

LEADERSHIP AS SHARED DIGNITY

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States, leadership long has been described and perceived using a metaphor of power. A nation begun by adventurers, malcontents, and religious devotees, the white culture shaping the society here believed in independence and dominion—dominion over oppressive governments, over other societies, over the geographic territory itself, and over the everyday hardships of life. A good leader demonstrated qualities clearly representative of what the culture then as now deemed the masculine gender: one who braved fierce physical conditions, singled himself out as a winning competitor, and won battles of all kinds. A good leader preserved rights and meted out justice (Kohlberg, 1969). That legacy of leader as power continues to endure, even as the society has moved on into an age changed in nature, in context, and in needs.

At the end of the twentieth century, when the U. S. population has burgeoned to over 100,000 times its size in 1600 (recognizing, of course, that the population figures of that time did not include the numbers of indigenous peoples), the nation emerges as a complex matrix, no longer in need of frontiersmen and women to settle its vast geography. Now one of the most economically privileged, militarily able, and informationally steeped societies in the world, the culture in the U. S. sees itself and is seen by many as the “top dog” rather than the “underdog.” The pervasiveness and familiarity of that rights-driven, hierarchical perspective of leader and leadership reflects a developmental lag in the society, a failure to mature from the limited conceptualization of leader as power to a more complex conceptualization that balances hierarchy (power with an end of rights and justice) and latitude (collaboration with a means of care and responsibility), mediated by mindful dignity.

The most recent upsurge of women into public life—that is, the women’s movements of the twentieth century—has affected the traditional power/leader profile. Although still fundamentally adherent to its position as a masculine stronghold, the concept of leader has begun to develop what this society calls feminine qualities: concern for other, focus on the collective, attention to process or means rather than solely on product or ends, and an eye toward care and responsibility (Gilligan, 1982). In the twenty-first century, social mandates surrounding the nature of leader are in flux; women and men advocating and enacting the new model—one using shared dignity to incorporate this culture’s feminine—care and responsibility—together with the traditional masculine—power in the forms of rights and justice. Such a change in the concept of leader and leadership faces daunting forces of stasis;

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however, now is the time to meet those daunting forces because the culture also faces an opportune moment for change.

#### POWER AS A METAPHOR FOR LEADER AND LEADERSHIP

Evident in various social arenas such as religious, economic, political, and educational, the leader/power metaphor also pervades academic research. Research about women as leaders or women and leadership consistently equates power and leader. Hess and Wagner (1999), for example, use dynamics of power—coercive, reward, legitimate, expert, and referent—to measure “power leadership.” Their methodological scale—the Leader Power Inventory (Rahim, 1988)—has been used for the last fifteen years as one way to study a key descriptor of leadership: influence.

That perspective on the power/leader metaphor carries the implicit message of hierarchy and control, expanding the gap between the power/leader and the “follower” thereby preserving the power/leader tradition. In some leader studies, the definition of leader may become reduced to one who exercises influence over others: “Leadership. . . is a process. . . by which one member influences and controls the behavior of the other members toward some common goal” (Denmark, 1993, p.343). Conceptualizing leader in such an elemental way further enlarges the power distance within the U. S. culture. The differential between power/leader and follower increases.

Other research reinforces and even enlarges that single-faceted idea of leader by talking about leader and “hero” interchangeably (Ikenberry, 1996) inferring that all leaders look to manifest power. Ikenberry’s comparison of leader as hero provides the standard from which to observe that phenomenon. Scholars may nod to the fledgling movement toward a shift in the conceptualization of leader by commenting about “linkages” among major industrial countries and the “reinvention” of leadership; however, even that perspective presumes that any leader innately embodies the masculine model. That leader, these scholars point out, is now “reinventing” himself. From that point of view, those leaders whose styles already balance between the masculine and feminine models or those leaders more heavily weighed on the feminine side would not be “reinventing” their leadership. They are not recognized in the leader landscape. Only the masculine model is referenced.

