



## Intersectionality and Leadership

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The overall body of existing leadership diversity studies has focused only on one or two diversity attributes, missing the effects of multiple intersecting attributes. This study uses intersectionality theory to examine the interactions of surface level diversity attributes to dissect leader identity. Based on qualitative narratives and a substantial literature review, this study examines phenomenological and intersectional analyses of the perceptions of leadership style and efficacy of two successive university presidents—one male and one female. The results showed that the perceived differences in leadership were attributable to an interaction between multiple factors, and they affected surface level and deep level attributes when describing leaders. However, in this study, it was the leaders' business and education backgrounds as well as their approach to moving the university forward that respondents emphasized as the differences between the leaders.

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**F**rom the perspective and lived experience of subordinates, are there differences between how males and females lead? If so, are there other additional factors that contribute to how males and females lead? These are the questions we sought to answer in this study. Interest in gender and leadership is neither new nor is it waning. A sizable body of literature exists covering inquiries regarding gender style differences, efficacy, glass-ceiling effect, and leadership identity and persona.

Leadership literature is replete with research examining the supposed differences between male and female leadership styles. This body of research has provided various explanations for gender-related differences, such as biology (Bass, 1998; Helgesen, 1990; Kolb, 1999; Rosner, 1990; Shimanoff & Jenkins, 1991), societal role expectation (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Kent & Moss, 1994; Koch, 2004; Sczesny, 2003; Wood & Eagly, 2002), context (Oakley, 2000; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994; Wicks & Bradshaw, 1999), attributes (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003), and values-drive perceptions (Claes, 1999; Hare, Koenigs, & Hare, 1997; Kabacoff, 1998). Another body of research has focused on determining each gender's

leadership suitability and leadership efficacy, a measure of a leader's effectiveness at certain leadership tasks (Druskat, 1994; Gherardi, 1996; Rosner; Sczesny; Tomlinson, Brockbank, & Traves, 1997).

There has been no research providing conclusive evidence of gender-related differences between the leadership styles of males and females. Studies examining the interaction of multiple factors in leadership style have been rare, usually focusing on only one or two attributes (Harrison et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 2003). The research purpose was to examine the interaction between gender, race, context, and professional occupation in subordinates' perception of leader identity and leader accomplishments.

Our exploratory study attempts to understand the lived experiences of professionals as direct reports of two successive leaders. We posed several questions to investigate the distinctions between male and female leadership, management, communication, change management, and fiscal management styles in institutions of higher learning. Additionally, we wondered whether differences exist that are not accounted for by gender alone.

### **Intersectionality Theory**

We approached this qualitative, phenomenological study by employing intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2000; Hill-Collins, 2004) which is increasingly being used to understand complex social situations. The premise of intersectionality theory is that people live multiple, layered identities derived from social relations, history, and the operation of structured power. In other words, people are members of more than one category or social group and can simultaneously experience advantages and disadvantages related to those different social groups (e.g., an African-American woman may be respected as a college president yet experience discrimination when attempting to purchase a house in a largely White suburb).

There are two compelling reasons to consider intersectionality theory for studying leadership. First, intersectionality aims to reveal the multiple identities and personas of social actors exposing the connections between those points. Second, it suggests that analysis of complex social situations should not reduce understanding to a singular category; rather, it should facilitate the understanding of substantively distinct experiences from the effects of inextricably connected roles and situations.

Our approach of using multiple aspects or factors to examine leadership diversity is supported in study recommendations made by Jackson et al. (2003). These researchers determined that "multi-disciplinary work may also stimulate new approaches to measuring diversity" (p. 807). They stated that the narratives of a qualitative study, such as our study, will be productive in determining "which attributes are most closely associated in everyday cognitive stereotypes and self-concepts" (Jackson et al., p. 807).

An intersectional approach neither constructs categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality as autonomous categories of analysis nor attempts merely to add one category to another (Zerai, 2000). In the present study, we used intersectionality theory to examine the interaction of gender, race, and professional background toward understanding perceived leadership identity and perceived differences in leadership behavior and leadership efficacy.

We believe this study is significant because, to date, most leadership diversity studies have taken into account only one or two leadership aspects. This study examined a number of leadership factors. Therefore, the results produce a deeper understanding of the different factors involved in leadership identities and efficacy.

