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Review of *Leaders Who Dare: Pushing the Boundaries* by L. L. Lyman, D. E. Ashby, & J. S. Tripses

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Book Review

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Leaders Who Dare provides anecdotal and analytical accounts of leadership by outstanding women educators in Illinois. Initially "an ambitious passionate project . . . to tell the stories of Illinois' outstanding women educators, many who have been honored at *Dare to Be Great* conferences" (p. xi), the book documents the work of women honored annually by the Illinois Women Administrators (IWA) organization for daring " . . . to lead themselves and others to new possibilities" (p. xv). The book's purpose is to describe the "*how* and *why* of the leadership practices of outstanding Illinois leaders . . . ." (p. 3). These stories of leaders within one state highlight the importance of understanding and, at times, challenging local and state organizational, political, and social contexts in the practice of educational leadership.

The book is a carefully designed and documented interview study of the leadership of 18 Illinois women educators. In Chapter 1, the co-authors give a detailed explanation of the research process. A team of 23 trained interviewers, all members of IWA, collaborated to design data collection instruments and collect data. They used purposeful reputational sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify a list of 41 Illinois women educational leaders as potential participants. Using clearly defined nomination criteria, including participants' consent to have their names published, the research team selected 21 participants and interviewed 18. The researchers used themes from acceptance speeches for the *Dare to Be Great* award to develop interview questions that covered four areas: participants' personal stories of leadership, discretionary decision making, creative insubordination, and gender and values. Data were analyzed using content analysis and constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2001). Participants and interviewers checked the transcripts and draft manuscript for validity. Interviewers reflected on the research process in a focus group meeting at the project's conclusion. Although the central purpose of the initial project was to tell stories, the careful detail given to methodology shows that this book evolved into a well-crafted study of outstanding women leaders.

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Overview and Themes

In Chapter 2, the authors place their study within the context of four contemporary issues in studying women's leadership. Their participants' stories are counternarratives to American culture, specifically to education. Counternarratives are "stories in which self images contrast with dominant cultural models for women" (Chase, 1995, p. 10). Yet the cultural script that women belong in domestic roles, not leadership roles, presented itself in counternarratives of success and barriers in the participants' stories. These stories revolved around the four themes of resolving cultural tensions, essentializing, honoring diversity, and concerns about feminism.

Scholars identify various approaches women use to resolve cultural tensions in defining themselves or their leadership roles. Blackmore (2002) enumerates several gender scripts women select to operate at work, through which they construct "individual solutions to the collective problem of inequality" (p. 178). Curry (2000) thinks that women construct a *leader persona* in the absence of female models. Freeman and Bourque (2001) argue that women in leadership must consider issues of power, concluding that " . . . the amount of power a person has, rather than the gender, makes a difference in how a person uses power" (p. 22). Blount (1998) states that women need to redefine the leadership role rather than themselves, paying attention to societal questions of who has power and how power is constructed.

Essentializing, or generalizing about gender differences in leadership styles, is an error to be avoided. Smulyan (2000) and Freeman and Bourque (2001) agree that essentializing limits our ability to understand how individual women leaders negotiate leadership based on their own needs and the specific context of their local situations. Although participants gave mixed responses to the question of essentializing, half of them thought that women's and men's leadership is different in education, particularly in the categories of focus, interpersonal skills, and collaboration. Yet, a majority of participants' stories had an essentialist view of women's leadership.

Perspectives of four African American women respond to well-documented calls to include women of color in the study of women's leadership. Scholarship on minority women addresses denial of access to leadership opportunities and positions (Alston, 1999; Brunner, 2003), alternative values and visions for leadership (AhNee-Benham, 2003; Mendez-Morse, 2003), and beliefs viewed from the context of leadership or spritiuality (Atlas & Capper, 2003; Murtadha-Watts, 1999).

Feminist concerns complete the list of contemporary issues of women's leadership. Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000) present three alternative approaches that characterize feminist leadership: "instructional leadership, participatory or shared decision-making, and caregiving leadership" (pp. 149-150). Blackmore (2002) challenges us to focus on "the social relations of gender, and not just women in leadership" (p. 63). Young and Skrla (2003) and Smulyan (2000) raise issues of methodological dilemmas in meaning and validity of research. Although this study did not originate from a feminist perspective and the authors did not impose a feminist interpretation, they hope that the women's stories impact the quality of leadership in schools.

