differences. Swearing is thus an effective tool for attenuating the authoritarian associations of leadership; it is a feature of the way that male mates talk in informal and egalitarian contexts.

This section has illustrated a number of discourse devices used by New Zealand male leaders to construct an identity as a good Kiwi bloke, someone who values mateship and supports the egalitarian ethos which is expected in many New Zealand workplaces. This strategy is another solution to the often conflicting demands of leadership and solidarity, enabling effective leaders to successfully integrate the demands of their leadership role in an organisation with the relational demands of collegiality. I turn now to consider the strategies that women leaders in our data adopt in order to deal with a rather different double bind, namely the conflict between leadership and femininity.

4. Reconciling leadership and feminine gender at work

Despite the fact that some women have succeeded in reaching senior management positions in New Zealand, there is undoubted evidence in the everyday talk in many workplaces, and particularly more ‘masculine’ workplace cultures and communities of practice, that women continue to be marginalised in subtle and not-so-subtle ways at work (Holmes and Stubbe 2003b, Holmes and Schnurr 2006, Holmes 2006). One way in which effective women leaders in New Zealand workplaces respond to the challenges this offers is to make use of both authoritarian, powerful discourse as well as more relationally-oriented normatively feminine discourse as appropriate.¹² A number of leaders in our data demonstrated great sociolinguistic skill in selecting from a range of strategies according to features of the immediate context, as well as the type of workplace and workplace culture in which they were operating. One way in which women made this work was to adopt the socially powerful roles of “mother” and/or “queen”—roles which licensed them to “do power” in the workplace without arousing antagonism or condemnation for being “unfeminine”.

4.1. Being ‘mother’

In many societies, aspects of the stereotype of “mother” are not necessarily attractive (eg. overly fussy, interfering), but overall, in New Zealand society, the maternal role is generally regarded positively and commands some respect. In our data, the aspects of the motherly role which were employed included both authority and caring. The nurturer-caregiver role is an obvious one for people to allocate to senior women and Koller notes that in the business magazines she analysed, women managers were often ‘conceptualised in terms of caregivers’ (2004: 6). In example 6, Leila, the section manager, constructs herself as a motherly figure, concerned about the welfare of her staff.

Example 6¹³

Context: Regular team meeting in a government organization. The team is discussing the best use of resources to address some staffing problems. Leila is the meeting chair.

1. [laughter throughout this section]
2. Lei: Emma you are part of the solution
3. in that I think that ()
4. Em: I only want to be part of the problem
5. XF: really
6. Lei: [laughs] [in fun growly tone] don’t you
7. dare be part of the problem
8. I’ll keep on giving you vitamin c bananas

¹² See Miller (1995) and Takano (2005) for a similar approach used by women managers in Japanese workplace interaction.

¹³ This example from our data is discussed in Holmes and Stubbe (2003b).

9. [laughs] chocolate fish [laughs]
10. I gave I gave um I you know everyone
11. had chocolate fish last week but Emma
12. had more chocolate fish than anybody
13. the only thing was she had holes in her teeth
14. /[laughs]\
15. Em: /I couldn't eat them\
16. Lei: she couldn't eat them [laughs]

In this excerpt, Emma establishes the humorous key by contesting Leila's statement that she is *part of the solution* (line 2) to the staffing problem, joking that she only wants to *be part of the problem* (line 4). Leila then playfully threatens to feed Emma with various goodies (line 8), points out that Emma had *more chocolate fish than anybody* (line 12) when they were handed out the previous week, and then reveals information about the holes in Emma's teeth (line 13). The exchange concludes with a supportive comment from Emma *I couldn't eat them* (line 15) which is echoed by Leila, *she couldn't eat them* (line 16). Listening to the recording confirms that this is extremely collaborative harmonious all-together-now talk. This good-humoured exchange, characterized by laughter and a joking tone, clearly reinforces the supportive team culture of this close-knit and feminine community of practice, but it also constructs Leila in a nurturing, motherly role. She humorously plays the role of mother to offset the more decisive and authoritative stance that her managerial role requires at other points in the meeting. Leila here uses the maternal option to reconcile authority and gender identity.

Example 7 is from a different community of practice, an IT company, and a relatively masculine community of practice. Jill, the Board Chair, adopts a maternal role to resolve a potential problem in a way that the participants will find easy to accept.

Example 7¹⁴

Context: Board meeting of six people including Donald and Tessa who are also husband and wife. Tessa cannot find the mouse which she needs to take the minutes on the computer, as is normal in these meetings.

