Full Length Research Paper

Women's Leadership: Young Men's Expectations of Female Leaders

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Interviews with twenty pre-professional millennial men revealed that while many young men have experienced a male-dominated home life in their youth, their experiences in college and early work have led most to believe that in their professional careers female authority figures will be a normal and accepted part of work. Other themes include the desire for more personal and trusting relationships in the work place and a growing acceptance of all people without discrimination. Implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: Women's leadership, female leaders, Leadership and gender

Introduction

Beginning in the 1960s women experienced massive expansion in access to higher education and leadership positions in American society. With the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and Title IX, new opportunities have been seized and in 2014 there are more women than men earning degrees in all levels of post-secondary education (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011). A critical mass of highly educated and experienced women is poised to move into executive and other leadership positions in all sectors of society. The current study explores whether the future work force is prepared for the insurgence of female leadership, how young men describe women in leadership, and whether they expect to work for a woman. In "Miss-Representation," Newsom (2011) posed concerns that young people cannot become what they do not see. Her documentary presented a media that does not portray women in positions of leadership and thus inhibits society's ability to accept female leaders in the United States. Yet, The White House Project (2009) has found that the vast majority of Americans polled felt ready to accept women in leadership, even at the highest levels.

The authors of The White House Project polled many generations. The millennial generation, those born after 1980, is the youngest generation to begin entering the work force and there are many indications that this generation is bringing new values and new expectations to its communities. Deal, Altman and Rogelberg (2010) studied millennials at work and found new attitudes toward the working environment. They attributed these new attitudes to changes in family structure over the past few decades that include more single parent families, more working mothers, and delayed child-bearing.

Other research has focused specifically on millennial men's bias toward leader identification. Jackson, Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer (2007) conducted a seating chart study that asked undergraduate students to identify the leader at a conference table when one end of the table pictured a female and the opposite end pictured a male. Though young men continued to identify men as leaders, when asked the reason for doing so, they cited the social bias and norms as reasons for their choice while denying any personal bias toward female leaders, "none made comments regarding the superiority of men" (p. 720).

Eagly and Carli (2007) studied the causes of gender discrimination in the United States and found that authority, and particularly assertive and dominant behavior, is considered unfeminine and is often rejected by male subordinates. This phenomenon holds true across many studies, though few researchers have looked at subcultures within American society to identify geographic regions, religious groups, ethnic groups or age groups that might hold variations on acceptable behavior for women in positions of authority.

Kilbourne (1990) indicates that men are more susceptible to stereotypical images of women in the media and thus may be unable to accept women's supervision just as women are poised to assume more management and executive positions. Kilbourne (1990) studied respondents' ratings of women's leadership ability after exposure to ads depicting women as professionals and ads depicting women as housewives. Female respondents rated women consistently and showed no effect of influence from the advertisements. Male respondents showed significant influence from the ad depicting a house wife by rating women's leadership ability much lower after exposure.

However, these studies are aging in a fast-changing culture and bear examination with a new generation of men.

Twenge (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of 71 studies that used the AWS (Attitude Toward Women Scale) and traced the results across time, place and gender, as well as maternal employment and individual experiences of social change. Twenge found that women consistently scored higher (more liberal toward female leadership) than men and the general trend from 1975 to 1995 is one of steady and continuous acceptance of women in authority despite some regional differences. In the three decades since this research, the current study is proposed to determine if expectations of female leaders have evolved to allow for a broader expectation of behaviors. Twenge (1997) indicated that we should expect even greater liberalization of attitudes toward female authority figures.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the question,

How do young men describe their expectations of female leaders?

Method

An understanding of young men's expectations about future supervisors can only be obtained through discussions with participants that allow the young men to tell their own stories. Interviews of millennial men aged 19-24 were conducted to ascertain their expectations of working for a woman in the future. Twenty participants enrolled in a university or community college, but not yet working in their planned profession, were interviewed about their leadership expectations and ability to work for a female supervisor.

