



ADVANCING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

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Full Length Research Paper

“It’s not enough to hold that power”: The Gendering of Advice in Corporate Discourse

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Abstract: In this qualitative study, we analyzed advice literature written by corporate women for women readers who want to rise in the corporate ranks. Advice is pervasive social practice, and rests on an asymmetry of knowledge between authors and readers. We use discourse analysis to examine how authors of advice books deploy strategies to instruct, encourage, and exhort women to do better. We identified four strategies that expand on the current literature on advice-giving: pronoun choice and alignment, credibility, the assertion of necessity, and the use of metaphors. We found that advice literature re-creates narrow gender categories and dichotomous performances of gender for women to carry out. Rather than offer alternatives, advice to corporate women works toward ratification of gender norms, ratifying a notion of women’s shortcomings.

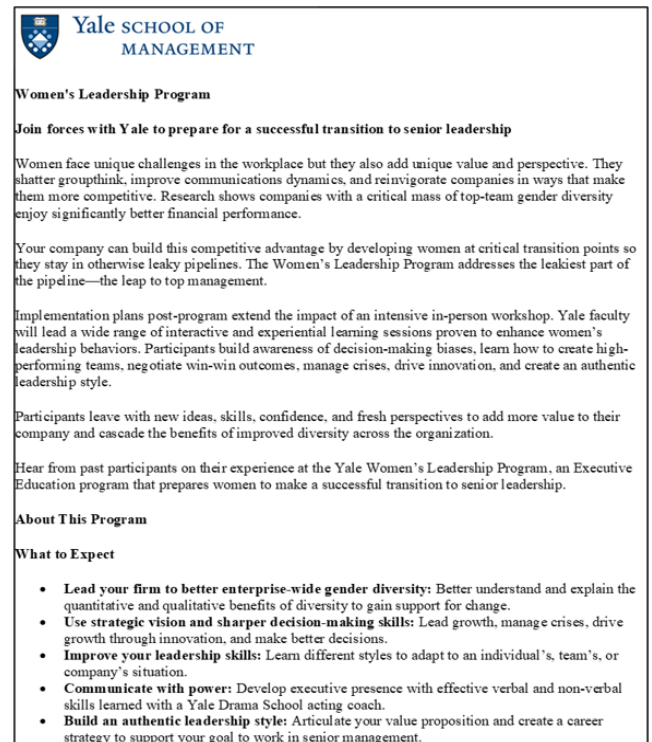
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Introduction

Diverse organizations (e.g., Pew Foundation and LinkedIn), and prestigious programs like Yale and Harvard have created courses, certificates, seminars, and conferences dedicated to women. These initiatives, which fall under the rubric of leadership training and “strategies for women” (LinkedIn), focus on women as subjects of mostly unmet aspirations. What may be counterintuitive about these initiatives is how they contribute to a social discourse of gendered inability. As Ahl (2006) noted (see also Fairclough, 1992), discourse practices, or how we communicate about people, is both indexical and constitutive of institutionalized practices. Because leadership models present the language of leaders as inherently, even innately, masculine, and women’s language as inherently feminine (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, for a discussion of gendered assumptions about language), we considered how leadership discourse emphasizes a putative gender binary, with women as the opposing pole.

Thus, advice to women readers is disingenuous: it does more for the professional standing of expert authors than for emancipation from the constraints of gendered leadership. Fig 1 below, extracted from the Yale School of Management’s Women’s Leadership Program Online (Women’s Leadership Program Online, n.d.), offers insight into our argument.

Introduction Page of the Women’s Leadership Program



The image shows a screenshot of the Yale School of Management's Women's Leadership Program introduction page. The page features the Yale School of Management logo at the top left. Below the logo, the text reads: "Women's Leadership Program", "Join forces with Yale to prepare for a successful transition to senior leadership", "Women face unique challenges in the workplace but they also add unique value and perspective. They shatter groupthink, improve communications dynamics, and reinvigorate companies in ways that make them more competitive. Research shows companies with a critical mass of top-team gender diversity enjoy significantly better financial performance.", "Your company can build this competitive advantage by developing women at critical transition points so they stay in otherwise leaky pipelines. The Women's Leadership Program addresses the leakiest part of the pipeline—the leap to top management.", "Implementation plans post-program extend the impact of an intensive in-person workshop. Yale faculty will lead a wide range of interactive and experiential learning sessions proven to enhance women's leadership behaviors. Participants build awareness of decision-making biases, learn how to create high-performing teams, negotiate win-win outcomes, manage crises, drive innovation, and create an authentic leadership style.", "Participants leave with new ideas, skills, confidence, and fresh perspectives to add more value to their company and cascade the benefits of improved diversity across the organization.", "Hear from past participants on their experience at the Yale Women's Leadership Program, an Executive Education program that prepares women to make a successful transition to senior leadership.", "About This Program", "What to Expect", and a list of bullet points: "Lead your firm to better enterprise-wide gender diversity: Better understand and explain the quantitative and qualitative benefits of diversity to gain support for change.", "Use strategic vision and sharper decision-making skills: Lead growth, manage crises, drive growth through innovation, and make better decisions.", "Improve your leadership skills: Learn different styles to adapt to an individual's, team's, or company's situation.", "Communicate with power: Develop executive presence with effective verbal and non-verbal skills learned with a Yale Drama School acting coach.", "Build an authentic leadership style: Articulate your value proposition and create a career strategy to support your goal to work in senior management."