The leader/power metaphor also may function in tandem with the power/money metaphor; although the scholarly conclusions may appear to be citing a shift in leader conceptualization, closer scrutiny suggests the traditional power model prevails. Short and Johnson (1994) write value arguments in favor of empowerment, but their conclusions subjugate effects of empowerment to the traditional power model: “Business organizations have found that empowered workers contribute more to the profit motives of the company at less cost” (Short and Johnson, 1994, p.581). Empowerment becomes a tool by which profit can be achieved; profit becomes the critical weight that throws the

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balance of power to the business organization that adopts empowerment as its strategy. The key here is that leader as empowerer toward relational morality is not the end; leader as empowerer is a means toward profit and acquisition of monetary advantage, which is the end.

This leader/power affiliation in research marks the present U.S. culture as one whose members understand and continue to pursue the romanticized and outdated practice of seeking, recognizing, and following a hero leader; however, the present, personal-political climate may well support change to a more mature, more inclusive conceptualization and practice of leader and leadership. Whether the role of leader will include some sort or measure of hierarchical power is not being argued here; the need for situational use of hierarchical power will persist. What is being argued is, 1) that change to a more mature, inclusive leadership paradigm is thwarted by the historically masculine-gendered accounting of hierarchical power as the most prominent, most preferred, and oftentimes principal metaphor for leader; 2) that transformational leadership and empowerment still trade on the traditional leader model and do not accomplish shared dignity, a necessary and critical mediator for definitions or actions of leader and leadership; and 3) finally, that progress will be slow and demanding for those leaders and scholars attempting to balance the prevailing moral reasoning based in rights and justice (this culture's masculine paradigm) privileged in power/leader with moral reasoning based in care and responsibility (this culture's feminine paradigm) necessary and nearly absent in leader definition and act.

## PROBLEMS THWARTING CHANGE

As women have entered the public realm in greater numbers, they have begun to garner leadership positions and act out their characters as leaders (Evans, 2002). For example, Carli and Eagly (2001) report that women make up 45% of managers and administrators in the U. S. and that worldwide, nearly all women who have attained high positions in corporations have done so since 1990. Entrance of women into leadership positions continues to be thwarted in higher echelons of the U. S.; in positions at Fortune 500 companies and state and national government, representative percentages of women plummet to single digits.

Agents of change, these women—and those men—who enact more feminine leadership styles or styles that blend masculine and feminine behaviors, face resistance. Disrupting the “power/leader-follower” pattern ingrained in social behavior means dealing with complex issues of paradigm shift, both as they affect the women themselves and as they effect the leader and leadership expectations. A second hurdle for these change agents entails establishing credibility, credibility that does not extend from position status as it does in the traditional power/leader model. Last, change requires energy. Change during revolution or eminent disaster derives some of its force from the turbulence in the context in which it occurs. Present day agents must generate

force for change without the advantage of usurping energy from an animated context. Present day change agents are committing their acts of change in the context of stasis and the fierce resistance of inertia. These problems thwarting change create a conundrum for leaders who recognize the value of balancing the masculine power/leader with the feminine care/leader mediated by shared dignity.

*The Problem of Followership* In the traditional power/leader paradigm, responsibility for action rests firmly on the role of leader; a bifurcated system of leader/follower develops. The leader/follower system fosters for followers a norm of reactive rather than proactive social behavior. Followers learn that social action consists of cooperating to bestow power on a leader whose role it is to blaze the trail, take responsibility for action, and create comfort for the followers. Followers may abdicate their responsibilities so they need not create their own trails but may travel with ease, stepping in the footprints of the power/leader. The ideal in this paradigm is for leader to assume responsibility and for follower to submit. As leaders emerge who seek to change that paradigm to a balance of shared power, care, and responsibility, those leaders may face an uninformed and resistant community of would-be followers.

As Denmark (1993) notes, “Leaders derive their status from their followers, who may choose to grant it or take it away” (p.350). Followers may not recognize the impact of their contributions to leader and leadership function and formation. More familiar with the power/leader model where their roles in bestowing status often are not recognized by followers nor acknowledged by leaders, followers have no precedent for being included as proactive members except in satellite roles.

