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**How Did That Happen?: Making Sense of the 2016 US Presidential
Election Result through the Lens of the “Leadership Moment”**

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How Did That Happen?: Making Sense of the 2016 US Presidential Election Result through the Lens of the “Leadership Moment”

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the victory of Donald Trump in the 2016 US election through the lens of the “leadership moment”. A phenomenologically based framework, the ‘leadership moment’ theorizes leadership as an event which occurs when context, purpose, followers and leaders align. Perception links these four parts of leadership, in particular the perceptions followers have of their context and the relative strengths competing leaders have to respond to that context. By considering how key voters perceived Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in relation to their circumstances, the ‘leadership moment’ offers a way of making sense of the election result, as well as emphasising the importance of perceptions of context in the achievement of leadership more generally. Importantly, it highlights the economic and identity-based dynamics which attracted voters to Trump, and which remain in play no matter who holds the Presidential office. Theoretically the argument contributes to the emerging field of relational leadership in two ways: by looking beyond the ‘between space’ of leaders and followers, to include the ‘around space’ in which those relations are embedded, and by emphasizing the role of affective perceptions (rather than discourse) in the creation of those perceptions.

Keywords: 2016 US Election, Donald Trump, followers, Hillary Clinton, perception, phenomenology, political leadership, relational leadership theory

How Did That Happen?: Making Sense of the 2016 US Presidential Election Result through the Lens of the “Leadership Moment”

‘In 10 days’ time we go from a Harvard constitutional scholar, loyal family man, thoughtful, classy, well read, restrained, man of principles and dignity to a proudly ignorant, narcissistic, racist, anti-science, corrupt con-artist.’

Elina D’Cruz; California Occupy Democrats Member, January 2017
(D’Cruz, 2017)

This quote summarises the dismay felt by many people throughout the USA, and indeed, the world, on the morning of 10th of November 2016. Donald Trump, a billionaire businessman with no political experience, who portrayed himself to be unapologetically misogynist, racist, and potentially psychologically unbalanced, had been elected to the highest office of one of the world’s most powerful nations.

I, too, was disturbed by the election result. Trump’s win has spawned copious media and journalistic coverage attempting to explain what happened. How could so many Americans have voted for the inexperienced and unpredictable Donald Trump over former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, a woman of huge political experience in both national and international arenas? In order to make sense of what was for many an unprecedented upset, this article analyses the dynamics contributing to it through the lens of a phenomenologically based model of leadership, the “leadership moment” (Ladkin, 2010).

The “leadership moment” theorizes leadership as a lived and dynamic experience, rather than an abstract set of traits (Gibb, 1947) or behaviours (Fiedler, 1971) attributed to an individual. It argues that leadership occurs when context, purpose, followers and individuals willing to take the leader role align in a particular way. More importantly, it is not just how these factors align which is important, but *how they are perceived by followers*, which really determines who is accepted in the leader role. Such an appreciation builds on accounts which take seriously the role of followers in the achievement of leadership such as LMX theory (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Schierman, 1978) and relational leadership theory (Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Uhl-Bien, 2006). It elaborates on these theories by identifying the crucial role context and its affective perception play in mitigating leader/follower relations, a claim which will be explored through reference to the 2016 US presidential election.

The importance of context is recognized by other leadership scholars (Fairhurst, 2009; Gordon, 2002; Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). However, none of these writers link the followers’ perceptions of the context in which they are embedded to their endorsement of a particular leader. As a framework which seeks to illuminate leadership as a lived experience, the ‘leadership moment’ includes as much of the field of experience as possible to make sense of individuals’ attraction to those they choose to follow. Although the case in question concerns the way political leaders are explicitly chosen by electorates, the argument has

implications for organizational leaders who may not be explicitly ‘elected’ but whose influence depends on followers’ prerogatives.

As well as highlighting the micro-level perceptions which fuelled Trump’s victory the ‘leadership moment’ also attends to the larger contextual dynamics critical to this election result. For instance, the rise of populism and suspicions of neoliberal agendas will have played their part in Trump’s victory, as well as influencing voters in other unexpected results such as Great Britain’s referendum vote to leave the European Union. The ‘leadership moment’ accounts for the socio-historic dynamics which work outside of the leader-follower relational bubble but nonetheless impact on it.

The article proceeds as follows: firstly, key facts pertaining to the US’s election are elaborated, particularly in relation to the unpopularity of both candidates and the results of the popular vote (which Clinton won). The ‘leadership moment’ is then introduced and contrasted to current relational leadership theorizing. The context of the 2016 election, the candidates and the purposes towards which they aimed their candidacy as well as their followers are then analyzed. The discussion elaborates two ways in which the ‘leadership moment’ pushes the boundaries of relational leadership theorizing: by recognising the importance of the ‘around space’, as well as the ‘between-space’ of leader-follower relations, and by emphasising the role of affective perceptions, (as opposed to discourse) in the creation of those perceptions.

The 2016 US Election – Key Facts

One of the most marked aspects of the 2016 election was the extreme unpopularity of both candidates. Indeed, their ‘unfavorability’ ratings peaked just eight days before the election with an ABC News/Washington Post Poll suggesting that Clinton was seen ‘unfavorably’ by 60% of likely voters (49% suggesting they felt ‘strongly’ about this). On the same day Trump was rated ‘unfavourably’ by 58% of likely voters (with 48% seeing him as ‘strongly unfavourable’) (Langer Research Associates, 2016). No candidate had polled so badly in the pre-election run-up since Walter Mondale and Mitt Romney were seen as unfavourable by 51% of likely voters in the 1984 and 2012 election campaigns, respectively. This unfavorability could be seen to contribute to the low voter turn-out, which at 58% was lower than in 2012. Indeed, Bernabe (2016) suggests that the real winner in the 2016 contest was ‘No body’, as 47% of eligible voters did not vote, outweighing the 25.5% who voted for Trump and 25.6% who voted for Clinton by almost double.