Figure 1

Though asymmetry is part of all communication (Marková & Foppa, 1991), that of advice is an asymmetry of knowledge: the

advice giver assumes competence in matters of gender, leadership and power the same cannot be said of the recipient. In this way, Yale's initiative rests on an unequal distribution of power. As social action, it proposes to re-direct the communication and actions of women. From the outset, we are told that "women face a unique challenge in the workplace." This is presented as a social "fact," not requiring support. Though this statement embeds an evaluation about gender, challenges and organizational culture (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), its declarative formulation (re) constitutes women as beings with "unique" challenges (Takano, 2005) and thus reifies the very gendered norms and power asymmetries that constrain women's career advancement (Allen et al., 2016). As well, it feeds into a social metadiscourse (c.f. Craig, 1999) of gendered innateness; according to the connotations of uniqueness, the challenges of women are theirs alone. It follows that non-male bodies (which incarnate and enact challenges) need additional help in matters of leadership. The program assumes that leadership, though gendered, does not correspond to women. Leadership discourse constructs both gender and leadership as innate by situating it in males (Baxter, 2010) engaging in "masculine" behaviors. Nonetheless, it presents this as surmountable by way of advice, which is a clear relational practice. The outcome of this double logic is to take male leadership as the standard, and to guide women who aspire to grow professionally to adapt to the standard (Baxter, 2010). In effect the implicit promise is that of transmuting women into male-like beings. And those outside this putative binary are not accounted for. This logic is manifest in advice books written by women for women.

Our argument proceeds as follows. We first, contextualize the study within the literature on advice, identity, leadership and gender in professional settings. We use a synthetic approach to discourse analysis to examine four strategies that corporate women utilize to advise other professional women. These strategies are: pronoun choice and alignment, credibility, the assertion of necessity, and the use of metaphors. They are based on the inherent asymmetry of advice, which is weighted in favor of the advice giver's putative authority. Our conclusion considers how advice may very well be counterintuitive to women's emancipation from gender roles and personal empowerment as leaders.

Literature Review

The Technology of Advice

Jones (2016) explained that technologies are tied to the relationship between discourse and action. Technologies do more than transmit a message, for they construct its meaning via metacommunication: they state rules of action and position bodies accordingly (Jones, 2016). They are "part of larger social practices, which can be considered highly developed "technologies" for getting things done" (p.11). Applying the understanding of technology advanced by Jones (2016), we argue that advice is a technology of gendered inability, for we will

show that it is given in expectation that readers will shift their language and beliefs according to the authors' recommendations.

The authors' technological proficiency is grounded in their "professional vision" (Goodwin, 1994), a term which captures how experts circumscribe the area of knowledge which they then proceed to occupy. Like Benoit-Barné (2020), we consider authority as a relational dynamic: "a property of relationships communicatively generated and negotiated in the process of organizing" (p. 149) (see also Vasilyeva, Robles, Saludadez, Schwagerl, & Castor, 2020). As Cooren (2010) pointed out, authorship and authority are closely connected, first, etymologically and second, discursively, for authors claim expert ownership of their words in the text-reader conversation (Smith, 2005). Because advice seekers "turn to those who they feel might have insights into their problems, whether or not those individuals have credentials" (De Capua & Durham, 1993, p. 529), authors ground their insights in terms of credentials both professional and personal. Because it is common knowledge that workplace advising may improve job performance (MacGeorge & Van Swol, 2018), the authors in our data emphasize their authority in matters of professional identity and leadership. The technology of advice rests on the claiming and granting of this authority. In order to refute it, readers would have to question the authors and the weight of the evidence and experience.

Gendered Identity

Tracy and Robles (2013) argued that people construct who they are, as well as account for who they have been and will be, through their social interaction. Along these lines, sociolinguistic Janet Holmes (2015) noted that "individuals are constantly engaged in constructing aspects of their interpersonal and intergroup identity, including their professional identity and their gender identity" (p. 887). They do so by way of discursive strategies, vocabulary, or grammatical structures (Holmes, 2015). Therefore, women's leadership discourse constitutes and molds women's professional identity. In her analysis of leadership texts, Ahl's (2006) review of research articles about women's leadership takes this very view as a premise. We have observed identity as a contingent identification in which subjects position themselves in a competitive discursive context of gendered leadership. According to Fairhurst (2007), the term "contingent" indicates that identity is always otherwise positioned. The more contingent the field, the more "space of action" the individual has for determining freedom, autonomy, and personal interest. This renders identity multiplicity and "discursively constructed over and over again in particular interactions" (Van De Mierop, 2011, p. 566).

Analyses of leadership discourse have found that leadership is associated with hegemonic behavior, which is in turn grounded in masculinity (Schnurr, 2009; Jones, 2021). The ideal leader corresponds to a masculine stereotype, an obstacle to women and their career growth (Holmes, 2017). With effective leaders' qualities defined as innately male, gender is a ubiquitous aspect of leadership discourse (Schnurr, 2009). Workplace culture has a particular way of understanding gender, and leadership is not a

gender-neutral concept; thus, “masculine ways of doing leadership are typically viewed as normative” (Schnurr, 2009, p. 7).