Four organizing themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented as thematic chapters 3-6. Themes are explicated through interpretation of data supported by quotations from participants' stories.

In Chapter 3, collaborative decision making processes are identified as central to the evolving nature of leadership. Participants described themselves as decision makers, focusing on processes, difficulty of decisions, and personal values that guided their decision making. The career of Dr. Rebecca Van Der Bogert, superintendent of Winnetka, Illinois School District, exemplifies a commitment to collaborative decision making. Participants' decision making shows a balance between the importance of collaboration and data gathering and information analysis. Of the 14 participants who described themselves as collaborative, 10 also did their "homework" (p. 43), making sure they had the right information while involving the appropriate people. Four participants emphasized an individual decision-making process but still involved people in information gathering. Levels of commitment to collaborative decision making varied depending upon whether the outcomes were what participants' faculty and staff wanted. Rebecca van der Bogert recognized the psychological aspects of collaboration, observing that, "You have to really genuinely want to hear other people's opinions and you have to be able to tolerate the fact that possibly your opinion doesn't matter, and also believe it's going to be better because it's everybody's opinion (p. 47)." Sixteen of the 18 participants were comfortable with discretionary decision making, based on their own

judgments rather than bureaucratic rules or policies. Positive and problematic outcomes of discretionary decision making clustered around four themes: changing directions when decisions became problematic, time-frame considerations, dependence on involving procedures and programs or involving people, and a range of factors including incomplete information and political pressures. The most difficult decisions leaders had made involved personnel issues followed by value conflicts. Chapter 3 concludes with a discussion of gender and decision-making in which the authors note that there are many perspectives. Rebecca van der Bogert summarizes her philosophy of decision making with a startling statement: "I don't think of myself as a woman or a man. I just know how to make happen what I believe in" (p. 58). Her statement summarizes the practices these leaders used to engage people, use data, and focus on their values in making decisions they felt were the right thing to do rather than being bureaucratically correct.

In Chapter 4, how these leaders pushed bureaucratic boundaries to get things done is described. The chapter is framed around the concept of creative insubordination, originally identified by Morris, Crowson, Porter-Gehrie, and Hurwitz (1984) and defined as "a counterbureaucratic approach to decision making that bends and/or ignores rules and otherwise subverts the authority of the chain of command when such subversion is justified by the greater authority of personal values, service to students, and common sense" (p. 63). Women leaders practiced four aspects of creative insubordination that were identified in the original study: using the community as an ad hoc weapon, management by loophole, short circuiting standard operating procedures from necessity, and calling on the old crony network. These leaders gave examples of new practices of creative insubordination including *negotiating* and *just going ahead and doing something.* Participants used creative insubordination when they were principals to be congruent with their personal values, serve students' needs, and accomplish goals or get things done. They identified risks of creative insubordination as loss of influence, reputation, and one's position. Participants were not overly concerned with these risks. Some participants changed bureaucracies though transformative leadership practices, eliminating the need for creative insubordination. The chapter concludes with the story of Ola Marie Bundy, assistant executive director at the Illinois High School Association from 1967 until 1996. She worked within the bureaucracy to bring equity to girls and women in athletics. Basing her leadership on values, she worked tenaciously with local districts in Illinois to change the system.

Chapter 5 adds to the small body of literature on micropolitics of educational reform, specifically the expectation that leaders engage their

