



ADVANCING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

VOLUME 40, 2021
ISSN 1093-7099

EDITORS: BEVERLY J. IRBY, NAHED ABDELRAHMAN

Full Length Research Paper

Exploration of Women's Leadership Development Challenges and Transformational Learning: A Positional Paper

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Accepted July 24, 2020

My review of the positions that involving decision-making roles shows that women still hold less than 26% of the decision-making roles within Fortune Magazine's list of Top 500 companies, higher education, and politics. Fortune 500 boards of directors and entrepreneurs show increasing rates of women in decision-making roles. Surveys related to the division of labor in households show that women are still responsible for the majority of the work needed to keep the household running. These factors, along with challenges such as a lack of positive social feedback for aspiring women leaders, gender stereotypes, educational methods, and a lack of prominent role models, can affect women's development as leaders and the number of women in leadership roles. This paper explores social feedback, gender stereotypes, conditional teaching, and lack of role models as affecting women's potential and development as leaders. This review also explores applying lessons from the transformational learning literature to women's leadership development process.

Keywords: transformational learning, leadership development, identity development, women's leadership development, gender stereotypes, social constructs

Women's Leadership Development and Learning

This positional paper offers a deeper understanding of gender-specific challenges that some women may face in envisioning themselves as potential leaders, their developmental process to become leaders, and the importance of transformational learning as an essential part of their leadership development. The web of challenges faced by women trying to develop as leaders includes social feedback, gender stereotypes, the way they are taught in formative years, identity as a leader, and the skills needed to lead. Understanding transformational learning and the challenges women may face trying to become leaders may help facilitators of women's leadership development create the environment, conversation, and education that supports and challenges women in their leadership development.

Transformational learning is a theory developed by Mezirow (2012), in which an individual goes through a process of examining and questioning beliefs, values, "uncritically assimilated assumptions" (Cranton, 2016, p. 2), and perspectives to shift their frames of reference or ways of knowing (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2012). This process of questioning, critically reflecting and becoming aware of things we believe, where those beliefs came from, and the "consequences of taken-for-granted beliefs" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 19) is essential in leadership development. Transformational learning leads to a change in

self-perception (Cranton, 2016), consciousness (Kegan, 2000; Taylor, 2000), what is known and how they know it through changing frames of reference or meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2000).

Our frames of reference make up our deeply held beliefs about ourselves, others, and our world "- that we are smart or dumb, good or bad, winners or losers – are inferred from repetitive affective experience outside of awareness" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). These frames of reference become how we see the world and interpret our experiences. Frames of references are strongly influenced by cultural norms or social paradigms and may have been unconsciously assimilated from the culture or the "personal perspectives derived from the idiosyncrasies of primary care givers" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 16). Frames of reference anchor our sense of self and deeply held values which give us identity, a sense of community, and stability (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2000). Our identity is a "set of meanings attached to the self, this set of meanings serves as a standard or reference for a person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 50). When other viewpoints seem to go against our frames of reference, there is a tendency to sometimes emotionally and vigorously defend our perspective (Mezirow, 2000). However, these viewpoints that challenge our current frames of reference can be the beginning of the transformational learning experience by causing a disorienting dilemma (Kegan,

2000; Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Taylor (2000) made the point that when there is little exposure to people who have different cultures, values, or frames of reference that there is less opportunity to experience disorienting dilemmas to challenge the current frames of reference and begin the transformational learning process.

Leadership development can be complicated and challenging. Facilitating transformational learning by offering support and challenge to the process of critically questioning and exploring unconscious assimilated long-held beliefs about self, others, and leadership may help more women show up as leaders. While transformational learning may require profound changes in social, educational, and individual ways of knowing, understanding the challenges women face in becoming a leader, we can raise our awareness and the awareness of the women who are being impacted by unexamined beliefs. Raising awareness allows women to feel discomfort with their current ways of being, which may begin the transformational learning process they need to challenge and change long-held beliefs about themselves and women in general as leaders.

The role of being a leader provides the opportunity to be a part of discussions, make critical decisions, and influence the outcome in business and society (Kanadlı et al., 2018; Walters & Manicom, 1996). Yet the proportion of women in prominent leadership positions in the United States is very small (Catalyst, 2020a; Catalyst, 2020b; Ebrahimji, 2020; Kelly, 2019). As a businesswoman and scholar whose primary focus is leadership development, I have developed, trained, coached, and supported leadership development in myself, men, and women over the years. I am choosing to focus on American women's development as leaders for two reasons: (a) I am a woman who has experienced these issues, and (b) I am concerned about the relatively small number of women who have prominent leadership roles. I firmly believe that we need more prominent women leaders. To facilitate this, we need a greater understanding of the challenges that women may face in seeing themselves in leadership roles and in developing into leaders.