### The Current Interest in Leadership Studies

There has been scant literature on leader persona (Curry, 2002) focusing on the relationship between leader persona and organizational identity and leader identity (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006) that builds on development theory. According to Jackson et al. (2003), there is a need for diversity leadership research that examines the characteristics of top-level leaders. To fill the leadership literature deficit, we examined the intersection of gender, race, context, and profession in the perceived leader identity of two college presidents—one male and one female. The male president was in office prior to 2003 and placed a heavy emphasis on athletic programs. His successor, the female president, has a strong business, financial, and strong academic background. Her emphasis for the university has been on academics and streamlining processes.

#### *Shortage of Qualified Leaders*

Currently, the United States is producing too few leaders to meet demands (Treverton & Bikson, 2003). With the current demographic trends and the baby boomers retiring, the U.S. leadership talent shortage has been projected to continue for several decades (Moran & Moran, 2004). Compounding this problem is that in today's global society, organizations are expanding leader job requirements to include comprehensive perspectives and skills (Dohn, 2000; Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Towers Perrin, 2001; Scott, 2003; Treverton & Bikson).

#### *Female Leaders*

Over the past decade, the interest in studying female leaders has increased dramatically. There is a body of research in existence concerning the scarce number of females in leadership roles—especially related to glass-ceiling effect and style suitability (Adler, 1999; Catalyst, 2000; Maume, 1999; Nierenberg & Marvin, 2006). A few studies also exist concerning the double oppression of African-American female leaders (Hill-Collins, 2000; Hune, 1998; Montero-Sieburth, 1996; Wolfman, 1997).

The interest in studying females as leaders is threefold. First, females constitute 51% of the labor force which affects the pool of available potential leaders (Nierenberg & Marvin, 2006). Second, despite females' increasing numbers and representation in lower-level managerial ranks, they are marginally represented in executive leadership ranks (Nierenberg & Marvin). Third, recent research and anecdotal evidence has indicated that females may be well suited for current business and organizational models (Book, 2000; Fondas, 1997; Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Nierenberg & Marvin).

The challenges facing today's organizations are remarkably complex and likely to increase (Treverton & Bikson, 2003). Ostensibly, organizations cannot profit wholly from the distinctive talent and perspective that females possess when it goes underutilized given the time and money spent on preparation and training (Nierenberg & Marvin, 2006). Interestingly, some theorists now perceive female leadership styles as assets in light of the trends toward flatter organizations, team-based management, and increased globalization (Oakley, 2000).

## Debate on Gender Leadership Style Differences

### *It's Not in the Biology*

The research of Oakley (2000), Powell (1993), and Sczesny (2003) all revealed that stereotypes portraying females as less capable leaders than males still exist. As Sczesny and Hoyt (2005) discovered in separate studies, not only are there persistent and negative stereotypes of female leaders, but many people automatically think male when it comes to management and leadership. While research has identified gender differences in leadership style (Collingwood, 1995; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Rosner, 1990), most of the research on the issue has indicated there are no gender differences in leadership style (Bass, 1998; Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Donnell & Hall, 1980). Leadership style researchers, such as Kolb (1999) and Shimanoff and Jenkins (1991), determined there are far more similarities than differences in the leadership behaviors of males and females, and they are equally effective.

### *Societal Role Expectation*

Stereotypes about females and males are based on observations of their behaviors in gender-typical social roles (e.g., males are breadwinners and females are homemakers) and contain consensual beliefs about the attributes of females and males (Eagly, 2000). Past research consistently established that males are commonly perceived as more agentic (self-focused and autonomous) and competent than females; females are seen as more expressive and communal than males (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Additional research has identified two types of role expectations or gender-based social norms. Descriptive norms (Burgess & Borgida, 1999) are beliefs about what females and males actually do, and prescriptive norms are beliefs about what members of both social groups ought to do (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). One area in which gender stereotypes manifest themselves is the attribution of leadership abilities (Heilman, 2001). To summarize the various results, gender role is a better predictor of leader emergence than gender only (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kent & Moss, 1994, Oakley, 2000).

Prejudice against female leaders occurs especially in circumstances that engender perceptions of incongruity between the feminine gender and leadership roles. Eagly and Karau (2002) described two forms of prejudice toward female leaders in their role congruity theory. The first form is the less favorable evaluation of female's leadership potential. It originates from the activation of descriptive beliefs about female characteristics and the resultant attribution of feminine stereotypic qualities to females which are unlike the qualities expected or desired in leaders. The second form is the less favorable evaluation of the actual leadership behavior of females than males which originates from prescriptive norms. When females occupy leadership roles, they face biased appraisal that originates from their nonconformity to the sociocultural expectations of femininity (Bartol, Martin, & Kromkowski, 2003; Eagly & Karau; Mincer, 2002).

