Focus Group Becomes Support Group: Women in Educational Leadership

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If you are sitting around the table but you say nothing, that's a lost opportunity. Move beyond that and say something about what you have to offer. The reason you're there is because you have something valuable that can be added.

Ursula Burns

Introduction

The myth of meritocracy and denials of inequality still pervade American culture on many levels. The notion that individuals in leadership position are the most deserving of said positions is ubiquitous in our current milieu. However, research indicates that stereotypes, stereotype threat, overt discrimination, and more covert forms of discrimination, such as exposure to daily microaggressions, can render the road to leadership fraught with potholes, pitfalls, and impediments for women, particularly those possessing additional nondominant identities or multiple minority statuses (Gutierrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). Yet and still, we are in need of diverse leaders in our educational institutions (Paludi & Coates, 2011), most specifically women.

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Vignette One: The Value of Women's Voices, the Escapades of Jen and Ken

I worked in a high school setting for 17 years; 15 of those years I spent in a small alternative school for students labeled at-risk for school failure. It may or may not be surprising to note, depending on how much one is versed in K-12 education, how many of my co-workers were female. In fact, other than the principal and one other teacher, both male, the rest of my co-workers were female. That is why I found it so interesting when the women around the lunch table would lean in any time the man would say anything. Women even made him lunch and bought him gifts, simply because he was the only man; these were not romantic gestures, but some kind of an antiquated tradition of "kissing the ring," acknowledging the phallus, upholding the patriarchy. My feminist sensibilities were troubled. Sometimes, it was funny. Other times I was incredulous or outraged. And this male teacher was my friend. He would laugh about it, but he did not see at first that it was because of male privilege that he was receiving these gifts, until I pointed it out. At staff meetings, it was not uncommon for me to notice how everything Ken said was lauded. Often, I was ignored. And the majority of the people facing me were female. I understood that women could internalize sexism, so I enlisted Ken into an informal experiment. I explained to him the pattern that I was noticing: men's voices, although in the minority: in this case Ken and the principal, were more valued around the table than were women's. It was not that he did not believe me; he just never noticed it. (He did not have to, as it did not affect him.) Being my friend, and open to my feminist perspective, he agreed to my "experiment." My idea was this: I would broach various ideas during staff meetings. Upon being ignored or dismissed, Ken would broach the exact same idea, worded in a similar manner a few moments later. We repeated this pattern over several weeks and recorded our findings. Although Ken was surprised, I was not. Overwhelmingly, my ideas were ignored, but when repeated by Ken, they were embraced enthusiastically.

Jen and her female colleagues experienced what many women face daily: difficulty in being heard and in participating in decision-making compared to male colleagues. While scholars debate the reasons for this, the phenomenon itself is well documented (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012). In some cases, women are not heard because they may not speak as much. At the same time, the vignette shared above points to another aspect of women in leadership: women bring unique and highly valuable skills and perspectives to leadership roles. Notably, Ken himself did not see the privilege that his voice received, but Jen, his female colleague, *did* and she worked with him to validate her observations. Jen and Ken did eventually share their "experiment" with the rest of the people sitting around that table, most of whom were women. When Jen revealed her analysis of her speaking experience in comparison to her male colleagues, she was met with shock, followed quickly by regret. The other teachers resolved to do better and to be more reflective about assigning cultural capital (power, weight, significance) to a person's speech based upon dominant identity markers. Jen's sense of activism is not uncommon among women leaders.

Women in leadership roles are often more likely to take on women's issues (Martin, 2011b), other issues of marginality (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012) and to bring perspectives unique to women to light.

In this chapter, we first review the enduring challenges that women face in attaining positions of status and leadership and the theories that underpin these challenges. We then address the issues of differential expectations for leaders based upon biological sex, the issue of the underrepresentation of women leaders in education and the potential reasons for this, and the unique experiences women, including those of multiple minority status, face when they strive for or attain positions of leadership. Personal vignettes written by the authors will be interspersed throughout the chapter. We also offer the voices of a cadre of women holding leadership positions in K-12 education, as a way to elucidate and provide context to the literature.

Grounding the Paucity of Women's Leadership

Attribution Error

According to attribution theory, the personality characteristics (and personal accomplishments) of women and men are often perceived differently (Kirchmeyer, 1998). For example, women's accomplishments may be attributed to luck or other external factors; additionally, women's advancement may be attributed to affirmative action and not to personal ability (Kirchmeyer, 1998; Lyness & Thompson, 1997). Moreover, a woman's performance (on tasks traditionally perceived to be associated with male characteristics) is often attributed to luck or to effort, and men's performance is attributed to skill (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). The reason for the former can be explained through the idea that such successes violate people's sex role expectations; to avoid cognitive dissonance, many observers attribute negative attributes to women, such that women are not responsible for their own successes—they just "got lucky."

Vignette Two: Enduring Challenges for Women, a Student in My Office

One day, about halfway through the semester of teaching Multicultural Education, a student entered my office. Because I had previously taught this student in an Introduction to Education course, I felt very comfortable and open with this student. I motioned for him to enter my office and to sit down even though I had an Information Technology person assisting me with my computer at the time. As we were working on my computer, the student proceeded to tell me how he felt my course was "sexist" and made him feel angry. I asked him to name what I had done or said that was sexist, and he replied that he could not name an example, but he felt entitled enough, in front of another person that he did not know, to inform me that somehow I was not doing my job correctly. I wondered if he would have felt as comfortable speaking in a similar manner to a male professor, especially with someone else in the room.

Despite my shock and embarrassment at the situation, I attempted to defend my curriculum and my point of view. I attempted to inform him that because I broach the topic of sexism, this does not mean that I am sexist. It was as though he was attempting to shoot the messenger for suggesting that he think about things he had never before been asked to think about: his privilege. He did not like it, and he was looking for someone to blame.