Sample Selection

Selection of individuals began with a snowball technique. Access to recent high school graduates through the alumni network of a local high school and fraternity members at a local university in a large Midwest City garnered the first participants who then referred classmates or friends to the researcher. Selection of individuals within this population was affected by willingness to participate and availability. When possible, all interviews and observations were conducted at the participants' home school or place of employment, or a mutually agreed-upon location. Long distance interviews were conducted via telephone or Skype.

All of the participants in this study were born and raised in the United States or territory of the United States and nearly all come from Midwestern states, from Ohio to Nebraska and Wisconsin to Texas. The majority of the participants were white and middle class, though one was Black and came from an inner-city poor background and three others were Hispanic or mixed race. The sample group therefore represents a narrow slice of middle class and Midwestern millennial men.

Data Collection and Analysis

With the permission of the participants, all interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim. Each interview consisted of nine to ten questions and lasted from 15 to 40 minutes. The ultimate focus of female leadership was not made known until during the interview. This tactic was used to decrease the likelihood of participant bias due to the gender of the researcher and to allow the researcher to capture participants' first reactions to questions of female authority. The unguarded reactions to the question of working for a female provided important field observation data.

The sample size was based on saturation of categories, "theoretical saturation is what grounded theorists aim for" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 114). After the first fifteen interviews had been completed the responses of participants became repetitive; no new data were being offered. At that point, the researcher expanded the sampling technique to ensure greater ethnic and socio-economic diversity was included in the sample. After twenty interviews with a variety of young men, the common themes and categories proved saturation with the population's views on the research topic.

The data were analyzed for key words and telling comments in the responses of participants. Initial coding identified attributes of participants and values/attitudes that may affect their acceptance of female leadership, as well as the leadership qualities desired by participants and their negative and positive statements regarding female leadership. The second phase reorganized, categorized and developed axis to identify a central or core theme (Saldana, 2009).

Protection of Subjects

All participants' identities were carefully guarded. Each participant gave his permission to be recorded and all were reminded before the interview began of the right to stop the interview at any point.

Methods used to build internal validity in the analysis included peer review of the interview guide and methodology for validation and consistency purposes. The researcher made every attempt to validate through triangulation of responses within the sample group. Themes and categories identified in the results appeared in at least three of the participants' interview responses, and often far in excess of three respondents; the themes and categories represent a majority of the participants' views.

Results

Attributes

Coding of a variety of attributes was based on participant's own words during interviews and the results are visually displayed in Table 1. For example, a strong identification with one parent was inferred from participant's frequent references to the mother or father (or in one case to grandfather and in another, a

step-father) during the interview. Traditional family life meant that the father was the primary bread-winner for the family and if the mother worked, it was either in the home or in a significantly lower status position than the father and in a position that allowed her to take primary responsibility for the home and child care.

The professional aspiration of each participant was also coded as being a masculine (M) or feminine (F) or gender neutral (NEU) profession. This coding relied on the current social interpretations for professions, so for example, though "lawyer" was considered a masculine profession a few generations ago, this generation has an equal number of women in law school as men, so it was coded as gender neutral. Police officer, military, and electrical engineer remain heavily dominated by men and were thus coded as male professions.

Because many of the participants in this study attended all-male high schools, this factor also became an interesting attribute for analysis. This factor may be a partial cause of one of the themes identified below: New experiences are challenging old expectations. Going to school with women is a relatively new experience for a number of men in this sample. The values of the participants who attended mission-centric schools are also strongly influenced by the charisms of their schools.

