LEADING GRACEFULLY
Gendered Leadership at Community Colleges

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Community colleges anchor the largest foothold of women in senior academic leadership among institutions of higher education. Currently, women represent 27% of all 2-year college presidents relative to 18% at baccalaureate colleges and to the 13% of women leading doctoral universities (Corrigan, 2002). In addition, women currently constitute 21% of deans of instruction (chief academic officers or similarly titled positions) positions at community colleges (Weisman & Vaughan, 2002). Since the prime pathway to the presidency remains from the provost or the senior academic affairs administrator, most likely more women will be heading community colleges in the future.

Despite these encouraging statistics, women are still underrepresented in the upper academic leadership ranks relative to the number of women in other positions along the administrative pipeline (Amey, VanDerLinden, & Brown, 2002; Glazer-Raymo, 1999) and relative to the number of women students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003). Yet a projected rapid turnover in administrative positions may present opportunities for more women to break through the glass ceiling and ascend to positions of authority at 2-year colleges. Community colleges, perhaps more so than 4-year institutions, face what some call a leadership crisis, as an expected 79% of 2-year college presidents plan to retire in the next 8 years (Evelyn, 2001; Shults, 2001; Weisman & Vaughan, 2002).

In order to facilitate the promotion of women within community colleges, we need to better understand the experiences of women currently leading 2-year colleges relative to men in similar positions. Often strongly held traditional beliefs on what it means to be a leader still rely on a male
norm, making it difficult for women to lead from a more authentic perspective (Curry, 2000). This chapter asks, How do women and men community college leaders construct their perspectives of presidential leadership? Furthermore, do these presidents lead in traditionally gendered ways?

**Theoretical Framework**

Nidiffer (2001) posited an integrated model of leadership that blends historically gender-related leadership competencies. Her model argues for a fuller array of leadership competencies drawing from the best elements of models that have favored men in the past, that is, traits of power, decisiveness, hero, and so on; and those that favored women’s attributes, that is, traits of generative leadership, collaboration, participation, and so forth. She argues that when using an integrated approach “the typically female traits are more advantageous than typically male traits. Thus, choosing a man for a leadership role has no automatic advantage” (p. 112). The integrated model of leadership Nidiffer proposed builds on two perspectives of leadership competencies: socialized competencies and acquired competencies. Her integrated model of leadership values the feminine and masculine proficiencies. In contrast, the feminine deficit model discriminates against the socialized or more traditional female competencies, devaluing the very essence of female strengths and approaches to leadership relative to the preferred male socialized norms. Likewise, the masculine deficit model discriminates against male attributes, which come up short when using female strengths as the measure of success.

The study underlying this chapter tests the applicability of an integrated model of leadership theory in practice by analyzing the leadership of sitting presidents. It applies Nidiffer’s (2001) conceptual model of integrated leadership using a feminist standpoint. “Feminist standpoint theories focus on gender differences, on differences between women’s and men’s situations, which give a scientific advantage to those who can make use of the difference” (Harding, 1991, p. 120). Standpoint theory places value on women’s experiences, acknowledges the different experiences of women relative to men, and does not equate difference with inferiority. Hartsock (1987) points out that standpoint theory allows the invisible to become visible. Rather than a simple dualism, standpoint theory “posits a duality of levels of reality of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the ‘surface’ or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which the appearance inverts and distorts the deeper reality” (p. 160). Thus by looking at leadership from the perspective of women, we may discover an alternative interpretation of the construction of leadership, one that moves beyond the traditionally male
attributes often associated with leadership theory and toward the integrated model espoused by Nidiffer.

Literature Review

In framing this research, I drew upon three areas of literature. I began with the history of leadership in community colleges, then expanded those historical foundations using current findings of pathways to the community college presidency, giving particular attention to female forms of leadership as it relates to male-normed traditions, including the role of work-life demands. Finally, I considered and incorporated the influence of gendered language.

Historical Foundations

Twombly (1995) reviewed four eras of community college leaders. From 1900 to the 1930s trait theory dominated, epitomized by the “great man” theory. The leaders of the 1940s to the 1950s sought to become independent from secondary schools and forge an identity of their own. The 1960s–1970s detailed the present-day version of the community college in which colleges served the function of educating transfer students, meeting local economic needs, and educating a vocational workforce. Typical leaders exemplified strong, dominant leadership representing male norms of leadership deemed necessary during those pioneering days. Finally, the 1980s–2000 focused attention on resource issues, employing models from business that emphasized efficiency and strategic planning. These eras of community college leadership drew heavily upon male imagery, traits of strength, power, and dominance. Recent writing on community college leadership, however, argues for the need for a more cognitive approach to leadership, one that places greater emphasis on acquiring skills in learning to lead than on the acquisition of a particular set of traits (Amey, 2005).