There are fewer studies that focus on women's education and ways of learning. English and Irving (2012), in a comprehensive review of learning and gender showed that the category of gender has almost entirely disappeared from the adult education literature. They pointed out that this may be due to an attempt to connect with other causes such as race, class, sexual orientation, and disability. Race, class, sexual orientation, gender, and disability are all interlocking issues faced by women who seek to become leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; English & Irving, 2012; Kelly, 2019) and not all training professionals have an educational background that has exposed them to researchers' insights related to gender or feminism, which is needed to understand the interlocking issues and challenges faced by women (English & Irving, 2012). According to English and Irving (2012), "by naming women's transformative learning as a central concern [it] puts a spotlight on these interlocking issues and on women specifically" (p. 246). If researchers examining

adult education fail to give special attention to women's needs and causes, it depoliticizes these issues and causes them to remain hidden. These hidden challenges disrupt a woman's leadership development (Cranton, 2016; Davies et al., 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2013; Simpson et al., 2016).

Transformational learning in women's leadership development is beginning to show up in research (Debebe, 2010; English & Irving 2012; Megheirkouni, & Roomi, 2017). In women-only leadership development programs, Debebe (2010) found evidence of transformational insights such as challenging beliefs, challenging internal and external assumptions regarding relationships, and affirming personal values. English and Irving (2012) stated that it might be "the right time for theorists focusing on women to learn and benefit from the transformational learning literature" (p. 246). Transformational learning can be challenging to facilitate because emotions and feelings play a role in transformation (English & Irving, 2012; Taylor & Cranton, 2012).

While there is a need for more research on transformational learning in women's leadership development, English and Irving (2012) cautioned researchers not to "further essentialize women and their experience or contribute to their further marginalization in society" (p. 255). This statement led me to research more about women, femininity, and gender. Walters and Manicom (1996) emphasized that "In working with conceptions of women and gender there is always a fine line between reinforcing particular constructs and meanings and questioning not only the relations that produce women's oppression but also the prevailing conceptions of femininity" (p. 20). It is not just the reinforcement of marginalization of women's leadership in society that needs to be considered; it is also the acknowledgment that major systems of oppression are interlocking and reinforce each other, causing a belief that they are correct (Debebe et al., 2016; Ely, & Padavic, 2007; English & Irving, 2012; Walters, 1996).

The Web of Underlying Challenges

According to Walters and Manicom (1996), if we want to empower women, we must challenge two pillars of patriarchal ideology and practice. Patriarchy is a legitimating ideology and a social structure in which men have more power and privilege than women (Walters & Manicom, 1996). These two pillars are the labor division between genders and "male control of women's sexuality which both seriously constrains women's space and physical mobility and shapes conceptions of what 'women' should be" (pp. 23-24). When writing about women in South Africa, Walters and Manicom (1996) asserted that if women want to move away from patriarchy, that they need to "attain real power as part of a process of economic, political, and cultural transformation. In other words, women must gain access to and participate in decision-making structures at all levels in society" (p. 24). Stephenson-Abetz and Aleman (2012) found that students in their classes often question if feminine issues apply to them.

These underlying challenges have built worldviews and frames of reference that influence how women see themselves regarding their leadership roles and abilities. Those same underlying connections impact how others see and perceive women as leaders. Cranton (2016) explained, "Becoming aware of assumptions or the habits of the mind that consist of a web of related assumptions is difficult" (p. 50). To become aware of the frames of references that make up her beliefs about herself and leadership (Mezirow, 2000), a woman may have to pull apart her interconnected web of assumptions (Cranton, 2016). This interconnected web of assumptions and frames of reference is built from a lifetime of unnamed and hidden messages about ideas of what a woman should be. A woman may have to battle her beliefs about herself, leadership, and society's beliefs, to build her leader identity and see her potential to become a prominent female leader.

Women in Leadership Roles

In the United States, a country in which women have rights and freedoms, one may argue that gaining access to and participating in decision-making structures is not a pressing concern for women. To understand whether women are gaining access to and participating in the decision-making structures that Walters and Manicom (1996) called for, I began by investigating women's decision-making roles, looking at data for women in leadership roles in business, politics, higher education, and entrepreneurship.