Their expectations about leadership or leaders are further effected by their confusion of the leadership concept juxtaposed to the concept of the feminine (Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald, 1998). The contradictory stereotypes—eg leader as directive, objective, definitive, and individually powerful versus feminine as deferent, subjective, inclusive, and tuned to others’ feelings—present antithetical conditions for followers; the common response defaults to setting separate, less highly regarded, standards for women. For example, one study concluded that to be “most favorably evaluated, female leaders should be mindless and warm” (Kawakami, White, and Langer, 2000, p. 61). To be evaluated favorably and also be effective leaders, however, female leaders “should be mindful and cool” (p.61). Followers cannot reconcile expectations of hero leader with expectations of nurturance and care, feminine stereotypes.

The resultant—but decreasing—generally negative reactions to female group leaders (Morrison and Stein, 1985) can constitute a frustrating dilemma for women. For example, Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald (1998) call for high-status members of organizations to externally legitimize female leaders, a strategy toward educating followers about alternative leader paradigms. The paradox lies, of course, in the use of the power/leader influence to bestow

status; whether the practice functions to change followers' perceptions of leader or simply ensconces power/leader more firmly in place by relying on the established power to dictate value may depend on the subsequent actions of the power/leader to incorporate new leader practices themselves.

Leadership as a balance between power (rights) and care (responsibility) mediated by regard and shared dignity requires followers to play complementary roles, enacting rights, responsibility, and regard for themselves, others, and the leader. "Followers themselves take on leadership functions in their decision making, goal setting, and maintenance of the leader-follower relationship" (Denmark, 1993, p.350 citing Hollander, 1992). Followers attend the accountability and evaluation of leaders and the leadership function, fully sharing responsibility. The resulting proactive leadership function emanates from the collective rather than the individual, an experience unfamiliar to many followers and one not found in the power/leader paradigm. Some followers may have had experiences where power/leaders have presented the rhetoric of shared responsibility only to discover the "way things really work" remains fundamentally unchanged. Their resistance to the care/leader style may root in their previous, repetitive leader experiences.

The prevalence of the power/leader model, the duplicity of rhetorically adopting a shared responsibility model and then practicing power, and the confusion of juxtaposing feminine with power/leader collude to prepare actors to become "followers." The emergent conundrum for women consists of the triple-duty they must undertake as leaders. They must educate and train followers to become true collaborators; they must establish status to do so without reifying the power/leader idol; and they must adjust "end" goals to include provisions of care heretofore relegated to the category of "irrelevant."

*The Problem of the Assigned Leader* A common response to the leader conundrum is to presume to confer status on a woman by assigning her the position of leader. Assigning a woman into the position of leader operates with the assumption that position will bestow credibility and status (a tenant of the power/leader mind set) and that leader may then regulate style and interaction. Consistently, research reveals that appointed women leaders do not fare well (Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald, 1998, p.210). In particular, men do not positively evaluate appointed women leaders. If women do not conform to feminine stereotypes, they also will receive negative evaluations both from women and men. The same is true if assigned women leaders take traditionally male positions.

These negative evaluations double bind women; the higher their status, the more likely they are perceived as empowering (Denmark, 1993). To achieve the high status where she might be perceived as empowering, a woman may not deviate from the cultural stereotype of feminine nor can she take a male position. Yet to affect the change in paradigm, she needs to be perceived as high in status. She is left to achieve that status without engaging a hierarchical style of power/leader (which would be taking a traditional male

position and a position antithetical to either “feminine behavior” or a balanced leadership style). Women achieve status as effective leaders with the mindful, cool style (Kawakami, White, and Langer, 2000). The familiar pattern is not surprising, then, that many women in high status positions have assimilated their care/leader styles to a style that reduces warmth to accommodate the dominant paradigm.

