DEGENDERING LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Mom, Dad, Ben, Hans, and Henry for your support and inspiration.

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I would also like to acknowledge the 34 study participants who were willing to take time out of their busy and unpredictable schedules to take part in an interview. I am greatly inspired by their experiences. I am thankful that they shared some exceptionally personal stories that add to the richness of my data.

1

INTRODUCTION

It's problematic to use the terms "masculine" or "feminine" to define a leadership style. Even if a university board member applauds a woman's leadership as "masculine" because she is hardheaded and unyielding in her commitment to canonical rules of the institution, it's still problematic. Even if a university dean praises a man's "feminine" presidential leadership because he frequently hosts student office hours, welcomes student leaders into his family's home on campus for dinners that he cooks, and allows others' opinions to guide conversation before jumping in with his perspective, it's still problematic. Critics of the leaders in the aforementioned examples might say, "why can't she lead more like a woman should?" or, "why can't he lead like a man?"

Binary, gendered characterizations lead to a stereotypical framework that reinforces gender essentialism that men and women are wired differently, and loses sight of individual leadership approaches that are likely a combination of personality, intellect, awareness, commitment, and prior experience. Assessing leaders with gender binary glasses also limits opportunities for trans, non-binary, and intersex leadership in

higher education. Degendering leadership opens the door for this diversity that institutions should be preparing for.

While women have not yet broken the glass ceiling in academia (Agathangelou & Ling, 2002; Alexander, 2005; Pierce, 2003), they are increasingly joining college and university boards (Brown, 2009) and presiding at some of the most esteemed colleges and universities. From 2011 to 2016, according to the American Council on Education (ACE, 2017b), the percentage of women presidents at institutions of higher education increased from 26.4% to 30.1%. Data published by ACE show that this percentage has steadily climbed since the 1980s. ACE data from 2017 reveal that 5% of all college presidents were women of color (ACE, 2018). Overall, the ACE American President Study 2017 shows that from 2011 to 2016, minority representation among college presidents increased from 13% to 17% (ACE, 2017a). Leaders from different demographic backgrounds with respect to gender, age, race, sexuality, and ethnicity are governing higher educational institutions. They come from different academic disciplines, serve in varying roles at differentially sized institutions, and represent a diverse array of experiences that led them to senior administration.

This book addresses the following questions: (1) What role does gender play in the narratives of women and men leaders? (2) How does gender figure into women and men's descriptions of their workplace interactions? (3) How might leaders' gendering of leadership reproduce gender stereotypes? (4) What strategies might leaders and institutions of higher education use to degender leadership? and (5) What might degendered leadership look like?

Overall, this book demonstrates the power of the narratives of senior higher educational administrators to degender leadership. In this chapter, I define leadership in gender-neutral terms, discuss literature on gendered leadership style

variation, and through a feminist degendering movement framework, challenge gendered leadership differentiation. I also introduce my methodological framework and guiding research questions.

Chapter 2 helps us move away from gendered leadership constraints by defining effective academic leadership through both scholarly contributions and the voices of my interview participants that take institutional values and norms, as well as university stakeholder expectations, into account. These conversations will especially inform search committees for university administrators, as well as professors who are looking to advance.

Chapter 3 focuses on the formal and informal trainings and experiences that are the foundation for learning the leadership skillset and that will be the basis for a successful career in higher educational administration. I note the relevance and potential limitations of gender-specific trainings for women leaders in this chapter.

Chapter 4 addresses respondents' reactions to the socially constructed masculine versus feminine leadership framework as well as instances in which respondents felt that gender mattered, or did not matter, with regard to their work. This discussion demonstrates the need to disentangle gender and leadership so that administrators can lead without underlying expectations.

Chapter 5 concludes that gender identity does not predict leadership style. Reported leadership styles did not vary among my diverse sample of interview participants with respect to gender. University leaders, from a variety of gender, racial and ethnic, disciplinary, geographic, institutional, and administrative backgrounds reported leading in very similar ways. I discuss the larger implications of these findings in my conclusion that speaks to the future of university inclusivity that starts from the top down.

I went to the top of the university hierarchy to learn about how leaders really operate. Popular self-help books and media discourse have framed a message that women leaders need to develop masculine survival skills to thrive in a "man's world." Had women leaders in academic settings actually bought into this? Did men serving as deans, provosts, and presidents, really have a different playbook? My findings dispel these gender essentialist messages.

THEORIZING LEADERSHIP VARIATION

Lorber's (1994, 2000, 2005) "feminist degendering movement" acknowledges the fluidity and malleability of gender and Butler's (2004) notion of "undoing gender" that calls to reduce the power of gender as an organizing principle, inform this "trait degendering" focus. Degendering leadership dismantles preconceptions, stereotypes, and hierarchies. We live in a society in which we are highly familiar with a gendered, social construction of leadership (Brescoll, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). External responses to leadership are oftentimes rooted in a leader's gender identity and gender roles embedded in all social institutions.

Leadership scholars have synthesized style classifications that cover a variety of leadership manifestations. Lewin and Lippitt (1938) introduced the polar opposites of democratic and autocratic leadership styles that other leadership scholars (e.g., Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Eagly & Johnson, 1990) have built upon in their efforts to characterize gendered leadership variation. Notably, Eagly and Johnson (1990) do not find differences in how women and men approach the social and

instrumental factors associated with leading. However, they find that women are more open to collaborative, democratic leadership styles. Women avoid an autocratic leadership style since operating in such a way can lead to intense scrutiny and personal repercussions. Social role theory explains why women develop this democratic leadership style; stereotypes regarding a woman's role in society prevent her from acting in an autocratic fashion. Openness and transparency in women's decision-making as leaders is therefore attributable to gender roles. Women are not biologically wired differently to be collaborative; social norms oblige this leadership style. My research confirms that women avoid an overly autocratic leadership style. Yet, my research challenges this understanding because men also avoid such a domineering presence.