These factors still resulted in Clinton winning the popular vote by 2.8 million votes. However, US elections are won through the Electoral College, with States’ electors casting a set number of votes for the candidate who wins the popular vote in their State. Trump won the election because Electoral College votes in the States in which he won the popular vote exceeded those held by the States in which Clinton won the popular vote. The case of a president winning the popular vote but losing the election has occurred four times previously in US history; most notably in the 2000 election between George W. Bush and Al Gore.

What is important to point out is that in absolute terms Clinton won the *most* popular votes, and still lost the election, than any previous candidate (George W. Bush lost the popular vote by about 150,000 votes, whereas Donald Trump lost the popular vote by nearly 3 million)(Kentish, 2016).

In actuality, then, more people did vote for Clinton than for Trump. However, what was crucial for Clinton was to win particular ‘Swing States’, those which are known to ‘swing’ between Democratic and Republican candidates. These States include Ohio, Michigan, North Carolina, Wisconsin and Florida. It was very unlikely that Clinton would have lost in California, Connecticut or New York. However in order to win the election she needed to prevail in at least some of these States as well. She lost them all. Interestingly, these States voted for Obama in the 2008 and 2012 elections. What caused so many voters to switch their vote to an unpopular Republican in 2016? Before addressing that key question, the ‘leadership moment’ is introduced below.

The ‘leadership moment’

Rooted in the philosophical approach of phenomenology, the ‘leadership moment’ (LM) theorizes the experience of leadership as a collectively produced phenomenon, rather than as set of competencies or traits residing within one individual (Ladkin, 2010; 2013). It differs from theories such as charismatic leadership (Beyer, 1997; Weber, 1947), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) or even authentic leadership (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011) in that it does not specify any particular characteristics which a person must have in order to be the ‘leader’ of a group. From a phenomenological perspective *any one* can be a leader, provided followers perceive an individual to demonstrate those characteristics judged to be important within a particular context and circumstance. In this way it is particularly well suited to explaining how an individual characterized as unsuitable to hold the Presidential role by senior members of both Democratic and Republican parties, managed firstly to win the Republican nomination, and subsequently to win the overall election.

In its attention to the interaction between leaders and followers as central to the achievement of leadership, the ‘leadership moment’ resembles relational leadership theories as offered by Uhl-Bien (2006) and Cunliffe & Eriksen (2011). Uhl-Bien defines leadership as ‘relational’ in that it is ‘a social influencing process through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced’ (2006: 655). She differentiates relationship based approaches into two types: entity perspectives, which maintain their focus on individual leaders and individual followers relating to one another, and those she calls ‘relational’ which focus on the process occurring between leaders and followers as the preferred unit of analysis. Following from Uhl-Bien’s work, Cunliffe and Eriksen draw from Bachtin and Ricoeur to examine the role of conversations and other more mundane interactions in their account of relational leadership (Cunliffe & Eriksen 2011).

Two limitations of these accounts beg further questions concerning how these ideas might be applied to understanding the US election result. Firstly, all of these writers situate leading

within the organizational, rather than political domain. In this way, followers are not responsible for ‘choosing’ who leads them in the manner of a political election (certainly organizational followers may choose not to be influenced by a leader to whom they do not relate, but the assumption is made in these writings that leaders and followers are established as such). Secondly, none of these writers expressly consider the role of the context within which those leader-follower relations are embedded. Instead, attention is primarily directed to the space ‘between’ leaders and followers, rather than the ‘around’ space which influences how leaders and followers perceive one another. Furthermore, the mechanism which facilitates leader/follower relations is largely identified as discursive, rather than ‘affective’.

The ‘leadership moment’ includes leader/follower relations, but extends beyond that focus to consider the purposes to which a leader directs his or her efforts, as well as the role context plays in achieving leadership. ‘Context’ is understood to be subjectively determined and as such, to have an affective element which overlooked by relational approaches. Broadening out the achievement of leadership to include these aspects begins to make sense of the very different reactions voters had to the two presidential candidates.

It is important to point out that the term ‘moment’ within “‘leadership moment’” does not refer to a temporal quality. Instead, as Sokolowski (2000) explains, the term refers to a particular sort of phenomenon. According to phenomenology there are three types of phenomena: ‘wholes’, ‘parts’ and ‘moments’. ‘Wholes’ are complete in themselves and can exist independently of other phenomena (for instance a ‘chair’ can be seen to be a ‘whole’ thing which is not reliant on anything else for its usefulness or experience). ‘Parts’ make up ‘wholes’, and as such do not generally have usefulness unless they are part of something else (for instance a chair leg is part of the chair, and it only has usefulness in relation to the chair, that is, unless it is to be used momentarily as a weapon, for instance). Finally, there are ‘moments, which exist only through the confluence of other phenomena. For instance, ‘colour’ cannot exist without extension; that is, it can only be conceptualised in relation to the space it takes up. Phenomenologically, it is a ‘moment’. ‘Leadership’, I argue elsewhere (Ladkin, 2010) is just that sort of phenomenon: a ‘moment’ which only arises through the alignment of four ‘parts’: context, purpose, followers and a leader. Figure 1 below depicts this idea:

Figure 1: The Leadership Moment

From a phenomenological perspective therefore, referring to ‘leaders’, as though they exist independently of those who accept them as leaders (or in political leadership, independently of those who vote for them to be their leader) is problematic. Accordingly, it was not the characteristics of Clinton or Trump which would be decisive in determining who would be

the 45th President of the USA. Instead, how each was perceived by followers, from those followers' particular contexts, would prove pivotal.