### *Context*

Reportedly, females experience work environments where they feel less welcome and somewhat threatened by what they perceive as self-serving, domineering cultures (Kark, 2004). If a male or female leader is new to the organization, this perception may be even more

exaggerated as the dynamics are much different for individuals who are new to an organization as opposed to long-time collaborators (Jackson et al., 2003). Over time, minority leaders gain influence and stronger social ties.

Previously, organizations supported stereotypical masculine values and rewarded behaviors that conformed to gender-based values (Catalyst, 2000). As such, the more masculine attributes of being domineering, tough-minded, and powerful may be noticed by more females and become socialized to exhibit different values in their behavior (Wicks & Bradshaw, 1999). Changes are slow to occur since many organizations are still structured to protect dominant power structures and reward masculine behaviors such as analytical rationality (Oakley, 2000; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994). Furthermore, gender-based stereotyping and the closed circle of what is referred to commonly as the *old boy network* are strong social forces that are stubbornly maintained (Oakley).

Organizations can either foster or hinder employees' aspirations for promotion. By disproportionately employing females in jobs that lack regular promotion procedures, employers effectively encourage some females to surrender aspirations of advancement (Cassirer & Reskin, 2000). Burke and Collins (2001) found even in the current politically correct atmosphere popular in North American corporations, the old boy network is thriving. They also discovered male employees purposefully generate institutional impediments to freeze female's advancement. At a cultural level, the dominant male network fosters solidarity between males and sexualizes, threatens, marginalizes, controls, and divides females through organizational power structures (Burke & Collins).

Specifically, Burke and Collins (2001) found that male managers perceive the characteristics needed for managerial success as being associated with those generally attributed to males. The finding that male managers may not consider female characteristics important for managerial success can negatively influence promotional decisions (Burke & Collins). However, in contrast to Burke and Collins, Olsson and Walker (2003) examined how males and females position themselves within the so-called corporate masculinity and found females engaged in identification and differentiation comparably to males. Involved is a more tentative process of differentiation from corporate masculinity through the construction of an emerging new culture—the culture of females in business.

Another focus of context studies is to examine the gender composition of organizations. The results of these studies are mixed. Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested several factors in the organizational context moderate the emergence and direction of gender differences in leadership styles. They reported gender differences related to the proportion of males among the people whose style is assessed. This suggests these female managers use styles congruent with the gender typing of the context in which they are working (Eagly & Karau).

The gender diversity or composition of the subordinate team is also related to gender differences. According to a study by Jackson et al. (2003) that examined military officials' performance, the sex diversity of the staff did not affect male performance; however, it did affect female officer performance. The study did not specify if female officer performance was impacted in a positive or negative manner. Similarly, in a field study among meeting participants, van Engen, Van Knippenberg, and Willie (1996) reported both male and female participants used more stereotypical masculine influence styles in male-dominated meetings than in female-dominated meetings.

Van Engen, van der Leeden, and Willemsen (2001) studied whether the gender typing of the organizational context influenced the leadership behavior of male and female managers.

Shop assistants in masculine- to feminine-typed departments described their managers in terms of task-oriented, people-oriented, and transformational leadership styles. As predicted by the researchers, no gender differences in leadership styles were found; the gender typing of departments did not affect perceived leadership styles (Van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). Their results differed somewhat from the findings of Gardiner and Tiggemann (1999) whose research showed female managers adapt their style to the organizational context. Van Engen, van Knippenberg, and Willie (2001) had an interesting finding in their contextual study when it was discovered that another contextual variable, the site of the department store, unexpectedly influenced leader behavior.

According to psychologists, females are at highest risk of stereotypic appraisal when they form less than 15 to 25% of a management level (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). When females move in large numbers into upper management, as they are now predicted to do in many professions, the evaluative norms are presumed to change (Nierenberg & Marvin, 2006). In this predicted new world order, the perception will shift from female managers to that of simply managers (Jamieson, 1995; Kephart & Schumacher, 2005; van der Boon, 2003).

### *Values-Driven Perception*

New values with positive outcomes have emerged in organizations—feminine values (Claes, 1999). In the past, values were associated with the aggressive, imposing approach of male-dominated management (Claes). These new leadership values are based on agreeable relationships and create new methods to communications, negotiations, structure, and authority (Hare et al., 1997; Oakley, 2000; Stanford, Oates, & Flores, 1995).