The Nature of Advice

In the self-help literature we analyzed, advice is by nature implicitly solicited. By this we mean that readers do not directly ask the authors for it; however, the readers (advice-seekers) are professional women who buy these books to reach their career advancement goals. Consequently, these books are produced in expectation of readers’ consumption and solicitation. The following is an example:

Excerpt 1: Own the power (Krawcheck, 2017, p. 2)

I’m here to tell you that you already have the qualities and skills it takes to get ahead in the modern workplace, and, that in owning those qualities, you have more power and potential than you realize. So rather than looking to be “empowered,” this book is going to be about how to leverage our existing power to thrive and advance in our careers in ways that play to our strengths (data omitted; discusses the need for a woman-friendly workplace). Who am I to tell this story? Well, I’ve been around.

In Excerpt 1, Krawcheck spoke in the first person and presumed the readers’ wants. She also relied on her own experiences, research, and observations at the workplace to advise women. In this excerpt, Krawcheck considered power relations and reflects on organizational power relations, specifically when women seek leadership. As Krawcheck mentioned in her book, she is against the notion of women being empowered and believes that women can actively work on diversity issues (women’s inclusion). Women do not need to be given any power because women already have the power and qualities that leaders own. This is at odds with her own power as agent of advice. In line 7, Krawcheck offered the relational terms of the advice asymmetry by noting how long she has been an experienced professional, using the idiom “I’ve been around” to create familiarity with readers. Notice that this phrase is vague; therefore, she relies on readers to believe her account of experiences that led to her expertise and authority.

Linguists have examined advice-giving in multiple contexts, such as everyday conversations, phone calls, and online forums. They have identified the following language strategies: the use of should, imperative sentences, elaboration, assertion of individual choice, expressions of empathy, and introspective questions (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007). As communication scholars and discourse analysts, concerned with the relationship between language and embodied/ material, social action, we expand on their observations by suggesting four novel discourse strategies.

Methods

We examined four best-selling self-help books by corporate authors and leadership coaches. We focused on Amazon best-seller books directed to professional women regarding how they can pursue their career advancement. C-Suite is “a widely-used term used to refer collectively to a corporation’s most important senior executives” (Fitzsimmons, Callan, & Paulsen, 2014). These corporate women advise other women in their career progression based on their experiences and anecdotes.

Our data were drawn from the following volumes: *Lean in* (2013) by Sheryl Sandberg, CCO of Facebook, *Own it: The power of women at work* (2017) by Sallie Krawcheck, CEO and Co-Founder of Ellevest, *How women rise: Break the 12 habits holding you back from your next raise, promotion, or job*, (2018) by Sally Helgesen and Marshall Goldsmith, an international author, speaker, and leadership development consultant and a top-ranked executive coach, respectively, and *Lean out: The truth about women, power, and the workplace* (2019) by Marissa Orr who spent 15 years working at today’s top tech giants, Google, and Facebook. We chose these texts for two reasons. The first is that they are the highest rated books by readers on Amazon.com. The second is that their publication occurred over a relatively short period of time (from 2013 to 2019) which corresponds to an increased awareness in organizations to address diversity in hiring, and the prevalence of a “second generation” gender bias (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013) Notice that all, save from Sandberg’s book, are published following the #metoo movement (2017) – a significant consideration when evaluating advice on gender.

As discourse analysts, we coded by hand; this is a common way to identify features of talk or text for analysis in language and social interaction studies (Fairclough, 1992; Tracy & Mirivel, 2009). In reading, we attended to pragmatic features of the text: lexical features (e.g., metaphors), repetitive phrases (e.g., you need), key narratives that stand out (e.g., rejecting promotions, maternity leaves, being fired). In a discursive approach, these features are understood as strategies (a term that highlights that language is a doing) (e.g., Bartesaghi, 2014; 2021; Halliday, 1985). Advice is defined as a formulation (Hak & DeBoer, 1996) where one party suggests/recommends to another what to do to achieve or change something. Two important aspects are worth mentioning. The first is that giving advice (as we mentioned above) legitimates a functional asymmetry of knowledge between the person who offers and the person who is presumed to seek the advice and for whose benefit the advice is formulated. Second, it follows that the particular change is something desirable that the advice-seeker wants and, therefore, that advice is warranted and sought after. This, though the actual request for advice is never explicated; it is simply assumed, as is the underlying premise of advice as social support (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). In sum, advice is circular and self-validating, for it creates and legitimates its own professional vision.

Discussion

Our discussion of strategies is worth additional context. The term “advice” appears infrequently in our data (8 being the lowest, and 25 being the highest). This, in texts ranging from 206 to 242 pages. It follows that advice is a doing, and rarely explicitly recognized as such. Below, we examine how advice is done.

Strategies of Authorship

We identified four strategies of authorship: pronoun choice and alignment, credibility, the assertion of necessity (you need), and the use of metaphors. As follows, we analyzed different excerpts to distinguish each strategy and how each accomplishes advice-giving and speaks to the authority of the giver to offer it.

