The "genre bender": The Creative Leadership of Kathryn Bigelow

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Abstract

In the present chapter, we present the case study of the only woman film director who has ever won an Academy Award for Best Director, Kathryn Bigelow. We analyzed 43 written interviews of Kathryn Bigelow that have appeared in the popular press in the period 1988-2013 and outlined eight main themes emerging regarding her exercise of leadership in the cinematic context. We utilize three theoretical frameworks: (a) paradoxical leadership theory (Smith & Lewis, 2012; Lewis et al., 2014); (b) ambidextrous leadership theory (Rosing et al., 2011), and (c) role congruity theory (Eagley & Karau, 2002) and show how Bigelow as a woman artist/leader working in a complex organizational system that emphasizes radical innovation, exercised paradoxical and ambidextrous leadership and challenged existing conventions about genre, gender and leadership. The case study implications for teaching and practice are discussed.

Keywords: ambidextrous leadership, paradoxical leadership, role congruity theory, creative leadership, director, film industry

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"She's acting out desires. She represents what people want to see, and it's upsetting, because they don't know exactly what to do with it."

Cultural theorist Sylvére Lotringer

Introduction

Organizations are abounding with tensions and conflicting demands (e.g., flexibility vs. control, exploration vs. exploitation, hierarchy vs. empowerment). In order to navigate uncertainty, handle complexity and achieve strategic agility, leaders need to adopt a paradoxical and ambidextrous mindset (Andriopoulos, 2003; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2012; Lewis & Smith, 2014). Such a paradoxical perspective is even more critical in the context of creative industries where creativity is a fundamental ingredient of the final product (Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000). In order to cast light on the intricacies of leadership in a creative context full of collaborative tensions, we focus on a renowned film director who has received both critical acclaim and box office success, has raised controversy with the choice of topics and has balanced on a strenuous seesaw: *auteur* (Hicks & Petrova, 2006; Mainemelis, Nolas, & Tsirogianni, 2008) vs. *commercial director*. In her thirty-five years as a film director, she has encouraged viewers to "rethink action-hero masculinity by breaking with genre conventions" (Besnon-Allot, 2010, p. 33) and has been named the "genre bender" (Turan, 1989) and a "Hollywood transgressor" (Jermyn & Redmond, 2003). On top of it all, she is the only woman that has ever won an Academy Award for Best Director, Kathryn Bigelow.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of Bigelow as a creative leader we utilize *three* theoretical frameworks, the *paradoxical leadership theory* (Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Lewis,

2012; Lewis, Andriopoulos & Smith, 2014; Levine, 2014), the *ambidexterity theory of leadership* (Rosing et al., 2011) and *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rosette & Tost, 2010).

Increasingly scholars have leveraged a paradox approach to address the fact that organizations are rife with tensions and complexity and that long term sustainability requires constant balancing of multiple, divergent demands (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Lewis, 2000; Quinn & Kimberly, 1984; Smith & Lewis, 2011). Innovation has a complex and nonlinear nature (e.g., Anderson, De Dreu & Nijstad, 2004) and a paradox lens can offer unique insights. Smith and Lewis (2011) defined paradox as "contradictory yet interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time" (p. 382). Their definition highlights two components of paradox, the underlying tensions and the actor responses that embrace tension simultaneously. Smith and Lewis (2012) further suggested that a paradoxical view of leadership is needed. Leaders who can embrace inconsistencies, and seek to support contradictory elements simultaneously, can foster creative, beneficial alternatives (Andriopoulos, 2003; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gotsi et al., 2010; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This is particularly important in the cultural industries where managing has long been considered a "balancing act" among diverse and often conflicting needs and imperatives (e.g., Lampel et al., 2000). Lewis (2000) has proposed three approaches to how managers seem to handle paradoxes: acceptance (learning to live with it), confrontation (to construct a more accommodating understanding or practice), and transcendence (having the capacity to think paradoxically).

Close to the notion of paradox is that of ambidexterity, as they both share the need to address competing, seemingly paradoxically crucial yet incompatible objectives. On the institutional level, Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) noted that ambidextrous organizations excel

at both exploitation (incremental innovation) and exploration (radical innovation), whereas Tushman, Smith, and Binns (2011) argued that firms "thrive" when senior teams can contend with this duality and they must "embrace inconsistency by maintaining multiple and often conflicting strategic demands"(p. 76)

Rosing et al. (2011) in their theory of ambidextrous leadership propose two complementary sets of leadership behavior - opening and closing - that foster exploration and exploitation in individuals and teams and shares the assumption with Quinn's (1988) competing values model that leaders need to unite contradictory leadership behaviors or roles. Thus, ambidextrous leadership consists of three elements (1) opening leader behaviors to foster exploration, (2) closing leader behaviors to foster exploitation, (3) and the temporal flexibility to switch between both as the situation requires.

In addition to paradox and ambidexterity, Bigelow's case study offers a great platform to discuss gender stereotypes in relationship to leadership (e.g., Duehr & Bono, 2006; Heilman, Block, Martell & Simon, 1989; Schein, 1973; Schein & Mueller, 1992), with a special emphasis on female leaders in creative contexts (e.g., Ensher, Murphy & Sullivan, 2002; Murphy & Ensher, 2008). Schein's seminal work on managerial sex role stereotyping revealed that "think manager–think male" was a strongly held belief among both male and female middle managers across multiple cultural contexts. Drawing from *role congruity theory* (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rosette & Tost, 2010) and the lack of fit model (Heilman, 2001) prior research has consistently documented the incongruity between construals of women and leaders and the prejudice that women in leadership positions experience due to this lack of fit. Media studies document a similar role incongruity and gender disparity in the film making industry. Smith, Choueiti, & Gall (2011) report that females are underrepresented behind the

camera and that in a study of 1,565 content creators only 7% of directors, 13% of writers, and 20% of producers were female. One could, thus, easily draw an analogy with Schein's (1973) quote: "Think director, think male". The gender gap appears unbridgeable when we focus on one prestigious indication of directorial success, the Oscars (Simonton, 2004; Smith et al., 2008). In the 87 years of the Academy Awards only four women have ever been nominated for Best Director: Lina Wertmüller for Seven Beauties (1975), Jane Campion for The Piano (1993), Sofia Coppola for Lost in Translation (2003), and Kathryn Bigelow for The Hurt Locker (2008). Bigelow was the first, and to date the only, female director to win an Oscar for Best Director in 2010.