It is not abundantly clear exactly why the student in the above vignette acted in this manner. Did he attribute his professor's position to some external factor, thus deeming her less than qualified for her position as authority figure in the classroom? Women in positions of leadership and authority, such as teachers and professors, may find it more difficult to be taken seriously in comparison with their male peers because of students' attribution errors, whether these errors are made explicit through overt resistance, or kept implicit, revealing themselves on course evaluations (Hamermesh & Parker, 2005; Toombs, 2013). Although we are committed to social justice pedagogy, we understand that not only is achieving tenure more difficult for women and faculty of color because of organizational cultures that do not support their work or their identities (Gutierrez y Muhs, et al. 2012; Jones, Taylor, & Coward, 2013), but also because this work is further complicated for those teaching courses with "unsafe content." According to Ludlow, Rodgers, and Wrighton (2005), "… resistant White/male heterosexual/mainstream students respond to diversity courses by inverting the dominant/subordinate paradigm: the White student perceives himself/herself to be subordinated by the discourse of diversity and resists it as if she/he were the marginalized group" (p. 8). In these instances, if the instructor holds a dominant identity status, she/he is less likely to face student resistance on evaluations. Conversely, the more distant the instructor's identity is from the dominant status, the more intensive, abusive, and discrediting the resistance can become (Ludlow et al., 2005, p. 8). In Vignette Two, the (dominant status) student felt entirely comfortable challenging this professor's curriculum in front of a stranger. Given these realities, engaging in social justice pedagogy and scholarship is not among the best advice for new faculty members seeking tenure (Patton, Shahjahan, & Osei-Kofi, 2010).

We are aware that professors who violate students' expectations, for instance, by asking them to move beyond their proscribed gender role expectations can face consequences (Bachen, McLoughlin, & Garcia, 1999); however, women tend to receive more negative repercussions for said approaches (Takiff, Sanchez, & Stewart, 2001). Experiencing gendered microaggressions—one of the enduring challenges women face, such as those mentioned above—can make it more difficult for women to become leaders, and for women to be taken seriously as leaders (Martin, 2011b).

Despite decades of feminist progress, women leaders still have to think about how they are perceived based upon the gender stereotypes held by others. According to Takiff et al. (2001), "Female professors, like other women in the workplace, may often have to decide whether to conform to traditional gender-role norms or to demand the status and success they deserve at the cost of likability" (p. 143). It is not uncommon for students to expect a maternal figure in their female professors,

someone who is perpetually nice: someone who is not too challenging, someone who does not ask too many questions, for, as Sandler (1991) reminds us, gender can impact how students evaluate a faculty member's competence. According to Baker and Copp (1997), "… students may hold contradictory and unrealistic expectations of them [women]. These contradictions may make it hard for women faculty members to receive outstanding teaching evaluations, because students judge women by their gender performance" (p. 29). Attribution plays a part here too, as women's successes are often attributed to luck, while men's success is attributed to talent (Sandler, 1991).

Personal Agency and Gender Norms

The terms "agency" and "communion" were originally developed by Bakan (1966) to reflect two fundamental aspects of human existence. Agency describes a person's existence as an individual; communion describes a person's participation in a larger whole of which they belong. Bakan essentialized these constructs by attributing them to gender: agency as the male principle, communion as the female. Historically, women have tended to possess fewer agentic traits (or self-directed/self-promoting actions) than men (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). One reason for this involves the perceptions of observers, or the societal double bind. For example, when women take career risks or achieve success in nontraditional realms they may be viewed negatively by others. The same self-promoting actions in men (assertiveness) are often looked at as negative in women and are often subsequently relabeled (aggressiveness). "Aggressiveness" may include asking for a raise, a move fraught with risks for women. In essence, self-promotion in women may not be a "safe" course of action. Although some women leaders can withstand the negative labels of "bitchy" or "bossy," others find the cost too great: the risks involved becoming a leader in a field where women leaders are scarce are too personally taxing.

Additionally, because there are fewer women in positions of leadership, some may perceive women to be less capable of such positions; in other words, these ideas can translate to negative perceptions of women's capabilities (Eagly & Steffen, 1984)—which further leads to women's perceptions of their own capabilities (contributing to the vicious cycle which produces fewer women leaders). Women's acknowledgement of these negative perceptions of women leaders within the larger social construct can contribute to stereotype threat, causing their performance to weaken (Steele, 1997). In other words, when women feel responsible to represent their entire sex, or to alter the negative expectations and stereotypes placed upon their group, in areas where they represent the "one" or where they are in a minority, they may collapse under the pressure. Additionally, if women perceive their opportunities to be less than those of men, they may seek to strive for less or not seek promotions or leadership positions for fear of failure. This fear may cause a lack of motivation and thus perpetuate the cycle of few women in top management positions (Dreher, 2003).

Whiston and Bouwkamp (2003) found that career-oriented women are motivated by more intrinsic needs such as independence and achievement. This effect is directly associated with cultural expectations of women's work and acceptance of non-stereotypical gender roles. For example, Twenge (1997) found that while over time, communal traits have remained higher in women than in men, agentic traits have increased in women over time, as a result of the social re-framing of women's work and subsequent women's role performance. Accordingly, Twenge found that as the gap between women and men is decreasing in terms of feelings of personal agency, assertiveness (an agentic trait) in women has been increasing: a performance that varies with status and role. According to Abele (2003), both women and men displayed agentic or dominant traits when in positions of supervision; however, women presented as more communal (or submissive behaviors) when in positions of workplace subordination. Interestingly, women possessing non-majority identity status are oftentimes taught to internalize agentic traits as manifestations of their minority gendered selves. African American women, for example, are socialized into the Strong Black Woman (SBW) role (Sharp-Grier, 2013) and are expected, as part of their subcultural contextual identity as women, to be both agentic and communal as contextualized by the setting. This identity, because it does not represent the normed expectation of femininity, presents unique challenges to African American women leaders as they navigate what to them is culture shock, and to others, aggressive womanhood, within the professional milieu.

Vignette Three: Developing and Negotiating Leadership as a Non-majority Woman

Student organizations provide unique opportunities for young persons to develop the skills and acumen necessary to successfully enter into and succeed within professional and corporate venues. For Black women, opportunities to do so are often limited and present difficult hurdles. Tina, an African American assistant professor, assumed the leadership of an organization of Black women students. When she took on the role as advisor to the club, she knew that it was laden with issues that rendered the club fractured and ineffective. It was hemorrhaging membership, and the source of the flow was the president. Tina called the president of the org into her office to get to know her a bit, and to determine what she believed her role to be, as the ambassador of the organization. When the president arrived, Tina greeted her and started the conversation with pleasantries and an overview of why the meeting was called. When the president began discussing her leadership style, her demeanor changed—she became almost hostile and overtly demonstrative in a way that positioned herself not as a co-collaborator and leader of the group; rather she saw herself as an authoritarian figure, there to manage and control the members. Tina was struck by the president's posturing, but realized that her standpoint was not reflective of her desire to be dictatorial. Instead, she was attempting to juxtapose her perception of self as an African American, woman, leader—something about

which she received conflicting social definitions, and for which she had not been provided mentoring.

