

# INTRODUCTION

When I turned 40 years old, a magazine honored me for my leadership in an organization that I co-founded called Bioneers, which identifies and provides a platform for people working on innovative solutions to make visible a world that's possible now, and that's regenerative, healing, and just. We feature environmental and social innovators who address many of our most challenging problems. Back then, I had a very ambivalent response to being named a leader. I knew I should feel honored, but instead, I felt anxious, uncomfortable, and conflicted.

As I shared my experience with friends and colleagues, most of them women, I discovered that they also felt conflicted about calling themselves leaders. At the same time, I knew that our world was experiencing increasing social and ecological crises. I understood that we were in serious need of leadership of all ages and from all walks of life. I wondered how leadership might have to be redefined to meet my own needs and those of this time that we're living in.

From that point forward, I embarked on a twenty-year exploration into the nature of leadership and explored its necessary reinvention. That inquiry has shaped my life ever since.

First, I began by unpacking my own internal definition of leadership. I wondered whether unconscious stories, cultural biases, or the role models I'd seen might be contributing to my discomfort.

In my mind, my previously unexamined assumption was that leaders tended to be characterized as solitary, self-assured, highly accomplished, and experienced people. I saw them as sometimes arrogant or pompous individuals. In any situation, they held final power and had ultimate authority. I realized I believed that leaders exist only within a hierarchical or dominator framework. I'd observed a quality of hubris, aggression, or self-inflation among some leaders. Leaders often seemed to be inclined toward self-sacrifice, or proving how much they could accomplish, often working to the point of sickness or exhaustion.

I started seeing that my culturally-inherited definition of leadership was predicated upon social assumptions of competition, hierarchy, and scarcity. Goal orientation or winning seemed to be a common priority, without much concern or awareness about process, or how a team came to a solution.

As I scanned the leadership landscape, I saw how much of what I deeply aspired to for my own evolution didn't match up with what was conventionally being modeled. I noticed that appearances, stature, scale, and outer achievement were much more highly honored in conventionally-defined leaders than inner awareness, mindfulness, integrity, or deep listening. I saw how certitude was a prevalent attitude among conventional leaders, with little room for uncertainty or questioning. I observed how analytical and procedural thinking were more frequently appreciated than creative, relational and innovative thinking. I saw an imbalance in how conventional leadership was being practiced.

Then, I began to see the same imbalance in myself as I'd been observing in conventional leaders, including men and women. I also saw it reflected in institutions and social structures. I realized how useful

it could be to awaken people to that internalized and largely invisible bias — to help all of us to be able to perceive, shed and change it.

Indigenous Peoples of the Amazon believe that the bird of humanity has flown on only one wing for far too long. They say that these times require the feminine to thoroughly join with the masculine so that the bird of humanity can gain full wing, so that we can fly to soar with our whole capacity.

The psychologist Carl Jung attributed the archetypal feminine to our inner worlds, and the masculine to our outer or exterior ones. Of course, I knew that we all contain a full spectrum of human aspects within ourselves, regardless of our sex, orientation or gender. You might wonder, then: what did the concepts “masculine” and “feminine” mean to me?

In my earlier professional career, I usually showed up first from my masculine side. I wanted to appear capable, stable, focused, and self-assured. I was quick, rational, and decisive. I prided myself on how much I could accomplish each day. When I didn’t know the answer to a question or how to do something, I masked it with bravado, making up a response while inwardly hoping it would turn out okay. I rarely admitted to being uncertain or needing more time or counsel to consider how to proceed.

Inwardly, of course, there were lots of times I was unsure or nervous, but I never let it show. I devalued many of the other qualities that could have served me as a leader: my ability to listen deeply, to empathize and connect, my compassion, and my skillfulness at collaboration.

I also discounted my way of encouraging and inspiring leadership in others. I set aside my awareness of context, nuance, and the downstream ripples that might affect decisions.

As I realized all this, I promised myself that moving forward in my life, I would more explicitly integrate and strengthen my feminine side. In cultivating myself, it was important to me that my toolkit encompass all of my human capacities. I wanted to be able to draw from anywhere on that falsely gendered spectrum at any given time, as needed. This full spectrum approach allowed me to show up in the world in a much more authentic and effective way. It encouraged me to bring more aspects of myself into presence in my daily life, in all my relationships and interactions.