We first present Bigelow's case study utilizing data from 43 written interviews, and then we draw on the above three theories in order to analyze her creative leadership. Table 1 shows the filmography of Kathryn Bigelow from 1978 to 2014.

-----Insert Table 1 about here-----

The Case Study

Born in San Carlos California, on November 27, 1951, Bigelow's first vocation was to be a painter. The love of painting took her to the San Francisco Art Institute in 1971 and was subsequently granted a fellowship at the Whitney Museum Program in NY. Whilst there, Bigelow had the chance to have renowned writers and critics like Susan Sontag comment on her work. The possibilities of art expanded for her after she was hired by Acconci to film some material to be projected behind his performance piece. *"For me it was a revelation. I said, Ah hah! Movies"* (Interviewed by Gavin Smith, *Toronto Globe and Mail,* 1990).

Prior to making her first full length film in 1981 at the age of 30, Bigelow witnessed the rise and fall of the *New Hollywood Era*, the period between the mid 1960s and late 1970s, when

studios like Paramount allowed a generation of young directors to make highly creative and groundbreaking films such as *The Godfather, Apocalypse Now, Nashville, The French Connection, Raging Bull,* and *Jaws* (Biskind, 1998). These films transformed Hollywood structurally and culturally and elevated filmmaking as an art form in the US society (Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013). This group of young directors—Allen, Altman, Bogdanovich, Coppola, Friedkin, Lucas, Scorse, Spielberg, and others—reached an auteur status and helped change the role of the director who ever since has been perceived as the principal artist in filmmaking (Biskind, 1998; Mainemelis et al., 2008). Although in age terms Bigelow was a late member of that generation (she is just five years younger than Steven Spielberg), as a director she belongs to the 1980s generation who experienced the studio system being taken over by large corporations including Coca Cola, Sony, and News Corp: "*In the 1980s the merger mania that gripped Wall Street began to a spill into Hollywood, and by the 1990s every major studio had been successively gobbled up by huge multinational corporations that were focused brutally on the bottom line*" (Waxman, 2006: xv).

During the 1980s Hollywood focused less on making 'films' and more on making 'movie entertainment', which included not only making movies but also making videos as well as the exploitation of synergies between movies and other products and services. In comparison to the 1970s, the 1980s was a decade when Hollywood studios were less open to innovation, experimentation, and risk-taking (Waxman, 2006). Iconic directors of the 1970s, such as Bogdanovich, Ashby, Friedkin, and even Scorsese and Coppola, were sidelined for being marginally commercial. Biskind (2004: 9) notes that even "*Roger Corman, who produced B movies in the 1960s and early 1970s, used to complain that he'd had a hard time in the 1980s*

because the B movies had become A movies, with bigger budgets and real stars." According to

George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and William Friedkin,

> Once the corporations bought in, and once the agents, lawyers, and accountants took over, people who read the Wall Street Journal and cared less about the movies than the price of the stock, that's when the whole thing died. (George Lucas in Biskind, 1998: 381).
>
> It used to be you only had to debut once, and then you had a career. Now, every single movie that I make, I'm debuting again, everybody is judging me like it's my first film. (Steven Spielberg in Biskind, 1998: 403)
>
> In the '70s, if you had a flop, the attitude was, "That's too bad, but it was a good picture." Then it became, if you made a film that was not a hit, they put you under indictment. You were a fuckin' criminal. (William Friedkin, in Biskind, 1998: 404).

In the 1980s Bigelow experienced another defining moment in the historical evolution of

the film industry: the rise of the independent film industry, which was propelled by Miramax and

the Sundance Film Festival and stood for everything that Hollywood was not at that time: films,

reality, controversial themes, small budgets, unknown actors, and ultimate creative and artistic

control (Waxman, 2006).

> If Hollywood strip-mined genres, and dropped movies out of cookie cutters, indie films expressed personal visions and were therefore unique and sequel-proof. If Hollywood made movies by committee, indies were made by individual sensibilities who wrote as well as directed, and sometimes shot and edited as well. While Hollywood employed directors, hired to do a job, indies were filmmakers who worshipped at the alter of art. While directors accumulated BMWs and homes in Malibu, filmmakers made unimaginable sacrifices and lived in New York, preferably on the lower East Side. (Biskind, 2004: 19).

After finding her true-calling, Bigelow entered Columbia University's Master of Fine

Arts program in New York partly in order to finish her first film and most importantly to gain

theoretical expertise. Among the faculty that she met at Columbia was Milos Forman, the multi-

award winning New Hollywood Ear director who had made the 1975 iconic film *One Flew Over*

the Cuckoo's Nest. As Lane (1998) points out, *"Bigelow is one of the few women in mainstream cinema today who has an academic background in film theory"* (p.62). Her high degree of reflexivity in her films may be a result of this training. The academic lens is evident in her first short film, *Set Up* (1978) that consisted of two men beating and bludgeoning each other as the semioticians Sylvère Lotringer and Marshall Blonsky deconstruct the images in voice-over. Bigelow submitted her 1978 short film as part of her MFA thesis at Columbia University. As she was finding her way from the conceptual and abstract to the concrete and narrative, she discovered her affinity for classic Hollywood directors, like George Miller, Martin Scorsese and Sam Pechinpah and her love for B-movies *"There is a wildly chaotic rawness to them. And they are not self-important"* (interviewed by Richard Natale, *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, 2009).

