

Feminist Leadership Roles (and Modern Libraries)

The patriarchal aspect of society has not lessened over the eras, regardless of the few strides that women were able to take in terms of gaining the right to vote and work in a broader variety of environments. Historically, men were largely the group that had the social privilege to work in a wide variety of professions, earn higher wages and easily acquire positions of leadership within their communities and companies. Conversely, members of the female gender did not, and continue to struggle to, have the same advantages and freedoms. Traditionally, women were assumed to be less intelligent, capable of working in fewer fields, and interested only in homemaking and childbearing. The role of the woman was inside of the house, while the man was able to be a citizen of the world. This inequality led to many necessary movements in feminism throughout history as a role imposed by society, each wave of which pushed for women to gain more rights and expand into positions of leadership. Although the issue of equality is a symptom of an unbalanced society, the role of libraries within this issue is surprising. As proponents of equality and forward thinking, libraries must strive to set examples for their communities in terms of education and leadership.

The role of women has been changing throughout history but not without struggle. To best understand the relationship that women have with leadership, it is important to first consider the history behind the standing of women in society. Women were the gatherers and bearers of children in the early era of human history, leaving the men of their community to hunt and navigate other athletic, dangerous situations. As time progressed, women still remained in their inferior roles as the gender that could not participate in the stronger aspects of society. During the Victorian Age, it was the societal

belief that women were inferior beings that were prone to fits of emotions otherwise known as “hysteria” (Tasca et. al, 2012). Known to suffer from a “wandering womb,” women were taught to maintain subservience in society, remain in domestic environments and repress any sexual or administrative desires (Tasca et. al, 2012). In summation, women were to stifle their wishes to practice leadership both in their personal lives and as members of the global community. As time progressed into the modern world, women became the homemakers in nuclear families before finally venturing into the workplace in search of self-sufficiency and leadership.

The advent of feminism was brought about in order to press women into a realm where positions of leadership were available, a right they had to fight for. Beginning in the 1960’s with the creation of the National Organization for Women, women rallied to create equality in a system that believed it wasn’t flawed (U.S. History, 2014). In essence, the goal of this movement wasn’t entirely to startle the public with displays of burning undergarments or unshaved flesh, but to call attention to an ongoing issue and gain the ability to exert agency in their lives. As bell hooks (2010) states: “Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” Feminism is a movement towards women being automatically granted the same autonomy and opportunities as men.

The contemporary feminism movement continues to evolve and work towards true self-governance for all women, moving away from the whitewashed versions of feminism that do not acknowledge struggles that non-normative women face. Though white women have gained many rights, the struggle still continues in many ways for women of color, women with disabilities and transgendered women. Kimberle Crenshaw

first coined the term intersection, in relation to feminism, in her 1989 article that tackled the issue of minority women being unfairly represented within feminism, a movement that intended to work in the best interest of all women. Intersectional feminism, then, is a response by the movement to further refine the quest to introduce women to positions of leadership, stability and power by demarginalizing the women who did not traditionally fit into the normative expectations of society (Crenshaw, 1989).

The backlash to feminist leadership and the occurrence of women moving into a realm that was dominated by males throughout the great majority of history has been vast. Terms such as “feminazi” and “angry feminist” float around freely, attached to stereotypes of a surly, unwashed woman screaming in the faces of all men. Feminists are believed to be proponents of lying about sexual assault and creating situations in which they can cry “oppression!” to their benefit. Men’s rights movements have long been the counterparts to feminism, citing that “the primary victims of gender-based discrimination are men - casualties of a society that relies on their sacrifices while ignoring their suffering” (Blake, 2015). In modern society, these positions, though coming from a place of concern towards the male gender, serve to stifle the opportunities to leadership that women struggle to maintain.

Through these counter-movements, fights to cease state funding to domestic violence programs have been considered if the program does not include a faction for men. They rationalize this effort by claiming that the sexual influences exerted by women continually separate men from freedom and success (Blake, 2015). Responding to the notion that feminism is a theory that revolves around a hatred of men, Hilde Lindemann,

a renowned philosopher that focuses on bioethics and feminist philosophy, stated in a 2012 interview that:

It's a great mistake to see feminism as a war on men. Men aren't responsible for the subordination of women – they just benefit from it. It's not politically useful to set men up as the enemy, because that alienates people whom we need as allies. And it perpetuates the victor/vanquished, master/slave relation that's the whole problem in the first place. If the gender system is ever to be dismantled, it won't be by declaring war on men. It's much better to affirm lots of differences among people without insisting that differences have to be ordered into power hierarchies (Lindemann, 2012).