Despite a male-dominated education, one of the participants also lived in a home with a professional mother, no father and two sisters. This female-dominated home life was also true for a few other participants. Their experiences watching their mothers raise a family and deal with a demanding career turned out to be formative in their view of women's role in the work place. In some cases, even when the mother took a more traditional role as homemaker, an older sister's successful career offered the same formative experience. One participant said, "I've always had this certain respect for women because I grew up in a house with all women." He watched his mother, who had him as a teenager and gave up her dreams in order to raise him, struggle to make ends meet, working two or three jobs at a time. She has now completed her bachelor's degree, is beginning a master's degree and has published two books and a play. These experiences of strong women at home played formative roles in the attitudes of gender equality. Even those who grew up in a traditional home said, "I have two older sisters and a mother who were really important influences on me." His father was ill much of his life and so his sisters took on some of the parenting in the family: "My sisters have shown me the way…. They challenge me to get better and make something of my life." One of the participants came of age in a fundamentalist Christian home where paternal superiority was overtly taught. This conservative traditional home is marked with two X's in Table 1 below.

Race and religion also played a role in the attributes of this sample group. Sixteen of the participants are Caucasian, two are Black or mixed race, and two are Hispanic. Race shaped participants' views on gender discrimination. A Black man who grew up in inner-city poverty, said,

If I was to draw a distinction professionally between a man and a woman, then I'd also have to draw a distinction between a Black person and a White person, a gay person and a straight person. Or whatever it might be, a tall person and a short person. You know, I have a lot of things that would take me out—this guy shouldn't be here. If I was to draw that distinction then I'd also have to draw these other discriminatory distinctions.

Along a similar vein, a man who struggled with a disability much of his life shared the same sentiment toward discrimination of any kind, "I guess I don't want someone to think that I can't do something. It goes both ways."

While the experimenter did not specifically ask the religion of the participant, it became clear during the interview that most of the men were Roman Catholic, and nearly all came from homes where their religion continued to be actively practiced. Two of the participants indicated that they were active in campus ministry at their colleges. The skew in the sample toward Catholic participants occurred for two reasons. First, the cities where the participants were located, Columbus, Ohio, Omaha, Nebraska and Chicago, Illinois all have high percentages of Catholic residents. More importantly, early points of contact were through the alumni association of a boys' high school that is Catholic and through students at a Catholic university. The non-Catholic participants also specifically referenced their church community as important to them. This attribute had some interesting effects on the data. Though there is no correlation between the participants' religion and concern with working for a woman, when asked if women in their lifetimes would achieve equality even at the highest levels in society, some of the participants pointed out that the Catholic Church would be the exception to their belief in women's access to any office.

This distinction was not limited to Catholic participants. A Baptist who was raised with overtly paternalistic teachings in his home, but was attending a Catholic university, when asked if women would achieve equality even at the highest levels of leadership replied, "I would say yes, but being in a Jesuit school I'm pretty aware they can't do things like be priests and any high ranking religious positions."

Other Christian religions offered a formative experience of female leadership in a participant's young life. One participant's grandmother acted as bishop of his church. When asked about the cause of his acceptance of female authority he said, "My mom was a single parent and my grandma was really powerful. My whole family is church-oriented. My uncles and aunts are pastors. My grandmother, she was a bishop, along with my granddad…. She had a lot of authority."

The last attribute noted in Table 1 is whether the participant indicated concern with working for a female boss. Though two participants did raise the concern that a romantic or sexualized relationship in the workplace would create serious problems, they also noted that this was unlikely and unprofessional so not of immediate concern to them. Only three participants expressed concerns with having a female boss, but even they said that if common ground can be reached then there would be no problems with working for a woman.

Most respondents, 17 of the 20 participants or 85 percent, gave an unqualified and definitive answer, "absolutely not," when asked if they would have any problem working for a woman. One phrased his response more colorfully, "I don't care if they're male, female, brown, yellow, green, purple, whatever they are. I don't care if they have a pink mohawk." The participants' denial of any concern with working for a woman was often phrased in a deeply passionate voice and couched in terms of values of justice and equality for all people, no matter their gender, race or any other characteristic: "If I was to draw that distinction then I'd also have to draw these other discriminatory distinctions."