I discovered that it also gave me a greater capacity for renewal and regeneration after periods of intense productivity. Integrating even brief times for rest into my daily routine nourished and revitalized me. The feminine within me needs periods of rest and reflection, spacious time to re-balance my body, heart, mind, and spirit.

In considering full-spectrum leadership in all its dimensions, I also saw how our Western culture encourages us to avoid what’s difficult, vulnerable, or painful. And while I knew that addressing inner turmoil can lead to real learning and personal growth, many of us chronically avoid facing into the tough stuff.

Carl Jung defined what he calls “the Shadow” as unconscious aspects of ourselves or our personalities — the parts that our egos don’t acknowledge. When we avoid bringing those shadow aspects into our awareness, they exert undue and often unconscious influence on our actions. I believe that our collective aversion to what we call the ‘negative’ emotions — to experiencing grief, anger, fear, or depression — tends to have us act out in ways that undermine our conscious intentions, and therefore undermine our leadership.

All of our emotions have a purpose, in awakening us to important understandings, and none are actually ‘good’ or ‘bad.’ If we don’t face

into and integrate our personal and collective shadows, I fear we may be doomed to recycle our wounds. If we do that, we'll perpetuate cultures of immaturity, false narratives, and violence.

I yearned to identify and reclaim new forms of leadership that acknowledged these urgent realities. Seeking models, I looked to leaders we had featured from Bioneers networks from different disciplines, backgrounds and walks of life, all at different stages in their visions, work or life journeys.

These leaders, some of whom you'll meet in the stories that follow, are creative and collaborative, curious and courageous, humble and passionate. They each have diverse, and yet authentic responses to the challenges that their work addresses.

They use both sides of their brains, and all their gendered parts. They marry apparent contradictions. They merge the rational with the intuitive, at once. They weave the relational, the strategic, and the collaborative. They're able to balance deep listening, open-mindedness, and humility with asserting their own perspectives or what they know to be true when they need to.

Some may not even consider or call themselves leaders. But those who most inspire me are the ones who don't necessarily have a title, graduate degree, or any other external markers of authority. What they do have is a passionate commitment to some aspect of the living world, and their dedication or love is so profound that it causes them to act with a quality of dignified authority. To me, it's as if they receive their assignment from their intuition, their hearts, or their spirits. As if their inner voice said, "I have to do something to protect, defend or reinvent what I love."

Reflecting on these new models of leadership led me to co-create a book called *Moonrise: The Power of Women Leading from the Heart*

with my colleague Anneke Campbell. It's an anthology of more than 30 essays by diverse trailblazers, including mostly women and some men. We organized the book to illustrate leadership's reinvention. It's being used in university and graduate courses about leadership, women and diversity, equity and inclusion.

I was also inspired to co-create Cultivating Women's Leadership intensives in 2006 with Toby Herzlich and Akaya Windwood. They are two longtime facilitators and transformative process designers with deep experience, both with women and leadership trainings. These six-day residential intensives, housed within Bioneers for eight years, were designed to do several things: to clarify each woman's sense of calling or purpose; to explore the shadow side of women's leadership; to share intentional practices for ongoing self-cultivation; and to experience beloved community among a very diverse group. They also offered an embodied experience of how exponentially women can accelerate and strengthen each other's learning and leadership.

Co-facilitating Cultivating Women's Leadership intensives inspired me to appreciate a wide array of perspectives and people in all forms. I don't mean just ethnic or racial diversity, but the real value of working in community among a diverse range of ages, orientations, classes, abilities, faiths, disciplines, and sectors. It has led me to a deeper understanding of the complementary values of extroversion and introversion, and how we all process information differently, applying visual, auditory, and kinesthetic capacities and ways of learning in varied ways.

None of the women's leadership we've featured at Bioneers has ever been about reinforcing binaries. It has always oriented toward inclusivity, beloved community, and wholeness. Some call it blended leadership, informed by a healthy integration of all of our feminine and masculine qualities.