This sentiment is similarly shared by bell hooks (2010) as she explains that feminism is not a movement that is built off of hating man, but instead working to equalize the exchange between the two genders. She writes: "by naming sexism as the problem it went directly to the heart of the matter. Practically, it is a definition that implies all sexist thinking and action is the problem" (bell hooks, 2010). These two explanations, in combination, allow the definition and goal of feminism to encompass the issues pertaining to women's rights without alienating the male gender.

Feminist leadership, as defined in a 2012 presentation to the L.E.A.P conference by Heather Lysa, is a response to the "general agreement that women historically have more barriers to becoming leaders than men do" and that "leaders can promote social change." This definition is important to reflect upon, as it does not involve usurping all men from their positions of leadership and wantonly replacing them with women. While women move into leadership positions, it is integral to understand that feminist leadership insists mutual respect between genders, races and age ranges. As quoted by Lysa, bell hooks stated in 1994: "everyone's presence and participation must be valued," lending value to the concept that feminist leadership and female positions of power are

not only an equalizer but will bring about a greater societal change to the benefit of all parties involved (qtd. in Lysa, 2012).

Creating equality in the workplace through a new wave of leadership is integral to community development. Barton states that “feminist leadership is about social justice, about advocating for women and other who are marginalized, and about attending to injustices” (qtd. in Lysa, 2012). Empowerment in one aspect, such as allowing women to freely pursue positions of leadership, empowers a range of groups through a ripple effect. Minorities will be empowered through viewing women governing their own lives and succeeding at their roles as managers, directors and business owners. Representation is key in feminist leadership as it is a direct way to advocate for individuals of all sorts to overcome past obstacles and injustices to serve in positions of leadership. As Ciulla (1995) states, the role of a leader is not to maintain structures of oppression but to “exploit tension and conflict within people’s value systems and play the role of raising people’s consciousness.” With marginalized individuals moving into positions of leadership, it is possible to speculate that positive social change will be achieved through the change in “consciousness” that communities will experience through these new leaders.

Speaking to the issue of being both a female and minority member in a position of leadership, Alicia Fedelina Chávez, an Associate Professor at the University of New Mexico, has spent the majority of her career trying to bring light to the disparities that exist between genders and different minorities when it comes to leadership roles within academia and the community at large. In a chapter titled “Women and Minorities Encouraged to Apply: Challenges and Opportunities of Cross Cultural Feminist

Leadership in Academe,” Chávez (2010) reflects on the experiences she’s faced in her life that demonstrate the need for intersectional feminist leadership.

A major issue with the dearth of feminist leaders is the lack of diversity that can be found within these positions and within the community representatives. When an entire system is made up of vastly similar people, it becomes stagnant within the ideals of that specific group. Chávez (2010) stated that, although she was hired for many positions, the professionals that she worked with wanted her “in theory but not in practice.” She writes:

In living within Indigenous and Latina feminist paradigms, I often seem incredibly different to most I work with in fundamental ways as a leader, teacher, and scholar. And though the phrase "women and minorities encouraged to apply" is so common-place as to be almost invisible in descriptions and ads for positions in academe, I find that most of the time, professionals and students around me want my ways of being in theory but not in practice. In practice, my old ways of being are often considered irritating, inconvenient, and unwanted regardless of my effectiveness as a leader, teacher, and scholar or my cheerful, friendly, and optimistic demeanor (Chávez, 2010).

This type of dissonance appears to be the case in many situations, as it is possible for women and other minority members to be placed into positions of power but become gridlocked in opposition from peers that do not understand a diversified perspective or more inclusive alternatives to old practices. Regardless of the level of education, effectiveness and political networking ability that a woman may possess within her leadership role, it is always possible for her work to be dismissed.