1. Tess: where's my mouse
2. Sam: [laughs]
3. Tess: /(er)\
4. Don: /(no well)\ you're sitting too far away
5. from the /receiver\
6. Tess: /oh for\ goodness sakes how am I going
7. to be able to do this
8. Don: eh? oh well I'll do it if you want [laughs]

¹⁴ This example from our data is discussed in Holmes and Schnurr (2005).

9. Tess: well f- just tell me from there
10. Don: no I can't do that
11. Jill: okay well while while Tessa and Donald
12. [laughs]: have a moment: [laughs]...
13. um so I'll go for a quick flick through the agenda

Tessa and Donald engage in a little skirmish, with Tessa complaining about the placing of the computer (lines 1, 6-7) and Donald dishing out advice (lines 4-5) and offering to come and help (line 8), which Tessa irritably rejects (line 9). Jill is about to start the meeting. Instead of ignoring the skirmish, asserting her professional identity, and authoritatively taking the floor, Jill takes the opportunity to re-establish a pleasant tone and pour oil on the troubled marital waters by humorously adopting the role of 'mother' or at least 'understanding older adult' rather than 'boss'. Her humour takes a very feminine form too, in that she playfully and supportively constructs the distracting pair as lovers who need a moment's privacy.

Jill's teasing comment (lines 11-12) is an effective strategy for asserting her authority in a low key way in the face of this diversionary spat. Using humour as an integrative discursive strategy, she manages to have her cake and eat it too, using humour to skilfully balance the need to be authoritative with attention to workplace relationships.

These brief examples illustrate, then, some of the ways in which effective women leaders adopt on occasion a social role which acceptably integrates their authoritative positions with their femininity, namely, that of "mother". By adopting a maternal style of doing power, they effectively finesse the stylistic conflict which faces women in positions of authority. Another such authoritative role available to women leaders is that of queen.

4.2. Playing the Queen

Like the role of mother, the role of "queen" is somewhat ambivalent in some contexts, carrying connotations of "putting on airs", for example. Acknowledging this ambivalence, it is nevertheless clear that women who attract such a term are behaving in authoritative ways, and that others recognize that they expect to be treated with respect and deference.

One particular senior manager in our data who played the royal role very effectively was explicitly nicknamed "Queen Clara" by her team, a nickname that she was well aware of and which she exploited to the full. Clara worked in a very hierarchical multinational company where roles and responsibilities were quite explicitly articulated, and people were clear about lines of accountability. While there was much friendly social talk around the edges, meetings were run relatively formally, with authoritarian decision-making very evident (and treated as unmarked) at points of controversy. The adoption of a queenly role was apparently Clara's solution to the double bind of the conflicting demands of gender identity and professional identity. The slightly ironic but very functional

'queenly' persona resolved the potential contradiction between the need to be commanding yet feminine.

Clara's willingness to be explicitly authoritative when required is also well illustrated by our much-cited example 8, which demonstrates how she resolves a conflict when team members want to bend the rules established at the beginning of the project. The team is discussing how best to provide instructions to other members of their organisation about a specialised computer process. The discussion revolves around a request to allow people to print off material from the computer screen (i.e. to "screendump").

Example 8¹⁵

Context: Regular weekly meeting of project team in multinational white-collar commercial organisation.

1. Har: look's like there's been actually a request
2. for screendumps
3. I know it was outside of the scope
4. but people will be pretty worried about it
5. Cla: no screendumps
6. Matt: we-
7. Cla: no screendumps
8. Peg: [sarcastically]: thank you Clara:
9. Cla: /no screendumps\
10. Matt: /we know\ we know you didn't want them
11. and we um er /we've\
12. Cla: /that does not\ meet the criteria
[several reasons provided why screendumps should be allowed]
13. Cla: thanks for looking at that though
14. San: so that's a clear well maybe no
15. Cla: it's a no
16. San: it's a no a royal no

Clara here gives a very clear directive that under no circumstances will people be allowed to print material from their screens. She states her position clearly and explicitly: i.e. *no screendumps*. And she does so three times (lines 5, 7, 9) without any modification, thus conveying her message in very strong terms indeed. Moreover, when Matt suggests this is simply a matter of what she wants, *we know you didn't want them* (line 10), she follows up with an explicit reference to the previously agreed and ratified criteria (line 12). In other words, this is a very clear instance of Clara doing leadership in an explicitly authoritative way.