Further study by Amey and Twombly (1992) deconstructed language to study leadership at community colleges over time. Their review illustrated that a group of White male scholars and practitioners reinforced their own ideals of the typical leader. Having a White male as the norm leaves women and people of color struggling to conceive of ways to authenticate their own leadership, as it does not fit the images portrayed in the community college literature.

Current Pathways

Recent research (Amey et al., 2002) noted that while the pathways to the presidency in community colleges have become more varied, historical patterns prevail. The majority of college leaders obtain their positions after a
trek through the administrative hierarchy from faculty to department chair to dean to vice president of instruction, finally arriving at a presidency. Further study by VanDerLinden (2003) argued that women face barriers in promotion, given their inability to move and the lack of advancement possibilities within their current institution, hence limiting their promotion options and, ultimately, the number of female presidents. Women with family responsibilities and those who are part of a dual-career couple with spouses whose careers are coequal or elevated from their own face burdens not experienced by their male counterparts because women are less able to move. Men with families, on the other hand, more often will have a wife who either does not work or whose career is subservient to their own, thus allowing for more flexibility to take advantage of promotions offered through a move to another institution.

Regarding family issues, women face even further differentiated experiences than men do. Recent research (Mason & Goulden, 2004) has problematized these differences, highlighting that having a family may slow the career progress of women faculty—most often the stepping-stone to administrative ranks. Notably, women presidents (all institutional types) altered their job for children 25% of the time compared to men (2% of the time; Corrigan, 2002). Moreover, women in heterosexual relationships still handle the majority of household chores and are the major child care providers, establishing a differentiated and added work experience that their male peers do not share. The inevitable tensions and choices between the primacy of family versus career, or of having a family at all, inserts another barrier for women who would seek advancement.

Female Versus Male Forms of Leadership

Previous research on women and leadership (Helgesen, 1995; Rosener, 1990) argued that men and women lead differently. Literature on women’s leadership assumes more sharing of power and a participatory orientation to leading (Chliwniak, 1997; Townsend & Twombly, 1998). For example, successful women leaders operate within a web of inclusion, rejecting traditional hierarchies and relying instead on a web of relationships (Helgesen). Likewise, traditional male leaders rely on transactions of rewards and punishments, whereas women focus on transforming individual self-interest into meeting institutional objectives via increased participation and power sharing (Rosener).

Yet other research suggests that leadership may not be so rigidly gendered. For example, juxtaposed with this perspective is the research of Gillett-Karam (1994), which studied men and women presidents at
community colleges. Although her findings mirror current demographics outlined above (age differentials between male and female presidents, experience differences, etc.), she concluded that leadership actions were strongly tied to situations, not gendered differences. Eddy (2003) found that while campus members spoke about their presidents in gendered terms, perceiving that men exhibited authoritative leadership and women generative leadership, the actual leadership behaviors of the presidents were not stereotypically gendered. Jablonski (1996), despite research that has shown that women have more generative leadership orientations (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988), discovered that although women presidents believed they led in more participatory and collegial ways, faculty members at their colleges disagreed.

Furthermore, although conceptualizations of college presidents’ approach to leadership have changed from the “take-charge,” “great-man” approach to an emphasis on participatory and shared decision making, an approach more often associated with women leaders (Chliwniak, 1997), the faculty members in Jablonski’s (1996) study were conflicted about what they desired and expected in a leader. On the one hand, faculty members wished for more participatory leadership, but on the other they also wanted strong, aggressive leaders—the latter attribute most often linked with male leadership. Thus, women often are caught in the double bind of trying to meet male norms while also meeting the expectation of their gender.

