Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Current Contexts

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Abstract

Women have increasingly moved toward greater gender equality at home and in the workplace. Yet, women are still underrepresented in leadership roles and still considered an anomaly compared to men when in high positions of leadership especially within institutions of higher education. In examining differences between how men and women lead, it is often less what they do than in the different experience they face when they lead. Stereotypic gender role expectations can constrain their leadership behaviors. Perceived incongruity between women and leadership roles pose obstacles to leadership and result in double binds, more negative performance appraisals, and different standards compared to those applied to men.

It is increasingly clear that a gender neutral view of leadership is insufficient, and that we need to consider the influence of cultural worldviews and socialization on shaping leadership style. There is much to suggest that feminist leadership styles are intentionally different-- more collaborative and transformational compared to men. This becomes more complex when we include dimensions of racial and ethnic diversity. We need to transform our views of leadership to promote more robust theories and diverse models of effective leadership. While current leadership theories favor transformational and collaborative leadership styles, organizational cultures often mirror social constructions of gender and ethnicity norms in society. Within the context of higher education institutions, there is often a tension between hierarchical and collaborative forms of leadership reflected in contradictory sets of practices. While women leaders may have an advantage in such contexts, they also face obstacles in needing to change organizational cultures that mirror social biases against women as leaders.

Underrepresentation

Women have increasingly moved toward greater gender equality at home and in the workplace. Changes in gender roles and lifestyles have occurred with men now sharing more in household chores and childrearing. Social rules of etiquette and gender roles are now more flexible and equity within the marital relationship more common. Women are more able to navigate life in and outside the home easily and freely. Many women now work outside the home; in the U.S., they comprise 46% of the work force. So much has changed; so much has not.

Women are still underrepresented in leadership roles in corporations, institutions of higher education, and the political sector especially in light of the changing population demographics. In the U.S., women now make up 23% of American CEOs. Few women reach the top in higher education although women increasingly enter the ranks of academia. A total of 453 women, representing 16 percent of all presidents, now head U.S. colleges and universities; their share of college and university presidencies has more than tripled in the last 20 years

(Touchton, J. G. & Iomengram, D. 1995). In 2006, 86% were white and 23% were women with the majority of women presidents heading up small, private four year universities or community colleges (June, 2007). Women are still considered an anomaly compared to men when in high positions of leadership. Contradictory portrayals of women leaders pose obstacles to how they lead, and often result in different standards than those applied to men. Women leaders are alternately portrayed as "soft and ineffective" or "domineering and manipulative". This picture is complicated by its interaction with racial and ethnic differences.

Is there a difference between men and women in how they lead?

The answer to this is complex; yes and no. Theories of leadership are typically neutral or absent in their attention to gender as if "a leader is a leader" while studies on leadership typically ignore gender differences or mostly study white men. Popular wisdom and women's self-reports often identify distinct leadership styles and characteristics associated with gender while empirical studies on gender and leadership (e.g., Eagly & Johnson, 1990) often show that men and women leaders behave more alike than different when occupying the same positions. Why is it then that the strength of these perceptions persists?

We often perceive traits associated with leaders that may not have much with to do effective leadership; these characteristics are often embraced by leaders themselves. Terms like "he looks like a leader; he is presidential"; charisma, visionary, are all terms used to define leaders. They often capture what followers want in their leaders—which, in turn, are influenced by social constructions of leadership which are associated with the social construction of gender roles and their resulting impact leadership styles.

In a meta-analysis of gender and leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), gender differences did not emerge in organizational studies between interpersonal vs. task oriented style. However, stereotypic gender differences did emerge in laboratory experiments and assessment studies, i.e., studies when participants were not selected for holding a leadership position. Social perceptions and expectations apparently influence the leadership styles of women leaning toward being more relationship based when in situations of self-assessment or when appointed to leadership roles in laboratory studies. Men conformed more toward the social stereotypes of being more task oriented, self-assertive and motivated to master their environment while women conformed more toward social stereotypes of being more interpersonal, selfless and concerned with others. This is often distinguished as a person orientation over task-orientation with women viewed as having an advantage (Bass & Avolio, 1994; McGregor, 1985).