Business. In Fortune 500 companies, only 7.4% of chief executive officers (CEO) are women (Catalyst, 2020b; Ebrahimji, 2020). The CEO is the top decision-maker in a company or organization. Also, concerning antiracism, there are only three black women CEOs, and no Latinas hold a CEO role in the Top 500 (Ebrahimji, 2020). There is an encouraging trend in the Fortune 500 boards of directors. Since 2010, the number of women and minorities on boards has tripled to greater than 40% (Catalyst, 2020b).

Politics. Within the political realm, the numbers are a little higher. According to the Center for American Women and Politics, Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, in 2020, 127 women hold seats in the United States Congress, 23.7% of the seats. Of those 127 women, 47 are women of color. In 2019, 22% of US cities with populations over 30,000 had a woman as mayor.

Higher Education. In higher education, women earn 57% of bachelor's degrees (Fry, 2019). Gender research has found that gender stereotypes become weaker for women attending women's colleges (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 89). This prevalence was correlated with experiences and interactions with female faculty members in a women's college. While the representation of women as students is high, the representation of women in tenured professor roles is low in higher education. According to Kelly (2019), 26% of the tenured professors are women, a decrease of 1% from 2003. Women are less likely to hold high ranked roles and become tenured (Catalyst, 2020a; Kelly, 2019).

Instructor positions are considered the lowest ranking positions in academia, and 57% of the instructor positions are held by women (Catalyst, 2020a). In 2016, only 30.1% of college presidents were women (Women Presidents, 2017).

Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship was the most significant area of women showing up in leadership. 13 million women-owned businesses represent roughly 42% of the firms in the United States (American Express, 2019). Much of the growth comes from minority women. Firms owned by "women of color grew 43%, and African American women-owned firms grew even faster at 50%" (Lesonsky, 2020, para. 9). While this may seem exciting and promising news, these women-owned businesses often produce low revenue, employ fewer people, and are less profitable (American Express, 2019; Hechavarria et al., 2019). As entrepreneurs' women often face gender-based barriers in their business, including getting access to traditional networks, capital, and misperceptions regarding market opportunities (Lesonsky, 2020). Faced with these challenges women often leave their business and return to the primary workforce (American Express, 2019).

Distribution of Labor in Households. I also reviewed the role of labor distribution in households. Brenan (2020) shared a 2019 Gallup study that showed whether married or partnered, women working full time jobs outside the home are more likely than men to "take the lead on everything from doing laundry, cleaning, shopping for groceries, and preparing meals, to planning family activities, caring for children and furnishing the house" (para. 1). The current COVID-19 pandemic is forcing many people to work full-time from home. A Morning Consult survey of 2,200 adults showed that 67% of women reported that they were fully or mostly responsible for the housework (Miller, 2020). Homes with children also had to home school their children, 80% of women reported primary responsibility to ensure the schooling gets done (Miller, 2020).

Each of the challenges and statistics mentioned above seems to indicate that patriarchal social constructs are still affecting women, thus affect women in leadership. The more I read, gathered information, researched, and reflected on the representation of females in leadership positions, the more I began to see a need for a deeper understanding of the challenges that women face in trying to become leaders. As I reflected, I began to notice a pattern; it became apparent that there are more significant concepts such as gender stereotypes, societal expectations, assumptions, worldviews, and individual frames of references that are still at play in a web of interconnected barriers and constraints. When looking specifically at women's leadership development, these deeper webs of underlying challenges are connected to identity, education, societal assumptions, and cultural expectations involving women's roles. These need to be explored, understood, and addressed. The awareness of the underlying challenges needs to be heightened within the education and developmental efforts of all disciplines.

Ideas for Solutions

This battle requires transformational learning and the development of a leadership identity at a deep level. Transformational learning is a process of examining and questioning “uncritically assimilated assumptions” (Cranton, 2016, p. 2), values, beliefs, and perspectives to shift frames of reference (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2012). Transformational learning is the process of examining beliefs to understand where they came from, why we believe them, and considering what the implications are for continuing to accept that knowledge as accurate in light of new experiences or information (Mezirow, 2000). Transformational learning can change both frames of references and habits of the mind. It encourages a more in-depth exploration of long-held beliefs and views. However, each woman who wants to be in a leadership position must be willing to go through the cycle of identifying her outdated frames of reference and identities; naming them as obsolete, as no longer valid or applicable to her; and then building new frames of reference and new identities (Berger, 2012; Burke & Stets, 2009; Day et al., 2017; Mezirow, 2000).