Four of the participants, or twenty percent, indicated they would actually prefer to work for a woman: "I've gotten along better with women than men. I might prefer to work for a woman." One participant said it is "very impressive for women to step up and take the role. I actually prefer female leaders in organizations and groups."[1]

Even men in male dominant work environments, such as the military, found a female superior acceptable. An airman said, "There would be barriers. I think that the women know they are in a male environment so they're more guarded, careful." He added that he couldn't call a female superior "bro." When asked what he would call a female superior, he answered, "Ma'am."

Table 1:

Participant Attributes and Expected Concerns of Working for a Woman

Strong identification w 1-parent	Traditional Home	Profession	All-male HS	F-run home	Religion	Race	Concern over working for a woman
M	X	M			Catholic	Cauc	Y
Neu	X	F	X		Catholic	Cauc	Y
Neu		M		x	Christian	Black	N
Neu	X	F			Catholic	Cauc	N
M	X	M			Catholic	Cauc	N
M	X	M	X		Catholic	Cauc	Y
F		M	X	x	Catholic	Cauc	N
M	XX	Neu			Baptist	Cauc	N
M	X	Neu	X		Catholic	Cauc	N
Neu	X	M	X		Catholic	Cauc	N
Neu		Neu		x	Catholic	Cauc	N
M	X	Unk			Catholic	Cauc	N
M		M			Catholic	Cauc	N
Neu	X	Unk			Catholic	Cauc	N
F		M		x	Christian	Mixed	N
Neu		M			Catholic	Hisp	N
M		Neu	X	x	Catholic	Cauc	N
Neu		M		x	Christian	Hisp	N
M		Neu		x	Catholic	Cauc	N
Neu	X	Neu	X		Catholic	Cauc	N

Notes: M=male; F=female; Neu=neutral; Cauc=Caucasian; Hisp=Hispanic; Mixed=Mixed race. Traditional Home refers to a two parent family where the father is the primary bread-winner and the mother has primary responsibility for the house and children; the double x (XX) indicates an ultra-conservative home where male superiority was overtly taught.

Based on Table 1, no pattern can be discerned that connects participant attributes with concerns over female leadership. While there are similarities between the three who expressed negative reactions to female leadership, those same attributes are also seen in participants who responded positively. The lack of any pattern in attributes may be due to the homogeneity of the sample group and the very small number of participants who responded negatively to working for a woman.

Three of the respondents, fifteen percent of the participants, expressed initial concern with working for a woman. Two of the participants attended an all-boys' high school and all three expressed strong identification with their fathers. When asked about their concerns about working for a woman, like the participants who had no concerns about working for a woman, they cited their limited experiences of females in the work place. One gave examples of working with female students on class projects when his female partner and he could not seem to find common ground on what needed to happen to complete the project. Another spoke of his mother's and girlfriend's negative attitudes toward work. Both also offered many positive

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[1] Rosette and Tost (2010) concluded that when a woman achieves top leadership positions, she is likely to be rated as both more agentic and more communal by subordinates of both sexes who admire her for having achieved top leadership despite the social biases against this.

experiences of working with women and contradicted their first opinion when pressed for examples.

Values

Millennial men interviewed in this study often expressed strong, though developing, beliefs about justice, equality, human dignity and the changes they expect to experience in their lifetimes. One young man was surprised to learn, during an interview for a job at his fraternity, that the leadership was not all male. He asked the interviewer why that was, "and he said, I'll never forget this, he said our only goal is to hire the most qualified person and if that's a man or woman, greek, non-greek, over-weight, tall, short, whatever, we really don't care. I thought that was really awesome."

Relationships based on trust and respect also emerged as a common value. The young men expressed a desire to protect human life and build strong relationships as well as a desire for a more communal environment as a feminine leadership style: "There are a lot of men who have grown up with pre-conceived notions that there were certain like masculine qualities. . . [an] alpha male role. I think a lot of those myths have been broken." The values expressed by the participants strongly influenced the traits they desired to see in leaders as they enter their professions.

Common leadership qualities.