There is strong evidence to support the tendency for women to adopt a more collaborative, cooperative, or democratic leadership style and for men to adopt a more directive, competitive, or autocratic style; this emerged in all types of studies. Even though selection criteria for leadership positions may even out the gender differences, women seem to be intentionally different and more collaborative based on differences in personality and social

interpersonal skills. The use of a collaborative process is increasingly central to views of effective leadership.

Is there bias against women leaders?

People often associate qualities to leaders that are inherent in the personality of the leader. They may view leaders as inspiring followers to behave according to the purposes of the leader including: 1) a role model (i.e., setting an example), 2) talent in having a specific skill for the organization, 3) initiative and entrepreneurial drive, 4) charisma (i.e., attractiveness to others and the ability to leverage this esteem to motivate others), 5) inspirational (i.e., instill passion or cultivating an environment that brings out the best of individuals), 6) commitment or visionary (i.e., clear sense of purpose or mission-driven). However, it is unclear how dimensions of gender, race and ethnicity confound these assessments of leadership and the conferring of leadership status.

Aversive sexism and racism—Eagly and Karau (2002) suggest that perceived incongruity between female gender role and leadership roles leads to prejudicial appraisals of women leaders. Women as leaders can be perceived as incongruous. Eagly (1987) also found that women leaders were evaluated differently and less favorably than men even when performing the same leadership behaviors. Thus, social perceptions and expectations often result in more exacting standards for women and ethnic minorities than those applied to white men. These biases have also been identified by Dovidio and Gaertner (1996) in unintentional or unconscious discriminatory evaluations of racial/ethnic minority individuals because of underlying anxiety about race and ethnicity—termed aversive racism. Social role stereotypes of gender and race have also been found to influence the performance of women and racial/ethnic minorities. Steele (1997) found that these individuals might also underperform in situations where they are evaluated on a domain in which they are regarded, on the basis of stereotypes, as inferior—termed stereotyped threat.

Evaluations of leaders often include characteristics associated with leaders and leadership, but actually have little to do with effectiveness. Given that white males have typically occupied leadership positions, evaluations of leader effectiveness often favor male characteristics of height, white, and masculinity. Consequently, the context of masculinized norms and the expectations about "what a leader looks like" introduce conditions of bias against women and racial/ethnic minority leaders. It raises challenges that are not faced by white Anglo males.

Credible leadership—reflects these concerns about image, and in the advice to "dress for success". While this applies to men and women, one's appearance and behavior may project "un-leader like" images and perceptions associated with gender and ethnicity that may have little to do with leadership. It is more complex for women since they tend to be defined by their fashion. What they wear could be a distraction or fit stereotypic images of being too feminine or too ethnic, and therefore, not leader like. Another challenge to credibility is the communication

styles of women who tend to have softer, high pitched voices which may be perceived as being less commanding than a loud, booming male voice. This is reflected in the common observation of their being ignored or not being yielded the floor to speak by others, and becomes a way to disempower women.

Performance appraisals—Women are evaluated more negatively compared to men even when performing the same leadership behaviors. There is bias against women leaders in appraisals of their effectiveness and expectations of their leader behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This often places them in double bind situations when they feel compelled to conform to differing role expectations associated with gender and leadership. Are they to be feminine women and be perceived as weak or strong leaders and be perceived as too domineering? Whereas current organizations typically conform to masculinized norms more congruent for men, women leaders can at a disadvantage when exercising behaviors that contradict such expectations or when they are compelled to conform to these norms.