*The Problem of Context* The expectations and predilections embedded in the social context set power conditions and effect the climate in which leaders emerge and leadership occurs. Influence strategies also derive from that context (Kezar, 2000). Masculinity is accepted both in male and female leaders but femininity is effective only when it appears in males’ behaviors. Even within that context quality, subordinate females will perceive leaders less effective if they display feminine behaviors (Hackman and Paterson, 1993). Conversely, autocratic female leaders are evaluated negatively by males (Bongiorno and David, 2003). The overall effect of these conditions, both situationally in a given context and longitudinally over a woman’s lifetime of career, is to “substantially reduce the number of women who successfully attain positions of high authority in the work world, especially in occupations and contexts not culturally linked with women” (Ridgeway, 2001).

Women’s choices within contexts fraught with these contradictory demands depend on women’s decision-making systems. Gillett-Karen (2001) contends that women have a different way of measuring moral behavior, and that measurement results in different leader conduct. She acknowledges that beliefs about women as leaders are changing but that “we are still a phenomena that warrants separate study” (p.167). Women may more highly value the personal—that is, Kawakami, White, and Langer’s “warm” or “cool,” relationships and the process of maintenance of relational coherence. The feminine qualities of leader may operate differently from the more familiar masculine qualities pursuing power rights—often rights in economic terms—that differentiates rather than connects. The relationship between those feminine and masculine qualities lies at the crux of decision-making strategies.

Both connection within one’s personal realm and differentiation within the public realm comprise critical components of a single dialectic. One way to envision distinctions between these balanced halves is to conceptualize feminine as a force to monitor and promote care and responsibility toward the integrity of connected relationships among individuals in a collective and to conceptualize the masculine force as one to preserve separate individual rights as a means of monitoring and maintaining justice toward of the end of a coherent society. Rather than functioning as dialectic between what the culture has deemed masculine and what the culture has deemed feminine, the two dynamics operate as one system within another. The feminine force operates within the rules of the more pervasive masculine force, a relationship that precludes consideration of each dynamic as equally valuable and viable. Introducing the expectation of shared dignity within the dialogical interaction

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between the two creates the means to negotiate an effective balance of power/leader and care/leader.

### DIGNITY AS METAPHOR FOR LEADERSHIP

It is characteristic of mankind to make as little adjustment as possible in customary ways in the face of new conditions; the process of social change is epitomized in the fact that the first Packard car body delivered to the manufacturer had a whipstock on the dashboard. Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown* [1929] pt. VI, ch. 29.

traditional power/leader metaphor began more than a decade ago with mainstream advocacy for empowerment. The change continues with more recent work citing “transformational” leadership, its label forecasting the immanent paradigmatic transformation. Even “servant leadership” has been examined. All these developments may be steps toward a balanced power/care/leader concept, but each carries with it lineage of the traditional power/leader expectations.

Power and status to the less powerful, e.g. “The most effective leader is able to empower those who are least empowered themselves” (Denmark, 1993, p.351). Although the one in power in this scenario is compelled to share that power, the perspective remains a hierarchical one, albeit a hierarchy with a compassionate and benevolent powerful being at the top. The “one-up providing for she who is one-down” philosophy is couched in terms of “sharing,” although it operates at a linear, transactional exchange, even a sliding diagonal exchange, rather than an interactional and dialogic exchange. Empowerment literature says leaders “provided direction and vision” or facilitated “the awakening [in the other] of what was innate in the person” or found that “seeing growth in someone else was their [leaders’] reward” (Muller, 1994, p.80). Empowerment presumes at its base a benevolent power meted out at the leader’s discretion.