Many of the people described or quoted in this book are leaders I've learned about through coproducing Bioneers. If you'd like to learn more about any of them, you can search for them on the Bioneers.org site, or on YouTube, to see their talks or hear podcasts featuring their voices.

It's important to note, also, that leadership's definition itself really needs expanding. For me, parenting and raising children are among the most challenging, and most rewarding forms of leadership there are. Being an artist of any kind who reveals future possibilities is clearly a form of leadership. As is caregiving or being a teacher. I could go on and on, as my emergent definition is an inside job, and one that's applicable in almost any field of endeavor.

After many years of working with women who lead change, I now believe that at its heart, leadership is about the nexus or connective tissue that brings together three core elements. I see it as finding the place where each of our unique gifts or talents connect with serving what we love the most, and also with a real need for reinvention or renewal in the world. When we find that connection point, that nexus, and act from that, we become unstoppable. The joy that comes from doing that work creates a self-reinforcing loop.

Once you find it, it's powerful and revitalizing. Because it's so fulfilling and regenerative, it defies that tendency toward burn-out and self-sacrifice that I'd had such an aversion to earlier. It amazes me to feel how much energy, joy and creativity has been unleashed within myself as I reclaim and learn to love aspects of my own inner wholeness — my council of Ninas, I call them.

Integrating all our internal or personal parts must also, I believe, be mirrored by acting externally — ecologically, socially, or politically.

Learning from nature reveals that diversity is not about political correctness. It's about resilience and survival. In natural systems, diversity means having an abundance of options for adaptation. Options that ensure survival and mitigate against extinction. Ecosystems that are rich in species diversity rebound much faster after trauma, while systems with monocultures are far slower to recover and heal. Human systems are a subset of nature's systems, so if diversity serves nature's well-being, it will serve ours as well.

I now believe that there's nothing that will serve our future better than bringing the aligned capacity of each of us — our own full spectrum diversity — to our leadership in all its forms. It seems to me the most potent and useful response to this moment when the world is asking so much of us.

This book is organized into three sections, and it can be read or listened to from front to back, or in any sequence that calls you.

The first section shares stories of my own inner discovery and healing from internalized biases.

The second addresses some of the external, behavioral, and political aspects of women's leadership. It also speaks to the imbalance of the archetypal feminine in us all, and it includes stories about some of the leaders that inspire me most.

And the third section speaks to my own growing awareness of racial equity, what Kimberlé Crenshaw named as the 'intersectionality' of racial and gender biases. It describes my ongoing awakening to the places where systems of White supremacy, misogyny, colonialism and capitalism converge, and the impacts they're having on people and places that I love. It also shares best practices for gathering in diverse groups.

As you read these pages, I invite you to notice any parts of yourself that may have been previously hidden, silenced, or kept small. Perhaps ideas or stories within this book might enter your dreamtime, or motivate you to grow into or reclaim previously undervalued or banished qualities.

I hope you find this book inspiring, expansive and heart-nourishing. If you're interested in using it to help facilitate your own or others' learning, there are questions for reflection that you can find after each essay or poem, with embodied practices after each section.

I'm honored, humbled, and thankful to invite you to join me in this journey of exploration.

To do so, I suggest that you first give yourself permission to fall in love. Fall in love with a place, a people, with children, a cause, an organization, a creature, a species — anything that really lights you up. Then give yourself to it in some form of purposeful action.

You don't have to know what that means, exactly, or have it strategically mapped out in advance. You just have to commit to being its ally, its relative, to acting to defending or protecting or improving its life. Then see who else is committed to it. Who else is in this river you've opted to swim in, on behalf of our collective future?

I suggest bringing yourself to it with all the wisdom of your magnificent body, the knowing of your heart, your mind, and your intuition. Call on all your aspects, from your discipline and rigor to your compassion and empathy; from your strategic thinking and analysis to your body wisdom and instinctive feelings, from your masculine to your feminine, and everything in between. Bring all of yourself.

Lastly, I suggest that you trust that exactly who you are is what is needed at this moment in the world. Know that you are already

enough in every way to meet this assignment. And here's the best part: I'd suggest you do this not because it's right (though it is), not because it's needed (though it surely is), but because it's the most joyful, purposeful, and fulfilling way to live your life.