The Role of Perception

The crucial role that perception plays is highlighted once these kinds of questions are posed. However 'perception' itself is a multi-faceted and relational phenomenon. During this election, voters would have been assessing not just Trump's 'racism, misogyny and unpredictability' in isolation, but *relative to* the perceived alternative offered by Clinton as their President.

Once the role of perception is highlighted, the fluid, dynamic nature of leadership becomes much more apparent. Perception can change in an instant. Indeed it seemed to do just that as polls swerved throughout the campaign as new revelations concerning Trump's previous relationships with women emerged or new questions concerning Clinton's use of email were raised. Factors deemed to be important for an individual to display in order to be the 'leader' seemed to change moment by moment, depending on followers' perceptions. Despite exhibiting the experience and intelligence most textbooks cite as vital for leaders, Clinton was literally 'trumped' by perceptions that Trump offered something seen as more important by key voter groups. The following section considers how perception played into these judgements.

Perception Vs Facts.

The *Oxford Dictionary* has chosen 'post-truth' as its 'word of 2016', signalling a 'general characteristic' of our times, in which 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal beliefs' (Oxford Living Dictionary, 2016). Closely associated with politics, 'post-truth' was seen to play a major role in the presidential election, especially in relation to Trump's propensity to state outlandish lies with great personal conviction. (This inclination was apparent as early as 2009 when Trump began his campaign to question President Obama's citizenship, which simmered throughout the President's eight year term in Office.)

Trump seemed able to mould public opinion in ways that Clinton was not. This could be for a variety of reasons; his style of delivery, his outlandish claims, the way in which his claims fed into more deeply seated experiences of individuals, or perhaps the way in which he articulated politically incorrect beliefs in ways which made people feel somehow better for their own racist or misogynist views (Kilgore, 2017). Below, two perceptual arenas which influenced the result are examined in more depth: unemployment and immigration.

Unemployment

By the end of President Obama's eight years leading the country, the rate of unemployment in the USA had fallen from 8% in 2009 to 4.7%. President Obama claimed this success as evidence of his effectiveness in saving the American economy in the aftermath of the 2007 financial crash. However, the perception of many in the USA is that unemployment is much

higher than 4.7%, a perception that Trump asserted forcefully throughout his campaign. What is going on?

Figures from the government's Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the unemployment rate did indeed fall by almost 4% during President Obama's time in office. However, the 'labour participation rate', that is, the number of people considered to be available for the workforce, had also fallen, from 67.3% in 2008 to 62.6% in 2016, placing it at a 38 year low (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Therefore, one of the reasons that the unemployment rate is so low is because the number of people considered to be participating in the workforce is also low. Indeed, many long-term unemployed people are not included in the 'unemployed' statistic, because once people are out of work for 27 weeks they are not defined as 'unemployed'. Additionally, people are included within the 'employed' statistic if they are working in zero-contract, lowly paid jobs. Even a person who earns less than \$20.00 by working at McDonald's for an hour a week is considered 'employed' by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

In a speech given in Feb 2016, Donald Trump called the government on their low unemployment figures, declaring that people should not be fooled by the phony statistics, like 4%. He claimed that the 'real unemployment rate' was actually much higher; 'perhaps as high as 42%' a figure which the web page 'Politifact' (Qiu, 2016) labelled a 'pants on fire' untruth. However, 'for millions of Americans working in low wage or temporary jobs, or suffering long term unemployment, it 'felt' like the truth (Kendzion, 2016). In other words, the 'fact' of 4.7% unemployment is itself misleading, and does not align with many people's affective experience. Given the discrepancy between the 'fact' and the 'experience', people were perhaps primed not to believe facts offered by the Obama government (and politicians more generally).

Another aspect of the current employment scene in the US which leads to discontent in terms of working people is the increased level of people in insecure, low paid positions. This statistic includes a broad swathe of individuals, from those who are unskilled to those who hold PhDs and are on temporary University contracts. Although the official unemployment rate is low, this 'fact' covers up a much more varied employment landscape, leading to a simmering discontent among many Americans.

In this way, looking behind the official numbers reveals a different picture from that offered by President Obama in June 2016 (The White House, 2016). Certainly, construing unemployment figures in ways that benefit sitting governments has been a mainstay of presidential politics throughout US history. Trump however was able to tap into the affective experience of significant numbers of people for whom the 4.7% unemployment rate did not ring 'true'. The felt perception of unemployment, rather than the 'truth' of the figures may well have contributed to a situation in which Trump's blatant lies (suggesting that unemployment was 42%, for instance) were not discounted quite as easily as they might otherwise have been.

Immigration

A second highly contentious issue during the 2016 election campaign concerns illegal immigration. Most notably, Trump promised to ‘build a wall’ to stop the ‘flood’ of illegal immigrants arriving from Mexico. According to the Pew Research Centre in Washington DC, however, the truth is that illegal immigration from Mexico has lessened since 2009, and instead the majority of illegal immigrants into the US are coming from countries in South East Asia, South America and the Sub-Saharan region of Africa (Kragstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2017).

Trump’s focus on illegal immigration stemmed from his contention that such people were ‘competing directly against vulnerable American workers’ (Politico, 2016). A report by the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine summarised in *The New York Times* (Preston, 2016) suggests that illegal immigrants do not compete with vulnerable American workers, and instead, within a generation are contributing up to £30 billion a year to US taxes. Indeed, the report suggests that ‘the prospects for long-run economic growth in the United States would be considerably dimmed without the contributions of high-skilled immigrants’.