"I just check in and do my job. I know they're always there, but they leave me alone." This desire for autonomy was always couched in terms of knowing what was expected of them (clear communication) and a desire to be told if their work was not up to par (honesty and openness). Said one participant, "The fact that she actually trusts me and respects me enough to let me take responsibilities has really been beneficial and it's also really allowed me to grow and become a professional over the past two years." He captures the leadership traits of autonomy, professional support and respect. He also spoke of his supervisor being "up front" with him if he did not produce what she expected of him.

Beyond professional support and growth, many also desire a leader who cares about their personal lives and needs. "If you can't get some sort of personal level with your employees, then you won't be able to get them to work to their full potential." A respondent who is serving in the Air Force while working toward his bachelor's degree said, "In the military there's a wingman theory. We're supposed to be a family."

Along with these relationship-building and communal traits, there was also some desire for strength and fearlessness from leaders. A leader "needs a backbone," and must be "good under pressure," but these qualities were discussed in terms of protection of subordinates. Participants also seek a role model in their leaders. "Passion" and "strong work ethic" were words often used alongside words like "responsible," "skilled," and "organized."

Think leader, think male. As participants described their ideal qualities of leaders, their language indicated a strong tendency toward male pronouns. Jackson et al. (2007) found that millennial males continue to identify leaders as male, though they also justified this bias as an indication of social norms rather than personal prejudices. This finding is strongly supported in the current study. Only one participant used female pronouns when describing an ideal leader. He referenced his current supervisor in an internship.

Focused and second stage coding. As the young men described their acceptance of female authority figures, a focused theme of 'Newness' in terms of their post-high school experience of female authority as opposed to their childhood expectations emerged in many of the interviews. One participant described his childhood understanding of female authority to the developing acceptance of it, which though extreme, provided a powerful example of what many of the participants described in more subtle ways. He explained that his mother had not worked most of his childhood but she had recently left his father.

> Because of the culture I grew up in, Southern Baptist female oppressive culture, where I was pretty much explicitly taught, like women can't be in charge of men, explicitly taught that. Then being here and exposed to so many women who are just so infinitely more competent than any man or woman that I've ever seen before. It's really been incredible and really exciting. So I don't wonder if there's not like a newness factor—like I never knew this before and it's really great.... And from another way it's been my mother and me coming out of this culture together at the same time, and so once she's out of it I've seen her be more strong.

While the other young men did not experience quite this degree of transformation, they too voiced a new awareness and appreciation for women's abilities after attending college. "I went to a high school that was dominated by males....When I came to [my university], ... I saw a lot of women in control . . . [it was] all women who run things." He went on to share that his university's undergraduate population is 62 percent female, so he sees many women in leadership positions and this "makes it normal in a way." A young man in physical therapy school where he has experienced dynamic and competent female supervisors in the hospitals where he has interned reflected,

> When I was a kid with my dad in the hospital, we didn't see many female doctors. There were a few, but thinking back I can't picture them. I only ever remember meeting male doctors. But now there are at least 15 attached to the clinic, and only one male doctor of physical therapy and three female.

Another focused theme that emerged was the role of influential women in each young man's life who helped him to challenge his childhood concepts and believe that female authority is acceptable and even favorable in society. For some of the men

it was their mothers or older sisters who became their role models. Other young men who came from more traditional families also named their mothers. "Well, that would be my mom. She was a strong authority figure." He went on to describe her using the qualities he had earlier named as qualities he would seek in a good leader, sensitivity, advocacy for her children, a good listener.

Men who grew up watching their single mothers raise their family while working universally credited their mother with instilling in them a deep respect for the abilities of women. Other young men had experienced a female supervisor in summer or part time jobs in high school and college. These experiences proved formative in their acceptance of female supervisors.

Positive, negative coding. One of the respondents who preferred not to work for a female explained his feelings were due to his mother's negative attitude about work he had witnessed at home. "I would be afraid of their attitude." He also believed that many of his male friends felt the same and that a female authority figure was often called "the B-word." Other concerns raised by those who did not want to work for a woman came from direct experience of working with female partners in college classes. The girls were too concerned with the details and making it "pretty pretty perfect" rather than with looking at the big picture or working for efficiency. Another concern was that the women he worked with often did not fight to ensure their voices were heard. They were "drowned out" by more assertive men in mixed work groups.