More precisely, leadership scholars have identified a variety of leadership models that are often dichotomously used to define gendered leadership including shared governance and collaboration, communal versus agentic leadership, transactional versus transformational leadership, and a laissez-faire approach to leadership. I contend, through my findings, that these definitions are to be viewed as multidimensional representations of leadership where all leaders, regardless of gender identity, situationally shift between styles.

A shared governance model emphasizes the importance of collaborative involvement of faculty and pertinent institutional stakeholders and is marked by transparency, democratic engagement, and equal opportunities for individuals, at all levels, to weigh in on significant prospects for institutional change. Open deliberation is the mark of the shared governance model and the culture of higher education warrants this framework. Sometimes institutional figureheads are fairly new to an institution when major decisions are in store and it is important, for example, that prominent stakeholders

with historical university roots, feel like their opinions matter. Leaders with long tenures in academia generally buy into this shared governance model and shy away from any autocratic decisions, unless emergency situations warrant swift action.

Communal leadership emphasizes power sharing, whereas an agentic style incorporates assertive independence (Bass, 1990; Cann & Siegfried, 1990). Communal leadership involves more than decision-making based matters, as is the case with democratic leadership, by incorporating a sense of oneness among the stakeholder community. Furthermore, agentic leadership differs from autocratic leadership given that leaders can be assertive and independent without necessarily wielding single-handed decisions. Scholars underscore societal expectations that women will exhibit a more communal, or collective/community-related leadership approach, while men are expected to have a more agentic approach that is marked by independence in decision-making (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Koenig et al., 2011; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Eagly and Carli (2007, p. 123) find that, "… [women] have to reconcile the communal qualities that people prefer in women with the agentic qualities that people think leaders need to exhibit to succeed." Exhibiting too much communality or too much agency could damage a woman leader's reputation.

Gendered democratic/authoritarian and communal/agentic leadership styles are in part related to the dichotomy of *laissez-faire* versus *hands-on* styles. Studies show that men were more likely than women to exhibit a laissez-faire style (Eagly et al., 2003) that is marked by a hands-off approach likely resulting in inept management (Bass, 1990). This leadership style is rooted in social role theory and gender roles.

Other comparisons are characterized in terms of transactional and transformational leadership. A transactional approach, characterized by micromanaging with careful

monitoring of worker responsibilities, differs from transformational leadership that is more team oriented and involves goal setting and mentoring from above (Bass, 1998; Burns, 1978). Eagly and Carli (2007) find that the transformational approach is the most effective leadership style and that women most commonly exhibit this leadership style: "at least one aspect of transformational leadership is culturally feminine – *individualized consideration*, which is consistent with the cultural norm that women be caring, supportive, and considerate" (p. 130) and perform considerable "emotional labor" in their leadership to acknowledge the views and sentiments of fellow stakeholders in both the best and worst of circumstances (Hochschild, 1983).

Given what we know about leadership practices and styles, finding out how leadership *actually* operated in the higher echelons of academia meant securing interviews with some of the most scheduled and visible figures in university leadership. I next discuss my study design and interview strategy.

STUDY DESIGN

I used a feminist interview strategy with a semi-structured interview schedule to address participants' power structure negotiations. Mechanisms for climbing an organizational ladder that they may have adopted at much earlier stages in their careers (Chase, 1995) may not have become evident via a fixed schedule that did not allow for flexibility and the establishment of rapport in the interview relationship (Sprague, 2005).

Through life history/oral narrative interviews (DeVault, 1999; Naples, 2003; Smith, 1987), I learned about the "relations of ruling" (Smith, 1987) that structured these

leaders' experiences. First, I prompted the participants to begin with a story of how they became interested in institutional leadership and, through this approach, I was able to make sense of their career pathways. This revealed participants' relationships with mentors who may have promoted leadership advancement and how this relationship may or may not have been reinforced by a gendered, raced, or classed institutional structure.

Between February 2013 and August 2013, I interviewed 11 deans, 12 presidents, and 11 provosts (18 women and 16 men) for a total of 34 interviews, each lasting between 30 minutes to 2 hours. All respondents were cisgender men and women. Two of the men are from historically marginalized racial and ethnic populations in the United States. Three of the women I interviewed were women of color and one of the women was white and from a Western European country. One of the women was a white, openly out lesbian. None of the men that I interviewed identified as gay. The lack of diversity with regard to race and sexuality is reflective of the lack of diversity in the power elite within the United States. Yet, the power elite, that was once reserved for white men of privilege (Mills, 1956), is more diverse today than it was when Mills first wrote about it in 1956. Zwiegenhaft and Domhoff (2006) argue that people of color and people from other marginalized social locations, both men and women, are taking on leadership roles in political, corporate, and academic spheres through election, nomination, and appointment. While this may be the case, underlying vestiges of racism, sexism, and homophobia from within the academy create boundaries for many academics who do not fit the white male paradigm that has historically marked the academy (Alexander, 2005; Davis, 2005; Pierce, 2003; Williams, 1991). This book is in direct response to this need for leadership diversity