Maintaining such limited definitions and images of leaders leaves women with a narrow band of acceptable leadership behavior (Amey & Twombly, 1992). A dilemma for women involves the choice they must make between adhering to traditional norms and expectations based on male ways of leading or enacting a more personally genuine and therefore perhaps a more female construction of leadership (Amey, 1999). Glazer-Raymo (1999) referred to women who opted to adapt as they move through the male-normed system as “playing by the rules” (p. 157). A dangerous option, playing by the rules reifies the strict male-female conceptions of leadership. When faced with this double bind, women cannot win. This deficit model of leadership positions women as constantly judged against the male norm, facing the choice of attempting to meet these expectations by rejecting a sense of self. Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) added two more options for women—reconciliation and resistance. Reconciliation involves striking a trade-off for women, in which they recognize the limitations of the male norms but work within the system for change. Resisters, on the other hand, reject this Faustian bargain and strike out against the boundaries that male norms establish with active opposition.
The Influence of Gendered Language

Language construction also plays a central role in the enactment of leadership on campus. As with research on leadership, communication scholarship asserts that women communicate in gendered ways, with men serving as the norm (Tannen, 1994). Male norms of communicating allow for men to be directive, assertive, and in charge, whereas female norms expect women to be agreeable and nonconfrontational to allow for broader participation. For instance, women speak in a manner that offers suggestions rather than absolutes, often doing so in the form of questions (Spender, 1981).

West and Zimmerman (1987) posited that men and women are “doing gender” in following traditional gendered schemas along sex lines. In this scenario, individuals are penalized for acting in a manner inconsistent with their gender. Thus, an assertive or dominant woman is viewed as acting outside her proscribed gender role and is penalized versus a man acting in the same manner who would be rewarded. As a result, individuals lock themselves into activities supporting the socially acceptable behavior for their gender. Doing gender builds on creating differences between men and women that are then “used to reinforce the ‘essentialness’ of gender” (West & Zimmerman, p. 140). Valian (1998) describes this concept as gender schema. “Gender schema assumes men and women are different based on a combination of nature and nurture and as a result, each gender manifests different behaviors in various aspects of life” (Nidiffer, 2001, p. 109). Language then acts to reinforce what it means to be a male or female leader based on essential features, with the male and female speakers themselves reinforcing certain kinds of gender identity (Cameron, 1998).

The influence of male language usage affects organizational culture (Morgan, 1997). Of particular concern for leaders is how organizational culture creates social reality. The use of language feeds into the creation of reality in determining what is valued (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Thus, an organization with male language norms consequently creates a male-normed reality, ultimately setting the bar or definition of success as imbued with male attributes. Gilligan (1982) and Helgesen (1995) suggest that male domination of normative behavior also occurs in organizations. “Women moving into [institutions] are generally seen as interlopers, and are at greater pains to prove that they belong” (Eckert, 1998, p. 67). Language use serves to reinforce the cultural ideal of male hegemony within organizations where a patriarchal frame of values interprets reality. Despite research on the role of male symbols of privilege within organizations (Spender, 1981), gendered issues still remain (Ropers-Huilman, 2003). Thus, while we in academe are aware
of having organizational reward structures that value men and profess a concern for the advancement of women to leadership positions, our institutions of higher education still harbor gender discrimination practices and barriers to advancement. The recent coverage of the treatment of women in the academic sciences (Fogg, 2005; Wilson, 2004) exemplifies and reinforces that gender issues remain for women on college campuses.

Research on the perceptions of male and female leaders highlighted that “leaders were viewed more positively when they used a leadership style that was typical of and consistent with their gender” (Griffin, 1992, p. 14). Thus, leaders were rewarded for doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), which reinforced historic assumptions of male and female leadership characteristics.

Summary

The history of community college leadership builds upon and establishes male norms as the measure of what constitutes successful presidencies. The impact of more women entering the presidency shifts the historical definition of the type of leaders needed. In addition, present circumstances and the anticipated press to find new presidents to replace retiring chief executives at 2-year colleges demands that we rethink what it means to be a good leader. On the one hand, a historical dominance of male norms of leading creates a gauge for what it means to lead a community college. On the other hand, the contemporary push for more participatory leadership and collaboration values more female norms. The literature serves to provide a means to investigate and discern more clearly the distinctions between male and female attributes of leading, and how a theoretically gender-integrated style of leading might manifest in practice.

Methodology

For this study, I interviewed a total of nine community college presidents. Site visits were conducted at all locations, with face-to-face interviews occurring with all participants, as well as with campus members from the leadership team, faculty, and support areas. In total, I conducted 73 interviews. A broad range of geographic and institutional diversity was represented by the sites; full-time student enrollment ranged from 2,000 to 10,000, with rural and urban campuses represented. Five of the colleges were part of a community college district, but each campus had its own president. The gender composition of the campus presidents was five men and four women, which is an overrepresentation of women relative to the percentages of women leading 2-year college campuses (44% for the study, compared to 27% nationally;
Corrigan, 2002). To discover more about the gendered nature of community college leadership, I employed a phenomenological research method. Phenomenology research searches for the central underlying meaning of an experience, in this case the construction of leadership by community college presidents, and uses data reduction to analyze specific statements and themes for possible meanings (Creswell, 1998). This research methodology focuses upon how individuals consciously develop meaning via social interactions (Creswell, 1998). I also employed a heuristic lens to allow for deeper interpretation of the experiences described (van Manen, 1990).