Yet, like with unemployment, there is a lingering feeling that immigrants, and particularly Mexicans, are somehow taking jobs that ‘Americans’ should have. To more fully understand this perception and why Mexicans are identified as the prime culprits in the ‘stealing American jobs’ narrative, it is important to review the history of US/Mexican relations. In his book *Mexicans and the Making of America*, Foley (2013) recounts the ‘push-me, pull-you’ history between the US and its Southern neighbour which has existed since the time of the Spanish/American war in the 1800s. Over the last 200 years, whenever there was a shortfall of labour resource within the US (for instance to help bring in crops during the Second World War) border controls were weakened and Mexicans were even welcomed as ‘guests’ into the US. When their labour was no longer needed undocumented Mexicans were ‘sent back’, as happened in 1954 under President Eisenhower’s ‘Operation Wetback’. In other words, there is a history of targeting Mexicans for removal from the US and in some ways Trump’s rhetoric echoes a culturally familiar scape-goating narrative.

Perhaps even more significant for the 2016 election is that those of Latin American descent, including Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and even Cuban-Americans are creating a common identity in a way that has not happened previously (Barreto & Segura, 2014). Making up 17% of the US population as of 2013, those of Latino descent now comprise the largest ‘immigrant’ group in the States. Rather than being the ‘criminals’ of Trump’s rhetoric, Latinos are more visible as a ‘unified, empowered population’ in the US than ever before. This perception, that Latinos are more ‘present’ may indeed be a cause for concern among those Americans who are feeling their own culturally based power waning (a dynamic which will be discussed more fully in the section concerning ‘followers’). For now it is important to point out that although ‘Mexican immigration’ is factually on the wane, increased Latino solidarity itself creates a perception that rests uneasily with some groups in the US.

Both of these cases point to a critical feature of the post-truth context. Each of the ‘factual hyperboles’, as Trump would call them (that unemployment is at 42%, or that the US is being besieged by a wave of illegal Mexicans) may indeed be false, but they each tap into the affective experience of sizeable sections of the US population. What do the so-called ‘facts’ matter, if one can’t get a job or when those of Latino descent are perceived to be ‘taking over’ on television? It could be argued that Trump’s rhetoric aligned with the affective experience of many voters, even if it did not align with ‘facts’.

Such an analysis points to the importance for those who desire to lead to understand how a context is perceived and felt, rather than just relying on the facts of a situation.

Commentators have noted that Trump’s campaign spoke to those citizens (particularly white men and women) feeling niggles concerning their status within a country in which an African American man had been elected President (Lee, 2016). This was particularly true for many voters in the mid-West ‘rustbelt’ States, the context of which is examined more fully in the following section.

Context of the Rustbelt States

Writing for the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper, Longworth suggests that ‘the fact that Trump’s election came as such a surprise, only shows the unabridged canyon between the urban elites who thrive on a globalised economy and the millions of American who are living in its wreckage’ (Longworth, 2016). Indeed, if nothing else, the result shows the huge divide between rural, Whites who voted overwhelmingly for Trump, and urban dwellers of all nationalities who voted more consistently for Clinton. Nowhere is that divide more apparent than in the ‘rust belt’ States.

So called because they were known since the 1930s for their manufacturing base (particularly car manufacturing) the rust belt states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin were key to Trump’s victory. It is here that the manufacturing base, and with it, thousands of jobs, had shrunk severely since the late 1970s, leaving sizeable populations unemployed.

Interestingly, the rust belt phenomenon could be seen to have its genesis in President Bill Clinton’s signing of the NAFTA treaty, which many cite as the death-knell for mid-west manufacturing (Russell Hochschild, 2016). The ongoing consequence of globalisation enabled by NAFTA has been that many people living in the rustbelt were considerably worse off now than they were when Mr. Obama took office in 2008. The change that voters were looking for by voting in the first African American president in 2008 had hardened into a dire cry for help by the time of the 2016 election.

Rather than enjoying the benefits of neoliberalism and Free Trade many of those in the rustbelt have been ‘left behind’ economically, while watching Wall Street bankers thrive even after triggering the worldwide financial collapse of 2007-2008. More than anything, these voters were anti-establishment. Many of them held the political elite of Washington responsible for their economic hardships. Longman suggests that ‘they just wanted to be noticed...they didn’t care about equal pay for women. They wanted jobs and with luck, rising salaries.’ (Longworth, 2016).

This contextually based aspect of the situation would not be picked up by relational leadership theories with their focus on the ‘in-between’ space of leaders and followers. The leadership moment brings to the fore how followers experiencing economic hardship in the mid-west would not see Clinton’s experience as an asset. Instead, it would be read as indicative of her alignment with ‘establishment Washington’, the entity they blamed for their misfortune. Everything Trump did, from making outlandish and un-politically correct remarks, to referring to his experience as a reality television personality and Miss Universe judge, signalled he was anything *but* establishment. The fact that his own political party tried hard to disown him only enhanced his anti-establishment credentials. In such a situation, misogynist and racist remarks only served to emphasise how far outside traditional protocols Trump willingly ventured, factors which would make him more, rather than less attractive to those looking for a non-traditional candidate.

This observation leads to the next piece of the ‘‘leadership moment’’ model, that of the individuals themselves, and the purposes towards which their candidacies were aimed. The section below offers a pen-sketch of each candidate and considers how aspects of their biography played into voters’ perceptions of them.

The Candidates and their Purposes

Rather than suggesting that individuals attain ‘leader’ status primarily because of their characteristics, the ‘leadership moment’ suggests that followers choose to support particular individuals because they are perceived to demonstrate characteristics most salient in the given situation. This leads to the question: how were Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump each perceived by the American electorate?

Hillary Clinton

Hillary Diane Rodham Clinton had been at the forefront of the national political scene since her husband, Bill Clinton, became President of the United States of America in 1993. She served as First Lady during his two terms in office and during that time weathered the storm of her husband’s relationship with Monica Lewinsky. It is important to note that her decision to remain loyal to Bill despite his infidelity was met by mixed judgements by women (especially those who would call themselves ‘feminists’) throughout the US (Hill, 2016).