There is a well-established body of research confirming that feminine characteristics are beneficial to transactional leadership (Hare et al., 1997; Kabacoff, 1998; Kark, 2004). Transformational leadership is presently being touted as the most advantageous approach in organizations. The advantages of transformation leadership include (a) challenging individuals and becoming self-directing, (b) using technical and practical knowledge, (c) ownership in adopting and developing ideas, (d) participation in developing a common vision and direction, and (e) becoming more effective workers (Royal College of Nursing, 2007).

### *Race*

While there has been a plethora of studies examining the sole effect of race on leadership, there has been sparse information pairing race with other surface level diversity attributes. There have been a few existing leadership studies focusing on the effects of race and gender, focusing on minority female leaders. For example, Mitchell (1994) noted the dual pressures African-American females in academe face. Mitchell posited that African-American females not only felt the pressure to serve as a role model for their profession but also to represent their race and gender.

Some researchers have examined the effects of tokenism, the practice of hiring a random number of people from underrepresented groups in order to deflect criticism or comply with affirmative action rules (*American Heritage Dictionary for the English Language*, 2005). According to Jackson et al. (2003), each identity group responds differently to their minority status. In addition, team performance and processes may be affected by the team's diversity makeup.

The research examining the dual factors of race and gender largely examined performance results instead of the interaction between race, gender, and other potentially mediating factors such as background and profession. According to Jackson et al. (2003), the reason for this is that effective, focused research will most likely prove to be negative for proponents of diversity. Jackson et al. anticipated that results would show that increased diversity leads to increased problems with communication and team cohesion. Additionally, the literature has not provided an understanding of the interaction between multiple factors in leader identity: gender, race, age, background, and profession.

### *Leader Identity and Persona*

Leadership is dually constructed by both psychological and sociological phenomenon. Leadership identity represents the psychological component. The scant literature on leadership identity has largely focused on developmental stage theory which is a human development concept that defines development sequences common to all human beings involving hierarchical integrations of abilities and skills with all stages unfolding in the same sequence for all cultures (Newkirk, 2007). Leadership identity also includes attributes that include race, context, and profession (Brungardt, 1996; Komives et al., 2006).

Leadership persona is the sociological element of leadership. There has been only a scant amount of published research on leader persona. The existing studies have focused on organizational identity as influenced by leaders (Curry, 2002), development (Kegan, 1994; Komives et al., 2006), and organizational stages (Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 1993).

Surface-level diversity plays a role in leader identity and persona, especially for leaders who are new to organizations or leaders with newly-hired subordinates and colleagues (Harrison et al., 1998). Individuals form initial attitudes based on easily observable factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and race. Over extended periods of time, individuals begin to learn the social and psychological traits of the leader, more lasting opinions are formed, and the surface-level traits fade away as a contributing factor to leader identity and persona (Harrison et al.).

Harrison et al. (1998) examined the effect of leader and subordinate diversity differences and performance ratings that yielded mixed results. Leaders tended to give lower performance ratings to subordinates of the opposite gender; however, in military settings, there was no effect on leaders' ratings of opposite gender subordinates. Conversely, the results of race and ethnic diversity were clear. Leaders regularly provided subordinates of the same race and/or ethnicity with higher ratings (Harrison et al.).

### **Phenomenology**

We found no other studies that examined the interactions of multiple factors related to leader identity beyond gender and race; therefore, we employed phenomenological methodology for the purpose of exploration. Due to the lack of existing research on the topic, we made no assumptions regarding perceptions related to the interaction of multiple factors that result in perceived leader identity. Moran (2002) described phenomenology as a way of perceiving: "The unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears" (p. 1). In phenomenological approaches, the researcher examines phenomena uncontaminated by a priori common sense or scientific impositions; the goal is to

capture the richness of a phenomenon as it manifests in the individual who experiences it (Moran, 2000, 2002).

