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Sara A. Boatman

I'd like to share with you some thoughts from my last 20 years of leadership study and what I've come to understand during this time about women in relationship to leadership. Consider these remarks personal reflections on some of what has been written and discussed about leadership and especially about how women relate to leadership. Let's wonder together if we've come a long way in our thinking about leadership and how women's unique voices relate to it.

20 years ago we were just beginning to think about leadership in a broader way than simply a series of skills and abilities.

We were generally either thinking that leadership and management were the same thing, or thinking that leadership was the opposite of management, and it was good and management was not good. For example, Bennis wrote in 1989 that management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right thing. We hadn't yet figured out that it's possible to do both and to do both well.

In the mid-1980s we were beginning to appreciate James MacGregor Burns' 1978 work that introduced us to transforming leadership. Some of us bought into his concept that without the moral dimension, it wasn't leadership; it was power-wielding.

In the mid-1980s we were beginning to be profoundly influenced by the work of Bennis and Nanus who in 1980 told us from their research that leaders had a vision, communicated that vision, inspired trust in themselves and their vision, and influenced followers to become better in pursuit of that vision.

So, we were on the cusp of profound change in our thinking about leadership 20 years ago.

About the Authors

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20 years ago we were also just beginning to think about how women related to the leadership process, and this thinking created some significant changes in our thinking about women and leadership.

Many of us had read, about 10 years previously, the work of Hennig and Jardim in their 1976 book *The Managerial Woman* in which they argued that organizations were like the military and functioned like male team sports, so women had to learn about strategy, winning, achieving a goal. They contrasted this approach to girls' games which emphasized turn-taking and cooperation, simple and fluid rules that could be reformulated (hopscotch, jump rope); role playing (dolls, house); imagination and seeing the future (fairy tales). They wrote that women got "bogged down in definitions of process—in planning—in finding the best possible way," seeing a career as "personal growth, self-fulfillment, satisfaction, making a contribution to others, doing what one wants to do." They suggested that women lacked men's focus on the all-important question, "What's in it for me?"

In 1981 many of us read Anne Wilson Schaef's important book *Women's Reality* in which she contrasted the white male system (being in front; knowing the answers; strong; all-knowing) with the female system (enabling others to make their contributions; encouraging others to develop capabilities). Schaef presented a different perspective than that of the Simmons College researchers, and many of us found this approach useful because it described what we did.

Marilyn Loden (1985) suggested that while a typical male framework was hierarchical, competitive, and based on positional power, a typical women's framework was team-oriented, cooperative, and based on personal power.

In a mid-1980s television interview, Rosabeth Moss Kanter said that she ran her company like she managed her family: with a strong focus on relationships and helping others to carry out tasks since there were far too many for any one person to do on his or her own.

Somewhere in the early 1990s, I began to see how newly emerging ideas about women's leadership and newly-emerging ideas about leadership generally were coming together in a dramatic way.

The work of Burns (1978), Bennis (1985), Gardner (1990), Bass and Avolio (1987), Kouzes and Posner (1987), and others began to suggest a new paradigm of leadership. This new leadership was

Visionary
Empowering
Morally responsible

And this was what women's leadership had been like all along! More about these ideas later.

20 years later, we understand much better, I think, the complexity of leadership. From my perspective, here are some of the positives that have provided us with a nuanced and much more useful perspective of leadership:

First, we embrace a number of different perspectives on how to make sense of leadership and how to draw accurate conclusions and make reasonable predictions about the leadership process—it's not just leadership means the man at the top giving command and control messages.

We know that certain *traits* can be useful to leadership; for example, Ann Richards' wonderful sense of humor.

We know that leadership involves certain *behaviors;* for example, Rosa Parks moved into perpetual leadership by her refusal to give up her seat on the Montgomery bus.

We know that leadership means adjusting and adapting to fit specific *situations or contingencies*; for example, Hillary Rodham Clinton adjusted her approach as Senator and achieved much more credibility than she had as First Lady.

We know that leadership involves *power and influence*; Eleanor Roosevelt is considered in some quarters the most influential woman in recent history because of the choices she made regarding how she used her leadership.

We know that leadership can result in *transformation and social change*; for example, Betty Friedan's leadership influenced the women's movement in transformational ways.

We know that leadership includes an *ethical dimension*; for example, Mother Teresa always behaved in ways to allow her to do the best for those with the least.

Second, we recognize that leadership and management are two distinctly different processes and that both are valuable and essential. The best lead-

ers have management skills and abilities because these help get tasks accomplished. Women have been managing forever, and management skill helps when we are engaging in leadership.

Third, we recognize that leadership is a relationship—and thus it has less to do with position than with personal qualities, intellectual orientations and emerging in a particular situation; thus, anyone can engage in the leadership relationship, regardless of organizational or group position.