Her first independent film, *Loveless* (1981) starring Willem Dafoe, was still a somewhat academic exercise. The film follows biker Vance through a day in the life of a 50s biker gang. Bigelow was trying to project *"Images of power and a skewed perspective of it"* (interviewed by Gavin Smith, *Toronto Globe and Mail,* 1990). Her second film was a hybrid of a vampire movie and a western, *Near Dark* (1987), which grew into a cult and a cinephile favorite. It also grabbed the attention of a big Hollywood player, Ed Pressman, who joined Oliver Stone in backing her first mainstream movie, *Blue Steel* (1989) that had a big budget and an A-list cast that included Jamie Lee Curtis and Ron Silver. Answering to the question whether she was selling her independence for Hollywood opportunities, Bigelow told Clarke Taylor*: "I want more access. I can't just ask for money to fulfill my own creative desires. And yet I want to be able to continue to make films I can live with"* (interview in *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, 1988). She further added to Gerald Perry *"I now want to make high-impact films that transcend education and class structure, which are impossible to feel ambivalent about, and which inspire cathartic reaction"*

(interview in *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 1990). *Blue Steel* featured a female detective (Jamie Lee Curtis) in the traditionally macho role of a gun-slinging vigilante.

Her next film, *Point-Break* (1991) produced by her ex-husband James Cameron, also featured a tough female character but was emphasizing the male bonding between an FBI agent (played by Keanu Reaves) and the leader of a group of surfers-bank robbers (played by Patrick Swayze). The film further highlighted the blurred lines between ethics, duty and passionately pursuing a higher purpose. *"It's not about good guys and bad guys. It's a little more complicated when your good guy – your hero- is seduced by the darkness inside him and your villain is no villain whatsoever, he's more of an anti-hero"* (interviewed by Mark Salisbury, the *Guardian*, 1991). She also made a political statement in the film with the surfers-bank robbers wearing masks of past US presidents and by having Ronald Reagan burn down a gas station and then rampage through the backyards and living rooms of America (Smith, 1995).

Her following film, *Strange Days* (1995) a sci-fi action movie starring Ralph Fiennes, almost derailed her career and it took her five years for her next film, *The Weight of Water* (2000) in which a modern day journalist researches a 19$^{\text{th}}$ century murder. It was an unlikely choice for Bigelow but as she explained to Peter Howell (*Toronto Star*, 2000) she was drawn to the story because of certain similarities with her mother's background. The film basically flopped but she was ready for her next big movie *K-19: The Widowmaker* (2002) with a $100 million budget and big stars like Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson. Based on a 1961 Cold war incident in which the captain and the crew of a Soviet submarine heroically stopped a reactor meltdown and possible prevented World War III, the film took seven years to appear on screen.

> I wanted to dispense with all the movie tropes: the clean-through line, the idea of the hero. That was K-19: The Widowmaker – what was interesting to me about it was that there were no Americans. The Russians were the heroes. It was interesting trying to get that financed because you'd be pitching it saying, "This

really happened – they averted a thermonuclear event off the coast of a NATO base". I remember sitting in some executive's office and they said. "OK, but who are the good guys?" "What do you mean? The Russians are the good guys". "No, I mean, who are the Americans (interviewed by Jessica Winter, the Time, 2013).

Bigelow persevered and finally completed the film on time and under budget. Although *K-19* flopped grossing under $40 million in the US, it focused her attention on a setting that prevails in all her later films, war and people in the military. *"...I was fascinated by the opportunity to speak about war. I think all wars are tragedy and to critique it, you have to look at it. And the best way to look at it is to experience it on the ground with the people fighting it. You know, I am anti-war, but I'm pro-the people forced to engage with it"* (interviewed by Jessica Winter, the *Time*, 2013).Seven years after *K-19*, the *Hurt Locker* is released. The film tells the story of an American bomb squad in Bagdad that disarms roadside explosives. One of the heroes, Staff Surgeant William James, disables bomb after bomb and is addicted to the danger of war. In 2010 Bigelow becomes the first woman to receive the Directors Guild of America's "Outstanding Achievement in Motion Pictures" award and the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director. Her next (and more recent) movie, *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012) that pictures the hunt and killing of Osama Bin Laden, raised controversy and harsh criticism (from senators, journalists and the general public) about the brutal scenes of American operatives practicing torture in order to obtain information. When asked whether she expected such a response Bigelow answered:

> Well, yes and no. Yes, because this territory has been controversial since the early part of the decade. So I knew that the film was going to be controversial, though perhaps I didn't anticipate this kind of volume. But I feel we got it right. I'm proud of the movie, and I stand behind it completely. I think that it's a deeply moral movie that questions the use of force. It questions what was done in the name of finding bin Laden (interviewed by Jessica Winter, the Time, 2013). She further commented to Dave Calhoun (*Time Out London*, 2013):

> I think if you deny history, you repeat history, so putting information out there that's worth examining and exploring is very productive. Sadly, this conversation was not nearly as spirited before this movie, and I can't answer why. It's worth discussing and re-examining. I think torture is reprehensible. I've said that, and I will continue to say it…It's been a long, dark decade and it's been a chance to shed some light on the hunt itself, on the operation, on the tenacity of the individuals at the heart of it. It's arguably the story of a lifetime. Its timeliness and its topicality are incredibly important to me as a filmmaker: it gives you the opportunity to engage in the first draft of history.