In sum, self-actualized, secure, and independent women are not actively nurtured and cultivated by our society. There are still consequences for women who do not fit their prescribed role, including social ostracism and receiving negative personal feedback (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). Career-oriented women and women leaders can be viewed by others as cold, bitter, quarrelsome, and selfish, when simply possessing the same personality characteristics as their male counterparts (Heilman et al., 2004). Women who behave in ways perceived as traditionally male are less well received than are men who deviate from traditional norms (Heilman et al., 2004). Sometimes it is subordinates' belief of personality characteristics as opposed to one's actual personality characteristics that pose the real problem for women leaders.

Evaluation of Women Leaders

Women's performance, credentials, and workplace outcomes, when they mirror men's, are not evaluated in a fashion similar to men's. This reality may partially explain why women do not have equitable access to positions of leadership; as previously stated, leadership qualities, such as assertiveness, may be viewed less favorably when exhibited by a woman (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Eagly et al. (1992) found that women leaders were devalued in comparison with male leaders, when the leadership was carried out in a stereotypically masculine manner. This devaluation was exacerbated when women leaders occupied male-dominated realms and when male evaluators were used. Eagly et al. (1992) also found that women leaders were more harshly evaluated when they were evaluated by men, "Because placing women in leadership positions upsets the traditional societal gender hierarchy, male subjects might, in a sense, have more to lose by approving female leadership because their status vis-à-vis women would decline. Thus, male subjects may be more prone than female subjects to reject female leaders" (p. 7). Although the Eagly et al. study is more than 20 years old, not much has changed in terms of how people perceive and judge the qualities women leaders possess. As the following vignette will illustrate, it is not only men who are guilty of maligning women leaders for acting outside of traditional gender role expectations; women also can internalize sexism and use it to indict other women.

Vignette Four: "You're Abrasive!"

I chair the faculty committee on diversity initiatives on my campus. Although this committee is part of our system of faculty governance, additional members of the committee include student affairs staff members as well as students representing the various diversity organizations on campus. At our most recent meeting, we had invited the Vice President of Marketing to attend, so that she could hear students' concerns about diversity representation on the university's new website. After the

students presented their concerns, a staff member new to the university, Susan,[1] *began detailing her own personal problems with the website, including the fact that her picture and personal bio were not yet online. I attempted to steer the conversation back to our agenda and to respect the schedule of the marketing representative, who had another engagement to attend. Because Susan's concerns were not in the purview of marketing, I asked that the Dean of Diversity and Inclusion (who was in attendance) update the personal information of the staff members in their office and to send it to marketing. However, Susan continued perseverating on her incredulity that she did not exist on the website. I could tell that she was hurt, but this was not a venting session. I stated, as gently as I could, "Susan, I am sorry, but I have to stop you there. We have to get back to the agenda and the Vice President needs to get to another… ." Before I could finish my sentence, she interrupted with, "You're abrasive!" I was shocked. I was sure that I had not heard correctly. I said, "What?" She replied, "We'll talk about it later. I was talking." Although perhaps I should not have been shocked, I was. I knew that being called "abrasive" in a meeting that is under my charge, and in front of students, is absolutely unacceptable. A gendered attack such as this on a committee charged with fostering diversity on campus is more than a little ironic. Instead of "speaking to me later," Susan stormed out of the meeting, long before the adjournment, soon after the VP of Marketing took her leave.*

Perhaps the author of the above vignette was not perceived as being sufficiently "nice." Would a man who engaged in the same behaviors be deemed as "abrasive?" Perceptions of personality characteristics aside, women also report that their styles of leadership are also obstacles to their advancement (Shinew & Arnold, 1998). Some women leaders describe their leadership styles as being fundamentally different from men. For example, women often attempt to get their subordinates to come to a consensus with the goal of the group. In general, however, the perception of how leadership should be conducted philosophically is still viewed in terms of individualistic traits (as opposed to relational traits) (Vinnicombe & Harris, 2000). Vinnicombe and Harris (2000) argue that this perception persists because of the processes (such as hidden attitudes and stereotypes) of the informal organization, "The balance of the sexes in management can still be summed up by the phrase 'think manager, think male,' just as it was in the 1970s" (p. 28). Should the author of the above vignette have allowed the extraneous discussion to continue because of the expectation that women are more relational? The problem is that socially, women are not provided access to a full gamut of personality characteristics and leadership styles. Women possessing "feminine" leadership styles may have their style questioned; for example, some women have their sense of calm misperceived as weakness (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). Women in positions of leadership, possessing a traditionally "feminine" style are often perceived as weak, wimpy, and wishy-washy (Williamson & Hudson, 2001). If women are direct, they are viewed as oppositional; if they are relational, they may be viewed as weak. Because women leaders are still the few, they remain the judged, especially when it comes to performance evaluation.

[1] A pseudonym.

Effective performance is often attributed to ability when the employee being observed is a member of the "in-group," as opposed to the token or out-group; in the latter case, success is often attributed to luck (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). This does not just apply to gender; it also applies to other nondominant statuses (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). Employees who were thought to perform well because of ability were also judged more worthy of promotions than were those whose successes were attributed to luck or effort (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993). African American workers are subject to having their successes judged as not the logical outcome of the application of their talents and drive; but, rather as a vestige of affirmative action policies, which are erroneously perceived to include a mandatory "quota system," whereby organizations are required to hire and promote concrete numbers of Blacks, women, and other minorities to avoid federal scrutiny (Foster, 2015). Such perceptions are not only inaccurate, they also harm minority and women employees in that they discount the talents and abilities of the individuals scrutinized—suggesting that they were not hired because of *who* they are; rather, they were hired because of *what* they are (Exum, 1983). In short, they perpetuate the stereotype that "black folk just ain't smart" (Sharp-Grier, 2015). For Black women, in this instance, their intersectional selves—the nexus of their race, culture, and sex (Crenshaw, 1989) creates a unique path through which their expertise, performance, and outcomes may be evaluated.

Women experience discriminatory evaluation procedures, have their competence denied, and their performance devalued as a result of their sex (Heilman et al., 2004). These unfair processes perpetuate negative expectations for women. These negative expectations result from the inconsistency in how women are viewed and what characteristics are necessary to perform a particular job. Even when women are successful in traditionally male occupations, they may still be judged unfairly.