The vast majority of responses to female leadership, however, were positive. The young men who experienced competent and impressive female leaders in school and at their jobs described leaders who "get things done," and are "good workers." Most of the respondents argued that gender in no way mattered to them as long as the leader earned his/her credentials. Others suggested they might prefer working for a woman as they tend to be more blunt. "I've gotten along better with women than men. I might prefer to work for a woman," said one participant who cited the superior organization and motivation of the women at school. One young man's preference for female leaders was based on his interest in politics and admiration for Hillary Clinton, who he hopes to support in a 2016 presidential bid. Watching the media and congressional treatment of Secretary of State Clinton during the hearings on the attack on the embassy at Benghazi, Libya, he was upset to see the mistreatment of her,

> When she had the recent health issues, some people said that she was faking it. I just think when she was testifying on Benghazi, she cried during part of her testimonial. Sometimes I notice that when males cry, they're seen as in touch with what's going on and sensitive, but when females cry it seems like they are seen as unstable

He concluded that he would actually prefer to work for a woman as he found it "very impressive for women to step up

and take the role. I actually prefer female leaders in organizations and groups." [2]

The acceptance of female leaders did not, however, blind the young men to the differences in culture that would occur under female leadership, "I think I see different qualities in [my current supervisor] than reporting to a man." She was more likely to share her personal life and discuss his personal life with him. The men in the office discussed fantasy football. The young man, who grew up in a home with all women but attended an all-male high school said, "I enjoy both and I'm comfortable with both."

New experiences of female leadership. Over and over the respondents described their childhood acceptance of male authority and how those views had undergone change in recent years as they entered college and were exposed to competent and dynamic female leaders in the faculty, the staff, and fellow students. Even those who would not like to work for a woman said that at school they had seen good leadership from women. They "get things done." Arriving at a university from his conservative home, one participant said, the women "just blew me away in terms of leadership." These experiences are clearly formative but nascent.

Due to the newness of so many of the respondents' awareness and acceptance of female leadership, they often were able to name the women who helped shape their attitude. A female supervisor in a summer job or internship most often was offered as the cause of a young man's complete comfort level with working for a woman. In other cases, a mother or sister offered the formative experience of female leadership that made any experience of other strong women seem normal.

Growing desire for communal work environments. The most important qualities of leaders, based on frequency of reference among the respondents, included clear communication of expectations, personal concern for employees, autonomy, honesty and openness, skill, responsibility, accountability, and good work ethic. Participants spoke with great respect of female supervisors who helped them grow as a follower and as a professional through trusting guidance. A transformational leader, as defined in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire used by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Engen (2003), is someone who motivates respect and pride, communicates values, is willing to look at problems from new perspectives and works to develop and mentor subordinates to attend to their personal and professional growth. Comparing the qualities identified by the respondents to this definition, the common qualities are much more transformational than they are transactional (provides rewards for good performance and punishment for poor performance) or laissez-faire (manages without involvement). The quality of autonomy identified by

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[2] See Rosette and Tost (2010) for a discussion of women in top management and see Lewis (2000) for effects of women showing emotion in public.

millennial men might be considered a desire for a laissez-faire style of management, but the description offered in the interviews put much more emphasis on the trust, respect, and clear communication that accompanied that autonomy. Participants enjoyed the freedom to be creative while still expecting that their supervisors were available to them if a problem arose and knowing that if their work did not meet expectations, their supervisors would redirect their work. Millennial men also explicitly rejected male styles of leadership—domination and task-oriented efficiency.

A Grounded Theory

Millennial men express a high degree of acceptance of female authority as they prepare to enter professional careers. Their acceptance and egalitarian attitudes are based over and over again on their experiences, mostly positive, of female supervisors, teachers, and fellow students, as well as mothers, sisters, and grandmothers.