Women leaders (Eagly, Johannesen, and vanEngen, 2003), approaches the metaphor of leader as shared dignity but still retains trappings of “powerful gives to the not-so-powerful.” The powerful continues to be the center of the concept although some might argue more subversively so. For example, seven of the nine critical components Yoder (2001) cites about transformational leadership connote power dynamics naming transactional rather than interactional, one-down, hierarchical qualities: vision, inspiration, role-modeling, intellectual stimulation, empowerment, setting of high expectations, and fostering collective identity (p.824). The remaining two components, meaning making and appeals to higher order needs, may operate in ways more closely related to

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the notion of shared dignity. Theoretically, meaning making emerges as a one-across, dialogical, interactional event, that is, an event that evokes input and resource from both participants. The last component, the appeals to higher order needs, also approaches the notion of share dignity because it indicates actions based on principle.

but servant leadership retains the status of power. Schueler (2000) writes about

“servant leadership where leaders remove obstacles and free up resources to help people perform their jobs to the best of their abilities” (p.30). The servant leader sets down the objective and then clears the way for others to make their way as they choose toward that objective. In addition, the objective of the action may belie its use. Servant leadership was deemed successful at one health facility because it produced “highly favorable patient satisfaction scores, decreased employee attrition, and financial outcomes” (Schueler, 2000, p.29). Goals of the leadership remain focused on certain ends and those ends support the power/leader rather than the care/leader or power/care/leader metaphor.

Model reveals dimensions and combinations of dimensions suggestive of leader and

leadership as shared dignity. Servant leadership at the University of Chicago Hospital “helped revolutionize the culture of our hospitals” and improved “success factors. . .[such as] critical thinking and situational judgment” (Schueler, 2000, p.30). The interactional, relational dynamics of situational judgment, for example, identify this leader metaphor as beginning to develop characteristics related to shared dignity.

## ENACTING SHARED DIGNITY

a positive relational regard co-constructed and perceived by both (or all) participants. Pursuing principle rather than consequence, the shared dignity as leader metaphor may transcend human dignity, encouraging the social plateau to a higher order. Leadership, even leadership at a local or personal level, is enacted cognizant of a universal context where dignity must be made explicit and purposefully maintained. Toward this state, focus on dialogical interaction, on principle rather than consequence, and on blending paradigms may illuminate means toward enacting shared dignity.

*Focus on Interaction* Accomplishing leadership or character of leader by combining the masculine power/leader and feminine care/leader may result in the domination of the power/leader paradigm unless the leader metaphor also includes mediation by shared dignity. Power sets self as beneficiary; care sets other as beneficiary. A combination of the two may yield power as dominant. As Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald (1998) indicate, social reform is necessary to fit these feminine and masculine models together. Reform will



entail reframing concepts both of leader and leadership. Fitting the models together to enact leadership as shared dignity means refocusing purposive attention on the shared, dialogical interaction itself rather than on individual personas or on the relative accumulation or loss of leader status. Expectations for mutual monitoring of accountability (Schueler, 2000), which may initially generate relational instability to be expected at any moment of change, with practice may offer useful, interactive insight toward reform. A focus on accountability for the supportive nature of the dialogical interaction rather than on the status of an individual's power within that interaction may provide a strategy for achieving both shared dignity and the blending of these complementary masculine and feminine paradigms.

*Focus on Principle Rather Than Consequence* Leading by using the principle of shared dignity enjoins leaders to privilege principal over consequence. Kawakami, White, and Langer (2000) unintentionally describe implications of acting by principle when they distinguish mindfulness and mindlessness in leader behavior. “[M]indfulness is perceived as genuineness and mindlessness as nongenuineness. . . . [A] woman who is genuine is situated in the moment and has a process orientation rather than a preoccupation with the outcome of her actions. . . . Genuineness would be operationalized as something state-based, rather than trait-based. . . .” (p. 52). The authors explain that a leader “fixated on the outcome” and concerned about the success she can attain by playing her role, then, will be perceived as acting mindlessly; Kawakami, White and Langer have shown that mindless acts generate negative interpersonal effects. Fixation on outcome translates to a perception of a leader as mindless, engaging negative interpersonal interaction.

information, one perceived as based not in the trait of the person—a trait such as being powerful—but in the state of the process of interaction. Drawing the distinction of mindful and mindless from Kawakami, White, and Langer (2000), the mindless act, then—the one based in outcome or consequence—is perceived as nongenuine and is received negatively. The mindful—or principled—act is perceived as genuine and is received positively. The mindful leader is “situated in the moment” (p.52) and acts without rigid constraints of “past distinctions” (p.52). Focusing on the principle rather than the consequence may help transform the communication climate within which a leader operates from a more resistant, negative one to a more positive, open one.