Unique Challenges for Women of Color

Reliable, self-sacrificing, gutsy, redeemer, fierce guardian, observer, attendant, partner, unstinting, supporter, rescuer (Parks, 2010). These words have been used to describe Black women, and to define their role in the social realm. It can be deduced from this list that the expectations of Black women are many, and in some ways, daunting. Parks, in *Fierce Angels: The Strong Black Woman in American Life and Culture* (2010), noted that this list is "humanly impossible" to achieve, yet is expected by both black culture and the dominant milieu. Woods-Giscombe (2010), in her analysis of stress-related outcomes of the Strong Black Woman (SBW) (Sharp-Grier, 2013) role, noted a "Superwoman Schema"—a set of variables with which the analysis of the SBW can be examined. She identified a multifaceted system of characteristics, contextual factors, benefits, and liabilities related to the SBW role, including individualities, which incorporate a manifestation of strength, an obligation to suppress emotion, a resistance to being vulnerable/dependent, a strong drive to succeed, and an obligation to help others (2010).

These traits have been normalized and incorporated into the interactive social milieu as a racial and gendered emotional prescription for Black women and are in direct opposition to what has been hegemonically presented as the ideal feminine display. This prescription has influenced not only the social understandings of Black women and subsequent responses to them (Sharp-Grier, 2013, 2015), they have also been adopted by the various institutions within which Black women in general, and Black women leaders, in particular, must navigate themselves. Parker and Ogilvie (1996) suggest that these socialized traits correlate directly to a distinctively African American female style of leadership, which recognizes the hegemonic White male model of understood "female" styles, but by nature of the internalized understanding of self as Black women, is more agentic, and must be enacted within the context of racial and gender discrimination. Because of what Alston (2000) suggests is a dearth of Black women school administrators, the African American woman's experience in leadership is oftentimes discounted and/or overlooked. Yet, it is a salient and tangible aspect of how Black women in leadership positions exact their work, and are subsequently evaluated by their peers—even in the classroom setting. This model is also complicit in manifesting outcomes of stress, uncertainty, and a plethora of physical and psychological responses to its adaptation.

Woods-Giscombe, in her 2010 work investigating how the "Superwoman Schema" affects the physical and mental health of Black women, noted that Black women are chronically exposed to psychological stress, which leads to cardiovascular, immune, and neuroendocrine problems. Parks (2010) noted that despite Black women undertaking *more* preventative health measures than other women, particularly regarding stress-related illnesses (heart disease, hypertension, obesity), they are more often afflicted with these maladies and die sooner than their counterparts. She explains that the "cultural lockdown" of the SBW: images and actions required by the Black community, and expected by the White, have led to this phenomenon.

Power and Influence

Women of color were found to have less influence within their departments than were White women. Women within the science field experience fewer opportunities for leadership and influence, slower advancement, heightened isolation, and the like. Settles, Cortina, Malley, and Stewart (2006) argue that in order for women to be successful in science-related fields, they must realize these three outcomes: job satisfaction, productivity, and "felt influence." Sexual harassment and sexist environments in general affect these areas (Paludi & Coates, 2011). These factors and the tolerance of them within the organization hinder the success of women and are tied to lower productivity and career outcomes for women (Settles et al., 2006).

As illuminated in vignette one, women can also hold sexist stereotypes. In a randomized double-blind study of 127 science faculty members at research universities, Moss-Racusin and colleagues (2012) found that faculty members rated iden-

tical application materials for a lab manager position of male applicants higher than female applicants. This bias in favor of male applicants was true for both male and female faculty. At the same time, we must note that women can also take the lead in identifying such biases, just as Jen did.

Sex stereotypes still exist and thus create a double standard that negatively affects the evaluations of women in management (Dreher, 2003; Pardine, Fox, & Salzano, 1995). The percentage of women in positions of management has increased since the mid-seventies; however, the perceptions still endure that women are unqualified or unable to perform in such capacities. Those women who do make it into positions of management do little to contribute to the change in perception or changes in stereotypes of women; on the contrary, these women are instead thought to be the "exception" to the stereotype (Pardine et al., 1995). They are thought to be unrepresentative of women in general—their accomplishments do not impact societal beliefs about the qualifications of women in positions of management (Pardine et al., 1995).

According to the American Association of University Professors 2006 equity study, women hold only 24% of full professor positions in the United States. Despite the gains women have made in higher education over the past few decades, they are highly underrepresented in tenure-track positions. Women in higher education face more obstacles to career advancement than in the corporate world (West & Curtis, 2006). The areas with the fewest number of women in higher education are the most prestigious and most highly paid. Women make far less than men in higher education because they are more likely to hold positions at institutions that pay lower salaries and they are less likely to gain senior rank.

In a meta-analysis of 45 studies, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen (2003) found that women show more transformational leadership traits (such as charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualize consideration) than men. Gupton and Slick (1996) argue that these traits are valuable, "Transformational leadership advocates participatory management that motivates others by transforming their self-interest into the goals of the organization. Transformational leaders are skilled in leadership patterns that inspire increased worker performance by encouraging all points of view" (p. 108). Transformational leadership necessitates relational leadership and values mentoring and the communal; it can establish a sense of connection between people. Transformational leadership is a non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal form of leading where the named leader shares the task of leading by utilizing the strengths of those in the organization. Decisions are made together and the tasks of leaders are shared. In fact, the most effective style of leadership is transformational leadership, which builds empowerment in a mutual and collaborative context (Eagly et al., 2003; Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Women most often utilize the transformational leadership style, a style that requires empathy and a sense of caring for others. Although research suggests that it is the most effective style of leadership, we have a paucity of women at the highest levels of leadership in most fields (West & Curtis, 2006; Dreher, 2003; Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008; White House Project, 2009). Additionally, transformational leaders often put their own self-interest in check for the good of the organization, as the following vignette will illustrate.