Nearly every example offered by young men is limited to women in some very low level supervisory positions, middle management or lower. They do not often see, consider, or include examples of women in top management. But as interns, temp workers and part time workers, the pre-professional millennial man's experience of leadership has in fact been heavily dominated by female supervisors. This early career experience, at a formative time in their lives and careers, could prove to be very important to the way society continues to grow in acceptance of female authority.

The personal experiences of working with female supervisors were reinforced with major news items and events in the formative years of millennial men. In 2007, when these young men were in high school, they watched two women vie for the top political offices in the country, if not the world. During the months of data collection, November 2012 to February 2013, women achieved some notable milestones. The election of 2012 put more women in the U.S. Congress than had ever represented before in United States history. In February, the Department of Defense announced that women, long banned from combat on the front lines, would now be allowed to assume combat roles. This event in particular brought comments from respondents. Social acceptance of women in combat is another indication of growing acceptance of agentic behavior from women. These macro events served as a backdrop to developing attitudes and expectations of gender equality.

Major themes that emerged in this study include new experiences of female leadership at college, awareness of cultural changes in gender expectations as well as growing acceptance of all people without discrimination, the importance of key women in a young man's acceptance of female leaders, and the desire for more personal and trusting relationships in the work place all support a theory that is grounded in the data. Entry-level men experience women in leadership since middle management is often dominated by women. Thus, young men

do see women in leadership. Despite women's current inability to achieve equal access to top management positions, these millennial men will carry their acceptance of female authority figures from their early careers into their later careers, and society will continue a steady and fast-paced trajectory toward greater acceptance of female authority. The physical therapy student said of his experiences with female leaders during his internship,

> The majority of the leadership positions I've seen at the hospital are filled by women. Maybe these are just the positions I've seen. Maybe there are more at higher up positions that are filled by men or more behind the scenes that are filled by men. The ones I'm seeing are filled with women. The head of the nursing department, the head of the outpatient rehabilitation department all that kind of stuff is female. The patient manager on the outpatient [wing] and the RN all are female. It would be easier to count the number of men because there's less of them.

As another participant said, "it makes it normal in a way." Young men do see women in leadership positions and accept them.

Discussion of the Results

To answer the central research question of this study, how do young men describe their expectations of female leaders, the voices of 20 pre-professional young men was gathered. Overwhelmingly (85 percent), these men responded positively to the acceptance of female authority, and they vehemently asserted their beliefs in equality and justice in the work place. They described leadership in terms of communal and transformational traits. Four of the respondents, 20 percent, believed they would prefer to work for a woman. Millennial men expressed universal belief that it was only a matter of time before women achieved full equality in even the top leadership positions.

Deal et al. (2010) suggest that millennials' world view has been affected by different family structures such as fewer two-parent families and more working mothers. This study has shown the profound effect of single mothers' influence on their sons' perceptions of women in authority and equality for women. Perhaps just as important as changing family structure, world events have also been a powerful influence on acceptance of female authority.

Results in Context of Related Literature

Eagly and Karau (2002) theorized that acceptance of women in leadership would only occur if society's definition of feminine behavior changed or if there was growing acceptance of transformational leadership. Ayman, Korabik and Morris (2009) challenged Eagly and Karau's hypothesis with a study that showed that while female subordinates rated transformational leadership as highly effective, and while male subordinates also rated it highly effective from male leaders, they did not rate transformational female leaders as effective. Ayman et al.

explained the finding: Transformational leaders encourage subordinates to be involved in decision-making. This behavior from a man, who holds high status in society, is appreciated. For a woman, it is interpreted as weakness. No such conflict occurs between female subordinates and female leaders. These findings contradict the testimonies of the young men in this study and in many other studies (Dolin, 2008; Jackson et al., 2007; Ng et al., 2010; Twenge, 1997), but paired with the observational research of a mixed-gender campus Mac-user group conducted by Anderson and Buzzanell (2010), the findings raise concern that the values espoused by young men may not match their actions once in the workplace. Male members of the Mac-user group, though claiming beliefs in equality, continued to expect female members to provide food for meetings and maintained stereotypes that belittled female-dominated creative uses for computers.