For this study, I reviewed verbatim transcripts of the interviews for elements that reflected the integrated model of leadership posited by Nidiffer (2001), reading and rereading to obtain a sense of overall themes. I then coded all transcripts for language referring to the presidents’ leadership, reviewing their statements to discover how the participants constructed their ideals of leadership based on the gendered schema of the model. Categories for male and female language included sentences and phrases based on male descriptors or inferences, such as authoritative, directive, hero oriented, or male norms. Coding for female language included sentences and phrases using language invoking ideals of generative, participatory, consensus building, relationships, or based on a female norm. Because my own bias in terms of what constituted male or female language presented a potential limitation, discussion of findings with a peer reviewer addressed this issue and aided in category validation. Thematic groupings put assorted statements in separate categories that indicated various perspectives on how the participants framed leadership. I identified patterns and categories using what Marshall and Rossman (1999) referred to as “reduction” and “interpretation” (p. 152). The process of reduction allowed for sorting data into manageable portions with similar themes. I brought interpretation of meaning to these categories and insight, given previous research and the voices of the participants.

Findings

Several findings emerged after analysis of the data. First, gendered stereotypes were evident on some level for all participants, with individuals playing out the expected roles of their gender. Second, whereas some of the women presidents noted differentiation of experience based on their gender, none of the men did. For men, their gender was invisible, thus supporting the idea that male imagery remains the hegemonic norm. Finally, the integration of leadership appeared to involve one-way movement, with men still operating from an authoritative perspective but using relationship skills mainly to
obtain results—not relations. However, when the women spoke of their leadership being participatory, in reality their descriptions involved more use of hierarchy and directives despite the value they placed on relationships. Thus, while the data supported Nidiffer’s (2001) notion of an integrated model of leadership that values male and female competencies, the beneficiaries of the integrated model favored men, not women. Men were rewarded for using female competencies involving relationship skills, whereas the leadership women exemplified relied more on traditional male norms of authority at a cost of a less-authentic female leadership style that integrated competencies.

**Playing Gender Roles**

Previous research (Getskow, 1996; West & Zimmerman, 1987) emphasized how roles tightly link to the expectations others have of individuals based on their gender. This study reinforced such gender schema. For example, two of the women spoke specifically of seeking their presidencies when their husbands retired and their children were on their own, reifying the female expectation of caring and nurturing one’s family. One woman, when speaking of how she delayed entry into administration, noted:

> It was just clear to me at that point when my son was just 3 or 4 years old that I could not take an administrative position and protect what was important to me, which was the stability of my marriage, my son’s growing up in a stable environment. So, the only thing I did, I left the associate dean’s position, took a sabbatical, got back into teaching.

Each woman in the study also reported a circuitous route to the presidency, often with stop-outs for family obligations or lack of support for advancement.

Another gendered difference in routes to the presidency involved mentoring. Often, men receive more mentoring than their female counterparts (Hall & Sandler, 1983), establishing another facet of what constitutes male norms for leadership. One participant noted the lack of mentoring she received versus what she assumed her male counterparts were obtaining. Indeed, all of the men in the study commented on the help they received during their careers from mentors. Two men spoke specifically of mentoring they received from women. The approach both of these men in turn took in their presidencies highlighted more work on relationships and communication within the organization, presumably learned from their women mentors, than the approaches of the presidents who had only male mentors.
In an act of reinforcing gendered stereotypes, one of the female presidents stated:

I spoke in my first convocation piece that I was particularly well suited to this challenge [a cut in campus budget] because we had raised a family on a single faculty member’s salary, since I didn’t work when our children were young, but I was always pinching pennies and managing, so I was very well equipped for this job, but it’s tough.

This woman president specifically called attention to her female gender during this event of public discourse. Moreover, in describing this female president, one campus member said, “The president is willing to use her authority, but she uses it fairly gracefully.” The feminine descriptor of “gracefully” reifies the gender of this president, distinct from ways campus members described their male presidents. The men in the study did not refer to their gender with respect to their family roles; the exception being one male participant who commented that his wife was a librarian and when seeking his presidency, he was conscious of the need to find a location that could accommodate her career.