Vignette Four: "You're Abrasive!" Part II

In my view, sometimes leaders have to "take the hit" to protect their people or to serve the greater good; they put their personal feelings to the side for the overall benefit of the organization. Although I was very upset at being called "abrasive," I thought that perhaps the comment was not so much about me, but about Susan feeling virtually anonymous. I took a conciliatory approach by sending her the following email, "Thank you again for attending today's meeting. I fully understand your need to express your views about the website. That being said, _________ had already spent more time than she had allotted, as she expressed the need to get to another engagement prior to your arrival at the meeting. While trying to be respectful of __________'s time, I attempted to halt the conversation when it veered to topics not on our agenda and things not under her control. My apologies if I caused any discomfort on your part, for that was certainly not my intention. If you would like to address your concerns with me about the committee, or about any other issues, I would be happy to do so." However, I never got a reply. No response. No explanation for her behavior. No apology. Although I am not sure what the outcome of this situation will be, I am sure that as women leaders, we must be open about what we experience. To keep silent about the microaggressions we face will only compound their power upon us. And they do have power. Because this situation has not been resolved, I am anxious about the next meeting I will chair. But I will not keep silent. There is power in naming. And I name this as a gendered attack on my leadership.

Women leaders in K-12 leadership also face many challenges related to sex and race, and other minority statuses, as will be demonstrated later in the chapter.

Methods

Indigenous and feminist research methods are presented to voice the voiceless through the application of approaches most aligned with the narratives they seek to represent (Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016). Such methodologies, when utilized as tools of decolonization, diminish the influence of the dominant voice, which has traditionally been employed to define and contextualize the lives and experiences of individuals possessing minority status in the current social milieu (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011), including women. Conventionally, research models have reflected the temporal and cultural standpoints of dominant groups. They have reflected and strengthened the predominant perspectives of the mythical norm (Lorde, 1997), which have at best reinforced stereotypical notions regarding social minority groups in general and at worst contributed to the dehumanization and infrahumanization of those persons (Goff, Jackson, Di Leone, Culotta, & DiTomasso, 2014; Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016) and lessened life chances. According to Martin and Sharp-Grier (2016), "These approaches to social investigation have systematically framed minorities and women as other, and have viewed them as objects, rather than subjects of investigation. Their realities therefore have been interpreted and used by

the majority without giving them voice to speak for themselves" (p. 58). As culture jamming scholars—those who utilize "… a form of communication, art, protest … which rejects the dominant cultural discourse regarding the marginalized…" (Sharp-Grier & Martin, 2016, p. 4), we endeavor to ensure that those with lived experiences are positioned as subjects rather than objects of analysis and are free to communicate their stories and to be provided the opportunity to disturb traditional research processes when said practices sublimate the recounting of lived experience. In so doing, in addition to outlining our analysis in empirical literature and adding our voices through autoethnographic narrative, we organized and conducted a focus group interview of seven women in K-12 leadership positions.

According to Warren and Karner (2005), because interviews have proven robust in producing abundant and illustrative accounts of empirical knowledge, we felt that such an approach would provide a full understanding of the firsthand experiences of women navigating leadership in educational venues. We conducted one focus group session during our investigation, which was held at a neutral location on the campus of a small Midwestern university. The participants represented three small- to mid-sized school districts. Two of the districts can be defined as urban, and one distinctly rural. The contributors ranged in age from 36 to 69 years of age. All but two held positions of Assistant Principal or higher within their school districts. Three of the seven identified as White, and four as Black or African American. Each provided pseudonyms for themselves, which will be utilized in the below-listed analysis to identify them. All seven women possessed a Master's degree, and two had earned their doctorates.

For the session, we composed and administered open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to speak to their unique experiences. As was expected in the group interview process, participants were free and willing to build on the discussions and responses of their colleagues, which yielded a conversational tone and collegial interaction. As Martin and Sharp-Grier (2016) state, "We developed our queries to evoke relaxed, 'inquisitive' dialogues, as opposed to 'investigative' exchanges. The discussions were guided, yet designed to encourage the free flow of information…" (p. 59). A similar approach was utilized in the current study, and ultimately resulted in the generation of a bond between the participants that carried beyond the confines of the focus group experience.

As implied above, we developed a very rough outline of questions, because we intended to allow participants to the discussion and allow it to move in the directions they deemed important. (The focus group questions can be found in Appendix). The interview lasted approximately 90 min and was recorded. It was later transcribed and coded for themes. In order to contain our own biases, we analyzed the data with the recognition that the group was one within which a strong reflexive process was generated. Recognizing reflexivity involves acknowledging the ways in which "our own agendas" impact our research at all points, including analysis and interpretation (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 17).

The acknowledgment necessitated that we examine and consider the impact of how our subjects' positions, locations, and beliefs impacted not only the interpretation of their own lived experience, but also that of their fellow cohort. Moreover, our

recognition of the reflexive process similarly demanded that we, ourselves, consider our own biases, and how they impact what we choose to study, our motivations for the analysis, our methodological approach to study, and so on (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Continual member checking, informant feedback, and content validation, in order to ensure not only applicability but authenticity (Hesse-Biber, 2012) of information and interpretation, were practiced.

Data Analysis

We incorporated Saldana's (2016) method of *process coding* to analyze our data. Process coding involves highlighting gerunds within the data in order to connote observable and conceptual action. It is an action-oriented method. We selected this method based upon the tension women face between the active and passive gendered stereotypes of the leader. We thus wanted to determine if the women leaders spoke in an active or a passive voice, and if their style of voice conformed to their narrative telling.

This methodological process, active coding, encompassed several stages. We first conducted first cycle coding, recording all gerunds and the frequency of their occurrence. We then, as Saldana suggests, attempted to embody the process codes (to symbolically represent them physically) to get a sense of the overall understanding of conceptual action of the group as a whole.

Second, we developed a list of the most prominent process codes and engaged in other round of bode embodiment to get another sense of the overall understanding of the most prominent conceptual actions of the group. Through this process we developed common themes. Third, we reviewed the data and highlighted any key quotations that were paradigmatic of any of these themes.

Finally, we then had Chloe, our research assistant, scour through the narrative transcript and record her reactions. The first two authors, Martin and Sharp-Grier, then reanalyzed the data.

Results

Through the analysis of data, if a process code was only used once, it was removed from the gerund list, as we were looking for prominent and common actions. The four most prominent codes were "going [to]," "being," looking/watching," and "mentoring." Through the process of code embodiment, we realized that the process codes involved more of an aspirational symbolic conversation than a reporting of accomplishments. That is, the codes indicated to us that the women in the focus group talked much about what they were going to do, how they were perceived by others, what they observed in others and how they were observed, and their lack of and need for mentoring.

The prominent themes that we identified from the data were:

- Finding and giving voice (including feeling like an imposter)
- Differential expectations based on gender
- Mentoring and lack thereof
- Racialized and gendered microaggressions

These themes are not at all surprising and are in line with previous research. In sum, the women participating in the focus group lacked mentors, were one of the "only" of their identity markers in a position of leadership, and faced differential expectations and microaggressions based on their minority/multiple minority status(es) because of this.