In January 2013 the Senate Intelligence Committee opened an investigation into *Zero Dark Thirty,* which later reported as closed in February.

Key leadership themes from Kathryn Bigelow's interviews

In order to cast light on Bigelow's creative leadership, we analyzed 43 interviews that have appeared in the popular press in the period 1988-2013. Despite her success, Bigelow is rather press-shy and sparing in giving interviews. The 43 interviews used in our case study, although not necessarily an exhaustive list, represent all key stages of her career and all of her films, and were obtained mainly via the web and via a published volume edited by Peter Keough (2013). Due to the subjective nature of the data that is based on the narratives of a single director operating in a setting where reputation is key (DeFillipi & Arthur, 1998), we tried to contrast her views with those of critics and colleagues (whenever possible). We used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 2002) as our analytic approach. The identification of themes was done by the first author, mainly deductively as it was influenced by the theoretical constructs of interest (Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2009). It is important to note that our analysis is mainly oriented towards providing an illustrative case study of Bigelow as a "woman-director-leader". Our aim was mostly to spark fertile discussions around paradoxical and ambidextrous leadership and gender in the compelling context of the film industry rather than draw solid

generalizable inferences from this qualitative data. A summary of our thematic analysis is presented in Table 2.

-----Insert Table 2 about here-----

 Through the 43 interviews eight main themes emerged in relation to leadership and gender:

1. Provocation and Challenging Gender Stereotypes: Although *Zero Dark Thirty* has probably been her most controversial film, there is an element of provocation in all her films. Most of her films portray violence – from her very first film *Set Up* (1978) to the raw torture scenes of *Zero Dark Thirty*. When asked what switches her on as a director, she responded: *"I suppose that would be the opportunity to provide a text that is provocative"* (interviewed by Paul Hond, *Columbia Magazine*, 2009) and *"I try to ask myself why I'm drawn to that kind of material. It has energy; it's very provocative. I think it's important to challenge"* (interviewed by Victoria Hamburg, *Interview*, 1989).

Her topics (e.g., violence, war, torture) challenge gender stereotypes and she has received strong criticism about this role incongruity. *"What is a nice woman like Bigelow doing making erotic, violent vampire movies?"* asks Marcia Froelke Coburn (*Chicago Tribune*, 1987) and Mark Salisbury wonders *"Why does she make the kind of movie she makes?"* (*The Guardian*, 1991). She has forcefully fought against such stereotypical views *"There is nothing, culturally or socially, that would limit women to the more ephemeral, sensitive subjects – or men to hardware films"* (interviewed by Clarke Taylor, *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, 1988) and has constantly resisted being classified as a woman director (rather than a director):

> If there's specific resistance to women making movies, I just choose to ignore that
> as an obstacle for two reasons: I can't change my gender, and I refuse to stop
> making movies. It's irrelevant who or what directed a movie, the important thing
> is that you either respond to it or you don't. There should be more women
> directing; I think there's just not the awareness that it's really possible. It is.
> (interviewed by Gerald Peary, Toronto Globe and Mail, 1990).

And more recently:

> A filmmaker is a filmmaker. I tend not to look through a lens that is bifurcated in respect to gender or anything. But if what I do can serve for one person—let's say I can be a kind of role model for other women directors to prove that if you're tenacious enough, you can achieve what you have in your sights—then I'm proud to carry that mantle (interviewed by Draire Piene, More Magazine, 2012).

To those who criticize her for not acknowledging gender as a factor in her work and for not offering new insights to gender politics she answers: *"I subscribe to feminism emotionally. And I sympathize with the struggles for equity. But I think there is a point where the ideology is dogmatic"* (interviewed by Gerald Peary, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 1990).

2. **Embracing Paradoxes.** Closely related to the theme of provocation and challenge is the theme of paradox and working with oppositional ideologies that emerges through her interviews. She likes to mix genres and has been named the "genre bender" (Turan, 1989) and a "Hollywood transgressor" (Jermyn & Redmond, 2003). *Near Dark* was a vampire movie and a western, *Point Break* a surfer movie and a heist thriller, *Strange Days* a police drama with a sci-fi twist, whereas the *Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* are part narrative feature and part documentary. *"What interests me is treading on familiar territory. I try to turn the genre on its head or make an about face, and just when I make the audience a bit uncomfortable, I go back and reaffirm [the genre conventions]" (interviewed by Victoria Hamburg, Interview, 1989)*. She reworks genre by challenging its static formulations. Whereas Hollywood films usually contain a univocal and unidirectional logic, Bigelow has endorsed Altman's (1989) proposal for a tension-based, dialogical approach to mainstream film (Lane, 1998).

> I think it's important to work with an element that is familiar and comfortable and then take a left turn. And just when you take it a little too far, recoil a little. It's

fun to kind of play with the genre, mutate it, refract it, challenge it. At the same time, it should be experienced on a very visceral level too. You should be able to chew popcorn and have a good time". (Interviewed by Phoebe Hoban, Premiere, 1990).

Susan Sontag commented on Bigelow *"There is a maverick steak in her that enables her to handle these violent genres, but also to give them a very personal touch and deal with them in a very sensitive way"* (Whitney Program, 1972). The semiotician Lotringer also argued *"Outwardly the movie [The Hurt Locker] is against violence, but of course, violence is very seductive. And she played with the seduction. To have seduction and Iraq at the same time was a gamble"* (in Hond, *Columbia Magazine*, 2009).