communities in change, the effect of local, regional, and state politics on leaders personally, and the relationship of gender and politics. Regarding participants' political awareness, 17 of the 18 participants made conscious decisions to engage in political acts to accomplish goals that were important. Leaders built relationships to gain leverage for decisions that upheld their moral principles. Dr. Hazel Loucks, deputy governor for education and workforce development in Illinois at the time of her interview, exemplified "working politically while thinking socially" (p. 92). Other participants practiced leadership roles to successfully accomplish political work in the schools and communities, cognizant that being female had an impact on their political work. Four political themes emerged from the interview data. First, leaders used collaboration as a political choice to support, influence, and increase the probability of a decision's adoption and implementation. Participants preferred open over hidden collaboration with six of 18 participants using networking to collaborate. Ten participants commented that not involving key individuals and groups in implementation could result in failure of excellent decisions. The second theme addressed personal and positional power. Most of the participants did not talk about using positional power. With only three leaders in political positions, the majority of leaders preferred using interpersonal relationships and networking to get things done. Although 17 leaders thought schools were political organizations, they felt that the use of political power was limited. They preferred a facilitative role of shared decision-making. Speaking about the third theme, integrity, participants stressed the importance of "being able to look at themselves in the mirror" (p. 104) while dealing with political realities. Participants viewed themselves as being in positions to balance the use of political actions to make decisions based on integrity. The fourth theme about women's positions revealed most participants felt like they were outsiders operating as insiders with several attributing their outsider/insider roles to gender. Hazel Loucks eloquently described the way in which a woman leader can work as an insider even though she is an outsider due to gender or other reasons: "'Don't throw up your hands and give up.' Don't say an organization doesn't represent me. Get in there and make it represent you" (p. 111). Other women talked about playing the role of insider to accomplish their goals without the mentorship available to male leaders. Some women became politically active for specific causes, often choosing gender-related agendas. Participants recognized that their decisions would be held to greater scrutiny than those of their male counterparts. Becoming politically active and developing a political voice were related to personal integrity as expressed by Hazel Loucks in her repeated comments that she wanted to "make a difference."

In Chapter 6, participants' values are explored. Five themes in the data show how leaders live out their values through leadership. Dr. Elizabeth Lewin, superintendent of Carbondale, Illinois schools, represents leaders who live their values. The first theme, valuing people and relationships, specifies important aspects of relationships: nurturing the talents of others, honoring and respecting others, and connecting with others. Sixteen participants spoke about the second theme of making decisions that benefit children. Articulating what is best for students as a standard for decision making, leaders were willing to take risks when current policies and practices were not in the best interests of children. The third theme involved maintaining personal integrity and doing the right thing. Personal integrity was defined according to four sub-themes: fairness, a willingness to leave or move on when personal and organizational values conflicted unalterably, admitting and taking responsibility for mistakes, and maintaining credibility or the willingness to stand up for one's convictions. Twelve participants identified the fourth theme, honoring diversity by respecting others. Three sub-themes were appreciating different perspectives, recognizing the contribution of new insights and possible solutions, and maintaining a commitment to recognizing potential in others. The fifth theme that defined leading from values was spirituality. Spirituality, or connectedness with the largeness of life, included religious practice, creativity, intuition, wisdom, beliefs, appreciation for others, and compassion (p. 137). Data were represented according to Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell, and Capper's (1999) three dimensions of relationship that form the basis of spiritually guided leadership: relationship with self, relationship with a power greater than oneself, and relationship with others. Participants' ethics of caring, justice, and critique fit Starratt's (1994) three ethics. Although many participants would not go against organizational rules and policies, all leaders would not adhere to rules that violated their values. Participants led from living and leading their values.

In Chapter 7, the authors redefine leadership as *doing* and *being*. They assert that the leaders in their study practice a redefined leadership that emanates from a constructive postmodern paradigm for social reconstruction. Postmodern leadership implies new ways of *doing* leadership that are based on moral and ethical dimensions, an emphasis on social justice, and social reconstructionism. Data included developing images and practices of postmodern leadership, or what the authors call the *doing* of leadership. Three themes in the book exemplify *doing* leadership within the framework of constructive postmodernism. The first theme, developing collaborative decision-making processes, was practiced by 14 of the 18 participants who

were committed to collaboration. The second theme, pushing the bureaucratic boundaries, was practiced by participants through creative insubordination and transforming and transcending bureaucratic systems. The third theme, claiming power through politics, was a choice for 17 of 18 participants who chose to collaborate and network as a political choice to accomplish goals that were important to them. The developing image and practice of leadership is framed as the *being* of leadership. Referencing earlier research about the visioning of leadership, the authors' present 96 descriptors that support the values-based leadership of their participants. Values-based descriptors cluster around purpose, nurturing and process-oriented people focus, and an assertive task focus. The authors state that authentic leadership integrates *being* and *doing* in a sense of wholeness, with the ultimate integration leading with soul. The chapter concludes with a call to redefine leadership in new ways, citing Wheatley's (1992, 1999) work on chaos that calls for a better understanding of the processes to build relationships, growth, and development.

