AdvancingWomen Website

International Business and
Career Community
News, Networking & Strategy For Women

Home | Content Syndication |Business|Career | Workplace | Networking | Web Women
Hispanic Women | International Women | Women in Society| AW Leadership Journal | Money |Lifestyle

Advancing Women In Leadership

Attitudes Toward Women Leaders Analyzed by Gender and Occupations (1984-1998)

Jacqueline Lougheed, Ed.D.

LOUGHEED, SPRING, 2000

"Women and men need to be aware of the attitudes held toward women leaders and
the extent to which gender bias, that set of attitudes which creates a set of
expectations of another's ability by sex, and occupations influence attitudes."

In 1984, responding to the concerns of female graduate students, I founded Oakland University's Women in Leadership Forum. The Forum was designed to provide skill sessions to assist women in their search for leadership positions in education and social service agencies. In addition to the skill sessions, panels of successful women in leadership positions provided valuable insights as well as strategies for success. The design also included a research component to study the prevailing attitudes of women and men toward women leaders with a comparison of leadership styles of women and men. Attitudes are formed at an early age and are reinforced by prevailing traditions and society's socialization processes. It was deemed important to assess attitudes for attitudes in turn shape our reactions and assessments of ourselves and others.

The female graduate students spoke often of the negative attitudes that held them back from realizing their dream of attaining self-actualization through positions of leadership. Sadker and Sadker (1985) stated that gender bias is a set of beliefs or attitudes that indicate a primary view or set of expectations of peoples' abilities and interests according to sex. Problems concerning gender bias exist in the classroom, in the curriculum, and throughout various levels of the educational system. Rosemary Papalewis, Gypsy Abbot, Genevieve Brown and Beverly Irby in their article *Achieving Gender Equity in Education* (1997) stated in effect that educational policy sets that parameters which serve as the boundaries for the educational opportunities of young women and that educational practice provides the quality of the educational experience.

The belief in early popular literature was that women had not been socialized to compete on even terms with men, and women would need to develop new skills to compete. Gradually, interest grew in

situational variables to explain the lower status of women. Roseabeth Moss Kanter in her *Men and Women of the Corporation*, (1977) looked at the organizational settings and attributed women's lack of success not to innate gender differences but to the distribution of opportunities and power. Women's behavior, success, and leadership styles reflected their lack of power and women were being held back by practices within organizations that were antithetical to their success. Sex-role stereotyping powers these practices and historically women have had to deal with these barriers by themselves. In a review of the literature, Adkinson (1981) stated:

> Considerable evidence supports the argument that sex-role stereotyping and sex-role socialization reduce the probabilities that women will seek leadership positions and that organizations will be receptive to those that do. (p. 311)

METHODOLOGY

This article was drawn from a longitudinal study conducted over a fifteen year period, 1984 - 1998, to assess the attitudes of women and men toward women leaders and to compare the leadership styles of women and men. Attitudes were obtained through a structured interview with 17 major questions and 64 listen fores. The perceptual data were split by gender and several statistical procedures were used to analyze the data determining mean scores, standard deviations, and significant differences at the .05 level between the perceptions of men and women.

The data were also analyzed to determine the influence of the variables of age, education, occupations, marital status, and upward professional mobility on perceptions. Using factor analysis the perceptual data were divided into four factors and a key question for each factor was identified, and finally, the data were analyzed to determine significant shifts in perceptions over the life of the study.

Leadership styles were assessed using a Likert scale *Leadership Behavior Questionnaire* developed by J. William Pfeiffer and John E. Jones (Pfeiffer, Jones, 1974). The scale assesses leadership style on the basis of two dimensions, Concern for Task and Concern for People. A score for each dimension was obtained from the individual answers to the questions and then using a Leadership Style Assessment Profile a style was determined.

For the purpose of this article one segment of the larger study was expanded upon and analyzed namely, this article will, first of all, overview the analysis of the key questions for each of the four factors split by gender with significant difference noted. Secondly, an in-depth analysis will be made to determine the impact of different occupations on the perceptions held by women and men toward women leaders. Data gathered will be analyzed first by gender and then by occupations to determine if women and men have different attitudes toward women leaders and secondly if there are differences in attitudes by occupations.

Sample

The sample for this study was stratified to insure that an almost equal number of females and males were represented. It was also drawn to include all age, education, occupation, and marital status groupings. In addition, the sample was drawn to represent a relatively equal number of educators and non-educators. Finally, the sample was drawn from the Detroit Metropolitan Area.

The total sample was 3649 with 1846 women (50.6%) and 1803 men (49.4%). The average age was 42 years for both women and men. Eighty-seven percent of the sample had college degrees and 56.7 % had advanced degrees. Thirty percent of the sample were in business, 10% in medicine, 13% in government, law and public service, 26% in teaching, 12% as school building administrators, and 9% as central school administrators, in higher education and employed by state and county educational agencies. Those in

education represent 47% of the total sample and those in other professions represent 53%. In terms of marital status, 73% percent are married, 19% are single, and 8% are divorced. Twice as many women are divorced and half again as many women are single. In terms of upward mobility, 61% of the women and 54% of the men in the sample state that they are aspiring to a higher position of leadership in their chosen careers. The percentage of women aspiring to a higher position has grown steadily over the life of this study.

ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTUAL DATA SPLIT BY GENDER

As stated earlier, several statistical procedures were used to analyze the data. Factor analysis was used to divide the perceptual data into four factors: FACTOR 1 - Women's Leadership Potential, FACTOR 2 - Discrimination and Women Leaders, FACTOR 3 - Women in the Workplace, and FACTOR 4 - Selecting a Woman Leader. The key questions for each factor are:

FACTOR 1 - Can women be successful leaders?
FACTOR 2 - Are women leaders discriminated against as leaders?
FACTOR 3 - Do women and men have similar professional goals?
FACTOR 4 - If you could select your leader, would you choose a woman?

Participants answered the questions using one of the following descriptors: Strongly Agree, Agree, No Opinion, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Means and standard deviations will be displayed in tables. Using a Multiple range test, Student-Neuman-Keuls, significance will be determined between groups at the .05 level.

In the interview, each interviewee was asked to explain reasons behind their answers to each question. These reasons will be included in the analysis. The first analysis of the data is by gender and is displayed in **Table 1.**

Table 1. Key Questions to the Four Factors with Significant Differences between Women and Men (1984 - 1998)

FACTOR 1 - Both women and men are in strong agreement that women can be successful leaders and as demonstrated by the standard deviations, there is strong agreement among both the women and the men on this question. However, there is a significant difference between women and men with the women being in stronger agreement on this question. There has been very little change of these perceptions over the life of the study except that women have become more positive in believing in their own leadership potential and the leadership potential of other women. This is a very positive shift in perceptions.

FACTOR 2 - On discrimination against women leaders, again both women and men strongly agree that women leaders are discriminated against and there is very little difference of opinion among the women and men on this question, as shown by the standard deviations. However, there is significant difference between the women and men with the women being in stronger agreement on this question. As in the first factor, there has been very little change in perceptions on this question over the fifteen years of this study. When asked why the participants believed discrimination exists, they stated they believed it was caused not by what women do but by traditions and the socialization processes. This is a change over the life of the study in that at the beginning of the study both women and men believed it was caused by the fact that women by their very nature did not meet established norms for successful performance as leaders.

FACTOR 3 - Both women and men agree that women have similar professional goals as do their male counterparts but when asked to explain their response they stated that even though there is agreement that

women want to get ahead professionally, both women and men believe that women handle conflicts and relate to others differently. At the beginning of this study, both men and women viewed these differences negatively; however, over the fifteen years of this study there has been growing belief by both women and men that the differences are positive. This is a very positive shift in attitudes.

FACTOR 4 - Fifty-one percent of the women and 31% of the men would select a woman as their leader if they could make the selection. These percentages have increased gradually over the life of the study. There is a direct positive correlation between having worked for a woman and being willing to choose to work for a woman. From the reasons given to this question, it is clear that women who have been successful in acquiring a leadership position are helping to dispel the fear and anxiety associated with working for a woman leader.

From this analysis, it is clear that the women and men in this sample believe women can be successful leaders, are discriminated against as leaders, that women's behavior in the workplace is different but is being viewed more positively, and that a higher percentage of both women and men would choose to work for a woman leader if they were afforded the chance. Viewing women's leader behavior more positively and being more willing to select a woman leader are positive shifts which have taken place over the fifteen years of this study.

ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTUAL DATA SPLIT BY GENDER AND OCCUPATIONS

The perceptual data were analyzed to determine if there are differences of attitudes by the various occupational categories. Results are shown in **Table 2**. All participants were divided into the following seven categories: Group 1 - Business; Group 2 - Medical personnel including doctors, dentists, and nurses; Group 3 - Those holding government positions, lawyers and judges, and those employed in social service agencies; Group 4 - Teachers in public and private schools grades k-12; Group 5 - Educational administrators in schools as principals and assistant principals; Group 6 - Educational administrators in central office positions as superintendents, assistants and associate superintendents and directors of programs: and Group 7 - Those employed in higher education, and county or state educational agencies.

Table 2. Key Questions by Factors for Female Sample Split by Occupations (1984 - 1998).

FACTOR 1 - As can been seen in this analysis, regardless of occupation, all women in the sample are in strong agreement that women can be successful leaders and no significant differences were found between the occupational groups on this question.

FACTOR 2 - The women, regardless of occupation, believe that women leaders are discriminated against as leaders. On this question using the Student-Newman-Keuls test, significance was found between teachers and women in business and teachers and women as principals and assistant principals in the schools. In both cases, women who are teachers are in stronger agreement that women are discriminated against as leaders than are women in business or as building administrators. Even though significance was not found between teachers and the members of occupational groups 2, 3, 6, and 7, teachers are in strongest agreement that women leaders are discriminated against. Over the life of this study, women teachers have consistently expressed the strongest agreement that women leaders are discriminated against. Many have expressed their belief that the glass ceiling is very much a reality. Other teachers have expressed how difficult it is for women to attain the superintendency. It is interesting to note that women in central administration (Group 6) are not in as strong agreement as are the teachers that women are discriminated against. Perhaps these women having already achieved a central office administrative

position while strongly agreeing that women leaders are discriminated against feel less strongly about the discrimination women leaders face than do the teachers who at this point have not attained a leadership position.

