

Women's Educational Leadership Programs: Shatter the Glass Ceiling

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Abstract:

The construct of leadership conveys a variety of images in one's mind. Depending on the area in which the leader is imagined, these visualizations may vary. Militaristic leaders one imagines in uniform, following prescribed policy and a strict chain of command. The individual's gender or ethnicity rarely dominates the position as the entity itself is the central image, with the underlying support of the strengths associated with the organization. Leadership within the political realm in the United States, as the 2016 election has shown, has begun to evolve to a position whereby both ethnic and gender variance have been embraced in such a manner that the sole political voice is no longer exclusively that of a Caucasian male. While these changes signal a clear change in the thought pattern of millions of Americans, one realm of leadership still struggles to emerge with an equal voice in leadership. Ironically, this area is known as Educational Leadership, which purports to educate and train educators to become educational administrators and lead public P-12 schools throughout the country. This paper reveals the existing gaps in administrative leadership for women in educational settings and seeks to help reveal the apparent altered response men and women find in attempting to reach a pinnacle in their career as leaders only to encounter what is often seen as a glass cliff in terms of "pernicious processes such as a lack of alternative opportunities, sexism, or men's in-group favoritism" (Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 1988). Clearly, it is time to disenfranchise such antiquated mindsets, empowering women's educational leadership to rise at all levels, forever shattering the glass ceiling and leaving in its wake an environment of opportunity for all who are willing to respond to the call to lead.

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Educational Leadership programs in higher education have evolved dramatically, but further evolution is desperately needed to effectively confront the differentiation of challenges faced by administrators today. Not since the inception of the single room schoolhouse where the teacher was required to compete every task from floor cleaning to teaching to disciplining, has educator diversity expanded with such intensity that imagining it through a single lens is both antiquated as well as ineffective. Administration programs are no longer about managerial tasks and compliance; they are missioned to lead by example, using best practices and transformational leadership approaches. They must employ the most relevant methods and tactics to ensure that effective faculty are maintained and successful, well rounded students are graduated. This cannot happen without recognizing that the glass ceiling must be shattered, irreparably and permanently. The days of late where women leaders realized lower pay and less impactful positions based on their gender must be actively amended. In order to work toward realizing this goal, it is paramount that leadership programs recognize the evident space existing in leadership programs where exploration of the women's leadership initiatives and strategies can be fully addressed in order for impactful change to be realized.

According to the 2012, "Benchmarking Women's Leadership in the United States" a number of dramatic findings were revealed which limit the effectiveness of and progression of the society that is represented by the populations in the United States. For example, the study found the following, (Lennon, 2013).

- While women are outperforming men, they are not earning salaries or titles to support the elevated performance.
- Women's underrepresentation in leadership roles is not due to a preference for less demanding positions.
- Lack of women in leadership positions is due to a gender bias.
- Abandoning strategies to promote and advance women will result in organizations continuing to fall behind their global competitors.

In response to the evident discrepancies found in both academia as well as the world at large, Harvard University's Kennedy School created the Women and Public Policy Program tasked to "Increase Women's Agency and Impact," ([Women and Public Policy Program, 2016](#)). The program focuses on empowering women within the existing gendered systems in the following ways:

- Establish Quotas
- Modeling Female Leadership
- Women's Legal and Social Control Over Assets
- Industry Negotiation Standards
- Negotiation Strategies for Women

While contemporary 21st Century thought may lead one to presume that women have equal access and opportunities, especially when compared to the oppression of years past when women could not vote, hold office, or own property, the data and research counter this pop cultural myth. Published by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, "The Women's Leadership Program: A Case Study,"

succinctly addresses the fact that “the many facets of academic culture make it difficult to address gender equity in academic leadership” (Berryman-Fink, LeMaster, & Nelson, 2003).

It is in these more contemporary university settings where one finds the first evolutionary footprint for women’s leadership programs in the United States. While profound steps toward progression in the areas of both awareness of women’s leadership and the uniqueness of women’s leadership studies are advancing, there are abundant evidences of areas outside of these social change where an opportunity for women’s leadership is vast and uncharted. In public university settings in the Southeastern United States, for example, minimal exposure to women’s leadership is accessible within those geographical confines. Admirable in their initial efforts to chip away at the glass ceiling, institutions like Clemson University, with a Bachelor of Arts in Women’s Leadership (Clemson University, 2016) and Mississippi University for Women with a newly minted Master of Arts in Women’s Studies, offer some of the few programs in women’s leadership in the Southeast.

In exploring some of the most well-rounded and all-encompassing degree programs offered on Women’s Leadership platform can be found at Columbia University’s Barnard College where they have developed an innovative, full-spectrum program. Labeled the Athena Center for Leadership Studies, the center is missioned “to explore how women lead and how gender affects leadership styles and strategies...to help students prepare to assume positions of leadership at the highest levels of achievement” (Columbia University, 2016). The Athena Scholars Program seeks to create leaders who are “visionary, courageous, bold, globally aware, culturally sensitive, and determined to make the world a better place.” Specific to the Columbia program is its use of the developmental goals which not only seek to “communicate women’s leadership to a global world” but to also “apply and analyze gendered leadership styles and strategies.”

Even in the social construct of women’s leadership as a priori for university dialog, in K-12 school settings, for example, a common misinterpretation is that, given the prevalence of women working in these academic settings that the majority of women leaders are, therefore, women. In reality, only 44% of public school principals with the percentages declining sharply as the positions and power rise (Berryman-Fink, LeMaster, & Nelson, 2003). Furthermore, that same research provides evidence of women’s low stereotypical salary placement by providing evidence that women represent nearly 100% of the teacher assistants, preschool and Kindergarten assignments, which concomitantly represent the weakest salary commiserate. They also represent the lowest percentage, as a gender subgroup, in educational administration, the highest salary commiserate.

In higher education arenas, the insight delivered by women leaders welcomes a heterogeneity of thought that cannot be delivered within the social constraints of a homogenous pool. Furthermore, the heterogeneity in both style thought and presentation have allowed women in higher education to achieve 56% in national research awards and grants to men’s 44% (Lennon, 2013). Unfortunately, however, the data from this source also acknowledge that this accelerated participation does not equate to an expanded role in leadership in academia with women constituting only 28% of the full time professorships. The complexity of academic culture creates a live challenge for the indoctrination of women’s leadership programs with fidelity to ensure that such programs gain both the support and celebration needed. In order to become recognized as both critical as well as essential components of effective leadership programs, especially in the realm of K-12 Educational Leadership where children first witness and model their social constructs for leadership, one must address this key component with

both the tenacity and dedication to ensure that the unique facets are realized and preserved for the benefit and the advancement of humanity. Fortunately, the glass ceiling is beginning to crack and splinter. Empowered women's leadership programs focused on educational leadership strands, in particular, are gaining notice and recognition. Continuing to explore, expand, and appreciate the multi-dimensional tone garnered by the addition of women's leadership programs will allow society to realize the positive impact possible when one's paradigm is adjusted to allow views from alternative perspectives. Ideally, the combination of ideas from traditional leadership practices and innovations from women's leadership strategies can be harmonized in such a manner that the synergy creates maximal effectiveness, efficiency and creativity for the betterment of society, today, tomorrow, and for a future yet to be imagined.

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