The double bind women face when they act outside their prescribed feminine roles was evident for the participants. One participant recalled an event that shaped her desire to ultimately become a president:

I can remember a night that I met with the president and I was interim dean of academic affairs at this point. I was going to apply for the permanent position and I met with him. I did apply for the position. But I met with him and I don’t even remember what got us started but there was something that he wanted to do that I had a strong disagreement about and I told him that in my firm way [laugh] which was probably too blunt and bitchy. And he called me a bitch! I remember walking out of there, I mean I held my own, but I walked out of his office and said, “I can’t work for this man. And what’s more, I probably can’t work for anyone. I’ve got to be my own boss.” And what does that mean? If you’re not in academia, I supposed you go into business for yourself. If you are in academia, you look for a presidency. And that’s when I knew I was going to have a rocky time.

In this instance, when a woman tried to assert herself, she was punished for acting out of her prescribed feminine gender role. In a similar situation a man may have been called strong willed or tough, which would have reified the prescribed male attributes. Most likely, he would not have been demeaned or categorized in the same manner.
The men in the study often spoke of their leadership from the perspective of being the hero for the institution who arrived to save the day. The image of the hero-leader originates in male imagery and reinforces the gender schema of male leaders. The ideals of men’s being authoritative and ultimate arbitrators of campus direction were clearly manifested in the interviews. One male president commented:

The campus faculty were ripe for change. Ripe is my choice of words. They were ready. They were simply looking for someone to say, “What should we do?” So, there was receptiveness to any idea and a willingness to try things. . . . I think that to a great extent they were so appreciative that we wanted to go somewhere that even if they didn’t agree with where we were going that overcame their disagreement. And I’m still riding that sleigh.

Evident in all of the presidents’ comments were images of being the person in charge on campus. Regardless of the amount of participation by campus members, there was a sentiment that the “buck stops here” at the desk of the president. As the highest positional leader on campus, each participant took his or her role as the final arbitrator of decisions as given. The role of ultimate decision maker is rooted in male norms and characteristics.

**A Women’s Perspective**

Putting women’s perspectives at the center, how did these women talk about what it means to be a leader? As noted, only the women in the study commented on their gender with respect to their leadership. Other themes in their views on leadership included relationships, campus fit, community, family and timing, and a lack of career planning.

All the women participants held relationships in high value. For example, one of the female presidents commented, “One of my division chairs says that I’m Jimmy Carter, [since] I don’t like to think the worst of people.” These women worked closely with campus members as a critical and core component of the way they led. Several described how they spent the first months on the job hosting various small-group gatherings to meet with different campus members. While some of the male presidents also commented on doing the same form of beginning introductions, it appeared that such acts of relationship building held different intents for men. For the women, it created a sense of their individual ownership of the process of change on campus. They often used the words “my plan” when reviewing change initiatives, indicating a more personal connection with the process in which they were tightly invested in the outcomes. The men, on the other hand,
seemed to look to relationships not so much on an individual level, but rather as a collective lever to use in enacting the broader goals of change. The men exhibited less personal investment in the process, instead interacting with more detachment. Men did not tie outcomes as closely with a sense of personal responsibility. Rather, they attributed any missteps to process or context.

The women in the study often referenced a sense of “fit” with their campus. As one president noted about her experiences as a candidate in the search for her current position:

Each time I left [one of the interview meetings, I was] feeling pretty comfortable about it and pretty relaxed, and saying to myself, “If this is the kind of fit that I think that it is or that it feels like, then it will go forward and be successful. And if it’s not, then one of us is not meeting the other’s needs and this is probably not a place where I could be successful.” You know, it just felt good.

Another woman in the study defined fit a bit differently, not merely noting the fit with college but rather the region. She commented:

I fell in love with the state. I never really spent any time in the West. I was born and grew up in New York and New England, and that was it. I was struck by how much I liked the arid West. I like the sunshine, I like the absence of a lot of insect life, I like that dry, sterile, sort of environment. And there is wildlife, there may not be a lot of insects, but there’s a lot of other kind of wildlife. We walk every night. Two nights ago, we were followed by a couple of coyotes. So that happens. So my reaction was not so much to the school but this is where I want to live, this part of my life.

Statistics indicate that women hold fewer presidencies and obtain them later in life. Only one of the four women in this study came from a previous presidency, and it was within the same district. Given the lack of opportunities for multiple presidencies, these women gave added consideration to the positions they took. The fit of the position and the locale became justifiably critical in their choices.