Geis, Brown and Wolfe (1990) offer an explanation for the gap that could occur between values and actions as pre-professionals enter the work environment. Men who enter organizations where female authority is de-legitimized or poorly legitimized, may subtly be encouraged by the culture in which they work each day to reject female leaders. Cuadrado, Novas, Molero, Ferrer, and Morales (2012) found that evaluations of female leaders in Spain varied depending on the sex of evaluator. Scott and Brown (2006) reinforced the existence of gender stereotypes against female leaders "most notably when the leadership position is defined to be clearly masculine" (p. 231). In his early twenties, a young man's gender identity is still often in the moratorium stage, actively seeking identity, and so can be influenced in a different culture. On the other hand, exposure to competent female leaders in a culture that values and legitimizes their leadership will only strengthen and solidify young men's belief that female leadership is normal. For example, Scott and Brown (2006) found that perceptions of good leadership "depends both upon exposure to a target's behavior and preexisting knowledge structures regarding the traits that underlie that behavior" (p. 231).

Delimitations

The current study was conducted in 2012-2013 among millennial men attending college in a Midwestern city of the United States. The study was specific to an age-group at a particular point in career/education and thus cannot be assumed to be replicable to other generations. Furthermore, there are serious limits to the generalizability of any grounded theory as being representative of an entire generation.

Limitations and Assumptions

The limitations inherent in the study include access to participants of this age group. The sex of the researcher offers another limitation to the study as young men may be less honest about their attitudes toward women leaders when speaking to a woman. Thus, assumptions are that the respondents were honest with the researcher and were self-aware. The researcher assumed the respondents were not unduly influenced by the researcher's gender.

Implications of Results

The findings of this study and the body of literature on the subject reinforce the importance of nurturing work and school environments where women have equal access to leadership and where that leadership is legitimized by authority figures. Women must be seen in positions of authority and their credentials must be recognized and celebrated, particularly by other women in the organization. While agentic behavior is increasingly accepted from women, it is not universally accepted. A woman who makes her voice heard and adopts an assertive communication style will be accepted by some and rejected by others. And while communal management styles are desired by most employees, they can also be interpreted as weakness from a female manager, particularly in masculine environments.

The findings of the current study and others also have important implications for young men. The fact that they will be working for a woman is statistically increasing every year and their success as subordinates depends on accepting agentic behavior from women. Most young men are ready for female leadership, but others may struggle. Finally, for current leaders who want to ensure that the talent of all of their employees is maximized, the creation of a work environment that legitimates female leadership will also be important.

Significance of the findings is also found in the common characteristics voiced by participants as indicative of good leadership. The communal, personal management style built on trust and respect, as well as open communication, is strongly favored by millennials in the current study and other research (Dolin, 2008). Though the current study and others (Jackson et al., 2007) have shown that millennial men continue to think male when considering leadership, perhaps the next generation will break that stereotype as female leaders become more normal in U.S. society.

The results of this study also offer possible new areas for research. A longitudinal study of pre-professional men who declare highly liberalized views of female power could investigate if these values hold in the work place.

Twenge's (1997) meta-analysis of attitudes toward women indicates a geographical difference in attitudes. The participants of this study are Midwestern. Their values may differ from other geographic regions of the United States and the world.

Another sub-culture for future study is male-dominated professions and work environments. Scott and Brown (2006) and Geis et al. (1990) show that in these environments, men succumb to anti-female perceptions. Would the egalitarian views of millennial men change in such environments?

Finally, though this study focused on millennial men, the population could be further fractured and other sub-cultures

(religion, ethnicity, non-professional goals) of the generation may offer greater understanding of their expectations.

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