

Book Review: *Women Deans: Patterns of Power*

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Leadership positions in the American workplace are often accompanied by gender imbalance. According to National Public Radio broadcast, two years ago only eight CEOs at Fortune 500 companies were female. A New York University business school professor, Sheila Wellington, gave several reasons for this phenomenon. Two of these were female exclusion from informal male networks and women's jobs tend to be supporting other positions (NPR, 2005, February 23). However, I believe the reason there are so few women in leadership positions in the American workplace is that people have associated those leadership roles with men.

Women and leadership have had a dissonant relationship for a long time because traditional society has restricted leadership to the male population. For this reason, leadership positions occupied by men have been more dominant than female leadership. Looking back on American history, we can observe how the women's movement has sought to gain rights for women for many years. The victory of the women suffrage movement in 1920 was a milestone for women to begin to achieve equality in society. Nevertheless, American society continues to make it difficult for women leaders to advance in certain fields such as medicine, politics, and law that continue to be strongly dominated by men even in the 20th century. Few women could advance and become leaders in these areas in the last several decades. Sandra Day O'Connor, for instance, was the first women justice of the U.S Supreme Court in 1981 and Nancy Pelosi is the first elected women Democratic of the House leader in 2007. Both these women leaders could attain their leadership position in male dominant fields only in recent years.

This male dominance in leadership is found even in current higher education, and women leaders are frequently faced with gender discrimination. However, these female leaders encourage themselves by developing and honing their own leadership skills. Carol Isaac's book, *Women Deans: Patterns of Power*, demonstrates how women deans find balance for themselves both as leaders externally and as women internally. They often build their own leadership skills in an antagonistic atmosphere.

The author explores women deans' leadership by analyzing qualitative interviews. Ten women deans who had been in a supervisory position in academia participated in this study and all of them had at least three years of experience. Five women were full deans who came from male-dominated fields, and another five women were associate deans from female-dominated fields. The author's experience as a reorganized manager in the for-profit healthcare sector as well as her sister's experience as a clinical neurologist who failed to gain tenure in a top-tier medical school (Isaac, 2007) became the motivating force for this study. The author's journey starts with the review of the literature.

The author reviews the previous research done in order to help readers to find women's identity. Throughout this chapter she demonstrates women's roles and their status in academia and provides some information on how higher education female administrators build their careers. In addition, she describes power from a different perspective between men and women, and finally discusses Julia Kristeva who was the only female philosopher in the 60s and 70s to lead the poststructuralism movement. Poststructuralism is one of the approaches the author uses to analyze women's identity.

The responsibilities of women given the title of dean of women in the late 1800s were "to advise, assist, and counsel female students" (Schwartz, 1997, p. 504). The author explains that the deans provided leadership in order to help female students find housing and protect them against the coeducational environment (Isaac, 2007). In some sense, the women's positions were similar to "home economics" (p. 11) for academics. Because the social practice fixed the limits of the deans' role or minimized their ability, higher education characterized by a patriarchal hierarchy marginalizes women. Unfortunately women deans have not obtained "true or honest credit for their accomplishments" (Schwartz, 1997, p. 506) for a long time. As a matter of fact, we can find few women deans such as Marion Talbot, Mary Bidwell Breed, Ada Comstock, and Lois Mathews who "transformed the deanship from the role of house-mother into a profession" (Isaac, 2007, pp. 11-12). Naturally, women's status has been improved with these efforts and changes in society. However, women's rights are still marginalized in higher education administration. The phenomenon that women can hardly gain research funds, have heavier teaching jobs and more service commitments, and still have limits on promotion and tenure (Isaac, 2007) shows inequality in how women are treated. They often still take responsibility for the "nurturing and housekeeping side of academic life" (Isaac, 2007, p. 13). While these domains seem to hinder women's abilities as leaders, they are usually not considered of interest by men in academia. Obviously, this characteristic in higher education disrupts the gender-role balance. As the author discusses, many women administrators have focused on areas traditionally viewed as women's fields such as "home economics, education, student affairs, and other support roles" (Isaac, 2007, p. 15). This tendency is reminiscent of Wittmer's (2001) argument that "men in American society are expected to be in leadership positions whereas women are expected to be in subordinate positions" (p. 174). Furthermore, these women's career preferences are closely linked to their style of using power, which the author called "power-with concept of power which is considered feminine model" (Isaac, 2007, p. 18). Women tend to like a collaborative and cooperative working environment and want to help people, care for their family, as well as run the household. This concept called "reproductive processes" (Isaac, 2007, p. 18) is connected with the third generation of feminism associated