Indeed, ‘mixed judgements’ have been a feature of Clinton’s time under public scrutiny. She provokes conflicting and often strong reactions from men and women alike. Her intelligence, diligence and commitment to public service are beyond question, yet she has been said to suffer from a ‘likeability’ problem: an issue which is common for many strong women in public roles. Her credentials however are beyond question. A graduate of Wellesley College, where she acted as President of the Wellesley College Government Association and was the speaker at her Graduation address in 1969, Clinton went on to earn her Juris Doctor at Yale Law School in 1973. It was at Yale that she met Bill Clinton who she married in 1975. They began their married life together in Arkansas, where he pursued his career as Governor of the State, while she became the first female law partner of the prestigious Rose Law Firm in 1979.

While in Arkansas, Clinton developed landmark legal articles concerning children's rights. As Gary Wills noted in an article in the *New York Review of Books* in 1996, 'her writings were important, not because they were radically new but because they helped formalise something inchoate'. Furthermore, he suggested that Clinton was, 'one of the most important scholar-activists of the last two decades' (Wills, 1996).

Her commitments to left-wing causes and her tireless pursuit of 'making a difference' were not unequivocally applauded by Americans once her husband rose to the national stage. Making what some interpreted as disparaging remarks concerning her decision to focus on her career rather than 'stay home and bake cookies and make tea', she was often compared with 'Lady MacBeth' in the media, as indicated by the following quote from the *American Spectator* in August 1992 written in the midst of Bill Clinton's bid for the White House:

The image of Clinton that has crystallized in the public consciousness is, of course, that of Lady Macbeth: consuming ambition, inflexibility of purpose, domination of a pliable husband, and an unsettling lack of tender human feelings, along with the affluent feminists' contempt for traditional female roles' (Wattenberg, 1992).

This characterization of Clinton; as a career obsessed, unfeeling 'pseudo-woman' was one that would accompany her through her time as New York State Senator, candidate for the 2008 democratic nomination, four-year tenure as Secretary of State, and during her campaign for the White House in 2016. As mentioned previously, the media often noted her 'likeability' problem, her inability to 'connect with common people' at a personal level. Stories circulated about her distaste for shaking hands with people during campaign rallies, about how she would rather be 'doing the work' than making small talk. Some commentators have noted the way in which these issues reverberate through other stories of strong women. For instance Roiphe (2016) suggests that 'the idea of Clinton being 'unlikeable' has always been a code, a way of papering over and personalising a deep distrust of ambitious, powerful women that extends much further than uneducated, disenfranchised men, which we expect, to women, which we don't'.

Finally, there was the 'trust factor'. There was something about Clinton that many people just did not 'trust'. A *New York Times* poll conducted in August 2016 indicated that 67% of those polled 'had doubts about her trustworthiness' (Barbaro, 2016). In his June 2016 column in *The Telegraph*, Tim Stanley explains that Clinton's connections with Wall Street Bankers and others who finance her candidacy were part of the problem (Stanley, 2016). However, feminist writers such as Susan Bordo have suggested that men who use the same tactics for financing themselves are often considered 'clever', or even hard working (Bordo, 2017). Deep-seated mistrust of ambitious women, along with very traditionally held views about the 'unsuitability' of women for the top political role run deep within the US population and will have coloured the way in which Clinton was perceived, solely from a gender perspective.

In terms of the purpose Clinton stood for it is interesting for me to reflect that although I supported her candidacy, and indeed voted for her, I could not recall her campaign slogan. I had to look it up, and on discovering it to be 'Stronger Together', felt no better informed as to

what she sought to do as President. In pursuing this question further, her commitment to ‘the family’, ‘equal rights’, ‘diversity’, and ‘kindness’ became apparent – all concerns I could fully back—but were they of central importance to key constituent groups? How did Trump compare in terms of followers’ perceptions and the purpose towards which his candidacy was pitched?

Donald Trump

Born and raised in Jamaica Queens, New York City, Donald Trump was part of a family-run real estate and construction business which he took over in 1971, after undertaking an economics degree at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He soon changed the firm’s name from ‘Elizabeth Trump & Son’ to ‘The Trump Organization’. He rose to notoriety in the 1980s, as his organization built a series of high rise buildings in Manhattan, most notably the gold-plated and ostentatious ‘Trump Towers’. His business diversified into golf clubs and casinos. It is important to note however that although he has ‘successfully’ run the family business, as a family business The Trump Organization has never been subject to the kind of legal requirements for transparency and governance required of publicly listed companies. In fact, his foray into running public companies ended in disaster, all of them going bankrupt within a matter of years (Frum, 2016).

As Trump rose to prominence as a maverick businessman due to his wealth and personality, he began to make regular television appearances on talk shows such as ‘Larry King’, which served to increase his personal profile throughout the US. He also began making increasingly ‘political’ statements. In an interview with Larry King in 1987 he stated that he was ‘concerned about the US being pushed around by its allies...these countries are ripping us off’, and ‘contributing to the \$200 billion deficit.’ When pushed about his political ambitions, Trump responded, ‘ I’m not here because I’m running for President. I’m here because I’m tired of our country being kicked around and I want to get my ideas across’ (Butterfield, 1987).

Just over a decade later however, Trump was indeed running for president, putting himself forward as the nominee of Ross Perot’s ‘Reform Party’ for the 2000 general election. The Reform Party purported to offer an alternative to either the Democratic or Republican Parties, focusing on balancing the US trade deficit, being tough on crime, and lowering taxes. Declaring that ‘people want to hear straight talk, we’re tired of being bullied by those moron politicians’, Trump also asserted that his strategy for running would be ‘to be on television a lot’ (Baum, 1999). After only a few weeks as a candidate for the Reform Party’s nomination however, Trump exited. Although he cited in-fighting within the Reform Party itself as his reason for withdrawing, he was also third in the polls for taking the nomination.