3. Ambidexterity. Bigelow challenges the faulty binary opposition between the "independent true artist" and the mainstream director that is confined by Hollywood economic forces. She combines two seemingly conflicting identities: the "good director for hire" who knows the genre and can produce marketable products (such as Point Break, the Hurt Locker and Zero Dark Thirty) and at the same time, the artist who has a clear vision and engages in a heavy narrational style (Lane, 1998). She juggles demands of multiple stakeholders and manages to combine artistic integrity with business efficiency. She always brings her films on time, on schedule and on budget. She rarely speaks in the first person and is considered one of the most generous directors in Hollywood that always put her crew first (Brookes Barnes, NY Times, 2012) but at the same time she runs a tight ship: *"Her attitude: to formalize, to frame, to keep a distance, to control. I think control is important"* (Lotringer, in Hond, *Columbia Magazine*, 2009). She has thus managed to achieve being considered both an "auteur" and a Hollywood brand.

The fact that she has often been described as an "auteur" is particularly interesting, considering that Bigelow has written only three of her feature films to date (*The Loveless, Near Dark*, and *Blue Steel*). In auteur theory, the term "auteur" (i.e., author) designates a filmmaker who both writes and directs his or her films in a way that leaves upon the film a distinctive personal 'stamp' or signature (Sarris, 1968). For example, Woody Allen, the quintessential American auteur, has both written and directed all of his 44 films to date (Mainemelis et al., 2008). It appears that Bigelow's ambidexterity has played an important role in her being perceived as an auteur. For example, Wilson (2005) has noted that,

> Critics and academics have had difficulty theoretically situating Bigelow and Bigelow herself plays with her status as an auteur… Despite the apparent contradictions evident across Bigelow's body of work, there are a number of qualities that lend themselves to a conception of her 'signature'. These include the ongoing interrogation of gender, of the arguable essences of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' and the concomitant embodiment of androgyny by several of her protagonists; the examination of technology not as fundamental to human progress, but as a tool used, and misused by those in positions of authority, power, and /or law enforcement; the self- conscious fascination and manipulation of the cinematic gaze; and the transgression of traditional genre boundaries (resulting in hybridized texts that resist easy classification)… Her films lend themselves to different perspectives that include feminism, psychoanalysis, queer theory and cultural studies. The definitive aspect of her cinema is her ability to transcend those limitations imposed upon her by traditional cinematic forms, categorical imperatives attributed to her films by critics, and audience expectations of what a Bigelow film should look like.

4. Collaborative tensions: Although she does not provoke the extreme collaborative tensions we observe in other film directors like F.F. Coppola (Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013) she does not shy away from tension: *"She can be forceful in pursuing goals. Early on, there were some conflicts between her and the financiers. Someone less resilient and persistent would have capitulated but she didn't. If something comes to a head, her words can sting. But her storms blow over quickly. Those who stay are able to take it"* (Walter Murch, *K-19* film editor,

interviewed by Johanna Schneller, *Premiere*, 2002). She also deliberately induces tension through the topics she chooses that raise fierce controversy. For her, it is all about the conversation. Talking about *Zero Dark Thirty* to Jessica Winter she noted:

> You know, we've walked into a debate that's ongoing, and the film raised the volume on that debate. It's kind of a testament to the medium. If you pick challenging, contemporaneous subjects that create controversy and noise around them, it puts you with Apocalypse Now, All the President's Men, A Clockwork Orange, In the Heat of the Night, Battle of Algiers. That's some very good company. So once you've opened the window on topical material, it's very hard to close it. Holding up a contemporary mirror is more attractive to me now than ever (interview in Time, 2013).

5. Authenticity – Artistic Integrity: She continuously strives for authenticity in her work and refuses to compromise artistic integrity for Box Office success. *"When you get to the point you feel you are compromising, then you risk losing the thread of integrity that was the reason you wanted to make the film in the first place. If you are trying to satisfy too many people's expectations that poses a real risk to the material"* (interviewed by Victoria Hamburg, *Interview*, 1989). She always shoots her films on location despite the difficulties. Talking about shooting *Blue Steel* in New York City she said: *"Here, you work in spite of the city, but on the other hand, you have a sense of authenticity. This entire picture [Blue Steel] was shot on location – no studio sets at all, which can be very difficult"* (interviewed by Victoria Hamburg, *Interview*, 1989).

For *K-19* when it came time to build the submarine set, Bigelow insisted it to be to scale, even though that meant working in cramped conditions. *"She sacrificed a comfortable work environment to gain authenticity. It had ripple effects for the actors; it put them in the right mind set"* (Christine Whitaker, head of *National Geographic's* fledging feature films division, interviewed by Johanna Schneller, *Premiere*, 2002). Similar was her approach to the *Hurt Locker* *"Kathryn strove for authenticity throughout and said there was no switch off for the cameras"*

17

mentioned her film editor, Chris Innis, who had to then trawl over two hundred hours of footage (interviewed by Kingsley Marshall, *Little White Lies*, 2009). In *Zero Dark Thirty*, the Pakistan compound where Bin Laden was found was meticulously reconstructed. *"We wanted the rooms to be their actual size. Tight, narrow, airless spaces that would inform the performances"* (interviewed by Brooks Barnes, *NY Times*, 2012).

6. Clear vision: As Phoebe Hogan notes in her interview, the word most often used in connection with Bigelow is *vision*. Jamie Lee Curtis stated after working with her in *Blue Steel*: *"One out of ten directors has vision. Kathryn has it"* (interviewed by Phoebe Hogan, *Premiere*, 1990). Ron Silver also noted in the same interview: *"I had lots of confidence in her vision. I was aware that we were pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. She knows frame by frame what she wants"*. In addition to vision clarity, she is also skillful in vision articulation through empathy and individualized consideration for her actors:

> With every actor it's different. You have to find a vocabulary that works for them and understand their process. So with every actor there's a different methodology. With some you need to be very straightforward, deliberate, reveal your needs for a particular scene. With others you involve them in the process, get them to invest emotionally by making it theirs (interviewed by Tom Johnson, American Film, 1990).