*Blending Paradigms* Evans (2001) writes that because women are “outside” the loop, they are well positioned to change the leadership paradigm. Engaging a metaphor of leader and leadership as shared dignity offers change, one part of which is toward making explicit a context able to support leaders of many different styles. The importance of that context prompted women leaders in

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one study (Blackmore and Sachs, 2000) to turn their interview conversations away from qualities of leadership, which was the intended topic of the research, toward the circumstances of the changing situation with regard to leadership, a topic they asserted to be more important than leadership characteristics. The message from these women leaders demonstrates the value of context and the fluidity of the present moment where change may occur.

consistently advocate means for women to blend the masculine power/leader behaviors into their feminine care/leader repertoire. The burden to leverage change may fall to women and men who recognize the value of blending power/leader and care/leader behaviors and who recognize the need for shared dignity as the medium within which this blending may occur. Privilege of class and race provide more opportunity for some women leaders than others; nevertheless, women leaders in all capacities can improve the quality of leadership, increase the value of leader, and enlarge the shared care and responsibility for action among followers by blending the masculine and feminine and enacting shared dignity.

Feminine and masculine may require cognizance and reflectiveness on the parts of either males or females attempting the change. Stereotypically, women may struggle to reconstruct their expectations of their own behaviors. A common adjustment involves reframing responsibility and care, being careful not to adopt a fallacy of perfection or a fallacy of causation. Acting as a responsible, caring leader need not translate into an objective of perfection, that is, successful care for everyone concerned. Aiming at perfection can lead to deference or inappropriate responsibility taking to ensure absolute links of responsibility or care. Recognizing as myth the idea that perfect communication in all contexts is possible helps leaders conceptualize care and responsibility in useful and functional ways that can operate in tandem with power, rights, and justice.

*Consequence Among Women Enacting Care and Responsibility* Believing that their behavior can “cause” effects for others may deter women leaders from enacting rights or justice in appropriate balance to care and responsibility. After a lifetime of socialization to attend the connection dimension of relationship, these leaders may overestimate their abilities to induce responses or feelings from others. Reframing interaction as shared dignity can recalibrate the mutual responsibilities of interactants and reduce the over extension of attribution of cause.

*Intervening cultural irregularities;* for example, because the masculine is powerful does not mean all men are or feel powerful. That discrepancy generates complex power/care leader communication decisions—especially for women whose

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power may be assigned or suspect—in any given interchange. Ethnic women, long conditioned to help ameliorate the discrepancy experienced by ethnic men between their social roles as men and their conflicting roles as ethnic minorities, face yet other complexities in achieving a dynamic balance.

*Navigating this particular change requires skill to maintain the dialectic* At times, the purposive emphasis of one or the other is critical to the overall effects of both. For example, overt explication of nonverbal messages—nonverbal being the communication dimension that carries relational meanings—has been shown to significantly effect a group's communication climate and even its treatment of particular topics. Metacommunication may be used to make explicit and overt the relationships in the power/care dichotomy. Such explication can be defeated however, by followers' predispositions because metacommunication often is interpreted as caring and a powerful. Managing the power/care dialectic can require sophisticated use of shared dignity as the medium for these complex maneuvers.

Care/power dialectic mediated by shared dignity can elicit readily expressed cognitive concurrence. As evidenced in research, however, enacting that same dialectic often does not elicit that same concurrence. In fact, blending the feminine with the masculine in an atmosphere of reciprocal respect requires a stalwart commitment by the leader to this principled end; the resource and reserve necessary in light of personal investment and seemingly small progress toward its achievement can dwindle. Nevertheless, women and some men seem to be making a small headway toward a model of leader as shared dignity.

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