However, making a bid for the presidency remained an aspiration. Most notably he published a book, *The America We Desire*, in 2000, which set out the Trump ‘manifesto’: a leaning towards conservatism, liberal views about the need for universal health care, a bitter dislike for NAFTA and too much government control, but with the intention to sue alcohol companies in the same way that tobacco companies were held responsible for the health

damage of their products. He was, as one journalist commented, ‘erasing the lines between party politics’ (Baum 1999), in a way that was also apparent in his 2016 campaign.

From 2004-2015, Trump hosted NBC’s *The Apprentice*, a reality television programme which afforded him huge national exposure. The significance of his having held this role cannot be overestimated in terms of how it enabled him to appeal to a certain constituency of voters. Journalist Paul Schrodt goes as far as to suggest that it was because of *The Apprentice* that Trump was able to win the Republican nomination (Schrodt, 2016). By asserting continuously what a ‘successful’ businessman he was, and alluding to his understanding of ‘how the system worked’ Schrodt suggests that Trump was able to convince those struggling that ‘he could help them out’. In fact, Schrodt points out that Trump’s claims to being ‘the biggest developer in New York City’ were false, along with his assertions of financial success (when *The Apprentice* first aired in 2004, Trump’s casino businesses were going bankrupt).

These behaviours (repeatedly asserting statements that were lies, constant self-aggrandisement, alluding to his superior knowledge of how ‘the system’ –which was terribly flawed and stacked against ordinary people’--worked) were demonstrated throughout the campaign, and interestingly seemed to attract, rather than offend voters. In her article ‘What Makes The Donald Special’, Blair (2016) suggests that Trump had an uncanny way of connecting with certain groups within the electorate. Even his ‘clownish hair’, suggested that at any moment he might do something ‘entertaining’ an important attribute within a context dominated by reality television and Twitter. This coupled with the simplicity of his statements, Blair notes, is what gives Trump an aura of ‘unpolished immediacy’, something that is interpreted as ‘authentic’, rather than political (ibid p.5).

His purpose in running for President was represented in the memorable campaign promise to ‘Make America Great Again’. This would be accomplished by putting US interests first (a promise he reiterated vehemently in his inaugural speech). It was a purpose that spoke to key follower groups: many in the rustbelt States who longed for the possibility of putting a decent living together economically, but also, white middle class men who perhaps had felt their own status fade in the wake of an African American president and a sense that their powerbase – once so solid – was slipping away. The next section of the paper offers a more in-depth discussion of Trump’s followers and their motives for endorsing him.

Followers

Characterising those who voted for Trump as an homogenous group with identical views is of course, erroneous. Individuals voted for the candidate for a myriad of reasons, ranging from preferring him because he is male to believing he will ‘shake things up’ in what is often experienced as an out-of-touch political system. Three specific follower groupings will be examined more carefully here. The first (white middle-aged men) are considered because they virtually voted as a block to win the election for Trump. White women and Latino voters will subsequently be considered, because they might have been expected to have voted for Clinton, but voted for Trump in significant numbers.

White middle class men

Throughout the USA, white middle class men voted in significant numbers for Trump rather than Clinton. Indeed of non-college educated white men, 7 out of 10 voted for him (BBC News, 2016). However, contrary to the view that Trump was elected by the uneducated, it is important to note that the statistic was not much different for college-educated white men, with 6 out of 10 voting for Trump. Not all of these white men were ‘rural poor’, either. Indeed, the median income among those who voted for him was \$72,000/a year, as compared with the national average of \$56,000. In other words, not only poor, uneducated whites voted for Trump, but affluent, educated ones did as well. What explains their allegiance to the unpredictable and inexperienced billionaire?

In her *Time Magazine* article, ‘The Revenge of the White Man’, Jill Filipovic (2016) argues that what fuelled the election of 2016 was not economic circumstances but rather a ‘battle of identity’. She suggests that it was ‘people who benefit from the ‘old order of things’, particularly middle class white men, who voted for Trump. Trump’s battle cry of ‘Make America Great Again’ speaks to this longing for a bygone era. Voting for Trump, Filipovic argues, indicated ‘anxiety about the changing face of power in America’. Echoing this view, the novelist Siri Hustvedt surmised that ‘people who grew up with a powerful sense of white, masculine privilege (as well as others who sympathise with that image of power), people for whom that sense of superiority was always precarious and always needed protection, found in Donald Trump a figure for their own fantasy of the restoration of an era now gone.’ In short, explains Hustvedt, ‘(Trump) made humiliated, emasculated white men (and the women who identify with them) feel better about themselves’ (2016: 5).

Filipovic summarises the role ‘white identity unease’ played in the result by suggesting:

When you’ve been at an advantage for 200 years and simply assumed that was the natural order of things, a more even playing field feels like an unfair disadvantage. It adds insult to injury to hear political and media elites tell you you’re privileged, especially when you look at the White House and see a black man sitting in the chair that men who looked like you occupied without interruption for more than two centuries. The idea that a woman may sit there next feels like an unbearable affront to your own identity: what is a white American man, after all, if not the man in charge? What is a white American woman if not a fragile feminine creature to be protected—not some ambitious, pant-suited harpy telling men what to do (2016).

Together, Filipovic and Husvedt argue that identity and power issues played even more significant roles than economics in the election result. White American men, who at some level feel their power base eroded by the fact of an African American President could not countenance a woman president. Their vote for Trump represents a desire for the ‘good ole days’ of uncontested US economic supremacy, a disregard for political correctness, and perhaps a time when ‘black people (and women) knew their place’. For those concerned with such issues (especially at an unconscious level), Donald Trump was the obvious choice. The fact that the 2016 election took place after 8 years of an African American man having held

the Office and its impact on voters who might have been unconsciously troubled by this is picked up in the ‘context’ dimension of the ‘leadership moment’. But how does this broader analysis explain the fact that white women also voted for Trump in significant numbers?