Multiple and intersecting identities

Contemporary theories of leadership endorse authenticity in leaders—"in knowing who they are, what they believe and value" (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004, p. 803). Avolio (2007) calls for the level of integration in leadership theory and research which considers the dynamic interplay between leaders and followers, taking into account the prior, current, and emerging context in explaining what actually improves or develops leadership—he called this authentic leadership development. While theories of leadership would have us believe that gender and ethnicity is inconsequential to leadership, it is increasingly clear that cultural worldviews, socialization of gender roles, and different life experiences do contribute to one's resulting philosophy and style of leadership. Authenticity as a leader is more challenging when needing to negotiate multiple and intersecting identities. Women from diverse racial and ethnic groups might lead in different ways more aligned with their different world views and cultural perspectives. They may identify not only as leaders, but also as women, as racial/ethnic individuals, as mothers, etc., all of which intersect with one another. These include the challenges of work-family balance, caretaking responsibilities, gender role expectations, connectedness and affiliation with multiple communities while exercising their leadership.

As the literature on gender differences in leadership has shown, it is often not the differences in what women and racial/ethnic minority leaders do in their enactment of leadership as much as it is the different experience they face when they lead. Given the tendency to view traits held by women and racial/ethnic minority groups as negative or deficient because they are viewed as exceptions or different, leadership is a different experience.

In *Women and Leadership* (Chin, Lott, Rice & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007), we examined leadership among more than 100 feminist women leaders. While many preferred a feminist leadership style which was more collaborative and inclusive in nature, many felt this was not sanctioned within the institutions they led. Many feminist women often sought leadership

positions to achieve social justice goals, striving to be transformational in their vision, empowering in their actions, and upholding ethical principles. These principles often were felt to be at odds with strivings for power and status more commonly associated with men. Many of the women felt constrained to follow institutional rules defined by masculinized norms, and needing to compromise feminist principles in their leadership styles to be effective.

When we factor in diversity including issues of race, ethnicity, ability status, and sexual orientation, the exercise of leadership becomes more complex. We need to move beyond single dimensions of identity in our theorizing, and instead investigate multiple and intersecting identities if we are to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how diversity contributes to important phenomena such as leadership (Chin & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). Case examples suggest that an African American woman may identify with the values of straightforwardness and assertiveness in their leadership style while an Asian American woman may identify with values of respectfulness and unobtrusiveness. However, others may perceive the direct confrontational style of an African American woman as intimidating and deem the use of an indirect and teaching style of an Asian American woman as passive. These factors are likely to influence access to leadership positions and appraisals of their effectiveness as leaders.

Hall, Garrett-Akinsanya, & Hucles (2007, p. 283) define black feminist leaders as: "Black activists who, from the intersections of race and gender, develop paths, provide a direction, and give voice to black women". Kawahara, Esnil, & Hsu (2007, p. 310), in their interviews, found that Asian American women leaders held a collectivistic view of their leadership styles, and used bicultural values in order to achieve their leadership goals. Native American women described their leadership as: "stand[ing] beside, rather than behind, [their] men in their effort to preserve their tribes and treaty rights" (Kidwell, Willis, Jones-Saumty, & Bigfoot, 2007, p. 327). [They will not distance themselves from their men] because of the inherent threat posed by broader society against their men if they were to distance themselves. These case examples need further investigation, but suggest different leadership styles influenced by culture differences.

Lorene Garrett-Browder (Chin et al, 2007, p. 57) suggests that "African American women throughout history have been able to be effective leaders despite living in oppressive environment and dealing with power structures that do not always include our voice….Consequently, African American women (leaders might tend to use more direct communication styles and) have used our anger as an ally to help us speak the truth…even though it may be unpopular." In a context of oppression and power, value is placed on trust and fairness to accept leadership from an African American perspective. This approach places an emphasis on parity and social justice.