Pronoun Choice and Alignment

Because it involves a relationship between giver (speaker/author) and recipient (addressee), pronouns are the currency of advice. Pronoun alignment consists in the authors’ positioning with respect to the issues they discuss. For instance, when authors choose the pronoun “I,” they focus on their embodied authority, expertise, and power. By switching to the second person “you,” the authors center on the familiarity and closeness they develop towards the readers throughout the book and its content. As well, “you” is sometimes utilized as a directive for how the addressee should act or feel. Some authors use “you” in this way, to disassociate themselves from certain women’s actions that do not let them progress professionally. According to DeCapua and Dunham (2012), and we agree, shifting pronouns are often a discursive strategy that produces identification and lessens the distance between the advice-giver and the advice-seeker, shares the sense of identity, and promotes bonding. Below we analyzed authors’ pronominal strategies: we, I, and you.

Pronoun “We”. The pronoun “we” is multifunctional: both inclusive and exclusive (Pantelides and Bartesaghi, 2012), signaling “co authorship, implying shared identity” (p. 24) or, conversely, including the author among a category of experts from which the reader is excluded. “We” extends the sense of inclusiveness and empathy in two ways: it positions the author as a part of “womanhood” and thus someone who understands the issues women are going through, and second as co-creators of leadership. Most of the time, the authors use “we” as including themselves as part of the issue they discuss, for example advocating equality, as, for example, “we women,” “we as women,” and “we need” in order to seek identification or show being part of the same membership category, women. Extracts 2 and 3 illustrate how we can be used to at once affiliate and disaffiliate from readers.

Excerpt 2: (Krawcheck, 2017, p. 65)

The point is that if we as women want to capitalize on and accelerate the positive changes in the business world and make that world better for our children, we need to get our oxygen masks on first. We need to

position ourselves well for the coming changes in the workplace.

While in 2 the author is part of women helping themselves, in 3 it becomes clear that the author can be both part of and separate from. After all, authors are in a position of giving advice to those for whom they write. Notice the switch from “we” to “you.”

Excerpt 3: (Krawcheck, 2017, p. 93)

We women have actually gotten pretty good at the mentor thing. But that’s not enough. You need “sponsors” as well: those individuals who not only answer your questions but also advocate for you.

Pronoun “I”. The first-person pronoun is the principal strategy used by authors in our corpus, showing that the authority to advise is based on personal experiences and achievements in organizations. As Bamberg (2012) pointed out, narrators give narrative forms to experiences, confer their experiences, order experiences, and make sense of their experiences. Although narrators’ expertise is a component that may underscore an asymmetrical relationship between the advice-giver and advice-seeker, it may promote bonding as well (DeCapua & Dunham, 2012). As we studied the authors’ self-help literature, we note that texts produce and function as agents in organizational life (Cooren, 2004). Thus, the authors’ texts participate in the production of the advice-giving to women who seek advice to progress and manage leadership positions.

The first person positions the author as someone who knows how organizations operate and how a professional woman should deal with leadership aspects. This positioning also brings Cooren’s (2012) ideas of ventriloquism into play. He explained ventriloquial acts as follows:

The activity that consists of making someone or something say or do something — which is what I mean by ventriloquism—can thus be considered coextensive with any conversation, any discourse, whether we end up ventriloquizing not only policies and organizations but also languages, accents, ideologies, speech communities, rules, norms, values, identities, statuses, etc. (p.5)

As we see it, Krawcheck and Sandberg spoke in the name of expertise or authority in leadership. The author’s animation of ventriloquial relations can lead the audience to say or do something provided from the advice-giving or recommendation obtained from the authors (Cooren, 2012). The following excerpt illustrates the use of pronoun choice and alignment, “I.”

Excerpt 4: (Sandberg, 2013, p. 48)

No wonder women don’t negotiate as much as men. It’s like trying to cross a minefield backward in high heels. So what should we do? Should we play by the rules that others are created? Should we figure out a way to put on a friendly expression while not being too nice, displaying the right levels of loyalty, and using “we” language? I understand the paradox of advising women to change the world by adhering to biased rules and

expectations. I know it is not a perfect answer but a means to a desirable end. It is also true, as any good negotiator knows, that having a better understanding of the other side leads to a superior outcome.

In Excerpt 4, Sandberg aligned “I” as an animation (Goffman, 1974) for the author to speak and positions her as the expert who understands what women experience and the paradoxes at the workplace. In line 1, Sandberg let the audience know that she understands that specific matter (“negotiate as much as men”) and spoke to general knowledge (“No wonder”). By shifting to “I” in line 5, the author represents herself and represents all women in terms of understanding and awareness of the paradox of the advice she is giving. It is her authority that resolves this paradox, as Sandberg advises women to reflect on their behaviors and develop an understanding of how to manage themselves. Reflection is a metaphor. It amounts to holding a mirror to oneself, to be shown what was previously unnoticed or missed. In this case, the metaphor is apt: the readers need the authors to hold a mirror to their actions, showing them a new way. Notice how, in a series of retrospective questions, Sandberg included herself as part of the issue (“So what should we do?”). Sandberg constantly used the pronoun “we” in lines 2 and 3 to include herself as a fellow agent (Van De Mieroop et al., Miglbauer, & Chatterjee., 2017), who has this dilemma as well.