Leadership development is intensely connected to challenging frames of reference (Berger, 2012). For a woman trying to become a leader, these challenges may include frames of references related to gender-related social feedback (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ibarra et al., 2013), stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Simpson et al., 2016), education (Cranton, 2016; Ely & Badavic, 2007; Langer, 2016), and societal expectations (Debebe et al., 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ruminski et al., 2012). These possibly outdated frames of reference require women to undertake transformational learning experiences, requiring changes in their worldviews about themselves and others, and sometimes the core of their identities as women.

Social Feedback

Ibarra et al. (2013) pointed out that to become leaders, individuals need to take on challenging assignments, learn from mentors, and practice new behaviors. If the potential leaders’ performance is praised or affirmed through social feedback, it reinforces their leadership identity; they will continue to repeat the process and develop a stronger leader identity (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hall & Lord, 2005; Ibarra et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2005). Social feedback validates the potential leaders’ views of themselves as leaders. If others do not accept, confirm or validate these attempts at leadership, it may be much more difficult for a potential leader to establish themselves as a leader, both physically and mentally (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hall & Lord, 2005). A potential leader’s ability to develop an awareness of themselves as a leader, build self-confidence in leadership skills through successful application, and receive positive feedback from other individuals impacts the potential leader’s leadership identity development (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ibarra et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2005). Ibarra et al.’s (2013) research showed that the process of becoming a leader is “often more difficult for women than for men because of subtle biases. For example, behavior considered assertive in a man is seen as aggressive in a woman and thus denigrated rather than rewarded” (p. 63). When

there are subtle biases, women may not receive the social feedback they need to validate their attempts at leadership, thus challenging their ability to become a leader (Ibarra et al., 2013; Komives et al., 2005). This lack of validation may affect a potential woman leader’s self-identity as a leader (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ibarra et al., 2013).

As leadership development facilitators we have an opportunity to provide social feedback to help validate women’s view of themselves as leaders. We must understand and be aware of our own subtle biases and work to mitigate them. We can also ensure that our programs provide the opportunities for women to take on challenging assignments, learn from mentors, practice new behaviors, and actively receive positive social feedback.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are woven into the fabric of our culture and society through books, plays, and movies that become narratives that shape the “contemporary collective memory” (Xu et al., 2019, p. 1). In social psychology, gender stereotypes are biased, inaccurate, or generalizations about different gender roles and abilities (Ellemers, 2018). These gender stereotypes do not automatically go away as we mature, and everyday activities can reinforce them, even TV commercials (Davies et al., 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007). There are gender stereotypes that are connected to leadership. In our culture, the gender stereotype is that leadership is primarily masculine, and “the mere activation of the female stereotype can undermine women’s interest in leadership” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 91). The social construct that leadership is primarily masculine seems to imply that the activation of the female stereotype begins early in a woman’s life through symbolic meanings assigned to identity (Burke & Stets, 2009).

In their first study, Davies et al. (2005) provided a control group with gender-neutral commercials to watch; the treatment group watched gender-stereotyped commercials. The gender-stereotyped ads showed women in the content; one was excited about face care, and another was dreaming about being a homecoming queen. The gender-neutral commercial did not contain any gender-stereotypical products or situations. After the study participants watched the commercial, both the test group and the control group were given the same description of a leadership task to read. The study participants, who were both men and women, were then offered an opportunity to lead or be a problem-solver (follower), after watching the commercials. The women who were exposed to the stereotypical ad showed less interest in being a group leader. The content of the ads did not affect the men’s interest in leading.

Interestingly, Davies et al. (2005) repeated the same experiment with new participants in their second study with one crucial change. Each group was randomly assigned to read either the original description or a modified version designed to “eliminate women’s vulnerability to stereotype threat” (p. 281). In the revised description, the researchers added the sentence, “There is a great deal of controversy in psychology surrounding the issue

of gender-based differences in leadership and problem-solving ability; however, our research has revealed absolutely no gender differences in either ability on this particular task" (p. 281). By adding this identity-safe condition, they eliminated the relationship between the gender stereotype activation and the leadership aspirations of the women in that test group.

Davies et al. (2005) research offers several ideas that can help leadership development facilitators to support women's leadership development. Using identity-safe wording is an example that can be used in facilitation of leadership development programs. Raising our awareness to the types of images we use in our PowerPoints and presentation materials. Understanding the activation of stereotype threats that can decrease women's interest in leading and actively work to minimize them.