In the case of libraries, occurrences such as these are a shame. Despite the fact that libraries are run largely due to a heavily female-dominated workforce, a 1974 study conducted by Margaret Ann Corwin explores and exemplifies the imbalance in male-to-female leaders. Corwin (1974) focuses her study on the period of 1876 to 1923,

documenting the statistics on gender variety within library leadership positions during that time. In 1889, for example, Corwin (1974) found that only five out of thirty-seven state librarians were women. Similarly, it was found that “while men made up less than one-third of the profession in 1900, less than one-fourth in 1910, and less than one-eighth in 1920, men filled over twice as many positions of leadership in national (library) associations than women.” (Corwin, 1974). These statistics, disturbing as they are, are corroborated and reflected within Futrell’s 1985 article, where she states that “the number of women in educational leadership has never been as high as it should have been” and that statistics that monitor the number of women vs. men in educational leadership positions were just as disproportionate as those in Corwin’s 1974 study of libraries. The vast disparity between the number of women working in the field itself versus the number of women holding positions of leadership in the field may be reflections of the time period, during which women were still expected to remain at home or hold simple “female” positions that focused on secretarial work; regardless, this information is still an unacceptable and sobering group of statistics to review.

The need for feminist leadership in all fields, including libraries, addresses the issue of social growth versus subjugation of marginalized identities to dated methods of practice. Breaking boundaries through movements like feminism and a push for feminist leadership creates tension within systems of power and within communities, but these tensions often lead to the betterment of the system as a whole. Being no stranger to maintaining subversive information that may make some community members uncomfortable, libraries must step forward by removing systems of bias against women in leadership positions. To quote Mitchem (2009), “to achieve transformation,

transgressing canons is imperative...We end up working against, transgressing, the ways things are supposed to be including the roles assigned to people of color and women."

By inviting female librarians to hold positions of power, a step in the direction of allowing women to offer new and diverse perspectives. Libraries hold a unique role within each community, serving as a safe space for all people to seek information in.

Within the walls of the library, individuals have access to resources that they may be missing in their homes, including luxuries like the Internet and operating a computer which often get taken for granted. This makes libraries a meeting place for people of different backgrounds to explore materials unhindered and to seek help from the librarians on a plethora of subjects. By seeing women in positions of leadership within libraries, patrons will be able to see themselves represented fairly by the staff at all levels. Similarly, with feminist leadership striving to be inclusive and offer equality to all people, marginalized members may also see themselves represented by those with leadership positions, making a shift into feminist leadership integral to the advancement of the relationship between libraries and communities.

The definition and ethics of "leadership" are broad, leaving interpretation to vary between individuals and to shift as time progresses. Ciulla (1995) noted that "leadership scholars have spent a large amount of time and trouble worrying about the definition of leadership. (For example,) Rost analyzes 221 definitions to make his point that there is not a common definition of leadership. During the 1920s, leadership was defined as the ability to impress the will of the leader on those led; however, in the 1990s leadership was defined as "an influence relationship between leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (Ciulla, 1995). The lack of a stable definition

that persisted throughout time signifies that changes to hone the art of leadership are being made with each generation, allowing for movements like feminist leadership to take place.

Additionally, Ciulla notes that only a few of the definitions-per-year that were outlined can be reasoned to be morally attractive. The leadership skills revealed within these “attractive” definitions revolved around the way these leaders motivated their groups. For example, Ciulla (1995) notes that the terms “impress, organize, persuade, influence, inspire, obedience, voluntary consent, determined by the leader and reflection of mutual purposes” were all implicative of care and were normative to societal standards of decorum because they indicate “a non-coercive participatory and democratic relationship between leaders and followers.” The information stemming from this study lends a greater perspective when comparing the leadership methods of the past, which often relied on definitions that used phrasing like “impressing the will of the leader on those led,” to the direction leadership can take with the aid of women.

Men, traditionally believed to be more level-headed and capable of controlling a business, have developed different characteristics of leadership over time. Though differing from the leadership characteristics that females demonstrate, no set of methods or actions can concretely be held as better than the other when comparing the style between genders. A study conducted by J. Brad Chapman in 1975 illuminates the differences between male and female leadership styles, with offerings of human psychology to explain these differences. While setting the foundation for his study, Chapman (1975) makes an important note by mentioning that “an individual's sex is one factor that not only affects perception of certain phenomena but, based on social sex roles

stereotypes, also defines what behaviors are appropriate in given situations.” This statement effectively outlines the negative outcomes of stereotyping throughout history and especially in situations where leadership is involved, as gender is not a correct indicator of ability.