It is also noticeable how Sandberg shifts pronouns, from “we” in lines 2 and 3 to “I” in lines 5 and 6, to mark and disassociate herself from the rest of the women. Authors take a stance, and as Du Bois (2007) stated, “Stance has the power to assign value to objects of interest, to position social actors with respect to those objects, to calibrate alignment between stancetakers, and to invoke presupposed systems of sociocultural value” (p. 139). The epistemic stances “I understand” and “I know” in lines 5 and 6 acknowledge the speaker’s intellectual position in the discourse. Also, the phrase “I know” imparts a sense that the reader must know because, at times, this phrase implicates agreement with the other party. Moreover, Sandberg framed herself as expert knower when she used the interpersonal markers “I know” and “I understand.” The pronoun “I” provides the first-hand experience of her understanding of workplace and leadership matters and claims her role as a charismatic leader (Fairhurst, 2007): knowledge is located inside her, and because of this, she can externalize it.

In studying authority, Bartesaghi (2009) examined how it works by substituting first-hand experience by expertise. Thus, professional women may have the same experiences as corporate women; however, the corporate women’s expertise (their first-hand experience) allows them to advise other women. Thus, in Excerpt 4, Sandberg reinforced her expertise and authority of being capable of advising others by indicating that she knows what women are experiencing about bias. This authority also allows Sandberg to tell the audience that she knows how to deal with this type of situation, in effect representing herself and all women’s understanding and awareness.

Pronoun “You”. Among the books we examined, the authors concurred with addressing the reader with familiarity by shifting to the pronoun “you,” which permits the authors (corporate women) to position themselves as the character or voice who understands what the reader (professional woman) is going through professionally. Similarly, that “you” approach creates a closeness between the writer and the reader. In other words, the change to the pronoun “you” produces a direct conversation between both the writer and the reader. As Linde notes, a narrative presumes the personal experience of the teller, based on an actual occurrence (Linde, 1993). Familiarity allows the writer to express that she has been in the same position that the reader is.

Developing familiarity also included the type of stories that the authors select. Therefore, by establishing familiarity and stories, the audience, as members of a culture, do not struggle with the story because they recognize the stories and are receptive (Gergen & Gergen, 2006). As Harvey Sacks (1992) pointed out, “you” in its singular case is “regularly a way of referring to that member of “they” who happens to be present” (p. 166). In this case, the author referred to a member of the women category (professional women) who is presently reading the book. In addition, we observed that “you” is multifunctional, and some authors claim entitlement (Sacks, 1992). The teller authors the reader’s experiences and “owns” them, even though they are not her own (Shuman, 2006). The following excerpt illustrates how the sense of familiarity can be involved by using the strategy of pronoun choice and alignment, specifically with “you.”

Excerpt 5: (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018, p. 16)

As you will see, the trick to maximizing your talents and opportunities is not becoming a less thoughtful and giving person, but rather purposeful and intentional about your choices while also addressing the behaviors that keep you stuck.

By the formulation “As you will see” in line 1, the authors anticipate their ability to predict yet unforeseen but expected experiences. As well, the authors assume that readers are thoughtful and giving (line 2); thus, readers are not using the right strategy because these characteristics are at odds with leadership. In addition, Excerpt 5 exemplifies how the authors exercise their expert knowledge by the phrases “[what] you have to offer and why “you are stuck.” The solution’s vagueness and the use of a familiar register claims informality with readers once more supports the authors’ expertise. The shift to the pronoun “you” confers entitlement to the authors, who unlike their readers, have ownership and dominion over their own experience. On another note, the future tense in line 1 is intended to provide a sense of guidance and indicates that it will be a forthcoming explanation. The future tense also suggests that what will be explained is something that the reader does not see (the reader needs the explanation), and the authors will show her how to manage it. Specifically, the authors authorize that version of the story of life by giving a piece of advice. The following

excerpt is another example in which the use of the pronoun choice and alignment with the pronoun “you” appear.

Excerpt 6: (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018, p. 116)

When you enlist allies on a project, be sure to talk about them in a positive way. Praise what they are doing and connect them with others. You don’t need to be the world’s biggest extrovert to do this. You don’t need to try to make friends or form close ties. You just need to engage as many people as possible in your efforts to have an impact. And you want to do it in a public way so that you, and they can benefit from the association.

In Excerpt 6, this shifting to “you” is at almost every beginning of each sentence by employing anaphora. This rhetorical device allows the authors to emphasize the specific advice and intensify to whom they speak (their audience) by employing repetition. In addition, looking into the author-reader approach, Helgesen & Goldsmith use “you” as a command and claim to demand what women fail to do and, conversely, what they need to do to obtain more allies. In Excerpt 6, the authors seem to have some stories that support the advice of achieving ally engagement. By claiming narrative entitlement, the authors claim ownership (Shuman, 2006) of both their clients’ experiences and the reader’s experiences; from this position, the authors put forth the idea that women pursue incorrect ways of acquiring allies and establishing advantageous relationships.

Credibility

One of the strategies used by the authors is claiming credibility. The authors positioned themselves as experts who are knowledgeable about leadership and workplace matters. MacGeorge and Van Swol (2018) state that the advisor’s characteristics are: expertise, intentions, and confidence, and these corporate authors establish these characteristics in their narrative distinctly. At the beginning of each book, all the authors specify their credentials, motives, and purposes that inspire them to approach other professional women to help and encourage them with their career advancement. The authors established credibility through strategies of legitimization (MacGeorge & Van Swol, 2018), in which they cited respected sources to increase their credibility when they offered solutions, simultaneously reinforcing their own knowledge.