She uses rehearsal periods as opportunities for vision articulation and communication *"For me the rehearsal period is the invaluable search for communication. It has less with perfecting a scene and reevaluating the script than it had to do with communication with a particular actor, examining their process, enabling them to view yours"* (interviewed by Tom Johnson, *American Film*, 1990). Harrison Ford, interviewed about *K-19* said about Bigelow *"One of Kathryn's biggest talents is visualization and she was very collaborative with the actors*

in letting us find motivations for the kinds of movement that reinforced the reality in the space" (interviewed by Richard Natale, 2002, *Los Angeles Times Calendar*, 2002).

7. Empowerment and Co-creation: She empowers actors to ask questions and challenge the material. When asked whether she arranged the actors' physical posture in an emblematic scene of *Point Break* she responded, *"Rather than have a preordained idea of how they should lie, what I love to do is see how an actor organically works a scene or works in a space and then freeze it, shape it. So it isn't like you are imposing something that might not be organic to them or to that moment"* (interviewed by Gavin Smith, *Film Comment*, 1995). She also values the relationship between her and her actors and credits the dynamics of that relationship for the final radically creative product:

> Because acting is a very fragile process, and it's a very fragile bond that occurs between actor and director. I think if you view the director-actor relationship as a process that is always in a state of evolving and transforming, something fluid, never fixed, then you allow something entirely unexpected to come through, something unpredictable that is a wonderful surprise (interviewed by Tom Johnson, American Film, 1990).

She has also an eye for acting talent and is credited with the "discovery" of both Willem Dafoe and Keanu Reeves. *"She wanted Reeves to play the FBI Agent in Point Break but Fox executives dismissed the idea "Keanu Reeves in an action film? Based on what? Bill and Ted?" But she insisted he could be an action star. She worked on his wardrobe, she showed him how to walk, she made him work out"* (James Cameron, interviewed by Tom Johnson, *American Film*, 1990).

8. Resilience. Through the interviews, a consistent pattern of resilience, tenacity and positive psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007) emerges. Talking about projects that got shelved she noted:

The first few times it happens, you are emotionally devastated. Then you realize it's all a big waiting game. It's an inevitable process, and you just try to stay alive and not let it beat you. You have to triumph over it. It's simply the law of averages. You keep writing. It's a crapshoot and one script will ultimately make it (interviewed by Victoria Hamburg, Interview, 1989).

With a high degree of self-sarcasm, she later noted to Johanna Schneller: *"I was never daunted by challenges. I think there's something off in my psyche – I'm sure years of therapy could take care of it, but I don't have time for that"* (interview in *Premiere*, 2002). Recently, she added: *"When any film gets made it's a bit of a miracle. Certainly a film with substance. It's perhaps partially the sheer tenacity of the core filmmaking team and not gender-specific. Personally I don't take "no" well. I think that's part of it"* (interviewed by Draire Piene, *More Magazine*, 2012).

Creative Leadership Lessons from Kathryn Bigelow

In order to gain a deeper understanding of Bigelow as a creative leader we will explore the specific connections with the three theories presented in our introduction: (a) paradoxical leadership theory (Smith et al., 2012; Smith & Lewis, 2012; Lewis, Andriopoulos & Smith, 2014; Levine, 2014), (b) ambidexterity theory of leadership (Rosing et al., 2011) and (c) role congruity (e.g., Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Paradoxical Leadership. The paradoxical theory of leadership has focused on the capacity of leaders to embrace inconsistencies and inherent contradictions for radical creativity via employing three strategies: acceptance, confrontation and transcendence (Andriopoulos, 2003; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Gotsi et al., 2010; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). In their dynamic equilibrium model of organizing, Smith and Lewis (2011) note that organizational leaders can enable a virtuous cycle of managing tensions through acceptance and resolution strategies. In relation to acceptance, Smith and Berg (1987) argued that "by immersing oneself in

the opposing forces, it becomes possible to discover the link between them, the framework that gives meaning to the apparent contradictions" (p. 215). Bigelow's approach to her craft is a strong testimony of such an immersion in the opposing forces (e.g., mixing different genres and creating new meanings through such mixture, being an artist and an efficient manager, not explicitly subscribing to feminism but at the same time constantly challenging stereotypes about gender). She deliberately induces tension and engages in *confrontation* through the topics she chooses that raise fierce controversy. Through *acceptance* and immersion in the tensions, she reaches *transcendence* of conflicting demands and paradoxical thinking becomes ingrained in her leadership.

Smith and Lewis (2011) further argue that for leaders to become able to attend to competing demands and think paradoxically they require *cognitive and behavioral complexity* and *emotional equanimity*. By cognitively seeking valued differences between competing forces and at the same time identifying synergies, as well as being able to adopt competing behaviors, leaders can accept paradox and become able to handle tensions. Bigelow, throughout her career, has exhibited *cognitive complexity* (by engaging in a heavy narrational style, capitalizing on genre tensions and revealing ideological excesses, constantly questioning the rigid conceptions of gender and emphasizing the fragility of the male/female polar opposition). She has adopted Altman's (1989) view of film as "tension-based" and dialogical, and has viewed films as multivocal and contradictory (Lane, 1998). She has also shown *behavioral complexity*, by masterfully balancing between control and clear visualization of an artistic outcome on one hand, and individualized consideration, empowerment and emergence of a collaborative product that incorporates the voices of her actors and crew, on the other.

She further exhibits *emotional equanimity*. She is not daunted by challenges (as she joked in one of her interviews), exhibits resilience and persistence, triggers positive emotional contagion though her infectious laughter on set and creates a psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999) environment for her actors and crew to reach peak levels of artistic performance.