Ann Yabusaki (2007, p.55) suggests that Asian American women may use more indirect communication in their leadership styles. In Asian cultures, the balance of opposites and emphasis on the yin and the yang can bring out the best in leadership enriched by different perspectives. She identifies "how the emphasis on hierarchy influences ways in which leaders

and authority figures communicate in Asian cultures (resulting in the expectation and tendency of Asian leaders) to teach or convey a moral message when communicating". When this communication operates within a context that values kinship bonds and elders, the concept of benevolent authority is ascribed to leaders in the Asian culture.

These examples suggest that diverse women leaders may hold different views about assertiveness and express their leadership in different ways. Yet, their competence and effectiveness as leaders may be defined by social role stereotypes and expectations. Asian American women may need to learn how to "toot one's horn" without losing one's modesty or to "speak up" although the Asian culture values listening. Native American women may need to learn how to "get a seat at the table, and not wait to be asked. The challenge for diverse women leaders is to learn that it is a different game governed by different rules while transforming the organizational culture in the process.

Toward more robust leadership theories

The growing population diversity and more permeable borders in our global society demand attention to how women and diverse leaders are included in our models of leadership. Books on leadership have generally viewed them as special populations while leadership studies remain silent. It is increasingly clear that a race and gender neutral view of leadership fails to consider the influence of cultural worldviews and socialization on shaping leadership style. Defining and understanding leadership by simply examining those who currently hold leadership positions has led to a biased and incomplete portrayal of leadership and leader effectiveness. Whereas the experiences of women and diverse leaders may be different, these differences may serve to expand the world views reflected in existing leadership theories. What follows are ways to incorporate gender and diversity into our leadership theories.

Trait theories

Although trait theory fell by the wayside, leadership traits and attributes do matter according to Zaccaro (2007) who argues that combinations of traits and attributes are more likely to predict leadership. Yet, it is not clear how and if the range of traits now studied are representative of those manifested by diverse leaders or simply that of Anglo males who are now in the majority as leaders. Nor is it clear how these traits are confounded by biases based on social role expectations. Most studies using trait theories have not examined the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, or other dimensions of diversity with leadership traits. For example, studies of charismatic leadership have focused on characteristics more aligned with masculine traits. Whereas trait theories often see leadership characteristics as innate, (e.g., "born leaders"), they fail to consider the influence of social-environmental factors which have precluded women and racial/ethnic groups from such positions.

Trait theories have not considered "concept equivalence" across cultures when measuring attributes or traits. Assertiveness defined along one dimension may find women deficient;

expanding it to include different expressions may eliminate those differences between men and women. Diverse leaders have different experiences which may influence how they lead in different contexts even when all other factors are held constant. It is not uncommon to measure these traits using bipolar dimensions (e.g., assertive vs. passive; task oriented vs. interpersonal); this may result in cancelling out differences than if each were rated independently.

Contingency theories

Contingency or situational leadership theory offers an alternative approach to the problems posed by trait theories since it proceeds from the assumption that different situations call for different leadership characteristics; accordingly, there is no single profile of a leader. Contingency theories examine contexts and situations, and the interaction of leadership behavior and characteristics with follower characteristics. While these lend themselves to including the complexities of diversity, the context of leadership in these studies is typically the organizational culture in which leadership is exercised. A broader definition of contexts to include the cultural and social contexts would be more robust especially as we begin to look at the exercise of leadership within a global context and diverse society.

Empowerment and Shared Leadership

Leadership implies a relationship of power, the power to guide others. David McClelland (1975) studied the psychology of power and achievement, and saw leadership skills, not so much as a set of traits, but as a pattern of motives. Emphasis on power has fallen into disfavor with a shift from power to empowerment where the leader places power in one's followers. Emerging models of leadership have shifted from distinguishing authoritarian vs. democratic leadership styles (more common post World War II) to "shared power" and the "servant leader" as characteristic styles of the modern leader. The research has not yet examined how the use of power by leaders is mediated by race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status. For example, feminist leaders tend to prioritize social justice motives over power motives as the reason for seeking leadership positions. Nor has the research examined how more collaborative and collective cultures might influence the exercise of leadership. For example, businesses internationally have begun to shift from merely adopting Western theories and practices of management to cherishing unique social and cultural factors inherent in non-Western cultures while revising Western theories of management (Kao, Sinha, & Wilpert, 1999).