Both genders are acclimatized to their roles as males or females from an early age and without conscious decision by their parents. It is not uncommon for stores to carry gendered toys, such as baby dolls and kitchens branded for girls versus the building sets and technology experiments advertised for boys. Early conditioning often leads to females “exhibit(ing) leadership behaviors which are significantly more relationship oriented than are those of their male counterparts” (Chapman, 1975). These types of separation emphasize that girls should aspire to positions involving mothering and that boys should aspire to build and rise in societal rankings. Such differences do seem to affect the behaviors of men and women, but ultimately fail to cause any shortcomings in terms of the ability to lead. For example, Chapman (1975) found that women tended to form unions in an obliging manner, pleasing all parties involved while men were “more exploitative and used coalitions to gain individual advantages.” Similarly, Futrell (1985) noted that “negative self-image and lack of motivation are major factors (in women’s underrepresentation). Women often do not receive encouragement or support when they seen leadership positions.” Although the difference in treatment is unintentional, as gender bias has become integrated into the collective subconscious of society, feminist leadership is able to directly tackle this issue by interrupting the tradition of males dominating leadership roles.

This data set regarding the difference between male and female behavior in leadership seems to supplement a study Ciulla (1995) quotes when reviewing that a “1988 Harris poll of 1031 office workers...revealed 89 percent of employees thought it was important for managers to be honest upright,” perhaps alluding to feminine leadership more closely aligning with the preferences of workers, though this does not necessarily mean that women excel in leadership any more than men.

It is clear that the leader needs to constantly evolve as a figure in order to adequately cater to the needs of their subjects. Lipman-Blumen (1992), in the article “Connective Leadership: Female Leadership Styles in the 21st-Century Workplace,” argues that “organizational and political leadership will need to reflect certain behaviors to which females traditionally have been socialized, but many women are being urged to abandon to ensure their occupational success.” The final section of Lipman-Blumen’s statement leads to the important facet of female leadership as it has occurred thus far: women, if they *are* to have a chance at success in a male-dominated workforce, must adhere to the behaviors men in their positions exhibit. The situation of Alicia Fedelina Chávez, a professor whose argument was explore earlier within this writing, illustrates this phenomenon, in which any women who does not adhere to normative traditions is met with opposition. This was the case in the situation Chávez (2010) outlines when relaying the story of her meeting with the president of her university to discuss diversity issues on campus, which ended in his shouting that “(he) only created (her) position as a public salve to those pushing for diversity and that (she) should focus on offering workshops and let real leaders go about the business of making decisions about the university.” Such interactions, it could be assumed, would not take place between two

men in a similar leadership exchange due to the level of respect that seems inherent between males.

The article “Why Patriarchy Persists (and How We Can Change It),” written by Drew Serres (n.d.), outlines the impact that patriarchy has on the interaction men and women have in general and in terms of workplace leadership. “Men often occupy the most important and visible roles (e.g. executives, politicians, public leaders, etc.). Women who do hold these positions are expected to subscribe to male norms.” These male norms, Serres (n.d.) argues, link to qualities such as “power, control, rationality and extreme competitiveness” versus the “emotional expressiveness, compassion, and ability to nurture” that women are believed to possess. As a result, Lipman-Blumen’s (1992) point that “women are urged to abandon (these qualities) to ensure their occupational success” becomes validated.

Unfortunately, the history behind these patriarchal traditions being so well integrated into the systems of society makes change seem difficult unless the concept of feminist leadership being a negative model is transformed. “Dominance of masculine-based leader-manager models in the public sector have prevailed largely because of the legal-rational conceptions of the organization,” Rusaw (2005) writes of the patriarchal systems within the organization of work environments. These conceptions, Rusaw (2005) claims, are detrimental due to the manner in which “the preoccupation with masculine models has ignored the contributions of feminist-based leadership in the public sector.” Such systematic “preoccupations” serves to allow the illusion that male leadership and endeavor produces more favorable and memorable results to persist due to the overall disregard and stifling of women’s contributions and success.

The leader needs to constantly evolve as a role model figure within societies if these communities are to succeed through the course of history. The participation of women in leadership positions, through the use of the feminist leadership theory and model, actively accomplishes a step in the direction of true equality and inclusiveness. It is understood that changing a system of deeply ingrained patriarchy is not an easy task to overcome, but a well-informed society requires leadership to be reflective of the different members of that society. By removing the biases against allowing women into leadership positions, such as believing that their nature against competition, as Chapman (1975) explains, is negative in the business-world, will allow women to be integrated into leadership positions. While men have enjoyed a disproportionate advantage in receiving leadership roles both in and outside of the library system, changes are necessary in order to expand the support available to the diverse communities that branches serve. As a result, members of the community will feel more represented within the dealings of the library and library associations as employment and leadership diversifies. In modern society, feminist leadership will allow women and other marginalized groups to finally begin to overcome the lack of representation that has prevailed in all sectors of the public and business realms.

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