Phenomenology first began in the 1890s in Germany and spread to the United States in the 1920s (Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, 2005). According to the Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology, there are seven accepted factors in the phenomenological approach. These factors include (a) opposing the acceptance of unobservable matters and grand systems erected in speculative thinking; (b) opposing naturalism; (c) justifying cognition in which awareness is of a matter itself as disclosed in the most clear, distinct, and adequate way for something of its kind; (d) believing that not only objects in the natural and cultural worlds but also ideal objects such as numbers and even conscious life itself can be made evident and thus known; (e) holding that inquiry must focus upon objects as they are encountered; (f) recognizing the role of description in universal, a priori terms as prior to explanation by means of causes, purposes, or grounds; and (g) debating whether or not transcendental phenomenological epochê and reduction is useful or even possible. What is distinctive about coupling phenomenological and intersectional approaches is the researcher's recognition that the proper goal of exploratory research is not to merely recount the subjective experiences of study participants but rather to extract the core attributes elaborated and exposed within the textural-structural descriptions of lived experience.

Phenomenology is critical of objectivism. It deals with putting essences into existence. Essences are virtually impossible to define; therefore, phenomenology on any subject is the stage before that subject becomes a philosophy (Crotty, 1998). It is something that is inconceivable and cannot exist independently of the subject to which it is applied. Crotty insisted that it is not the purpose of phenomenological research to seek shared meanings and discard individual meanings unless they are held in common with others. In this view, the findings of phenomenological research can be presented as one or more rich and comprehensive narrative accounts of each individual's experience of a particular phenomenon. However, the researcher must transcend the mere presentation of narratives to illuminate the sufficient elements constituting a phenomenon that are embedded in participant accounts.

### Study Sample

In order to understand how leader identities are perceived, we purposefully selected a sample of university faculty members who reported to successive leaders (the first, male, and the succeeding leader, female) within the same regional university. The researchers approached 20 appropriate faculty members who worked under the direction of both university presidents. Several individuals declined because of concerns about jeopardizing their chances for achieving tenure. The final sample consisted of six tenured and nontenured faculty members with the designated rank of assistant, associate, or full professor at the university. Of the participants, two were males, and four were females. There was one White male, one White female, one African-American male, and three African-American females.

No considerations such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, rank, tenure, or nontenured status were used to disqualify participants. Clinical preceptors, staff, and adjunct faculty members were excluded from this study because of their limited visibility and/or contact with the university presidents. The selected university is part of a nationwide coalition of over 750 colleges and universities that largely caters to African-American students and seeks to promote student service, learning, community action, and research on college campuses.



## Procedures

We contacted each prospective study participant 2 weeks prior to the interview and scheduled appointments per the interviewee's request. Due to access issues related to staff trepidation, time constraints, and the intensive nature of the interviewing, eight interviews were scheduled. All participants were interviewed individually at an off-site location that was easily accessible. Prior to the taped interview sessions, participants had the opportunity to ask questions and were informed of the research purpose.

Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour; we facilitated the dialogue and assumed the role of participant-observer. Open-ended questions were asked to encourage study participants to share their experiences in narrative accounts. The following six questions guided the study:

1. Are there distinctions between male and female leaders in institutions of higher learning?
2. Are there leadership differences?
3. Are there differences in the way men and female leaders in institutions of higher education manage the fiscal health of the institution?
4. Are there differences in the way male and female leaders manage stress within institutions of higher education?
5. Are there differences in the way male and female leaders initiate the change process within institutions of higher education?
6. Do manager styles differ for males and females?
7. Interviews were conducted using a consistent question protocol; however, appropriate probing questions were utilized in each case to ensure depth of understanding.

Contact between participants was avoided to control for social response bias.

All interviews were transcribed. To ensure interrater reliability, an independent transcriptionist was used. We read and listened to each tape to validate the accuracy and integrity of the transcription. The interview data were coded and analyzed for recurrent themes and supporting conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We analyzed the data independent of one another.

First, we coded the interview transcripts (one from each gender of study participant). We then reviewed and updated the codes to capture the breadth and depth of the topics discussed by these study participants. Next, we coded the remaining interview transcripts. This resulted in refining the codes to create code families. Analysis of the code families provided the structure of meaning attributable to the participants' aggregated data. We used an iterative approach to develop and refine the code definitions.

## Findings and Discussion

The data analysis created meanings along four separate categories for each gender including behavioral and trait descriptors (male and female), outcomes descriptors (male and female), and intersectional descriptors (male, female, and both). Within the intersectional descriptors schema, four subcategories were developed including gender, race, background, and context. Words, terms, and phrases were coded with a behavioral or trait descriptor recounting how a leader went about his or her interactions or activities associated with his or her position requirements. Words, terms, and phrases used by subordinates to describe the outcomes of actions or decisions initiated by the leader were coded as outcome descriptors. The intersectional

descriptor code family was used to identify words, terms, and phrases that study participants used to explain how they accounted for a leader's behaviors, activities, tendencies, practices, and outcomes.