In contrast, three of the five men in the study had held previous presidential positions. With greater odds for subsequent presidencies, men did not reference the qualities of fit and locale as critical considerations. Only one man noted the location of his institution: in his home state near his elderly mother. But, he also commented, “I would have gone other places but don’t tell my mother that. She’s convinced I came back here to see her.”
The women participants all spoke of the role of community on the campus. Attentive to building relationships, they sought to foster a sense of cohesiveness and oneness. One woman president commented: “I think the lack of community is a concern for me here and I’m trying to see what we can do in terms of traditions.” Another president described her intentions for community on campus:

I’m really trying to maintain regular face-to-face contact with staff. . . . you know bonding and making sure we involve people so that they meet, everybody knows each other and really can share informally—really that’s one thing which I think is important that they understand, [that] they know who we are.

Women valued their roles in creating a sense of connection on campus. In contrast, although men spoke of relationships on campus, they focused on maintaining open communication and awareness of strategic goals, not on fostering an interpersonal connection or a sense of oneness.

The role of family and timing of career moves influenced career progression for the women participants. The issue of dual-career families also had a bearing on the timing of their moves into the presidency. For the women such a move was easier to make at the end of their husbands’ careers. The men participants, in contrast, did not note that their career choices were based on the obligations of their partners. Family and working spouses presented barriers en route to the presidency only for women. They clearly were rooted in gender. The existence of barriers and ways that women overcome such roadblocks ultimately influenced how these women lead and what they view as important issues, both for themselves and for others in the college.

A lack of career planning and intentionality about becoming a president were evident for all the women participants. As one of the women presidents noted,

It wasn’t something that I felt strongly about [getting a presidential position]. I mean, I was considering it and I guess I kept thinking what harm would it do to apply for this position here and what harm would it do to pursue the next step. It was kind of like, well, I’d take one step and see if that felt okay and then take the next step.

Since women did not always intentionally think about ascending to a presidency, they did not necessarily expose themselves to opportunities that would help them prepare for leading a college.
Men, on the other hand, sought their presidencies through encouragement of mentors, through promotions throughout the years, and often with an intentionality that was lacking in the female participants. Two of the men participated in the League for Innovation in the Community College presidential sessions, while another obtained his doctorate in the University of Texas at Austin program that holds a strong track record for training presidents. Those men who had strong mentoring also exposed themselves to opportunities that allowed them to obtain skills—the acquired competencies noted in Nidiffer’s (2001) model—relative to their female counterparts. The gender schema evident for the women leaders was primarily invisible to them. Men did not comment in specifics about their gender or on the influence of gender on being campus leaders; they operated instead with an assumed right to the position and an unquestioned link between their gender and position.

One-Way Integration

In moving toward an integrated model of leadership, an underlying tenet is the acquisition of attributes of the opposite gender. For men, this means acting more collaboratively and allowing for more participation on the part of campus members. For women, integration means exhibiting traditional male characteristics of power, authority, and directives.

The findings from this study indicate that the male participants have begun at a minimum to use the language of collaboration and teamwork. Of course, not all the men in the study exhibited more generative forms of leadership in the same manner. At a minimum, however, each of the male participants spoke of the value of relationships with campus members and the role that listening to input from others had on their own decision making. For instance, one president, who exhibited many “herolike” characteristics, also noted,

> Just because I had the vision [didn’t mean I could] implement it. I needed to do something before that. I needed to develop a consensus. Consensus is the wrong term. I needed to develop strong support for that from a group of faculty and staff.

Yet although men valued relationships and gave attention to individual voices, ultimately they did not seek true collaboration. Rather, they used collaborative behavior to garner support for achieving their intended and outlined presidential goals.
However, two different male leaders did show a more authentic style of collaboration. One described his leadership as follows:

I see my leadership style in ways similar to a team. A team like baseball in that I play multiple roles. At the same time I’m the team manager. I play that role. I’m also the coach. So I’ll take people aside and be a mentor. At times I’m a player. Not in today’s vocabulary—I play in a band but I play the game with them, meaning we are all there, we are doing that. I’m also a cheerleader. When things are going well I don’t need to wave a flag oh, I’m the president no, no but I’m cheering. Keep doing that and everything and I’m also a scout. I go out and I check out what is happening there. You notice [in] all of this I didn’t mention the team owner. I’m not a team owner. It’s ours. We are all in this together. And we have various roles.

Interestingly, when a campus member reflected on this president’s leadership he noted, “My sense is, and I’m not speaking for myself, but my sense is, my reading of this is what [campus members] say, they feel there is a leadership vacuum at this campus. They don’t feel that the president is taking charge and getting us the direction that we need.” The language of this description highlights the penalty for male leaders who act outside their prescribed gendered roles: Campus members perceived the more collaborative orientation of this male president’s leadership as less effective.