White women

Given the blatant misogyny which Trump has exhibited throughout his public life the high numbers of women, particularly white women, who voted for him is shocking. Among non-college educated white women, 6 out of 10 voted for Trump. Even among college educated women, Clinton only attracted 51% of their votes. How can such a statistic be understood?

In her *New York Times Magazine* article ‘Why did College Educated White Women Vote for Trump?’ Bazelon (2016) interviews three college educated white women (a mother and her two daughters), who all voted for Trump. These women overwhelmingly voiced the ‘economic’ argument: in their view they would have more economic opportunities with a ‘successful business man’ in charge. They also cited Trump’s daughter, Ivanka, as a positive role model for successful career women. ‘Rather than the Gloria Steinham version of feminism’ she was seen to be ‘sleek and chic’; a woman who ‘knew her own mind’, without ‘losing her femininity’.

A quote cited in *The Observer* from an African American woman, Tova Mandissa hints beyond the economic argument to reveal other factors contributing to Trump’s appeal to women:

You don’t have to be a politician to be a president, you just have to know how to better yourself. I’ve seen those TV shows, *The Apprentice*, and he was good with African Americans and we need a very strong man...I know who he is up front. Plus they were not going to treat her right as a woman, they weren’t going to treat her fairly. (Helmore, 2016)

Mandissa’s assertion that ‘they weren’t going to treat ‘her’ fairly, intimates the underlying tension involved with women voting for another woman. In an article concerning the role gender played in the result, Churchwell (2016) reflects that ‘on election night, male and female Trump supporters stated the die-hard view that ‘a woman is simply not capable of being president, too weak to stand up to foreign leaders and the military’. She continues:

‘The idea of a woman in the White House has always prompted the same responses: it is either a joke, a disaster or a cheat. Clinton was endlessly called ‘Crooked Hillary’ to shouts of ‘Lock her up’ although her crimes always varied. ‘Had she murdered Vince Foster, or Ron Brown? Had she covered up wrongdoing in the deaths of Americans in Benghazi, stolen millions, or was she, in fact, Beelzebub? It didn’t matter. What mattered was the idea of illegitimacy’ (p.2).

Although many women (and men) went to bed on the night of November 9th celebrating the notion that the US was about to elect its first female Head of State, many others retired unwilling to countenance such a result. Assuming that because she was a woman, other women would automatically vote for Clinton, ignores the effect of deep-seated, gender

prejudice and the way in which patriarchy infests both men and women. Although her gender was not the only reason white women did not vote for Clinton, it seems gender identification did not necessarily encourage white women to vote for her either. Comments like Tova Mandissa's reveal the underlying patriarchal context within which the US election and how it permeated voters' responses.

Along these lines it is important to stress that 'white women' are not a homogenous group, and individuals will have voted for Trump for specific economic, ideological or identity-based reasons. What is significant is that in this instance, many women's identity as 'women' (and as such people who would not vote for a man who blatantly boasted about his sexual assaults on other women or referred to his own daughter as 'a piece of ass') was over-ridden by affective experiences coloured by a context in which the notion of a woman being President is regularly framed as the butt of a joke.

Another follower group who might have been expected to completely eschew Trump as their leader is that of Latinos, explored in more detail below.

Latinos

Building a 'wall' to deter Mexicans from immigrating illegally to the US was a well-known platform of Trump's candidacy. Given this, and the implicit racism against those of Latino descent which it indicates, it is surprising to note the large numbers of these voters who cast their vote for him. Although the majority of Latino voters did vote for Clinton, 29% of those who voted cast their ballot for Trump. That compares with 27% of Latino voters who voted for Mitt Romney as opposed to President Obama in the 2012 election (Krupkin, 2016)

This result demonstrates the complexity involved in followers' choice of who they desire to lead them. As Krupkin (2016) explains, a myriad of factors determined Latinos' voting preferences. Identifying with their religious beliefs, some were against Clinton's pro-gay and pro-abortion stances. Some respected Trump's perceived experience as a businessman, and as owners of small businesses themselves judged that he would do more to protect their livelihoods. One of those interviewed for Krupkin's article asserts that 'as a mature Hispanic'... Donald Trump's views about Hispanics might hurt others, 'but not me'. There was also the view voiced that some 'legal' Hispanics were jealous of the success of others who inhabit the country illegally.

What this result shows, as in the case of white women, is that 'followers' salient sense of identity can be malleable; it is not fixed or static. Follower identity interacts with context, potential leaders and their purposes to produce a specific 'leadership moment'. Had other aspects of the context been different: for instance had there been more economic recovery in the rustbelt, or if Trump had been fighting against a different (male) candidate; different aspects of follower identity might have come to the fore to produce a different result. The 'leadership moment' shows us that nothing is fixed. Trump's victory was secured on the basis of fluctuating dynamics intersecting in a particular way in November 2016. What happens from here is similarly dynamic and emergent.

Discussion

This article has set out to examine the factors contributing to Donald Trump's election as US President. Perhaps most importantly, analysing the election through the frame of the 'leadership moment' indicates that there is no one factor which has delivered Trump's victory. The achievement of leadership will never be as simplistic as the traits of an individual, or even the extent to which an individual leader connects with follower groups as proposed by relational leadership theories. A myriad of interweaving factors produced the 2016 US election result, including economic hardship in rustbelt States, an historic moment in which the first African American had held the Office for the preceding 8 years, the fact that Trump's opponent was a woman (and a woman who is very identified with 'the establishment' at a moment of 'anti-establishment' sentiment), as well as the quirks of the US electoral system itself. Had any one of these elements been different, the result might also have changed. This is one of the key insights offered by the theoretical model of the 'leadership moment'; that the accomplishment of 'leadership' is a fluid, contingent phenomenon, dependent on the 'around space' in which leader-follower relations are embedded, as well as by what transpires between them.