On another note, Limberg and Locher (2012) argued that advice-seekers place the advice-givers in a position of having something to say about the issue raised; despite this, advice-givers use two strategies to show credibility, warranting strategies and mitigation strategies. Warranting strategies are used to “give credibility to their recommendations and to show expertise (e.g., citing a source, quoting facts and numbers, invoking personal experience to make a point)” and mitigation strategies are used “to downtone the impression that they might be imposing their view on the advice-seeker” (Limberg & Locher, 2012, p. 6). As we observe, these author’s behaviors establish certain standing among the readers, such as reliability and humility. In other words, the authors’ personal experiences validate the

sources, and vice versa, the sources validate the author’s personal experiences.

Furthermore, all authors voice the claim “research shows” when invoking statistics or specific data, and most of them include the sources, which often include academic articles. “Research shows” makes this putative and evaluative “seeing” self-evident (to the author’s expert eyes, at least), because the author has already read and assessed what is “shown” on behalf of the reader, while acting as a mere conduit for the research. In other words, the reader is asked to trust, and be relieved from the burden of her own judgment on what is in fact shown. The following is an excerpt in which Marissa Orr claims credibility.

Excerpt 7: (Orr, 2019, p. 95)

Many research studies and lab experiments confirm that women are liked less when they become successful. One of the most well-known studies that’s referred to throughout Lean In comes from Columbia Business School professor Frank Flynn and New York University professor Cameron Anderson.

In line 1, Orr highlighted her statement as credible and based on research. She placed accountability/authority on other texts that the reader should take for granted. Therefore, Orr is not accountable for the research; she is simply “reporting” on it. In Excerpt 7, we observed that texts and humans are co-agents. In the same way, Orr mentioned two universities and their respective professors in lines 3 and 4 who have studied how women tend to be less liked when they are successful. However, Orr did not specify how the study measures this unlikability. By stating these academic institutions and the professors, Orr made the argument stronger in terms of credibility since she provides a source. Also, the fact that the statement emphasized that the finding is based on research makes it believable and indicates that research in these matters is available and substantial. Thus, Orr positioned herself as someone informed about women’s careers and leadership matters and able to read and interpret scholarly research for the reader (who, by contrast, is less informed). In this case, Orr framed this academic study before exposing her opinion and discrediting it based on her experience with successful women. Orr uses her expertise as task-related knowledge (MacGeorge & Van Swol, 2018) to uncover the false discourse that other corporate women and organizations deliver to professional women in terms of not being likable.

Notice how Orr switched to locating credibility outside of herself, instead placing it on the authority of texts as a non-human agent. In this way, research is a textual agent, recruited by the author in her credibility strategy, and acting to boost it (Cooren, 2004; Barge, 2021; Cooren, 2004).

Excerpt 8: (Krawcheck, 2017, p. 9)

I’ll take you through some of the troves of research on the positive business results that derive from gender diversity for companies.

In line 1 of this extract, Krawcheck begins to establish her credibility by assuming that the reader is unfamiliar with this type of research and therefore needs her guidance, which is forthcoming. Also, Krawcheck presented research (which she has pre-read and assessed) as part of the equation (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009). That is, research is brought in to authorize the credibility of her arguments, including the voices of respected sources that allow her to explain or discuss gender diversity in line 2. Agency and accountability for the knowledge she presents is now distributed and disbursed (Castor & Bartesaghi, 2021) between Krawcheck, research sources, and business results. Krawcheck claimed, explained, and rationalized the information. Krawcheck once more spoke in the name of research and business results (Cooren, 2012).

The Assertion of Necessity (You Need)

This strategy was a revision of what DeCapua and Dunham name the assertion of individual choice (2007). In their work on the pragmatics of advice-giving, DeCapua and Dunham described this strategy as “statements that emphasize the importance of or need for, the advice-seeker to do what was best for himself/ herself” (p. 332). This strategy meets with the paradox of needing or choosing something. If you need something, then the choice does not exist. The authors in our corpus utilize the expression “you need” as part of their advice in an attempt to encourage an action. The semi-modal “need to” expresses strong obligation and necessity, specifically when something is required (Biber et al., Johansson, Leech, & Finegan, 2006). Thus, this semi-modal works implicitly like “must.” We reexamined this strategy, and we call it “the assertion of necessity,” which we define as a statement about something that is needed or requires an action to step forward and advance in an issue.

In the excerpt below, Sandberg’s narrative picks up as she recounts that after a couple of talks about gender, someone asked her, “So is this your thing now?”

Excerpt 9: (Sandberg, 2013, p. 146)

At the time, I didn’t know how to respond. Now I would say yes. I made this my thing because we need to disrupt the status quo (data omitted). Instead, we need to speak out, identify the barriers that are holding women back, and find solutions.

In her answer, Sandberg presented an account coherent with #metoo, recommending speaking up. She included herself as part of the issue by using the pronoun “we” in lines 2 and 5 and as a member of the women category who both is subject to this and has, by definition, overcome it (unlike the readers). This is a perfect example of the multifunctional potential of “we.” Excerpt 9 carries two synergistic strategies of advice. The first is the assertion of necessity and this is bolstered by the second strategy is the imperative sentence that commands women to act (“identify and find”) towards equality issues. Should they ignore her imperative, they will fail to act on behalf of diversity.