with Julia Kristeva. Previously women had only sought “equal rights and privileges to be just like men” (Isaac, 2007, p. 23), and in this period woman’s role as mother had them at a disadvantage to advance their career. Even in recent years, women who have children achieve tenure less often than men who have children (Williams, 2004). However, what they chose in the patriarchal hierarchy was a changed attitude. Women embraced the situation and welcomed the fact that there might be a chronic interruption to their career. As can be seen, the third generation provides balance to the reproductive and productive desires of women and this had led them to reconcile the need to have both children and a career (Isaac, 2007). The author elaborates on this characteristic through the deans’ interviews.

Following the literature review, the author describes the identity of women deans that is divided into five categories: identity of the masculine, feminine, father, quintessence, and third generation. The deans who have a masculine leadership identity created “followers’ roles, negotiated obstacles, promoted interaction” and their language is filled with “masculine discourses” (Isaac, 2007, p. 36). On the other hand, the deans who have a feminine leadership identity described their role by using feminine language such as “reflecting love, emotional content, resonance, and service” (p. 37) and these languages are inserted into the masculine leadership discourses. In addition, these deans have developed themselves with the influence of their families, particularly their “fathers” (p. 38). However, not all deans were inspired by their family to build up their identity. According to the author, some deans who have an identity of quintessence promote their leadership by “unfolding extensions of themselves” (p. 40), unimpacted by role models. They did not set out, or study to be, nor were they trained, or mentored to become leaders. Instead, their leadership appeared in their own identity and their identity as a leader was built before becoming one (Isaac, 2007). Finally, the author discusses identity of the third generation. Dean Dare, who is a full dean from a male-dominated college, exemplified how she was able to balance both her productive and reproductive desires. During her interview, Dean Dare’s productive role, according to the author, was seemingly in conflict with reproductive desire, however, her productive desire was balanced by developing a reproductive desire like attitude toward service (Isaac, 2007).

Dean Dare’s leadership is an example of a new-age leadership style. For many years, the leadership has existed for male leaders. It has demonstrated “a set of inherently masculine traits that are manifest in a command-control style” (Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan, & Fenty, 1996, p. 29), and thus men could obtain “advantaged social positions of power and status” (Hebl, 1995, p. 186).

As we can see, our society was under the influence of the patriarchal hierarchy for a long time and therefore masculine leadership has been both common and accepted. Moreover, this preferential tendency was matched during the last industrial age, and masculine leadership characterized as “completing task, achieving goals, hoarding information, as well as winning” (Vanderslice & Litsch, 1998, p. 6) is more powerful than feminine leadership in our society. This attitude brought career-oriented women to be “less feminine and more dominant” (Yogev, 1983, p. 221). This phenomenon is reminiscent of the first generation of European feminism, as the author already alluded to, that sought equal rights and privileges to be just like men. However, the new age does not want a top-down leadership style because “organizational paradigms shift from wheel to web structure”

(Guido-DiBrito et.al., 1996, p.30), and with a changing world women are seeking values that exist in women. The new leadership style referred to as “transformational, participative, empowering, generative, connective, authentic, and aspirational” (Guido-DiBrito et.al., 1996, p.29) is emerging through women leaders. They do not try to emulate male leaders and do not consider being feminine to be a barrier; rather they use it sufficiently at their work to succeed. Indeed, most successful women presidents use “the strengths most people expect in a woman, instead of trying to act like a man” (Vanderslice & Litsch, 1998, p. 7). I believe that the deans in this chapter are also examples of the new age leaders. These deans do not adhere or mimic a certain leadership style; instead, they equalize the value of both masculine and feminine leadership styles in order to display effective leadership, and this effort makes them embrace the productive and reproductive desires that once were devalued by a cruel, judgmental society.