Chloe's Analysis

The first conclusion I found through the focus group was all of the women had a hard time finding their voices, not only in their leadership roles, but in their daily lives. Participants suggested that it is often just easier to take on extra work, ignore comments made by their male counterparts, or to go about a situation by being funny, rather than just saying what is really on their minds or fighting. I also found that the four women of color found it even harder to speak their voice, even in the focus group. The three White women spoke 79 comments throughout the time of the group, whereas the four women of color only made 58 comments. I am not sure if this has to do with personality or race, but through the data the minority women spoke less.

Another large issue that came from the discussion was the role of family and child-rearing. Most of the women in the group had children, and they talked about the hardships of being in a role of leadership and also being a mother. One woman talked about the comparison between she and her male counterpart, both of whom had children around the same time. No one said anything to the man after the birth of his child, but for the woman, comments were made such as: "I could never leave my baby at home, how are you doing this, you know isn't it time for you to go home?" She reported that those comments have never been made to a man. Moreover, these comments were made by women. Another woman told about how her family resented her for continuing her education, and for arriving home or to her children's games late from work. Comments were made to her that she should stop her education, and her name would never change to her family members. And another woman said how she was the breadwinner in her family, so her husband took care of the children. It was not the role he wanted to play, which then created stress in their relationship.

Through listening to the women talk about their success and families, it seemed that the higher their success, the lower (status) their families and some counterparts saw them. In today's society women are still seen as wives and mothers, even if they are highly qualified for a position in leadership. It is as though these women have to carry the weight of their families and they must try to get their support. These women are not being supported or respected by their families, let alone as leaders.

Mentorship was a huge aspect throughout the discussion. Many of the women felt that they did not have proper mentors, and if they did then they all got too busy (and the mentorship dissolved). The question was asked, "How many women actually embrace other women, and offer mentorship?" The women stated that there was a lack of female role models. One woman stated that she felt as though people above her didn't want her to achieve. Many of the other women felt the same, and they wished they had support from other women leaders. The overall conclusion from the discussion was that women in these positions were busy, but they did need mentorship from others. These women felt that they needed more guidance, and wanted someone to talk to about these issues in educational leadership. No matter the age, experience, or educational background, these women in leadership had the desire to feel supported and have guidance from the others around them, yet it was hard to find.

The women also spoke of the microaggressions that they faced in their roles. Some of the women stated that men would be called by their title, while they were called by their first names. That could be another cause for these women feeling voiceless. Women in these higher positions have the same, if not more, training than their male counterparts; yet, they are not recognized as such. Other women stated how they had been called aggressive and a bitch, while the men (with similar traits) are called great leaders. One woman shared how a parent had called the school and asked for the "black principal." Statements like this are meant to tear women in leadership down. These words take away from the success and make the woman seem average and unimportant.

Overall, the results of the focus group were encouraging, in that the women shared their similar experiences and talked about how they could mentor one another. The conversation also showed that women in leadership must work harder than men to succeed. Once a woman does succeed and gets into a powerful position, the others around her still see her as just a female, wife, and mother. Women of color have these issues plus having to navigate race in the situation, so they then become the "black principal," rather than just the principal. Through the focus group, the comments made mostly focused on issues from: feeling voiceless, family and educational issues, needing more women mentors, and microaggressions. Although these are not the only issues women in leadership face, these are some of the most prominent issues suggested by the conversations in the focus group.

Thematic Analysis

The prominent themes that we identified from the data were: finding and giving voice (including feeling like an imposter), differential expectations based on gender, mentoring and lack thereof, and racialized and gendered microaggressions.

Our first theme, finding and giving voice (including feeling like an imposter), we found most prominently within the African American participants in the focus group:

> I have the same obstacle feeling like your voice is silent…. I'm gonna say that I thought my voice was silenced on multiple occasions. I'm gonna say even getting into the field during an interview process, this before I got the job, another time. They looked at my resume and your resume looked excellent, in fact it looks like you've done too much. What types of things do you do for fun? They said this—I was told—I'm going to ask this question, it hasn't been asked to anybody else, but what types of things do you do for fun? I'm confused. Am I qualified for this based off of the things I have listed on my resume?—Naomi, African American, 44 years old

Naomi's sentiments represent the classic double bind of what individuals possessing minority statuses face. They feel like imposters so they try to achieve more than their majority status peers, to be considered half as good. It is a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation.

Our second theme, differential expectations based on gender, ran the gamut from additional workload (inequitable division of labor based on gender) and being asked to take care of all "kin keeping" tasks. For example:

> When gifts needed to be bought and thoughtful things needed to be done, when caring type activities needed to be done, but what was also very strange—I don't know if any of you have any experience with this—but whenever there was really a crisis situation, I often would turn around and everybody was gone and I was the one. And so we started this foxhole I would say well, I will tell people to say are you in my foxhole? You will not be in my foxhole, because I noticed that the men, when it was like a conflict situation that required personal skill they would just kinda back up. And that's been a trend. I don't know…. And it's been all the way through my career—Scout, White, 56 years old

Scout speaks to the fact that she was often left alone to deal with problems. Another differential expectation was that of child-rearing.

Emma speaks to the fact that her male colleague had an easier time than did she with having and raising children while working. Emma received negative judgments for returning to work soon after having a child, although the primary breadwinner in her family:

> I can speak to that, my predecessor and I had almost the exact same experience in the past two years. And that was in terms of expanding our families. My predecessor had his first child during his tenure I had my baby this year as well. And while it was tough, I feel I weathered the storm pretty well. But I just noticed how often people had said, 'I could never leave my baby that soon. How are you doing this? You know isn't it time for you to go home? You need to go home.' I often find myself saying, you would had never said this to him.—Emma, African American, 36 years old

At the time of this writing, 2016, women still experience negative feedback for holding the dual roles of leader and mother.