Excerpt 10: (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018, p. 196)

As your sort through your decision, it’s helpful to keep in mind the old saying: Perfect is the enemy of good. In other words, don’t agonize, don’t imagine you need to start in the perfect place or get every step exactly right; just get going.

In Excerpt 10, we identified two strategies, the assertion of necessity and imperative sentences. Both strategies work together since the imperative sentence as command indicates what is necessary to do (lines 2-3). In Excerpt 10, the authors advise women to move forward and not wait for the ideal time or place; otherwise, they will remain paralyzed. Notice that by using “you need” in line 3, the authors give an explicit command of action.

Metaphors

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are at the basis of all understanding of the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consequently, they direct our sensemaking. Because we understand the world in metaphorical terms, we explain concepts and give meaning to those concepts through the use of metaphors. In the same way, metaphors are related to our culture, experiences, and everyday life. We use metaphors purposefully or unwittingly in our speech, conversations, life, and thoughts (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). They are part of our tacit cultural knowledge (Polanyi, 1970). In a broad sense, all language is metaphorical because it creates meaning.

Metaphors work by imposing entailments, which are the far-reaching ways in which they create and organize our sensemaking. For example, to say there was no chemistry has little to do with chemistry in itself, and instead creates entailments about relationships, such as that we cannot be accountable for them, they happen (or not) naturally, and they are part of the natural universe.

Organizational scholars have studied how metaphors organize. For example, Gareth Morgan (1986) employed metaphorical understandings to analyze the significance of organizational life through various metaphors such as organizations as machines or organizations as political systems, to mention a few. Therefore, through narrative and metaphors, we understand complex stories that answer our questions. In this study, we noticed how authors use metaphors as a technology of advice: to illustrate aspects of the workplace and how they address those aspects. The organizing metaphor in our corpus is the container metaphor (things being inside a container, in various states, and removable from it); it speaks of power, options, opportunities, and decisions as material things that one can own, move, push, and manage with the authors’ direction. Inside the container is women’s professional fulfillment, and advice is the way to open it correctly.

Power and Authority. The following extract exemplifies how power and authority is conveyed.

Excerpt 11: (Krawcheck, 2017, p. 24)

But it's not enough to hold that power. We need to own that power and put it to work.

We chose this metaphor in our title, because it is a well-worn conceptual metaphor; Power is a tool with a specific metaphorical expression in line 1, which entails that Power is usable, Power is carried, and Power can be manipulated. Krawcheck describes power as an object that someone can touch, hold, and do something with it. By "it is not enough to hold that power," she urges women to act and take action with power as a tool. But the real key to empowerment is by way of her guidance: it is by taking her advice that women can possess and appropriately wield the substance of power.

Careers and Options. In the following excerpt, Sandberg advises women on how to act to keep themselves moving forward in their careers.

Excerpt 12: (Sandberg, 2013, p. 103)

Anyone lucky enough to have options should keep them open. Don't enter the workplace already looking for the exit. Don't put on the brakes. Accelerate. Keep a foot on the gas pedal until a decision must be made. That's the only way to ensure that when that day comes, there will be a real decision to make.

According to Sandberg, women hold back their careers because they think about future decisions such as getting married or having children. Notice the assumption of a binary: that women need to choose between career or family. That Sandberg assumed it in effect reifies it. She is, after all, authorized by the reader to know. The conceptual metaphor is Career is a race with the metaphorical expressions in lines 2 and 3, which entail that Careers can be driven. Sandberg mentions "options" as an object that simulates a door in which a person can enter freely, and the person decides how to work with it (the option). She encouraged women to leave those doors open and not close them before the precise time. In line 2, Sandberg directs an action which she compared with a race car. This race car represented how women should keep going and taking those opportunities or options that the workplace offers them. The brakes offer an embodied metaphor, for it calls into being the experience of an abrupt stop, as we would experience to avoid an accident when driving. In line 3, Sandberg used another metaphorical expression to impart that women need to keep going and moving forward. The lack of action to "keep the foot on the pedal" causes women to lose professional opportunities. Once again, it is Sandberg who is driving the proverbial car, for it is fueled by her advice.

Equality and Leadership Gap. Sandberg is especially vocal in her encouragement that women do more for their careers. In her chapter Working together toward equality, she employs the following metaphorical expression:

Excerpt 13: (Sandberg, 2013, p. 172)

The hard work of generations before us means that equality is within our reach. We can close the leadership gap now. Each individual's success can make success a little easier for the next. We can do this — for ourselves, for one another, for our daughters, and for our sons. If we push hard now, this next wave can be the last wave. In the future, there will be no female leaders. There will be 6 just leaders.