This 'around space' is often overlooked by both leadership scholars and practitioners. One reason for this is that it is profoundly difficult to access and measure. At the very least this is because followers' perceptions of the 'around space' are comprised of both objective, rationally based 'facts' (such as those about the economic decline in rust-belt States which are readily evidenced) as well as subjectively-based, perhaps irrational feelings and judgements (such as ingrained prejudices and issues of identity). Revealing and then analysing perceptions which work at multiple levels and interweave with one another is hugely problematic, particularly in any predictive way.

From a phenomenological perspective the election of Trump, or indeed the election of any leader, is the result of the interplay between followers' outer and inner experiences. Central to those inner experiences is one's sense of identity, and how it shapes choices about who one is willing to follow. Social-identity theories of leadership (Haslam & Platow, 2001; Hogg, 2001; Knippenberg, Knippenberg, Cremer, & Hogg, 2004) speak to this connection, suggesting that in order to be accepted to lead others an individual must be prototypical of the group while representing key aspects of their values. In the case of Trump's supporters, the analysis here suggests that such an understanding of identity played a role, but other factors also weighed in (as indicated by the significant number of Whites who voted for Barack Obama in the previous two elections but then switched allegiance to the Republican candidate in 2016). As Collinson argues in his exploration of a post-structural approach to analysing follower identities, identity is an 'open, negotiable, and ambiguous' construct (2006: 187) which shifts depending on other aspects of the context. Trump's attractiveness to voters who elected the first African American President only 8 years earlier demonstrates the vagaries of identity and its commitments.

Followers' endorsements of leaders, both within the political and organizational realms arise from the interplay of conscious, unconscious, rational and irrational perceptions, along with

the affective experiences provoked by these perceptions. Choices are often made on the basis of salience rather than logical processes: ‘what impression ‘sticks’ the most given how I am experiencing the current situation?’ The sway which ‘alternative facts’ held in the 2016 election speaks to this: voters were more willing to believe lies (about unemployment, or the ‘tidal wave of Mexicans taking jobs that should belong to Americans’) because they resonated more accurately with their own lived experience than did the facts offered by government bodies. The prevalence of ‘post truth’ itself has its own genealogy in decades of government and media ‘spin’ which have left many parts of the electorate highly cynical of experts and their ‘truths’.

As a phenomenologically-informed framework, the ‘leadership moment’ aims to bring attention to the difficult to determine, but nonetheless powerful interactions between followers, their perceptions of their context, and those they would choose to lead them. Rather than aspiring to predict, the framework seeks to broaden and problematize the way achieving leadership is conceptualised, in order to expand the repertoire of both leader and follower possibilities. For example, in this instance, rather than focusing so much on her own cache of leadership tools: experience, expertise, a vision for America based on collective strength, Clinton might have done more to connect with the felt reality of rust-belt workers for whom the campaign slogan ‘Stronger Together’ produced little excitement.

The ‘leadership moment’ also cautions against becoming mesmerised by the spectacle of Trump’s presidency, but instead encourages us to attend to the underlying dynamics which have both created, and continue to support it. Were Trump to vacate Office today, the identity struggles, economic hardships and misogyny which fed into his election would not disappear. In order to alter the political landscape which elected him the perceptions and affective experience of a significant swathe of American voters needs to similarly shift. Without such changes, an even more extreme figure may enter the White House in 2020 or 2024.

In Conclusion

Leadership is a complex phenomenon. No framework or theoretical model can account for all of the factors which contribute to its achievement. If the USA’s electoral system were dependent on the popular vote alone, Hillary Clinton would now be the 45th President of the United States and the analysis offered here would be redundant, if not nonsensical. Perhaps one of the greatest limitations of the ‘leadership moment’ is that it works primarily as a sense-making tool, best applied in retrospect. As I write, the UK is in the midst of its own General Election and it is interesting to speculate about the insights those vying for power might glean by analysing the political landscape through the lens of the ‘leadership moment’. A key question such an analysis would pose concerns how significant swathes of the population are experiencing their context and its most salient feature (is it uncertainty concerning Brexit or is it a desire for stronger government in the wake of disintegrating public services?)

A key contextual element which the current article has not referred to, but which plays a powerful role in voters’ perceptions, is that of the popular press. It is beyond the scope of

this paper to comment on the media's role in shaping followers' perceptions, but there is no doubt of the centrality of its effects. Interestingly, the popular press seems to understand the power of perceptions in moulding public opinion about potential leaders in ways overlooked by leadership theorists. A fruitful avenue for further research would be to find ways of tracking the portrayal of political candidates in the press and social media, and to devise ways of evaluating the way in which those portrayals effect voters' judgements.

Returning to Trump's election, it is important to point out that having been elected, the job of 'being endorsed' will continue each day Trump is in Office, as is the case for any leader. Importantly, those followers who elected him are not those whose support he now needs in order to execute his promises. For that Trump needs the backing of legislators, many of whom have questioned his suitability to hold the executive role. Time will tell whether or not Republican legislators who hold majorities in both Houses will maintain party loyalties or respond to other values and callings. It is interesting to note that early initiatives Trump has taken, for instance to stop citizens of certain countries entering the US, or to reinstate torture as a form of interrogation, have been halted by the US judiciary branch and the Department of Defence, respectively. Perhaps Trump is learning, as the 'leadership moment' suggests, that leading is not accomplished through his individual exertions alone, but through their alignment with others, their perceptions, and the context within which they are all situated. For the necessity of such alignment to occur before one leader's aspirations can actually be achieved, in the case of Donald Trump anyway, many around the world are very relieved.

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