¹⁵ We have used this example many times in earlier publications because it is such a succinct illustration of such a wide range of points.

Clara's team have recourse to humour to manage the tensions created when a woman behaves in such a peremptory and authoritative manner. Peggy's sarcastic *thank you Clara* (line 8) provides an initial tension-breaker. Clara, however, then restates her position quite unequivocally *it's a no* (line 15). At this point Sandy makes an overt reference to Clara's queenly persona in another attempt to defuse the tension, *it's a no a royal no* (line 16). In this example, then, Clara draws maximally on the authoritative aspects of her queenly role, and, while they humorously appeal to that role to relieve tension, her team also clearly recognise its authority.

At the beginning of a meeting when she has just returned from holiday, Clara responds in a more playful way to her team's on-going joke about her royal identity. As background, to this example, readers need to be aware that the British Queen Mother had recently damaged her hip. Sandy is about to open the meeting but first addresses Clara directly.

Example 9

Context: Beginning of a regular project team meeting in multinational white-collar organisation.

1. San: how's your mum
2. Cla: sorry?
3. San: she broke her hip didn't she?
4. Cla: my mother?
5. All: [laugh]
6. Cla: what are you talking about
7. XF: [laughs]: the queen mother:
8. Dai: [laughs]: the queen mother:
9. Cla: oh
10. All: [laugh]
11. Cla: [using a hyperlectal accent and superior tone]:
12. my husband and I:
13. All: [laugh]
14. Cla: are confident that she'll pull through
15. All: [laugh]

While Clara is initially bemused by Sandy's questions (lines 1–6), it is clear, once she decodes the reference, that she is happy to play along with the charade and ham up her role as Queen Clara with a parody of queenly style: *my husband and I are confident that she'll pull through* (lines 12, 14). Clara's queenly persona is exploited for entertainment purposes in this light-hearted example of pre-meeting social talk. On other occasions, however, as illustrated above, it serves, with varying degrees of irony, to help resolve tensions generated at times by Clara's explicitly authoritative behaviour.

The role of "Queen Clara" thus enables Clara to resolve the inherent conflict between her role as manager and her feminine gender identity. This persona allows her to behave

in ways which are authoritative without causing discomfort to or attracting resentment from her team members. It allows her to maintain a certain social distance, and contributes to the impression of dignified graciousness and status. But it also allows her to act in feminine ways, attending to interpersonal aspects of workplace interaction by participating fully in the team's high involvement interactional style, contributing to the general social talk and collaborative humour, giving generous praise and approval, and encouraging thorough discussion and exploration of problematic issues. In this way, Clara successfully creates a satisfactory space for herself as a woman leader in a masculine workspace, adopting a way of doing leadership that does not negate her feminine gender identity. We could describe Clara, then, as a manager who creates her own myth, and who then effectively exploits it to maintain her feminine gender identity while also 'doing power' to achieve the transactional objectives of her organisation.

These two different roles, then, mother and queen represent two rather different strategies for resolving the tension between constructing an authoritative professional identity as a leader, and maintaining one's feminine gender identity in the workplace. The resolutions adopted by different women on different occasions tend to reflect the demands of the specific social contexts they encounter in their very different communities of practice.

5. Conclusion

I have explored in this paper a range of ways in which men and women construct their role as leaders in workplace interaction. Social constructionism problematises gender identity and emphasises the dynamic aspects of constructing social identity. Our research has put a good deal of emphasis on the varied and complex ways in which both women and men draw on masculine and feminine discourse strategies in constructing their workplace identities (Holmes 2006). However, it is also clear that pervasive society-wide stereotypes provide constraints on the behaviour of women and men at work, and this entails the adoption of different strategies by male and female leaders to manage the conflicts and complexities of reconciling different aspects of the leadership role.

Leaders are expected to be decisive, authoritative, and visionary. The hero leader is thus an appropriate role for many men at work, instantiated through powerful and controlling behaviour. As illustrated, the hero-leader often has a narrative to support his position. Enactment of a hero-leader stance involves such strategies as a hands-on approach to the management of meetings, including the use of contestive and challenging questions to control meetings.