Conditional and Unconditional Teaching

Societal expectations of women's performance and behavior are prominent in educating girls (Belenky et al., 1997; Cranton, 2000; Langer, 2016). Developing the ability to question authority can be particularly challenging for women, as "young girls are taught to be 'good little girls,' which translates into 'do what you are told'" (Langer, 2016, p. 20); however, the ability to question authority is essential for advanced meaning making and leadership development. Langer (2016) shared that the way information is presented and taught to students impacts their creativity, ability to question cultural norms, and challenge assumptions. Langer (2016) while studied the results of conditional and unconditional teaching found that the girls' performances improved significantly when mindful learning and conditional teaching was involved.

Conditional instruction requires flexibility in the transfer of knowledge instead of absolutes (Langer, 2016). Langer (2016) discovered that teaching students about an object using conditional information encouraged more creativity in how those objects could be used. While data and knowledge taught unconditionally based on experts or people viewed as authority figures, it tends to be accepted without question, and there is no room for creativity (Cranton, 2016). This discovery amplifies the importance of presenting information and knowledge with conditional information when educating girls and raising the awareness of women that information is conditional.

Cranton's (2016) research seems to indicate that unconditional learning continues in adulthood. This unquestioning acceptance of information aligns with Kegan's (1994) adult development theory and specifically the socialized mind, and also agrees with Belenky et al.'s (1997) epistemology of received knowledge. Adult development theory explains how individuals progress through complex stages of cognitive development (Kegan, 1994). The socialized mind is the most common stage of adult development (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). In the socialized mind, individuals adopt other people's emotions and ideas as their system of meaning making (Kegan, 1994). This system of meaning is influenced by the ideologies, institutions, or

individuals who are viewed as authority figures or as important (Belenky et al., 1997; Kegan, 1994). If an authority figure says that something is true, then there is no room for doubt.

Cranton (2000) emphasized that it is not easy to change the way we learn, and Langer (2016) shared that girls are strongly impacted when they are taught with unconditional information. Langer (2016) emphasized that "when females were taught conditionally, their performance was not different from their male counterparts" (p. 21). Teaching unconditional information silences questions, stifles creativity, and undermines self-esteem (Langer, 2016). There was a need to consciously develop the ability to challenge underlying assumptions and to question authority and cultural norms (Belenky et al., 1997; Belenky & Stanton, 2000; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Kegan, 1994); it added to the challenge when what was learned was taught as unconditional absolutes.

Even though research has shown that women learn differently than men, Cranton (2016) cautioned that there is a danger in suggesting that women and men learn differently; "given that women's learning is depicted as less valued in our society, this could also serve to further marginalize women" (p. 34). Facilitators, educators, and coaches should work to support and challenge the people they are guiding. Understanding the path to empower women's learning may increase our effectiveness in developing leaders.

The research on adult development, transformational learning, and women's ways of knowing and learning shows that it is essential to empower and support women in learning to process information as conditional. Langer (2005) shared that "conditional information leads us to be more mindful, and when we are mindful, we see more" (p. 175). Educators and facilitators have the opportunity to present information with opportunities to question, emphasizing that there is no right or wrong and that there may or may not be meaning to be made, and allow the participants to make up their minds as they progressed through the program, which can impact women's leadership development.

Women As Leadership Role Models

There is a cycle that needs to be disrupted; often, we do not see many women as prominent leaders, so women are not viewed as leaders. It is critical to understand the impacts of how we educate young women, how we build their awareness of social assumptions, and the cultural influences impacting their leadership development. Visibility is an essential part of this process.

The very act of being a visible woman in leadership can change the construct of what a leader looks like in society. There is a need for women to be visible leaders so that young women have examples of women in leadership roles. Ely et al. (2011) stated that one of the challenges for women trying to become leaders in organizations is the lack of role models. It is through observational learning that an individual receives cultural instructions for behaviors through the process of interacting with

and watching others (Ancona, 2000; Andreas, 2019; Bandura, 1977; Bonk & Kim, 1998).

It is through the observation of behaviors and the consequences of their actions that observational learning occurs. The observer then chooses to emulate or ignore an observed behavior based on the perceived results (Ancona, 2000; Bandura, 1977; Bonk & Kim, 1998). While addressing the issue and the importance of role models, Eagly and Carli (2007) shared that "because our mental associations about women and men follow from our observations of these groups, they can change with new observations" (p. 89). Visible role models play a part in observational learning, not just for women who are trying to become leaders but for the whole community, which may then start to see more women as leaders. This visibility can change the social construct of what a leader looks like.