Our third theme, mentoring and lack thereof, speaks to the fact that *all* of the women who participated in our focus group lacked mentors during their aspirational period when attempting to attain leadership roles, and in their current roles as leaders:

> I feel like I'm always looking for affirmation, looking for the nod like okay. Looking for that yep you're doing it. You're fine, you're doing a good job from colleagues and just everywhere I just- in my personal life too, because I feel so guilty.—Holly, White, 47 years old

Although some were mentored by male colleagues and bosses, all lacked other women as mentors and desired to keep talking about their experiences within the focus group. We titled our paper, "The Focus Group becomes the Support Group," because the women desired to keep the conversation going, resulting in a "Group Me" group text application where they could continue to support one another, and the communal desire to meet regularly with the researchers to continue the talk and support one another. Holly provided an insightful sentiment about the loneliness and sense of rejection she felt as the lone woman working in a central office leadership position:

> How am I going to be able to survive?—Holly, White, 47 years old

Our fourth theme, racialized and gendered microaggressions, was perhaps the most salient in our analysis. Emma and Janae both reported being victims of racialized attacks, and Janae reported a racialized and gendered attack when she is called a "Black Bitch."

> I had a parent call and said, "Let me talk to that black principal." And so when I answered the phone I said, "This is the black principal. What do you need from the black principal? The black principal is here." I just kept repeating it over and over again until they understood, you know without saying anything negative. I had to let them know, this is the black principal.—Emma, African American, 36 years old

Emma, being a very direct leader, subtly let this parent know that this language was unacceptable, and this worked for her. Janae, on the other hand, was still processing her own attack, which she attempted to characterize as a "double whammy":

> I think being called a black b is pretty upsetting, so that's worse than just being called a b 'cause there's a whole lot of other stuff that is implied with that and there are some signs that are very—that just right there, I don't handle that well. And so it happens and it's a double, I don't know what to call it….—Janae, African American, 52 years old

Janae did not reveal the specifics of her attack or her attacker. She did not even speak the entire phrase explicitly, but the pain and shock were evident on her face.

Another finding that stemmed from the racialized and gendered microaggressions theme was that of pay and recognition. That is, microaggressive comments from colleagues reveal inequities in pay and perceptions that women should not, or do not need to, get paid as much as men for the same work because they have husbands at home:

> Both formal and informal, just recognition. I was recently presented in a totally different context, the salaries, and the administrative salaries in our district and the treasurer, as soon as it was handed to me, she knew I had not seen it yet because I do not have a poker face. And I'm the assistant superintendent and you think I would know…So those, those, they still exist.—Holly, White, 47 years old

Additionally, microaggressive comments or microinvalidations reveal that women's work/women's leadership is not recognized or valued on equal terms with male peers. This causes the women in the focus group to reveal feelings of inadequacy, anger, and outrage:

> I just had a recent experience with that and I was really ticked off about it, not salary, but a comment was made about an opportunity that I was interested in and someone said, 'Oh

> you don't need the money.' And I… said, You know it isn't just racist, there is gender and you might not realize this, because in our district we talk about, you know racist issues a lot, and we don't talk about gender. And it was a male, [he] was clueless why that offended me. I said you would never say that to a man, you wouldn't. Never say that to a man.—Scout, White, 56 years old

Scout also shares an experience indicative of how women's leadership is not always respected by male colleagues:

> At the beginning of the school year in front of the entire staff I called out a male teacher, you know, 'Why do we have to do this, blah blah?' And it was very derogatory you some of the things which we spoke and everybody's looking at me, 'How's she going to deal with this?' And I've been in relationship, being proactive having a good relationship with your staff so that if you're ever have to be in a position, but I made a point as soon as the section was done I walked over to this man in front of everyone 'cause they all wanted to see it and you know we joked, he apologized, but I did not call him out right at that moment, that would not have been appropriate, but I made sure, I didn't walk around the perimeter I walked up the middle.—Scout, White, 56 years old

It is doubtful that similar behavior would have occurred had Scout been a male administrator.

It was very interesting to contrast the experiences of Emma, (African American, 36 years old) and Rue (White, 69 years old). Rue was a retired superintendent of a small rural district, and Emma is a current principal of an urban elementary school. Rue often spoke of, and advised the other women in the focus group to do the same, circumventing the exclusions she faced by "going around them," or "going through the back door," or "playing the game." She gave advice such as, "stand under the basketball hoop with your arms folded," when others felt that they were not taken seriously as women leaders. However, well-intended, her advice did nothing to trouble or to dismantle the institutional factors that impeded women, particularly women of color, and their success as leaders, many of whom were the first.

Emma, on the other hand, refused to play these games. As she states, "*I feel like I'm meant to be more of the aggressive person. I'm very private, and I don't do boys club thing.*" Emma, the primary breadwinner in her family, is a very direct person and deals with issues of justice and oppression in her school on a daily basis. "*Social justice is a huge issue,"* she stated.

Finally, it was interesting to note that most of the women in the focus group expressed the feeling that they were being surveilled:

> And people are watching you…I feel like I've been talking a lot. I don't care to, but one of the things that has been said to me over and over again and that I resent is, 'Don't let them see you cry.'—Holly, White, 47 years old

In sum, the women in the focus group felt as though their leadership was being scrutinized more so than their male counterparts.

Discussion and Conclusions

As alluded to previously, the women in the focus group did not want to leave the room when the allotted time was up. We, the researchers had planned for 1 h. We had to stop the group at the 90-min mark, but many women continued to talk and exchange contact information. We suggested that we schedule another group, whether or not to be used for the purposes of research, because of the urgent need for these women to talk and share their experiences. The women even suggested that we meet regularly, making it clear that this was a great need—they had never had the opportunity to have conversations with other women experiencing the very same issues and problems—that is was therapeutic for them. Thus, the focus group became for them a bit like a support group.

What surprised us about the focus group was how in line our participants' experiences were with previous research on women leaders in education; in fact, we were surprised that the situation has not improved much since such research began to be conducted decades ago. As described above, women still face numerous obstacles when it comes to attaining and maintaining positions of leadership.

Despite the aforementioned and continued struggles women face, Kropiewnicki and Shapiro (2001) identify strengths that female leaders bring to educational settings. They describe an ethic of care possessed by women administrators, prompting them to act in the best interest of others, to do what they felt was right for students, the school, teachers, and other stakeholders. The women in our study were motivated by self-possession, financial need, and sustained by outside support systems, such as friends and family. It is our hope that our participants will continue to find solace and support with our continued focus group, whether or not it be for the purposes of research.