To counteract the resentment of those who consider an overtly authoritative stance unacceptable in New Zealand society, some leaders also construct a "good bloke" persona, and adopt the role of "the good mate" when appropriate. In the examples discussed in this paper, self-denigrating humour and tolerance of teasing from other colleagues are ways in which a leader might indicate his desire to reduce status boundaries and empha-

sise that he is just one of the team. Colloquial pragmatic particles, such as *eh* and *you know*, provide another way of emphasising solidarity and mateship, as well as contributing to the construction of a very informal interactional context. The frequent use of swear words has a similar effect, though this strategy was not common in the professional workplaces where we collected data

Senior women also face a conflict in the workplace. The socially acceptable roles of mother and queen provide two rather different strategies for resolving the tension between constructing an authoritative professional identity as a leader, on the one hand, and maintaining one's feminine gender identity in the workplace. Using discourse strategies, such as humour and social talk, effective women managers strategically attenuate an assertive powerful performance in a variety of politic ways to produce a socially acceptable construction of leadership.

Though I have generally used different people from our dataset to illustrate the ways in which different kinds of leadership role may be constructed, it is of course common to find particular leaders drawing on a range of such ways of doing leadership in the course of their daily interactions. Leaders switch from one style to another according to the interactional context in which they are operating. It is possible to find instances of the same person behaving in an authoritarian way at one moment, and a collegial or feminine way at another. The resolutions adopted on different occasions reflect the demands of the specific social contexts leaders encounter in their very different communities of practice.

In conclusion it is worth noting that the dynamic nature of identity construction in social interaction offers the possibility of altering perceptions of what is regarded as "typical" or "appropriate" over time. Individual speakers clearly do orient to and manipulate established norms of masculine and feminine interaction, as well as norms of leadership and mateship discourse. So it is clear that there are a number of male leaders who appear to be successfully reconciling the demands of mateship and authority in a number of New Zealand workplaces, contributing perhaps to a new conception of what constitutes an acceptable leader. Similarly, some women are forging new conceptions of what it means to be a New Zealand leader as they introduce new ways of managing into workplaces previously considered as male domains, defined by masculine norms. By appropriating authoritative, powerful strategies when required, women contribute to de-gendering them and make it clear that they are tools of leadership discourse, and not exclusively of male discourse. In a range of ways, and to differing degrees, such women contest and trouble the gendered discourse norms which characterize so many workplaces, and which contribute to the glass ceiling they are trying to break through. More generally, this presents an optimistic picture of the possibility of achieving changes in workplace norms. Though individuals are generally expected to adapt to new communities of practice, it is also clearly possible to contribute to changing the norms of those communities in ways which make them much more palatable and attractive places in which to work.

Transcription conventions

All names are pseudonyms.

[laughs]:	Paralinguistic features and other information in square brackets (colons indicate start and end)
+	Pause of up to one second
.../.....\...	Simultaneous speech
.../.....\...	
(hello)	Transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
?	Rising or question intonation
-	Incomplete or cut-off utterance
.....	Some words omitted
XM/XF	Unidentified Male/Female
[voc]	Funny untranscribable noises

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Constitution of The Pragmatics Society of Japan

(Abbreviated Version)

Article I. Name and Purpose

1. This society shall be called the Pragmatics Society of Japan.
2. Its purpose shall be the advancement of pragmatics and related disciplines.
3. Activities:
PSJ shall
 - 1) organize annual conferences, and special lectures and talks;
 - 2) publish *Studies in Pragmatics*;
 - 3) carry out other relevant activities.

Article II. Membership

1. There shall be three categories of membership: regular, student, and institutional.
2. Any individual or institution in agreement with the purposes of the Society can obtain membership by paying dues.
3. All individual members shall be entitled to participate in events organized by the Society and to submit manuscripts for presentation at the Society's annual conference or for publication in the Society's Journal.

Article III. Officers

1. The Executive Committee of the Society shall consist of a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary-Treasurer and other officers.
2. The President shall serve for two years and serve as chair of the Executive Committee.
3. The President, Vice President, and Secretary-General shall be elected from among the members of the Executive Committee.

Article IV. Meetings

1. The Society shall hold an annual General Meeting.
2. The Executive Committee shall meet at least once a year.

Article V. Fiscal Policy

1. The Society shall be financed through membership fees and other donations. An outside audit shall be conducted annually.
2. The fiscal year shall start on April 1st and end on March 31st.

Article VI. The Secretariat and Other Committees

1. The Secretariat shall consist of a Secretary-General and one or more assistants. The Secretary-General is responsible for the overall management of the Society.

2. The Editorial Board is responsible for publication of the Society's journal.
3. The Conference Committee shall be responsible for reviewing conference abstracts, and for other matters related to conference planning and execution.
4. The Public Relations Committee shall be responsible for announcing information in the Newsletters and on the society's web page.