Leadership Development - More Than Education

Leadership development and transformational learning calls for more than educating the participants. Transformational learning calls for the participants to choose to learn and to engage in learning actively. A willingness to engage in challenging concepts that do not align with the learner's current worldview or frames of references because the learner is seeking knowledge is needed (Knowles, 1980). This difference also calls the facilitator of leadership development to go deeper into their own personal and professional development to better support and challenge the individual who chooses to engage in the more profound developmental work required to become a leader.

Leadership Skills and Identity

Some leadership development programs and initiatives focus on skills-based learning only (Day et al., 2017). However, acquiring leadership skills alone cannot truly impact a person's leadership behaviors, beliefs, and frames of reference. Day et al. (2017) argued that skills-based approaches alone could not capture the complex nature of leadership development. They argued for leadership development programs to focus on both leadership skills and leader identity. A leader identity is a "sub-component of one's identity that relate to being a leader or how one thinks of oneself as a leader" (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 365). When an individual identifies as a leader, that identity influences their self-perceptions and directs their behaviors and interactions concerning the cognitive schema which holds their knowledge and information (Burke & Stets, 2009; Kegan, 2000; Komives et al., 2005; Montero et al., 2008) related to leadership processes and roles (Day et al., 2017; Day et al., 2009;).

The traditional educational process for leaders is delivered, in many aspects, by a method that is built for explicit knowledge (Ancona, 2012; Faller et al., 2012). Explicit knowledge is the knowledge that can be learned by reading a book or attending a class or webinar. Understanding and knowing explicit information or knowing that does not automatically translate into knowing how (Janson & McQueen, 2007, emphasis added). It is not easy to transfer tacit leadership knowledge into explicit know how instructions for developing a leader (Janson

& McQueen, 2007; Lam, 2000). Tacit knowledge is intuitive, unarticulated, and cannot be understood, communicated, or used without knowing the subject (Lam, 2000). Because of the complexity of tacit knowledge and leadership development, traditional leadership training often does not go deep enough or provide the time needed for real transformation to occur (Day et al., 2017). Kegan and Lahey (2009) shared an example of why learning about leadership, but not taking the information to a deeper level into the tacit knowledge, is like

new files and programs brought to the existing operating system. They may have certain value—new files and programs do give you greater range and versatility—but your ability to use them will still be limited by your current operating system. True development is about transforming the operating system itself, not just increasing your fund of knowledge or your behavioral repertoire. (p. 6)

While there is a need to build an individual's explicit knowledge about the topic of being a leader and the practice of leadership, as leadership development facilitators and educators, it is our role to support and challenge individuals to upgrade their operating system. To do this type of upgrade often requires transformational learning and leader identity development for the individuals involved.

Leadership development facilitators and educators must understand that the transformational learning process can leave individuals feeling emotionally vulnerable (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Watkins et al., 2012). Individuals must feel safe, valued, supported, and respected within the social environment in which they are exploring the transformational process (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012). Besides providing a supportive environment, Kasworm and Bowles (2012) suggested supporting self-reflection and critical reflections on roles, culture, self, and other worldviews. Transformational learning should be a holistic process that includes multiple ways of knowing, embracing emotions, and spirituality to explore new possible ways of being (Kasworm & Bowles, 2012; Lawrence, 2012).

Transformational Learning in Leadership Development

In my dissertation work, the main subject areas that I studied were the experiences of individuals during their leadership development; the framework of the literature I used included adult development, identity development, spiritual development, and transformational learning (Andreas, 2019). I wanted to understand how individuals experience leadership development, and there seemed to be a strong connection between these areas of study. The internal development of a leader requires individuals to work on themselves as a leader and to move away from the social influences that helped create their previous concepts of leadership (Burke & Stets, 2009; R. J. Hall & Lord, 2005). This shift requires an individual to access a way of making meaning that allows them to view themselves as both a part of the system and as separate from that system (R. J. Hall & Lord, 2005; Kegan, 2000). Internal leadership development work requires the potential leader to build awareness of frames

of references, examine them, and possibly engage in transformational learning (Kegan, 2000; Mezirow, 1997; Mezirow, 2000). While transformational learning is happening inside the leader, it is not happening on just one level (Clark, 2012; Dirkx, 2012).