After reviewing the data, we uncovered four interesting findings. First, the perception of leader differences and efficacy seems attributable to an interaction between profession, context, and gender rather than from any one factor alone. The second finding was that study participants tended to use a combination of gendered and nongendered language to describe leader traits or behaviors and used gender-neutral language to describe the outcomes attributed to their leaders' actions and decisions. A third finding was study participants were not in consensus about their leaders' people orientation; however, they were in consensus in describing the former male university president as agentic and the current female leader as communal global. The final finding was that a leader's professional background may have a moderating effect on contextual influences on leadership style.

*Finding 1: Leader Differences and Efficacy are Attributable to an Interaction Between Profession, Context, and Gender*

All of the study participants expressed multiple factors that differentiated the style and efficacy differences between their previous male and current female university presidents. All of the study participants stated it was impossible to describe and understand the two leaders in terms of a single category. For example, all of the participants noted the difference between the two leaders' visions and perspectives: the male president focused on athletic achievement and scholastic achievement in his field of physical education and the female president, coming from a business and financial field, has focused on the success of the university as a whole. All participants mentioned the male leader's experience was strictly in academe; likewise, all mentioned the female leader had varied experience.

All of the study participants believed the leader's background was an observable dimension of his or her style and identity. One representative example of participant perspective was that "gender may factor into it, but their orientation may factor into it. A number of other things may factor into it . . . interpersonal style, background, and profession; all factor into leadership style."

All of the study participants expressed the female president's success in improving the university was perceived to have been due to her characteristically feminine collaborative style as well as her business acumen. As one participant stated:

She was able to take a global view of it, being a fiscal professional; she looked at it, the bottom-line, system wide to make decisions. So, no aspect of the system benefited over and above another. . . . She worked with each part of the system and included a wide array of people. She made sure that the entire organization was represented. . . . Women seem to be able to build relationships in a different way than men . . . where they can collaborate with everyone.

All of the study participants mentioned the female president's change style was gradual yet systematic and progressive. They further described a gradual change style as more typically feminine and that her business background in understanding organizational systems and her global worldview gave her the ability to facilitate the operational changes necessary to make her vision for the university a reality. The following example is representative of the expressed perspectives:

Women seem to be able to see the peaks and valleys in life. . . . They seem to know what's coming round the corner before it happens. She came in and looked at the whole thing and decided this system has to go. The old system had to be moved aside so that she could create a new system that will be able to bear the kind of vision she has. And, she had to really change a lot of things, especially at the top, to bring in the kind of vision she has for the university. She took her time and did it all systematically, . . . even changing the processes of how things got done. . . . She had system knowledge and a keen sense of how businesses operate, and she was determined that the university was gonna be run like a business.

A majority of the study participants perceived observable differences between male and female leader personas. However, they also reported there was no consistently different attribute between males and females. In other words, they could not say with confidence that all male leaders behaved in a certain manner and all female leaders behaved the same based on their gender. Moreover, four participants noted the perceived differences may be due to varying comfort levels between same-gender and opposite-gender relationships. Some of the female respondents reported feeling more comfortable working for females, while other female participants reported the opposite was the case. The female participants also varied in their expressed level of comfort working for same-gendered and opposite-gendered leaders. Three of the female participants believed the ethnicity of the female leader might play a role in how female leaders manage financial matters, perceiving finances as being the female's purview, particularly in the African-American culture.

The results for the two male study participants were mixed on this issue. One male participant reported feeling more comfortable working for female leaders. The other male reported feeling equally comfortable with both genders.

*Finding 2: Gender Labels Were Used to Describe Leader Traits and/or Behavior; Gender-Neutral Labels Were Used to Describe Leader-Initiated Outcomes*

Interestingly, all the participants used gender-congruent language to describe the traits of their two leaders. For example, all the participants classified their previous male leader as either a people person or not a people person; they described their current female leader as being either touchy-feely or not touchy-feely.

All of the participants defined the terms people person and touch-feely as identical attributes. Another example included the participants describing their previous male leader as tough minded while describing the current female leader as unsentimental. When describing leader behavior displayed in moments of stress, that was a departure from the leader's normal demeanor, participants labeled the male as angry and the female as emotional.

Several participants described their previous male leader as approachable and their current female leader as receptive. Again, in follow-up questioning, the participants defined approachable and receptive attributes identically. Table 1 shows the representative list of trait descriptors for both female and male leaders; these entries were those repeatedly mentioned across all participants. Table 2 provides a selected list of outcome descriptors.