Leadership style

Leadership theories often reflect the larger social contexts in which they were developed. Leadership studies post World War II, for example, emphasizing top-down, command and control models of leadership style have now shifted toward more collaborative and transformational models given the rapid social and technological changes of today's global society. Leadership studies shifted from examining autocratic vs. democratic styles of leadership to transformational vs. transactional styles of leadership. Emerging models of leadership are

now more value driven, ethics based, and social change oriented in response to fallout from such events as the Enron scandal symbolizing willful corporate fraud and corruption, the financial crisis in the banking industry and collapse of the housing and dot.com bubble during the beginning of the 21st century.

James MacGregor Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of "raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation", and introduced the concept of shared vision that unites leaders and followers toward a common purpose. Many definitions of leadership involve vision —providing direction, influencing the process, orienting toward achieving a future desired state, and energizing followers. This has been central to transformational leadership styles, and requires the leader to communicate that vision to followers to embrace as their own. Increasingly, transformational leadership styles are endorsed as essential for today's leaders given its emphasis on defining leadership as a process concerned with fostering change. It is intentional, directed toward future end or condition, is a purposive process, and is inherently value-based. How much changing demographics in the workplace contributed to this shift is a question. Whereas women have been found to be more transformational in their leadership styles, how they can be more effective leaders needs further investigation.

Context of Higher Education

Higher education plays a major role in shaping the quality of leadership in today's society. Today's rapidly changing and diverse global society is mirrored in our institutions of higher education, and present challenges to how we prepare and educate students today to be the leaders of tomorrow. Transformational leadership is a model consistent with the goals of higher education today, whose purpose is to enable and encourage faculty, students, administrators, and other staff to change and transform institutions to more effectively enhance student learning, generate new knowledge, and to empower students to become agents of positive social change in the larger society.

However, institutions of higher education are organized along two contradictory sets of practices. The hierarchy of administration is generally top-down; budgets at the chair level within these institutions often have limited discretionary spending with personnel (which makes up the bulk of budgets) generally controlled by "administration". At the same time, faculty who forms the bottom rungs of this hierarchy with less or little power also has great power because of tenure, unions, and principles of academic freedom. Faculty can and do operate with a great deal of autonomy in their primary work of teaching and research.

Tenure and professional status within current institutions of higher education are structured to be individualistic in nature. Contrary to egalitarian and collective systems, current organizational structures in higher education institutions breed competitiveness for funding, for the brightest students, and for attracting top faculty. Peer review, a potential mechanism for

collegial and collaborative leadership, may be derailed by faculty who see themselves exclusively as critics to judge rather than as colleagues to offer constructive feedback or by those with personal agendas viewing potential promotions as threats or competitors.

This hierarchical approach within higher education sits alongside the faculty committee structure which is more collegial. The typical committee is often advisory in nature with little leadership responsibility; products and recommendations need to be vetted up the line. While committees offer possibilities for collegial or collaborative leadership, leadership opportunities may not always be realized.

Leadership for Higher Education Today

The potential for transformational change and collaborative leadership within institutions of higher education lies in articulating its core values and vision. Those coming together with a shared purpose within an environment where they can disagree with respect can foster transformational change within the institution. Institutions of higher education today need to be quick and nimble in response to rapid change. However, biases and power dynamics may mitigate against such change. Possibilities for change are often weighted down by bureaucratic and organizational structures which enable the institutions to run like well oiled machines, sometimes even without the leaders in place.

The confluence of leadership theories and institutions of higher education favoring transformational leadership styles may provide women leaders with an advantage in today's environment. While organizational goals, values, and preferences may be aligned, organizational cultures will need to be transformed before institution can move toward transformational change. How do we do this? Some considerations follow.