Transformational learning is a process in which an individual must engage, and progress through, on their own with external support. Educators and facilitators can provide opportunities, knowledge, and experiences to activate challenges to the individual's existing ways of knowing and being; however, unless an individual is willing and able to engage in the process, they will miss the opportunity for transformational learning (Dirkx, 1998; Kegan, 2000; Knowles, 1980). Dirkx (1998) expressed that the part of an individual that is engaged in transformative learning "is active, with a strong sense of agency, acting on and often creating the worlds which it inhabits. It is a reflective, dialogical, expressive, and deeply emotional and spiritual self that constructs and re-constructs itself through experiences of learning" (p. 10). As individuals engage in leader and leadership development, they may challenge themselves on a new level of understanding about themselves as leaders and the practice of leadership, thus starting their transformational learning. Transformational learning often requires the person's full engagement through social, psychological, and epistemological exploration. Transformational learning focuses on social, psychological, and epistemological capacities (Mezirow, 1997; E. W. Taylor, 2007).

Social-Transformational Learning

Recognizing and understanding the connections between society and individuals in leadership development and transformational learning is an essential piece of the transformational process. While Scott (2003) gently chided Mezirow (1991, 2000) for decoupling "transformative learning from the dimension of societal structures in the mechanisms of transformative learning theory" (p. 265), Kegan (2000) recognized the importance of educators' understanding, not just the "students' present epistemologies but the epistemological complexity of the present learning challenges they face in their lives" (p. 48). Scott (2003) pointed out that we must recognize that there exist "within the collective (problems across families) and a reality of power structures out there that constrain families and an adequate quality of life" (p. 275). An individual must learn to recognize both internal and external influences on their frames of reference.

While environment and social connections influence and impact an individual's experience, some experiences may start the transformational learning process; others may influence them to continue embracing their current frames of reference without question. Bandura's (1991) work on social cognitive theory described the effects of environmental factors on learning. The experiences one has within their environment and society are not the only factors; it is also the "agentic action in exploring, manipulating, and influencing the environment that counts" (Bandura, 2001, p. 4). Transformational learning asks

individuals to "change the whole way they understand themselves, their world, and the relationships between the two" (Kegan, 2000, p. 67). Kegan (2000) stated that this is part of the process of developing personal authority; "we acquire personal authority, after all, only by relativizing—that is, only by fundamentally altering our relationship to public authority" (p. 67). Sometimes this authority is general, political, cultural, and other times it is familiar.

Psychological-Transformational Learning

The process of developing one's identity as a leader practicing leadership is both complex and psychological (Burke & Stets, 2009). This complexity comes from influences and experiences that challenge an individual to explore and process their experiences, interpretations, and knowledge with new frames of reference, as well as their identity, through transformational learning (Andreas, 2019; Brookfield, 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Kim & Merriam, 2012; K. Taylor, 2000; M. Malik, 2016). Challenging cultural and social norms and how individuals view themselves can take a toll on individuals emotionally and cognitively (Andreas, 2019; Mezirow, 2000; Rowland, 2016).

Researchers have recognized the role that identity creation plays in supporting and motivating the growth of leaders (Burke & Stets, 2009; Day & Dragoni, 2015; Day et al., 2017; van Kippenberg et al., 2004). The development of leadership identity is a more profound developmental process than just gaining leadership skills. How "we perceive ourselves, our self-concept, or identity has profound effects on the way we feel, think, and behave, and for the things we aim to achieve" (van Kippenberg et al., 2004, p. 827). Identity development demonstrates how individuals view themselves and their experiences (Burke & Stets, 2009; Kegan, 2000; Komives et al., 2005; Montero et al., 2008).

The process of developing a leadership identity as described by Day et al. (2017), while not directly citing transformational learning, closely mirrors Mezirow's transformational learning process. In transformational learning, individual experiences a disorienting dilemma that leads to self-examination and sometimes includes feelings of guilt or shame. This step then instigates a critical assessment of the individual's epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions. From the critical evaluation and the self-discovery, an individual then seeks out others who have experienced and navigated similar change; finding others who have shared similar experiences leads an individual to explore options for new roles, relationships, actions, and planning a course of action. This course of action prompts the acquisition of the knowledge and skills needed to implement the plan. The individual then begins to try new roles and builds competence and self-confidence in the new roles and relationships. Confidence then leads to the integration of new views in their life (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

Another challenge that developing leaders face is that of long-term identity changes (Burke & Stets, 2009; Day et al., 2017).

Day et al. (2017) described long-term identity changes as challenging and externally initiated. These external events trigger conflict between the individual's current identity and the "new set of identity meanings" (p. 607). In leadership development programs, the external event may be exposing the leadership students to an ideal leader or examples of exceptional leadership. The student then compares their leader identities to that of the ideal, and the comparison stimulates a reconstruction of "the meaning of his or her currently held identity, which manifests itself in changing identity strengths" (Day et al., 2017, p. 607). In their work on organizations' influence on identity, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) remarked that individuals "are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (p. 626). They also noted that stress, tension, specific events, transitions, and even surprises serve to raise an individual's awareness of the quality of their self-identity and compels them to conduct more focused identity work.