Table 1: Selected Gendered Descriptors Used to Express Leader Traits

Female	Male
Assertive	Takes action
Dainty	Angry
Touchy feely	Approachable
Not warm and fuzzy	Strong
Lady	Tough minded
Nurturing	Condescending
Open	Decisive
Receptive	Entitled attitude
Perceptive	Aggressive
Softer style	People person
Not timid	Fighter
Verbal	Fatherly
Communal	Paternalistic
Relational	Godfather
Symbolic	Macho
Formal	Patronizing
Unsentimental	Self-centered
Male	Good-old-boy
	Laid back

*Finding 3: Consistent Perception of Male-Agency Attributes and Female-Communal Attributes*

This finding supports previous research that has indicated a tendency of males to be agentic and females to be communal (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Larson & Pepper, 2003). For example, all of the participants voiced the perception that their former male leader had his own agenda to maintain a strong athletic program to the exclusion of many other areas of the university. Conversely, all of the participants described their female leader as having a vision of a university that worked for everyone and built a reputation for being collaborative and fair.

*Finding 4: Professional Background Can Predispose Leaders to Behave in Ways Not Necessarily Congruent With the Context*

One participant's response reflects the responses of other participants who expressed this perspective, "College systems are autocratic; but she [the female leader] led by democracy. . . . She got the whole organization involved. It's her experience as a business person." All participants noted that even beyond the two leaders assessed in the present study, whether strong or weak leaders, their field of expertise predicted the leader's style and influenced the organization's culture and, therefore, the context.

Educational institutions are bureaucracies with authoritarian leaders; at least, this is so in higher education. Society stereotypes industries and fields. And, while you can find females heading up elementary and even some high school systems, women rising to the top in academia is another thing altogether. Academia is the turf of men. But, if you get a

strong female leader, like the one that came here, you can see how their training influences who they are and that influence, with a strong leader, . . . affects how the culture reacts. I've seen this before, not just in this case with this female leader with her business and financial background, but I've also seen it elsewhere. We had a woman leader come in at [a different college], and she was from the social work discipline. . . . She came in and made a mission of rooting out system dysfunction. . . . The whole culture shifted under her. A person's background and profession influence the kinds of symbols they bring to an organization in their leadership of it.

As previously discussed, all of the study participants noted that their prior male president's physical education background influenced his focus on athletics at the university. Four of the participants gave examples of previous leaders whose fields of expertise shaped the culture of the institution. In these instances, the presidents did not change the fundamentally autocratic structure of the institution.

Table 2: Descriptors Used to Portray Various Outcomes, Actions, and Decisions of Each Leader

Female	Male
Raising standards of campus aesthetics	Built a policy of favoritism
Sought agreement from faculty	Built a strong athletic program
Built consensus	Produced winning teams
Communicated a clear vision	Hired like-minded men
Balanced the books	Centralized power structure
Brought us into the black	Built a new football stadium
Delegated authority	Made pragmatic decisions
Restored a dilapidated campus	Let conflicts dissipate
Introduced policies of fairness	Ran the school into financial crisis
Introduced technology	Reacted to crisis and beset by them
Upgraded faculty computer skills	
Skillfully negotiated broader funding	
Raised efficiency and rigor	
Built a competent staff	
Selected a diverse staff	
Made savvy political moves with the state	
Made subtle changes in systems at first	
Made surgical personnel moves	
Made analytical decisions	
Decentralized power	
Put forth a positive image of the school	

## Conclusions

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that leadership style and identity develops from a combination of surface level, deep level, psychological, and social factors. It is not only one attribute that a leader brings to an organization that determines the efficacy of the

leader but that leader's whole being which includes education, work experience, values, and the lived diversity experiences (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, age, etc.). These findings lead to future proposed research in the areas of leadership research, practice, and education.

Applying phenomenological and intersectionality approaches to this qualitative study allowed us to uncover findings we would have overlooked by looking at a single attribute or using a different method. Intersectionality eliminated the possibility of our downgrading traits and actions merely to one attribute such as gender which would have emphasized genderization and stereotypification of leaders. The study of leadership identity and style will advance further in the future if leaders are examined as complete individuals instead of dissecting them by surface level diversity factors.

The results of this study have significant methodological implications to leadership research. The research enables a holistic view of the socio-organizational phenomena via individual understanding. Furthermore, researchers using intersectionality theory are no longer confined to single variables; instead, researchers can examine the relationship of multiple variables in studying leaders.