Conceptual Leadership—According to Morrill (2010), colleges and universities complicate and problematize the exercise of administrative authority. He posits that an academic leader's most important forms of influence derive not from the administrative powers inherent in one's position, but from the platform it provides to function as an "intellectual and educational partner with the faculty" (p. 25). If so, the opportunity to shape broad institutional narratives provides the real power of that office. In saying this, Morrill aligns himself with other authors (for example, Bennis 2006), who recognizes the centrality of narratives as key leadership tools for shaping institutional culture. The ability to frame issues and articulate institutional values through compelling narratives and personal integrity (authenticity) will enable administrators (leaders) to promote a sense of common purpose and shape the strategic trajectory of their complex institutions.

Strategic Leadership—Morrill (2010) also raises the concern that institutional goals within higher education might be "seen more as exploratory hypotheses to be tested than as rigid objectives to be achieved" (p. 40). He links the more abstract dimensions of leadership (as in

strategic planning) with its pragmatic dimensions in management, financial planning, budgets (strategic management) as central to effective leadership.

Visible and Invisible leadership—By incorporating dimensions of diversity into our understanding of leadership, we must also consider alternative models. While charisma of a leader may be a visible trait facilitative to successful transformational change, other less visible styles of leadership may be equally effective. Assertiveness is often viewed as essential to good leadership, but we must recognize different forms of assertiveness as defined among Native American communities as characterized by pushing others quietly from behind (Boyd, 2010) or in the use of silence in Asian American communities, i.e. in choosing when not to speak (Yabusaki, 2007).

Benevolent Leadership— Ayman and Chemers (1983) found evidence for a Benevolent Paternalistic leadership dimension in Iran which has been corroborated in other Asian cultures. Different from power, this dimension derives from Confucianism within Asian cultures and reflects a patriarchal model of governing social order and leadership by emphasizing virtuous living, extolling the ideal of the (male) scholar-leader and his benevolent rule within a tradition of filial piety. It reflects the willingness of the leader to be benevolent toward his followers and allowing them to emerge; it contrasts with the notion of followers needing to seize power and authority. The notion of benevolent authority has not been incorporated in current theories of leadership, which tend to reflect North American and western biases.

Collaborative or Shared Leadership—Principles of shared governance is central to current notions of leadership within institutions of higher education. Committees using a collaborative process can be the mechanism to effect change and provide leadership. This is consistent with current emphasis on collaborative leadership. However, organization cultures may mitigate against true collaboration when competing agendas (e.g., weighing faculty personal interests against student interests) or adversarial camps of "them vs. us" attitudes exist, or when mistrust of administration become intractable. Finding ways to restore trust and cultivating common values and a shared purpose is needed to move toward transformational change.

Pathways to leadership for women in higher education

Alice Eagly (2007) describes the pathway to leadership today for women as no longer a glass ceiling where there is no access; rather it is a labyrinth through which must navigate and find their way. This new metaphor suggests the need for multiple models of leadership, and recognition that a woman leader might do it differently. Navigating the labyrinth will be easier if women examine their strengths and the advantages they bring.

In examining the experiences of women leaders in higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Wolverton, Bower, & Hyle, 2008; Madsen, 2008) , some suggestions emerge for navigating this labyrinth:

- Articulate your vision—align your statement of personal values with those of the institution toward a common purpose to make a difference
- Be Authentic—in being true to yourself and anchored in who you are, you transmit such values to the institution; ethics, honesty and openness are essential.
- Be able to adapt—in maintaining cognitive flexibility, you can to lead from multiple perspectives and adapt your leadership behaviors appropriately to the context
- Have a supportive network—to discuss the obstacles and challenges along the way
- Draw on your strengths and be resilient
- Identify change issues and create a leadership group toward a collaborative process

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