Epistemological-Transformational Learning

Epistemology is "not what we know but our way of knowing" (Kegan, 2000, p. 52, emphasis in original). Epistemology is developing a new set of ideas about ideas, addressing questions such as where the idea came from, and who or what makes the idea true (Kegan, 2000, p. 57). Kegan (2000) studied adult cognitive development, and Belenky et al. (1997) identified ways of knowing that they attributed explicitly to women. Both of their theories show that transformational learning must move to the next level of understanding. Kegan (2000) explored transformational learning and cognitive development. Belenky et al. (1997) described the process of moving to the next level of development using similar underlying concepts of transformational learning, cognitive development, and ways of knowing and how they lay the foundation of understanding from the standpoint of women's beliefs, developmental opportunities, and challenges.

Received Knowledge: Listening to The Voices of Others.

Women who use this way of knowing may struggle with leadership. They have not developed their voice of authority. They rely on authorities outside themselves for answers. This approach emphasizes dualistic and concrete belief in the words of others. There is only right or wrong, black or white, good or bad (Belenky et al., 1997). Because these women put so much faith in the words of others, they have little confidence in themselves; in fact, they silence their own voices to hear others (Belenky et al., 1997). The silencing of their voice aligns with Langer's (2016) assertion of how strongly girls are impacted when unconditional information is taught. Belenky et al. (1997) explained that the women who relied on received knowledge struggled when they were asked to produce original work. They could not construct knowledge independently because they believed that only an external authority could provide the right answer (Belenky et al., 1997).

Subjective Knowledge/Self-Authoring Mind. From this level of development forward, the possibility of an individual identifying themselves as a leader becomes viable. Belenky (1997), studying subjective knowledge, and Kegan (1994) examining the self-authoring mindset, explored the process of individuals gaining the ability to consider themselves as knowledge authorities and create a new way to obtain information. According to Kegan and Lahey (2009), by using a self-authored mindset, an individual can examine the rules, opinions, and expectations of outside authorities and mediate among the authorities' differing views utilizing the individual's internal self-governing system.

According to Belenky et al. (1997), by using subjective knowledge, women found that truth and knowledge reside inside themselves, and they can negate answers that authority figures supplied. The women also learned more about themselves and their preferences, and they began to redefine themselves using their subjective knowledge. They also become their own authority, the author of their lives. Becoming their own authority was a major developmental transformation that impacted the women's self-concepts, relationships, self-esteem, behaviors, and morality (Belenky et al., 1997).

Mindfulness in Transformational Learning

Transformational learning calls for mindful practice. According to Dong et al. (2018), mindfulness could help integrate professional and personal identities. McCall (2010) pointed out that it is an individual's ability to learn from experiences, and not just have the experience, that is crucial. Mindfulness is defined as "the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment" (Kabat-Zinn 2003, p. 145). Langer (2016) shared that "from a mindful perspective, one's response to a particular situation is not an attempt to make the best choice from among available options but to create options" (p. 111) and the power of transformation lies within mindfulness (Baer, 2017).

Transformation calls for "deep introspection and perception to ordinary experience" (Baer, 2017, para. 11). Deeper introspection of ordinary experiences brings the realization that "There is no such thing as 'ordinary experience.' Everything is extraordinary" (Baer, 2017, para. 11). This type of mindfulness is a way for an individual to be more aware of themselves. Mindfulness becomes a catalyst to a new way of ongoing learning and healing (Baer, 2017; Dong et al. 2018). Mindfulness, according to Birnbaum (2009) and Dong et al. (2019), is a compassionate and non-judgmental mindset that is essential for the advancement of self-acceptance.

Conclusion

If we want to see more women in prominent leadership roles where critical decisions are being made as educators and leadership development experts, we need to be aware of the underlying challenges faced by women trying to develop as leaders. These challenges are often woven in a web that

reinforces each other. Leadership development is complex and challenging, even without the web of underlying challenges that women may face. Transformational learning offers excellent opportunities for exploring frames of references and requires profound changes in social, educational, and individual ways of knowing. As leadership development professionals and educators, being aware of and understanding transformational learning and the particular issues faced by women will help us to effectively encourage and aid women during their transition to becoming visible, impactful leaders who are involved in critical decision making at every level in our society.

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