The next chapter unfolds between the masculine and feminine, power and powerlessness, authority and service, stereotype and difference, and resistance and adaptability. In this chapter, the women deans from male-dominated professions accomplish their goals with masculine leadership styles, and in particular full deans from male-dominated professions, differently than associate deans, expand their leadership by using a corporate discourse (Isaac, 2007). They want to inspire others as well as “make it happen” (p. 47). In turn, the deans, according to the author, who have feminine leadership style strengthen their power by helping followers, and this attitude is connected with service. However, although these deans have a collaborative leadership style and help people, decision-making is controlled by deans (Isaac, 2007). Consequently, the author shows that masculine and feminine leadership styles are not independent, but interrelated. In addition, the author describes how the deans in this chapter gain power in several different ways by “managing up and down,” “delegating decision-making” or “bring people together and sharing governance” (Isaac, 2007, pp. 55-56). Dean Highe from this chapter, who came from a masculine-dominated college, grafted gaining power on the discourse of the third wave of feminism such as “difference” and “diversity” (p. 56). “Bringing people together” is instrumental for her gaining power. Overall, as the author argued, the deans in this book do not like using the term power, rather they prefer to use influence and try to construct ownership and shared governance. This attitude elaborates the value of service. In the service section, the author finds different characteristics between the deans from male-dominated colleges (MD) and female-dominated colleges (FD). The language of MD deans highlighted service to students while the FD deans concentrated on obtaining power and authority. The author perceives that the female-dominated deans particularly want to retain power, and she formulates this tendency by using expressions such as “had a lot of power” and “was very powerful” (Isaac, 2007, p. 64) that comes from the text of the female-dominated deans. However, we encounter one question: why do they see the need for power and want to keep it? The author implies that the deans from female-dominated college are “compensating for not feeling valued within the academy” (p. 64). I agree with this author’s argument because American women still confront systematic biases as well as the glass ceiling, and continue to set too low a value on women leaders in decision-making positions in many arenas (Trigg, 2006). For them, the power likely seems to be a tool to survive in our society that still disrespects women leaders dedicating their passion to areas that are traditionally viewed as

women's fields. Finally, the author describes how deans resist masculine discourse, and negotiate power effectively. She mentions the term collaboration. Collaboration, which is expressed by men as a weakness can be a strong power (Isaac, 2007), and we can observe powerful collaboration through associate dean Wilson's interview. Her current dean, Dean Langer, had power in her college by collaborating and delegating well to others. "Bringing the data," "using assertive communication" and "managing her anger" (Isaac, 2007, p. 75) led her to obtain a great deal of power for her college. Humor was also an effective communication tool that allowed her to gain respect and power. She had her own unique buffer like humor to moderate sensitive work environments, and as the author mentioned in this chapter she did not utilize men as a ladder of success; instead she trusted and enhanced her self-respect in order for her male colleagues to respect her leadership. Ultimately, the deans developed and enhanced their role and status by using their own leadership that was not fixed by society's attitudes, but was a self-motivation.

Isaac's book provides ways for women deans to overcome the chilly climate towards women and successfully display their own leadership. Historically, women "have been excluded from formal leadership positions, and continue to be dramatically underrepresented" (Trigg, 2006, p. 26), and unfortunately this book reveals that this phenomenon still exists currently in academia. Her sister's suicide and Dean Dulap's experience of a "witch hunt" from her male colleagues show how women leaders are still victimized in academia. However, the author finds through this study that women deans create their own world sometimes by complementing their weaknesses and consolidating their strengths. Therefore, we can observe these deans' efforts to be attuned between the outside and the inside.

Not surprisingly, many women leaders throughout the world still suffer the same gender-discrimination. In particular women leaders in some Asian countries that have a deep-rooted tradition of male superiority and patriarchy are also marginalized. These women take charge of only a few areas that male leaders dislike or do not want. Naturally, this book will provide Asian women leaders opportunities to think how they can develop and apply their leadership skill at their work environments, as well as overcome their circumstances that are similar to western culture. Another significant message that this book conveys is that women leaders can realize their feminine value once slighted by male leaders, and use this at their work environment successfully. Consequently, women leaders can find strengths inside themselves and further develop it to become good leaders. As one can see, this book will help women leaders find their identity. Finally, this book is well studied for readers who are interested in women in leadership. In particular it is recommended to people who want to be good leaders in academia and deans who have just ascended to their position of deanship.

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