Chapter 8 focuses on the story of Stephanie Pace Marshall, president of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA), whose leadership integrates *being* and *doing*. In telling the story of Marshall's role in the history and growth of IMSA, she is described as a visionary leader who uses the metaphor of "flying at 50,000 feet" to describe her ability to see the meaning of her higher purpose. Her vision involves transformation and liberation so that IMSA can "invite children to liberate their goodness and genius by inventing a new mind" (p. 172). Marshall articulates her belief that the academy can choose its own future by creating its own story or vision of the future. She uses "sense of self" as a fundamental principle to guide decision-making, asserting that most organizations suffer from having multiple "selves." She believes leadership is always about name, meaning who the leader is, what she stands for, and what matters. Marshall's vivid language includes other metaphors that illustrate her belief that we need a new language for leadership to help leaders integrate conceptualizations of their work.

In Chapter 9, the authors offer reflections on the research project. Interviewers shared reflections three times in the project through written and oral communication. In addition to learning interviewing skills, many interviewers felt a sense of inspiration and renewal from the stories of these women leaders that affirmed their personal career decisions. The authors share the interviewers' enthusiasm for the research project, noting they felt strengthened. They conclude the book by placing it in the context of scholarship on women's leadership. Their original intent was to challenge

traditional leadership theories and contribute to the reconceptualization of theory to include women's experiences. They conclude by noting the study's place in redefining the *being* and *doing* of contemporary leadership.

Discussion

The origin of the book, as stated in the first chapter, is the storytelling tradition of the Illinois Leaders Who Dare conference. Lyman, Ashby, and Tripses wanted to tell the "rich stories and their lessons" of outstanding leadership before they became lost. They share those stories by showcasing leaders whose practices exemplify each chapter's theme. Specific examples and quotations from other women's leadership support the story of the leader who is showcased. These stories and supporting quotations provide specific instances of the *doing* and *being* of leadership. The extended stories are uplifting and inspiring, painting captivating pictures of these women's personalities, philosophies, and relationships with others. An appendix provides a biographical summary of the careers of the leaders and their interviewers. The very public way in which details of each woman's leadership are carefully documented is strong support for a creative methodology that goes against traditional concerns about maintaining participants' confidentiality. The authors also preface some quotations throughout the book with professional labels rather than by name, perhaps to protect the speaker. They also acknowledge that some women wore "masks" to avoid talking about controversial issues. This bold methodological approach balances ethical concerns to protect participants with offering their stories in a very public way.

Although the book provides a public forum to tell stories about leadership, *Leaders Who Dare* is much more than a book of inspiring stories. It is a thoroughly documented contribution to scholarship on women's leadership. The authors place their study within the context of contemporary issues of women's leadership through a thorough synopsis of the research on these four issues. Each chapter grounds the leadership practices and beliefs that emerged from the data within classic and contemporary research on each theme. More than 125 studies on leadership provide context for the current study and support its contribution to scholarship. The book's initial purpose of telling the stories of outstanding women educational leaders fits Shakeshaft's (1999) Stage 4 of research that reports how women experience leadership "on their own terms" (p. 7). The book's themes challenge traditional ways of leading (Shakeshaft's Stage 5) and contribute to reconceptualizing leadership theory (Shakeshaft's Stage 6). The authors

unquestionably have fulfilled their "hope" (p. 201) that their book will contribute to the redefinition of leadership that is gender inclusive.

Conclusion

Although this book set out to tell stories about exemplary leaders in one state, I recommend it to a broad audience. Profiles of building, district, state, and university leaders provide lessons for anyone who practices or professes leadership. Practicing and aspiring leaders and those of us who teach them have many lessons to learn from this book. Although the major themes of the book provide valuable lessons, the "moral" of these stories involves core beliefs about values, philosophy, worldview, and self. Anyone who reads this book will learn and grow from the lessons each woman's story has to teach.

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