Ambidextrous leadership. As described in the introduction, ambidextrous leadership consists of three elements: opening leader behaviors towards exploration, closing leader behaviors towards exploitation, and the temporal flexibility to switch between both (Rosing et al., 2011). Bigelow employs opening leadership behaviors towards her actors and crew by allowing them to get immersed in their craft and challenge her and the material, by engaging in an active dialogue and building a dynamically evolving relationship with them. She, thus, acts as a facilitator of the creative process and allows integration and collaborative emergence (e.g., Sawyer & De Zutter, 2009). At the same time, she utilizes closing behaviors of tight control, financial savvy, strong respect of deadlines and further acts as the leader "creator" who has a clear artistic vision that is not willing to compromise it. Although not explicitly evident in her interviews, the existence of temporal flexibility (Halbesleben et al., 2003) and adaptability to different situations can be inferred from her versatility in choosing topics and genres, her directorial evolution from independent cinema to mainstream Hollywood and her ability to handle diverse teams in a complex (but temporary) organizational setting.

Bigelow's provocative and often controversial style corroborates with recent descriptions of nonconforming creative behaviors in organizations, especially creative deviance (Mainemelis, 2010) and bootlegging (Criscuolo, Salter, & Ter Wal, 2014). For example, Mainemelis and Epitropaki (2013) described Francis Ford Coppola's leadership during the making of the *Godfather* as an exemplar of creative deviance in filmmaking. During the making of that film,

the young Coppola violated direct instructions from studio executives in order to maintain his creative vision intact, and ultimately, in order to shoot the film as he wanted to. Although the final outcome was highly successful both financially and artistically, the production went over budget and time and it was marked by extreme tensions and conflicts (Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013). In contrast to Coppola, Bigelow appears to possess generous degrees of foresight and political skill, which have allowed her to minimize the number of non-conforming reactions toward other key stakeholders (studios, financiers, crew members, etc). More specifically, in order to shield her creative freedom from studio control, Bigelow has often used four tactics.

First, she used as much independent financing as possible. Woody Allen (the quintessential auteur of American cinema) has long opted to finance his films in the same way and for the same reason: to protect his creative freedom from studio control (Mainemelis et al., 2008). Second, Bigelow has made sure that her films are always completed on time and on budget. This has strengthened her trustworthiness with studio executives, who are generally less likely to intervene in the daily work of directors whom they trust. Third, Bigelow mindfully controlled the flow, timing, and content of communication with the studio. For example, while shooting the *Hurt Locker* in her chosen setting in Jordan, the heat was unbearable for all those involved in the making of the film. She decided not to communicate the problem to the studio because she was afraid that they would likely move the production to another setting in Morocco. Instead, Bigelow pushed the crew to endure the extreme heat conditions in order to make sure that the film was made in Jordan in the setting of her choice. Last but not least, Bigelow avoided direct violations of studio instructions. She utilized, instead, different influence tactics in order to persuade studio executives about her views. For instance, this is evident in the manner in which she managed to persuade studio executives about casting Reeves for *Point Break*. Therefore,

although Bigelow is not a less provocative, controversial, or persistent director than Coppola, she appears to secure her creative freedom in less direct and less upsetting ways.

Role congruity theory. The case study also addresses issues related to the role of gender in leadership. Bigelow has consistently challenged gender stereotypes in her work, especially the "masculine action hero" role. Her films offered radical representations of gender and film theorists such as Lane (1998), see a more complex relationship between genre and gender in her movies. She has taken up the traditionally "male" genre of action and has given a leading role to female characters that do not conform to gender stereotypes (e.g., *Blue Steel*, *Zero Dark Thirty*). Her films revise dominant convictions about gender, and "offer competing ideological voice which questions assumptions about gender and sexuality" (Lane, 1998, p. 60). Although her female characters question the gender logic, she at the same time offers them a space to express vulnerability, sensitivities and a gender-congruent "soft" side.

Although Bigelow herself dreads the question and longs for the day that it's only about the work rather than her gender, we agree with Lane's (1998) conclusion that it is "…valuable to ask if we can tell or if we even care that there is a woman behaving the camera" (p. 60). After several decades during which women had only two possible paths to Hollywood (as actresses or secretaries), the building momentum of the independent film industry in the 1970s, facilitated a new breed of women directors like Bigelow who managed to gain a position in mainstream cinema after first proving themselves as artists in the independent terrain. Bigelow manages to defy the premises of "role congruity theory" regarding the prejudice female leaders experience (Eagly & Karau, 2002) through a double incongruity: a female leader in a male-dominant industry - choice of male topics played by women lead characters. It looks like a mathematical

calculation: multiplying two negatives makes one positive. Even with regard to gender, her paradoxical leadership style is still evident.

Practical and Teaching Implications. Based on our previous analysis, we argue that Kathryn Bigelow's case study is a great example of paradoxical, ambidextrous and role incongruous leadership in a creative context. As an "artist/leader" she embraces paradoxes, balances contradictory demands (artistic vision vs. budget constraints, actor empowerment vs. control) and exhibits cognitive and behavioral complexity as well as emotional equanimity. A closer look to her directorship sheds light on some paradoxical aspects of creative leadership in the workplace. She also defied gender stereotypes via her choice of topics (e.g., violence) and the representation of her female characters (as action heroes).