FACTOR 3 - All women are in agreement that women have similar professional goals as do men and they reason that women want success, power, and money as do the men. Again teachers are at the high end of agreement and are very close to strongly agreeing on this question. It is interesting to note that the standard deviations for all occupations are above one standard deviation.

FACTOR 4 - All women, regardless of occupation, agree that if given the choice they would choose a woman leader. However the women teachers are again in more agreement and there are significant differences between the teachers and the women in all other occupations.

It is interesting to note that regardless of occupation, all women in the sample strongly agreed that women can be successful leaders, strongly agreed that women leaders are discriminated against, agreed that women and men have similar professional goals, and the majority of women agree that they would select a women as a leader if given the choice.

Do the men have similar views across occupations when the data are split both by gender and occupations and are these views similar to the views held by women in the same occupational group? Results are depicted in **Table 3** .

Table 3. Key Questions by Factors for Male Sample Split by Occupations (1984-1998)

FACTOR 4 - We again see differences of opinions between the men. Men in business, in teaching, as building administrators, and in higher education etc. barely agree that they would select a women leader if given the choice and men in medicine, law etc. and in central administration for the schools saying no they would not choose a woman leader. Using the multiple range test there were no two groups significantly different between groups. However, the standard deviations for all groups except for the men in medicine are more than one standard deviation showing more variance in response. The men in medicine are in strong agreement with very little variance of opinion among these men that they would not choose a woman leader.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to assess the prevailing attitudes of women and men toward women leaders and to assess the possible differences in attitudes by occupational groupings. When the data were split by gender, women and men strongly agreed that women can be successful leaders and are discriminated against as leaders. The women and men agree that both have similar professional goals, and that they would select to work for a woman leader. When the data were split by gender and occupations, the women regardless of occupation strongly believe women can be successful leaders and are discriminated against. All the women, again regardless of occupation, believe women have similar professional goals to the men and that they would select a woman leader if given the choice. There are no significant differences by occupations on the belief that women can be successful leaders. However, on the next three key questions women teachers see more discrimination than do the women in the other occupational group. Women teachers also believe that women and men have similar professional goals. As noted earlier, there is a direct positive correlation between having worked for a woman and being willing to select a woman leader and more women have worked for a woman in education.

For the men, they are in strong agreement that women can be successful leaders however, men in business have a less strong belief that women can be successful leaders than all the other occupational groups. All the men regardless of occupation believe women are discriminated against and there are no significant differences between groups. In terms of women and men having similar professional goals, there is a split between the men who are teachers, building administrators and men in central administration who strongly agree that the similarities exists and the men in the other occupational groups only agree that the similarities exists. On the last question regarding choosing a woman leader, there are no significant differences between the groups; however, again there is a split with men in business, teachers, building administrators and men in higher education/state/ county educational agencies saying they would select a woman leader. This is in contrast to men in medicine, law/government, and central office administrators in the schools saying they would not select a woman leader if given the choice.

It is clear from this analysis of the data that there are differences in attitudes for both women and men by occupations. This study is providing a clearer picture of the perceptions held by women and men toward women leaders. Even though women and men believe women can be successful leaders, there remains discrimination against women leaders and questions remain whether or not a woman should be selected as a leader. In addition, this study was designed on the belief that awareness is the first step to change and that awareness levels need to be raised. It is the belief of this writer that all of us need to work together to bring about change, for in so doing, the quality of life for all will be enhanced.

REFERENCES

Adkinson, J.A. (1981). Women in school administration: A review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*. *51*(3), 311 - 343.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Lougheed, J. I. (1998). *Fifteen Year Study, 1984 - 1998, Assessing Attitudes of Women and Men Toward Women Leaders and a Comparison of Leadership Styles of Women and Men*. Monograph, Women in Leadership Forum, Oakland University.

Papalewis, R., Abbot, G., Brown, G., & Irby, B. (1997). Achieving Gender Equity in Education. In Wildman, L. (Ed.) School Administration: *The New Knowledge Base*. Fifth Yearbook, National Council of Professors of Educational Administration. Lancaster, PA: Technomic.

Pfeiffer, J. W. & Jones, J. E. (Ed.). (1974). *A handbook of structured experiences for human relations training*. La Jolla, Ca: University Associates Inc. Volume 1(Rev.).

Sadker, M., & Sadker, D. (1985) The treatment of sex equity in teacher education. In Klein, S. (Ed.). *Handbook for achieving sex equity in teacher education*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 145-161.

Dr. Jacqueline Lougheed is a professor at Oakland University.