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## **Role Incongruity in Leadership Development: A View from the Glass Cliff**

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Contemporary women's leadership development offers a significant opportunity to eradicate the glass cliff phenomenon and remove cultural prejudices against women in executive leadership. In response to the global financial crises, the predominately male executive leadership instituted a glass cliff failsafe to mask organizational ownership of VUCA circumstances. Many organizations view competitive advantages as stemming from leadership development, thus funding further investments. Between 2022 and 2026, PR Newswire expects 41 percent of the expected \$18.59 billion increase in leadership development to originate from North America. This article reviews the impact of second-generation gender biases, emotional intelligence, inclusion, and identity in women's leadership from the biblical narrative of the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7: 24-30), providing a glimpse of women's faith and leadership in the face of cultural opposition. In addition, the article explores how harmful cultural norms are eradicated through emotional intelligence and the removal of social barriers, employing inner texture-social rhetorical analysis. The glass cliff creates a self-fulfilling prophecy where the identity and communal skills (e.g., nurturing, democracy, and compassion) of women are deemed a lack in leadership, preferring what is generally garnered as male agentic qualities (e.g., assertiveness and competitiveness), thus producing an incongruent approach to leadership.

**Keywords:** Syrophenician woman, glass cliff, identity, emotional intelligence, inner-texture analysis

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Leadership development is a collective social process accomplished in a dynamic environment addressing real-world concerns with multiple external and internal agents (Turner et al., 2018) exchanging their will and power to achieve common objectives. Leadership development became a priority within organizational culture and design following the 2007-2008 global financial crisis (GFC) - a problem rooted in poor ethical behavior. The GFC initiated a practical and academic inquiry into how leaders were being developed (Turner et al., 2018). The knowledge gained revealed that top C-suite leaders were predominately men who lacked authenticity (Liu et al., 2015) and fell short of organizational responsibilities (Turner et al., 2018). The intervention created an overrepresentation of women in "precarious leadership positions" (Haslam & Ryan, 2008, p. 530). This reaction formed the phenomenon known as the glass cliff - "where women are more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions associated with increased risk of failure and criticism because these positions are more likely to involve management of organizational units that are in crisis" (Haslam & Ryan, 2008, p. 530). Historically, the agentic qualities (e.g., assertiveness and competitiveness) associated with achieving goals were considered male, and the communal qualities (e.g., nurturing, democracy, and compassion) needed for building relationships were categorized as characteristics of women (Andrade, 2023). This gender-based separation is shifting to a contemporary leadership model where an individual who builds and retains relationships while achieving organizational goals represents effective leadership.

The many and varied definitions offered for leadership do not infer the leader's sex. The aptly titled *Great Man* theory reviewed the exceptional qualities of men (e.g., Mohandas Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln) and women (e.g., Catherine the Great, Joan of Arc) of influence (Northouse, 2019). Still, the 1959 *Great Man* characteristics (intelligence, masculinity, adjustment, dominance, extroversion, and conservatism) of how to distinguish a leader from a follower were not inherent to sex (masculinity is non-gender specific). Gender (socially constructed roles of expression and identities) biases create barriers (e.g., glass ceilings) to women's emergence in the upper echelons of organizations. The concern for women in leadership shifted from the glass ceiling (an invisible barrier to advancement based on gender or race) to the glass cliff. Yet, another male-created social construct diminishes a woman's identity, barricading the road to fulfilling her purpose and potential - "A leader's identity is tied to his or her sense of purpose" (Ely et al., 2011, p. 476). Grover (2015) encourages women to anchor their identity development in their leadership purpose to achieve better results than conventional organizational leadership development paths. The gender role expectations from males in top leadership towards women's leadership impacts women's self-efficacy and ability to view themselves as an effective leader (Andrade, 2023).

This article reviews the impact of second-generation gender biases, identity, inclusion, and the role of emotional intelligence (EQ) on women in upper echelons of leadership roles. The article includes an inner texture-social rhetorical analysis exploring a negative cultural norm eradicated through EQ and the removal of social barriers. An analysis of the biblical text introduces the contemporary need for women's leadership development programs (WLDPs) that combat the glass ceiling and glass cliff phenomenon. Scripture described an encounter where Jesus experienced a

Syrophenician woman who exhibited a healthy attitude rooted in her socially constructed identity as undeserving of God's mercy. Jesus learns His way out of the unpredictable circumstances using the collective understanding of the Holy Trinity (*John* 5:19 & 20), providing a model for contemporary leadership.