In a teaching context, her case study can nicely compliment existing cases on film directors as leaders (e.g., Alvarez, Miller, Levy, & Svejenova, 2004; Mainemelis & Epitropaki, 2013) to discuss issues of leadership and gender. It can also be used as a platform for discussion of Implicit Leadership Theories (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; 2005; Lord, Foti & De Vader, 1984; Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter & Tymon, 2011; Schyns & Meindl, 2005) and of the paradoxical relationship between creativity and leadership cognitive schemas. The absence of creative traits as prototypical characteristics (e.g., Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon & Topakas, 2013) and the experimental findings indicating that the higher the perception of a person's creative potential, the lower the perception of their leadership potential (e.g., Mueller et al., 2011), are definitely worthy of classroom discussion. If creativity is not a salient characteristic of leadership, which are the implications for leaders striving for organizational creativity and innovation? How important is the role of context (e.g., creative industries) for creative leadership emergence and effectiveness? Through the class discussion it can become

evident that in collaborative contexts such as film-making, leadership and creativity are complimentary rather than antithetical constructs.

The case study further indicates the role of *failure* as a driving force of innovation (e.g., Chiesa & Frattini, 2011; Gino & Pisano, 2011; Kriegesmann, Kley & Schwering, 2005). Despite the fact that several of her films were box-office flops (such as *Strange Days*, the *Weight of Water* and *K-19: The Widowmaker;* see Table 1) she persevered. She embraced failure as part of the creative process and as an integral characteristic of the film-making business and continued to pursue her artistic vision despite the difficulties. Her resilience, perseverance and artistic authenticity eventually paid off with her two latest films (the *Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*) that achieved both critical acclaim and box office success.

Research Implications. Although claims of generalizability must be tampered since our analysis is based on a single individual, there are also research implications of this case study. Recently, Mainemelis, Kark & Epitropaki (2015) developed a tripartite framework of creative leadership (facilitating, directing and integrating) and viewed creative leadership as "…residing not within leaders, followers, or industries, but rather, within the dynamic interplay among all constituting players and factors" (p. 453). In their review, the creative leadership of cinematic, theatrical and television directors has been presented as an example of an integrating leadership context which requires high level of creative contributions from both the leader and the followers. Bigelow's case study can be definitely incorporated in this stream of research. Film-making is a truly collaborative context (e.g., Simonton, 2002), full of extreme collaborative tensions and highly informative for organizations that wish to foster innovation via cultivating a collaborative culture and mindset.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented the case study of the only woman film director who has won an Academy Award, Kathryn Bigelow. By utilizing three theoretical frameworks, i.e. paradoxical leadership theory (Smith & Lewis, 2012; Lewis et al., 2014), ambidextrous leadership theory (Rosing et al., 2011) and role congruity theory (Eagley & Karau, 2002), we attempted to cast light on how Bigelow as a woman artist/leader working in a complex but temporary organizational system (film-making) embraced paradoxes, managed tensions, maintained artistic integrity and elicited superb performance from her crews.

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Table 1

Kathryn Bigelow Filmography

Year	Film	Budget (in $ 000)	US Gross (in $ 000)	Major Nominations	Major Awards
1978	The Set-Up (short)	n.a.	n.a		
1981	The Loveless	n.a.	n.a.		
1987	Near Dark	5,000	3,370		
1989	Blue Steel	n.a.	8,220		
1991	Point Break	24,000	43,218		
1995	Strange Days	42,000	7,920		
2000	The Weight of Water	16,000	103		
2002	K-19: The Widowmaker	100,000	35,169		
2007	Mission Zero (short)	n.a.	n.a.		
2008	The Hurt Locker	15,000	17,017	Academy Awards: Best Cinematography, Best Music. BAFTA: Best Leading Actor, Best Special Visual Effects. Golden Globes: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay.	Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Editing, Best Sound Mixing, Best Sound Editing. AFI: Movie of the Year. BAFTA: Best Film, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Editing, Best Cinematography, Best Sound. Directors Guild: Best Director.
2012	Zero Dark Thirty	40,000	95,720	Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Leading Actress, Best Screenplay, Best Film Editing. BAFTA: Best Film, Best Director, Best Leading Actress, Best Screenplay, Best Editing. Directors Guild: Best Director.	Academy Awards: Best Sound Editing. AFI: Movie of the Year. Golden Globes: Best Actress.

Golden Globes: Best Picture, Best Director,
Best Screenplay.

| 2014 | Last Days (short) | n.a. | n.a. |

Notes: Source: IMDb. Nominations and Awards include data from the Academy Awards, American Film Institute (AFI), BAFTA, Directors Guild, and Golden Globes.

Table 2

Summary of thematic analysis of Kathryn Bigelow's interviews

	Themes	Issues
1.	Provocation and Challenging Gender Stereotypes	Choice of topics (e.g., violence, war, torture) that challenge gender stereotypes.
		Rethinking action-hero masculinity by casting women in "macho hero" roles.
		Resistance to being classified as a woman director.
2.	Embracing Paradoxes	Mixing genres (e.g., *Near Dark* was a vampire movie and a western, *Point Break* was a surfer movie and a heist thriller and so forth).
		Being named the "genre bender" and a "Hollywood transgressor".
3.	Ambidexterity	A "good director for hire" and an artist, business efficiency and artistic integrity.
4.	Collaborative tensions	Conflicts with financiers.
		Inducing tension through her choice of controversial topics.
5.	Authenticity – Artistic Integrity	Refusing to compromise artistic integrity for "Box office" success.
		Shooting films on location despite the difficulties.
		No switch off for the cameras.
6.	Clear vision	Knowing frame by frame what she wants.
		Vision articulation through empathy and individualized consideration for her actors.
		Using rehearsal periods as opportunities for vision articulation and communication.
7.	Empowerment and Co-creation	Empowering actors to ask questions and challenge the material.
		Valuing the Director-Actor relationship.

	Identifying and developing talent.
8. Resilience	Never being daunted by challenges.
	Embracing failure as an integral part of the process of artistic creation.