The other male president with a more cooperative orientation understood the way in which his position as president created distance between him and campus members. To combat this, he held individual meetings with each campus member when he first arrived at the college. As a result, he commented, “No one’s afraid of me.”

Importantly, the integrated model of leadership promoted by Nidiffer (2001) assumed that women operate from a more feminine perspective of leadership: one oriented toward the female values of democracy and participation. The data from this research do not support this notion. Instead, the women participants appeared to obtain their positions of power by enacting the very male features that have been traditionally held in esteem. Namely, the women worked within the hierarchy and assumed power by position. They relied on traditionally female characteristics of relationships and participation in ways similar to their male counterparts.

Each woman spoke of ways in which she used the hierarchy of the organization to gain control and also spoke of instances in which she used directives. As one female president noted,
Well the organizational structure was terrible. There were any number of serious problems. The most serious was that I had deans that I did not trust. . . . The first thing I did was to group areas under two vice-presidents. The appointment of the two vice-presidents was right away, like the fall of my first year, when I realized I needed to get some space. I needed basically to get some control.

Other women participants noted how they used shifts in the hierarchy to better align the organization to oversee changes. These women used the bureaucracy to set up a structure they could exhibit influence over. Key in the reorganization efforts was the placement of trusted individuals in positions of power.

One of the women set up a system of program review in which various degrees were labeled “In Jeopardy,” implying a risk of elimination if they did not improve their cost-effectiveness for the college. Other women in the study exhibited similar directives.

Only the president who led a newly forming campus exemplified a truly cooperative leadership style. Here, with no preestablished organizational norms to follow, she could use the features of a learning organization to begin to build the structure of the new college. The core team used a consensus-building model to make decisions on how to structure the new college and its systems. The president commented that collective learning was a goal: “Almost all the decisions so far were done in a collaborative way so we really reach consensus on those as we developed it.” She feared, however, whether she could keep this format of decision making operating once the college was fully staffed and operational. As she said,

One of the things that I fear a little bit. . . . One thing is to get them to accept our vision, and have them understand it and to believe it and embrace it. A bigger challenge might be for us to be open to the new ideas that they will bring. And not to just say well no, you can’t do that because that’s not the way we planned it.

The fact that only this one woman participant truly exemplified leadership from a more authentic female perspective might be attributed to context. She was charged with creating a new college versus assuming a leadership position in a college already established. While other women had the daunting task of infusing collaboration and participation into the traditional, hierarchical structures they inherited, she could root these attributes in her organizational culture as the new college formed.
Discussion

Nidiffer’s (2001) integrated model provides a strong foundation to consider how to get the best of both male and female leadership competencies. The visible clues of a leader’s sex may obscure our ability to see true integration, because they serve as the first clue we react to in establishing our expectations of them. These visual cues alert us to what to expect from a female leader versus a male leader based on past experience and socialized expectations of leadership based on gender. Consider the traditional desire for a “hero” leader, who is always male and who lives on in these times of tight fiscal constraints. Our challenge, assuming this continues as a valued form of leadership, is how to get ourselves and others to see a variety of acceptable forms of what a hero may look like.

Women face the difficult double bind of being expected to act according to their gender while being measured against male norms of leadership. Men do not face this same problem. Expected to behave according to the very norms they are measured against, most men are not even cognizant of the benefits their gender provides to them relative to women. For men, their gender is invisible, and they neither address nor comment upon it when they think of their own leadership.