Fourth, we recognize that leadership is about influence. Someone said that without influence and persuasion, leadership is just cheerleading. While cheerleading is often important, we now understand that influence must be present in the leadership process.

Fifth, we recognize that leadership is most definitely about ethics—and that there are persons who exercise leadership who do so from a positive moral foundation that assists the common good and that does no harm, and there are persons who do so in a way that is at the least self-serving and at the worst evil.

20 years later it is possible to see fairly easily how the leadership that is considered most effective today is more frequently demonstrated by women—not by all women, and also by some men. It's just that what we believe is the most effective leadership is demonstrated by women more frequently and more consistently. Here are the three characteristics that I believe are most frequently demonstrated by women—and that assist effective leadership.

First is reflection and self-awareness.

> Women tend not to define ourselves exclusively by our jobs; our identities are complex and multi-faceted.

> Our personal awareness and confidence is continuously honed by wide exposure to life experiences: work, service, cultural diversity.

> Leadership is about learning—and women are equipped to do this well.

Second is empowerment—the word used most frequently to demonstrate our leadership.

> Judith Rosener (1990) captured this best years ago in the *Harvard Business Review:* women are interactive leaders, encouraging participation, sharing power and information, enhancing other people's self worth, getting others energized and excited about their work.

> We are more eager to share power than to wield it: Jean Baker Miller (1986) explained that women tend to equate power with giving and caring, nurturing and strength, seeing power as an instrument of public purpose rather than as a tool for personal ambition.

Third is transformation—to create conditions so that persons, and therefore groups and communities, change to become practitioners of leadership themselves.

Women tend to be pretty passionately committed to making the society better.

We are comfortable sharing power, and work best in flat, collective organizations.

When we think about Bass and Avolio's (1994) characteristics of transformational leadership we can certainly tie them to what we know about women's leadership:

Having idealized influence (being considered as a respected role model)

Demonstrating inspirational motivation (sharing high expectations and promoting creative thinking)

Having intellectual stimulation (questioning old beliefs and assumptions)

Giving individualized consideration (showing personal attention to others)

The dyadic relationship is a key distinguishing feature of transformational leadership, particularly as it is used for mentoring and support. Think how frequently women leaders use this powerful relational connection.

James MacGregor Burns in 1993 studied women's leadership and made this comment about it: "Traditionally when we talked about transformational leadership, it was a white man on a white horse galloping to the rescue and being transformational. Now when we are talking more about transforming leadership, we look at how the original leaders become transformed themselves. The power of this idea is that you really bring about lasting change; rather than telling people where to go or what to do. You modify your original leadership and it becomes a big collective effort. This has often been the case in mass movements and social movements. In doing so the concept of transformational leadership becomes less elitist, more democratic, and related to leadership by women."

So, have we come a long way, baby? We are still doing what women find easier to do with respect to leadership. In some quarters we are discovering that what we do works exceedingly well.

Following a qualitative study of 100 top leaders, McFarland, Senn, and Childress (1993) concluded,

a new leadership culture is emerging which encompasses empowerment, vision, and the shared values of integrity, trust, respect and honesty. Moreover, leaders increasingly relate to people through caring, collaboration, facilitation, consensus building, networking and inspiration. Not long ago, these attributes were thought to be inappropriate in leaders.

They identified key characteristics for what they termed 21st-century leadership as

Communication (asking questions, empathetically listening, openly sharing perspectives, inviting ideas)

Balance (seeking harmony among responsibilities, using integrated, whole-brain thinking)

Empowerment (shared power, diffused leadership, facilitation and coaching)

Collaboration and teamwork (creating web-like structures, interactive and multidisciplinary teams)

Broad vision (promoting systems thinking and family perspectives)

They stated,

Many traits thought to be important for 21st century leadership, including these, are traditionally thought to be 'feminine.' While these traits are in both women and men, they're more natural for women. It will be increasingly important for women and men to learn from and teach each other regarding leadership.

The bad news, of course, is that we are still battling bias. I tell my women college students when they tell me I worry too much about the role of women in organizations to never take their situation for granted since they are speaking to a woman who was institutionally discriminated against throughout her career, and the fragile gains we have made must be protected at all costs. But—for the first time in my lifetime a majority of the U. S. citizenry reports that it is ready for a woman president, and we have two women out there right now who are looking pretty clearly at running. Times are a-changing.

Marie Wilson (2004) in her book *Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World,* writes,

when I look at the issues we face, and when I think of the changes we need, I am as convinced as I have ever been that our future depends on the leadership of women—not to replace men, but to transform our options alongside them.

We have come a long way in the past 20 years in how we are thinking about leadership, and in how we envision women relating to the leadership process. As one of my favorite poets, Robert Frost wrote, however, we have "miles to go before [we] sleep." I do believe, however, that it's a journey in which there is no turning back.

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