In Excerpt 13, we found multiple metaphors: Actions are movements, Equality is an object, and Change is a wave. As we notice with these metaphors, our conceptual system plays a central role when explaining our everyday realities, and concepts can be understood through several different metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Let's analyze the principal conceptual metaphor. Actions are movements with the metaphorical expression "If we push hard now, this next wave can be the last wave," which entails that Actions can bring changes or Actions can do changes. This metaphor positions men as ideal leaders and role models for women; it intends to explain the fight against women's leadership gap in the workplace and what direction equality should take (there will be just leaders without a gender distinction). Equality is presented as an object that is touchable and reachable. As such, women are positioned as not having done enough in their capacity to reach this tangible goal (equality). Sandberg offers her advice with a supportive act in which she inquires about a problem and provides information, knowledge, and guidance to resolve a problem (Feng, 2014). Since advice might function to reassure someone, here, Sandberg utilizes advice to reassure women of the existence of equality issues by making a problem seem manageable (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). However, by explaining how women can contribute to equality, Sandberg tells women to "push hard now." When someone pushes harder, the person is close to accomplishing the goal that is "pushed" (a directive very much connected to birthing, an experience that the readers can understand) because the person is asked for extra effort to bring action to completion. This metaphorical phrase presents the leadership gap as a container/object that is pushed to the other side, but it still needs to be pushed harder, and now it is the moment to do it. Push represents the actions taken towards closing the gap. Therefore, women need to push more because this issue is not over and because if they stop, all the efforts of previous generations would be in vain. As she specified, Sandberg invited women to push because this could be the last push since "this wave can be the last wave." Here, she connects birthing to gendered and political advancement. This expression conveys that Sandberg does not know if this is the last wave to struggle with the leadership gap, but she recognizes that pushing now can signify an essential achievement in the leadership gap issue. If she indicates that "this wave can be the last wave," Sandberg believes that the leadership gap issue (much like the suffering of birth) is close to its end. To boot, Sandberg recommended women be empathetic and try to understand others (Morrow, 2012) whose experiences are similar to theirs --

once more highlighting the woman's body as the source of experience, and the need for understanding.

Opportunities and Decisions. Metaphors create concepts like gender and what is understood as gendered styles (Koller, 2011). As a result, we see how metaphors are used to talk about men and women and how metaphors construct discourses and social domains that are identified as masculine or feminine. The following example illustrates how gender is created by metaphor.

Excerpt 14: (Sandberg, 2013, p. 115)

Women face enough barriers to professional success.

Through this metaphorical expression, Sandberg described what women encounter in the workplace. In this sentence, the metaphor concept employed is Women are climbers with the metaphorical expression Women face enough barriers, and the entailment is Women confront obstacles. The metaphorical expression "women face enough barriers..." depicts how women struggle against organizational barriers and how their gender works two times more than men to achieve success. This metaphor also describes women as the gender who struggles the most to reach professional success. Thus, this metaphor represents that it is more complicated for women to grow and accomplish professional success in organizations because they face more obstacles in their career paths.

Value and Women. Turning to another author, Orr provided another metaphor that drives to gender's description. It is important to note that she does not believe in Sandberg's motto, "lean in" and instead believes that women have many values and qualities to offer to organizations, and women do not need to behave as a man to achieve success. The following excerpt shows how she constitutes a woman.

Excerpt 15: (Orr, 2019, p. xxvii)

Perhaps the most difficult part for me to accept was the incessant stream of advice on how to behave. Instead of encouraging us to lean in to our individual strengths and celebrate the value women bring to the table, we were essentially being told to behave more like a man.

In line 3, Orr used the metaphor Value is an object which entails Value as something you give or hand out. Value is described as an object that you bring and offer to others. Orr also depicted women as a gender that can make things happen. Thus, women offer their individual strengths and a range of values and ideas. The expression "bring to the table" signifies what women add and contribute to organizations with their particular uniqueness without behaving like men. Additionally, we observed that the expression "instead of encouraging us" describes women as the gender that needs to be advised and encouraged to be successful. These components lead to organizations preparing leadership training exclusively for women.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined how self-help advice books work within the knowledge asymmetry that is advice. In considering advice as a technology, we have identified how it rests on the authority of the expert, and their access and deployment of particular strategies. Though the strategies are purportedly for the advancement of women, what is interesting about them is how they reinstate the very problems they promise to solve, and how this is done by fitting into a metadiscourse of the gendered bodies of women as inherently lacking what it takes to act in professional contexts like men. The fact that gender is presented as a binary is, of course, problematic, reductive and dangerous, given the awareness that gender is a social construct, and that it allows for a variety of legitimate performances (see, for e.g., Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). The dichotomy and duality between women and men presented by Sandberg, Orr, Krawcheck, Helgesen & Goldsmith actually reinstates it and materializes it as a basis for authorizing the authors' accounts (unlike the readers).

The case can of course be made that authors are authorities by nature of their status qua leaders, which is granted by the consumption of their books.. In fact, authors organize credibility by emphasizing warranting strategies that claim entitlement by various means: personal stories, testimonies, and the correct evaluation of data/ statistics, and sources. Nonetheless, authors' pronominal work suggests that they are both part of a common experience of womanhood and transcending it. As such, we are presented by a paradox that is the paradox of help discourse: though authority is based on affiliation with the readers, advice works by separating from them. On the one hand, are women who are "stuck," and on the other are the exhortations to act against this. But would not taking the advice be proof that women readers are too stuck to figure it out by themselves? This contradiction means that women always need to see their career choices as faulty and alter "their mindsets, actions, and approaches to work" (Lanier & DuPree Fine, 2018, p.17). Further research might want to consider how the technology of advice in various interactional settings might deviate from its promise.

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