Men realize the value of relationship building, traditionally a female characteristic, but have the advantage of still being seen as the hero at the same time. The men in the study often used relationships to foster and build on their hero image. The women, instead, used the relationships to foster more of a fit within the institution, with an eye toward the development of community. Paradoxically, although women leaders valued relationship building for community, they predominately operated within a directive hierarchy. The integrated model proposed by Nidiffer (2001) appeared to work more to the men’s advantage than to the women’s. A contributing factor to this assessment includes the forms of evaluating leadership. Research by Bensimon (1989) challenged how leadership perspectives might be biased given a male orientation to the conceptual models. When the models themselves are questioned, gender evaluations begin to look different. Thus, evaluating the participant’s leadership based solely on the competencies outlined may have favored male attributes over female even when acknowledging that both types of competencies are valued. Historically, leadership theory originates in the study of men. This creates a dilemma when measuring women against male-originated norms. This shortcoming was evident in how the male and female presidents viewed, defined, and articulated intended outcomes for relationships. Men used
An alternative representation of the model might better address the multidimensional aspects of leadership (Figure 1.1). This model allows for the presentation of the underlying gendered schema proposed by Valian (1998). Valian based definitions of gendered schema on assumed gender differences and behaviors reinforced as appropriate to and associated with masculine and feminine attributes. Depending on past experiences and underlying identity construction, individuals may see themselves along a continuum ranging from male to female. Given that gender is a socially constructed ideal, an individual may be located at different points along the continuum depending upon individual identity construction. Seeing gender as more multifaceted allows for a more nuanced discussion regarding leadership. Similarly, the continuum of attributes that have traditionally been more male or female in classification allows for a range of leadership behaviors. The attributes themselves do not rely on gender but rather on how an individual approaches his or her leadership. Thus, the male leader noted above who believed in a team structure for his organization would be located farther on the female side of characteristics on the continuum. Likewise, the female president who was using the structure of
the hierarchy to gain control would be positioned more on the male side of the range of attributes.

The availability of more dimensions in discussing leadership allows for a more authentic evaluation of leaders. Rather than a simple duality of male or female leadership perspectives, a multidimensional model allows for expanded conceptions of what it means to be a good leader. An individual with a higher male-oriented schema and more male characteristics of leadership would be located in the M-M quadrant of the model. Likewise, an individual with a female schema and corresponding female characteristics would be found in the F-F quadrant. Using the argument of Nidiffer’s (2001) integrated leadership model, individuals within an integrated model would be located in either M-F or F-M. The advantage of the multidimensions within this model is that even within this integrated formation, individuals may be located in a large range of locations. A multidimensional perspective allows for the deconstruction of the dualism often present in conversations regarding men and women and how they lead. Rather than being limited to an either/or situation, or even a blended concept as Nidiffer suggests, a continuum model allows for both genders to lead more authentically. A key to the successful implementation of a more holistic conception of leadership involves rewarding a variety of styles, not just those favoring men.

Conclusion

As the findings from this research indicate, women still do not fully lead from an authentic perspective. We still judge “good” leadership against the male norms of success. Change is evident, however, as highlighted by the woman president in charge of opening a new campus and who uses a more cooperative model of leading. Likewise, the two men presidents who valued teamwork and relationships within their colleges highlighted how male leadership has become infused with the traditionally female attributes of collaboration and participation. Pointedly, each of these men had women mentors. This implies a need to think more critically about the role of intentional mentoring for men and women.

Given the lack of parity in the numbers of women community college presidents relative to men, several questions arise: Are women opting out of pursuit of the highest leadership position since they feel they can be more authentic at lower levels? Are women being shut out of the highest positions because they are not perceived as herolike with the ability to save the day? Do women have to first lead like men to be recognized for advancement?
Once in positions of power, are they able to lead from a more gender-authentic perspective?

The viewpoint of a multidimensional perspective of leadership allows for more choices of what constitutes an integrated form of leadership. In this case, a variety of male and female attributes are recognized as appropriate for and suitable to leading a campus—ultimately allowing men and women to lead more authentically. If we envision the model of leadership more complexly, containing multiple planes of attributes and characteristics, individual leaders may be located in a variety of points within the model and still be effective and genuine. Currently, we might view one of the quadrants as historically more valued, that is, the M-M quadrant, and one as undesirable, that is, the F-F quadrant. The goal is to value more variability of location within the quadrants.

Hiring committees must think more complexly about gender in choosing new leaders. As this research shows, while campus members perceived presidents in gendered terms, the presidents did not necessarily lead in strictly gendered ways. The women employed traditional male leadership in using the hierarchy, whereas some of the men used expanded concepts of teamwork in making decisions. If committees base hiring decisions simply on gender, then community colleges will miss out on potentially good leaders. Given the leadership crisis facing these institutions, we must think more expansively about what it means to lead.

Women are becoming more accepted as college leaders and more numerous in positions of responsibility on college campuses. Deeply engrained perspectives of what it means to be a leader remain rooted in male norms, however. As more women become presidents, it may become easier for others to see women and their leadership perspectives as more typical—if women presidents lead from a degree of gender authenticity. The good news: We are looking at a markedly different profile of presidents now than we did even a decade ago. As the number of women presidents increases, it will help us to envision other ways of leading. In times of crisis, we may still desire a hero to save the day. More and more women, however, are becoming the heroes of their campuses and leading the way for expanded understanding of what it means to lead.

References


