

Discourse, Politics and Women as Global Leaders

EDITED BY
JOHN WILSON AND DIANA BOXER

DISCOURSE APPROACHES TO
POLITICS, SOCIETY AND CULTURE 63



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INTRODUCTION

Discourse, politics and women

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Introduction

This book focuses on women in global political leadership via their discourse practices. It does so by drawing on a diverse range of studies from across the globe, reflecting a range of cultures and distinct polities. The primary aim is to consider in what way(s) discursive practice underpins, reflects, or is appropriated in terms of women's political progress and achievements within politics. The chapters will employ a set of theoretical approaches all bound by the discursive insights they provide, and in terms of their contribution to understanding the role of language and discourse in the construction of gendered identities within political contexts. Our approach is inductive at heart. Studies of the discourse of women in political leadership roles are relatively new and often constrained within specific social, national or cultural contexts. By bringing together papers on a range of leadership roles, in different polities and across different cultures and nations, we hope to contribute to a growth in knowledge in relation to women's practices in specific political environments. As Einstein noted some time ago, we need to increase our range of knowledge from inductive exercises so that these may then be subsumed within a general theoretical program. We are not ready at this time, we believe, to advocate a single theory to explain the emergent role of women in senior positions, but we are in a position to begin to consider a broad variety of examples of how this operates and to work from there in the future to broader theoretical claims in this area.

Our interest arose initially from what Phillips (1995) refers to as the "symbolic" representation of women in politics, that is the increasing numerical representation of women within formal politics and in particular their increasing visibility as holders of senior political offices such as Prime Minister, President, and Cabinet Minister. At minimum this could be seen as reflecting the "presence" or "increasing presence" of women as political representatives, which, of course, was far from always the case