Employing intersectionality in leadership studies opens new possibilities for leadership theory and education. Specifically, intersectionality reinforces that leadership theory must continue to be researched and evolve. Education in this area must also be expanded to include and further develop teaching theories and models based upon leadership diversity. We do not discount the importance of teaching theories and models based on parallels; however, incorporating diversity creates a new dimension to learning.

The finding that perceived leadership differences and efficacy are attributable to the interaction of multiple factors may contribute new knowledge to the literature. No other studies were found that examined the intersection of gender, race, context, and professional background. Likewise, no studies were found that researched the intersections of gender and profession relative to leadership. Some studies examined the relationship or interaction of race and gender in leaders; however, the majority of these focused on the supposed double oppression of race and gender in preventing females, especially African-American females, to advance rather than how these two factors related to style and efficacy (Hill-Collins, 2000; King & Ferguson, 2001; Waring, 2003).

Several studies (Burke & Collins, 2001; Cassirer & Reskin, 2000; Kolb, 1999; Oakley, 2000; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994; Van Engen, van Knippenberg, & Willie, 2001; Wicks & Bradshaw, 1999) examined the interaction effects of gender and context. However, these studies largely focused on the degree to which a heavily male-dominated corporate culture precludes female advancement. A few context-gender studies examined the effect of gendered context on female's leadership styles. These have relevance to the present study, suggesting that in more gender-neutral organizational environments or female-dominated industries, female leaders exhibit more feminine leadership styles which foster decentralization and a greater degree of democratic practices (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Oakley). However, while females dominate the education field, collegiate level education is male-dominated. Research has shown in male-dominated university contexts, female leadership style tends to be autocratic (Bailyn, 2003; Kloot, 2004). Interestingly, the findings of the present study contradict these previous studies. This study found that the female leader was perceived to be democratic and fostered a decentralized structure.

The gender-congruent trait descriptors and gender-neutral terms participants used to describe outcomes were consistent. This finding supports previous research that people tend to

use language perceived as culturally correct for each gender (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999; Oakley, 2000). For example, Stelter (2002) noted that societal role expectations influence how people describe leader styles; however, the present study also found subordinates tend to use gender-neutral language to describe outcomes that were attributable to leader decisions and actions. For example, several participants described the male leader as having built a successful athletic program and the female leader as having introduced technology and significantly improved the computer labs.

The findings of this study also showed that leader traits and leader-initiated results are perceived and assessed differently. One possible explanation for this result is that superiors tend to rely on gender stereotypes in rating their employees' performance; however, leaders' subordinates tend not to rely on gender stereotypes in rating their superiors' performance (Carless, 1998). Another possible explanation for these results may be the observable shift toward a more androgynous view of female and male managers and students of management in the United States (Schein, 2001).

The finding that leader profession may moderate the contextual influence on the leader's style and behavior is incongruent with the existing, albeit scant, research. In one field study, researchers studied department stores to examine whether the gender typing of the organizational context influenced leadership behavior of male and female managers (van Engen, van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). While the individual departments (whether feminine or masculine in context) did not influence leader behavior, the actual site of the department store did influence it. The prevailing cultures of individual department stores located in four different cities uniformly influenced the behaviors of the managers within each of those locales. Additionally, researchers must look beyond the tendency to define researched contexts by too broadly defined categories.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

This phenomenological qualitative study provided insights into leadership by examining the intersectionality of a number of diversity attributes. This study revealed that, while there may be distinctions between leaders, these differences involve an intersecting of a number of surface and deep-level diversity factors. A review of the study and literature has shown that further investigation is needed to determine the relationships between these variables.

A study is needed to determine if specific leadership characteristics, associated with quality leadership, are stereotypically viewed as related to either gender. This will help distinguish between actual leadership abilities demonstrated and stereotypic perceptions. In addition, since this study provided a small sample size and unequal representation of participants based on gender, race, ethnicity, and age, a future study will need to correct these conditions. A much larger sample, which distinguishes responses based on the aforementioned diversity factors, must be included.

Based on the findings of this study, future research should also be conducted to determine the reasons why leader trait and leader-initiated results are perceived and assessed differently. The research should attempt to dissect the reasons why leaders rely on gender stereotypes when their subordinates do not. Once the reasons are identified, there is a potential for entirely new theory and methods for deconstructing these stereotypes.

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