The preceding also reinforced the socialization into and subsequent utilization by African American (AA) women of culturally sanctioned gender roles that revolve around emotional stoicism (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Frame, Willams, & Green, 1999). The SBW is a reflection of these roles, and a disposition that older generations of AA women forged within their daughters as a method of ensuring their ability to navigate the social world (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). After all, women of color, specifically Black women, have historically had to be self-reliant and robust (Hill & Sprague, 1999; Rodriguez, 2006). They were the ones who have had to both "bring home the bacon and fry it up in the pan" for the sake of their families (Frame et al., 1999). Black women were taught to "do what you have to do," and not let on that they were hurting (Williams, 2008). In this regard, SBWs engage in emotion management to mask their true selves (Rodriguez, 2006), and pick up the mantle of "superwoman" in an attempt to effectively manage themselves and their environments (Williams, 2008). Emma's conveyance of her refusal to "play the game" that Rue suggested as a mechanism through which gender inequities could be navigated highlights the invocation of the SBW and the differential understanding of self within a leadership milieu for African-American women. Emma aptly articulated her deployment of the leadership style that Parker and Ogilvie (1996) suggested is the methodology through which Black women must both present self and be interpreted

by others, so as to negate the microaggressive (and often macroaggressive) milieu within which they enact their role. This invocation of leadership is not only a method of identity presentation, it is representative of a level of emotion management that all women, but particularly Black women, must undertake.

Lively (2000) identified two types of emotion management: (a) individual (management of self) and (b) interpersonal (management of others). As part of the SBW persona, Black women engage in individual emotion management on a hypervigilant scale. They suppress and internalize not only feelings of frustration in dealing with others as members of a greater culture that views them as innately incapable and expects stereotypical behavior of them, but they also smother individual feelings of grief, exhaustion, sadness, and fear in order to maintain the impression of being emotionally stable and aloof (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005). This maintenance of self-emotion is a function of feeling and display rules (Hochschild, 1983; Lively, 2000) relative to gender relations in the Black community. Black women are to maintain competence and stoicism in personal demeanor, and engage in caretaking (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Lively, 2000).

The Black women in the group consistently reinforced notions of identity formation and renegotiation within the context of their leadership roles—they spoke of engaging in what Goffman (1959) identified as "facework." For Goffman, the idea that individuals conduct themselves in such a way that allows others to see only their desired attributes is embodied in this concept. For SBWs it is a way of life, and a style of leadership. SBWs are taught to manage their behavior, both towards self and others: they construct their own identity, and take active steps towards ensuring that others perceive their composed (pun intended) creed (Swann, 1987). They actively engage in what Cross, Strauss, and Fhagen-Smith (1999) identified as buffering: engaging in behaviors that provide self-defense against racism, thereby allowing self to control the immediate situation. Part of this buffering process is code-switching (Cross et al., 1999), or utilizing the language, posturing, and demeanor that reinforces the norms and regulations of the dominant group, including prescribed gender presentation. As noted, buffering, as enacted through behaviors such as code-switching, is reflective of not only identity regulation, but also emotion management, both of which provide African-American women leaders a modicum of protection against the bilateral realities of racism and sexism that pervade their work spaces.

The process of emotion management is not just one whereby SBWs maintain a positive affect in the face of diminished status and concurrent negative emotional display by others (Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Hochschild, 1983; Lively, 2000), it is also a mechanism whereby they fortify the SBW myth. It is a ritual of impression management that promotes dramaturgical loyalty (acceptance of and fidelity to the role of the SBW), dramaturgical discipline (suppression of emotion and self-control), and dramaturgical circumspection (adherence to the feeling rules associated with the role of the SBW) (Goffman, 1959; Harlow, 2003). In this context, instead of Black women's lower gender and social status being reinforced through emotion management, the unique presentation of self-sacrifice, stoicism, and strength (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005, 2007; Woods-Giscombe, 2010) elevates their status from the submissive to the SBW.

Strategies and Suggestions

In our estimation, these issues reflect not only a general challenge regarding women and leadership in education, but a specific method of leadership that women must undertake, which must be addressed within the context of leadership training. Vinnicombe and Singh (2002), in their discussion of methodologies through which women leaders may obtain the skills and techniques to successfully navigate the management milieu, identified women-only leadership training and mentoring as a way to provide fledgling leaders the tools needed to enact leadership roles within the context of a male-dominated environment. The women in our focus group echoed the need for women to train and learn from each other, which reflects Vinnicombe and Singh's (2002) assertion that such preparation would be productive. We also suggest that both potential and practicing women managers and leaders be afforded women-only mentoring and training, not in place of traditional managerial training and education, but in addition to it. We have learned that this type of modeling can be immeasurably effective in fostering self-efficacy and subsequent performance of women in leadership. This may be particularly effective for nonminority women, who face unique challenges and barriers to their leadership.

One of our greatest takeaways from this research was the dilemma many women leaders in education face: that of "likeability versus authenticity." That is, many women leaders must decide whether they plan to "play the game," or to be their authentic selves and face the consequences. That is not to say that some women leaders cannot be exactly who they are *and* be liked. However, our research indicates that this usually is not the case. Women leaders may have to face the "likability" challenge that men do not have to face. That is, they may have to compromise and "play the game" in order to be "liked," and to be accepted. This is salient particularly for women of color, as indicated by Emma, who identified the unique role that her intersectional self (Crenshaw, 1989) played within the context of her leadership role. We suggest that a leadership training scheme as iterated by Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) would teach women—not just women of color—the skills to buffer (Cross et al., 1999) against hegemonic expectations of leadership.

Many other of the issues that women leaders face as revealed by our research are: women still face inequities regarding motherhood and child-rearing issues, women still lack mentoring, and women still face differential expectations based on sex. These issues are reflective of the cultured and gendered expectations associated with womanhood, and not unexpectedly, manifest in the general milieu.

Unfortunately, we do not have easy answers to the problems and issues that women leaders in education still face. We question whether easy solutions exist for the deep-rooted issues of sexism and racism. The lessons that the focus group taught us were to find mentors where you can and find support when and where you can. Do something to manage stress, and pay attention to self-care.

Appendix

Focus Group Questions

1. What made you aspire to become ____?
2. Were people in your field encouraging and supportive of your experiences?
3. What were your struggles to get where you are in your position today?
4. Have you ever experienced bias against you based on your sex, gender, race?
5. How do/have you deal/dealt with situations where you have experienced biased situations?
6. How do you advocate equity in your profession?
7. Have you ever had issues with people taking you seriously in your profession?
8. Do you feel more pressure than your male colleagues in your position?
9. Were you ever told you would be better in a different field/position?

Do you feel judge on your physical appearance more so than your male colleagues?

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