### **Social Rhetorical Analysis (SRA)**

An exegetical analysis provides a holistic (multi-perspective), systematic (planned research process), and scientific (interdisciplinary research methods) approach to interpreting Scripture (Henson et al., 2020). SRA is a framework applied to exegetical analysis. SRA reveals the original authors' and audiences' understanding of the text within their culture, language, time, and situation (Duvall & Hays, 2012; Henson et al., 2020). SRA comprises five independent textures: inner, inter, social and cultural, ideological, and sacred (Robbins, 1996). The goal is to extract the nuanced interpretation from within the text by "remaining true to the original meaning of the biblical texts while holding the conviction that the *Bible* is applicable for today" (Henson et al., 2020, p. 6).

### **Inner Texture Analysis**

The use of inner texture analysis explores the biblical presence of cultural oppression through the "complex patterns and language" (Robbins, 1996, p. 2) of Mark 7:24-30 (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016). The aim of using inner texture is to gain knowledge of the historical criticism of the text. Inner texture analysis and leadership examine the medium of communication (Henson et al., 2020; Johnson & Hackman, 2018; Robbins, 1996). The tool of speech is the most tangible tool effective leaders possess for achieving desired outcomes (Johnson & Hackman, 2018, p. 2). Language creates the foundation in which people negotiate sense-making in their worlds (Robbins, 1996). The Syrophenician woman provides an example of sense-making through language. She speaks through the cultural texture to the spiritual, where Jesus' sense-making ability resides with the Holy Spirit and God. The six methods of inner texture analysis are applied to the chosen pericope: repetition of words, progression, narrational texture, alteration of speech and storytelling (OMC), how arguments are presented, and the aesthetic (feel) of the text (Robbins, 1996). SRA and authentic leadership dive into similar territories, both focusing on values, convictions, and beliefs (Northouse, 2019; Robbins, 1996.)

### **The Gentile and Jesus: Mark 7:24-30**

The *Bible* is both a contemporary and spiritual document (Henson et al., 2020) capable of guiding Christian leadership. The goal of interpreting the Word within the *Bible* is to grasp God's intended message by discovering the meaning within the text (Duvall & Hays, 2012). Scripture reveals God's "communication of Himself and His will to us" (Duvall & Hays, 2012, p. 41). Mark 7: 24-30 (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016) consists of six narrated scenes describing an incident between Jesus and a Gentile Syrophenician woman's request to save her "little daughter" (v. 25). Although the woman and daughter are experiencing identity and race insensitivity from Jesus and the narrator (v. 26 & 27) her faith perseveres. Her acceptance of her identity as a human is questioned, and her ability to embody motherhood (a potent form of

leadership) is not found in the text. The original audience knew her identity by the authors' clever addition of her place of birth (v. 26). Jews knew her condition was one of idolatry and paganism (Strauss, 2014). Jewish culture admired motherhood, but for her, a Gentile, the honor was not given. She accepts the words of Jesus and contends with the cultural status of representing the lesser side of society. Jesus, as a counter-culture leader, responds to her faith (v. 29) and sends His Word to heal her daughter (v. 30).

### ***Repetitive Texture and Progression***

This analysis portion often reveals theological significance that bears on the text's understanding (Henson et al., 2000). The repetitive use of words or phrases indicates that a repetition texture is present. Repetition can also be identified through themes, negatives, conjunctions, and more (Robbins, 1996). The pericope exhibits repetition in multiple areas.

- A form of action occurs in each verse.
- Attributed speech (vv. 26-29)
- Symbolic characterization (e.g., Jesus as savior, Syrophenician woman as the Gentile nation, and children as the Jewish nation)

Jesus and the language of children repeat seven times each, placing them as supporting figures to the Gentiles, who garner 11 mentions. Repetition reveals that the main subject is the position of the Gentile people within the salvific story.

### ***Progressive Pattern***

The next form of inner texture analysis is progression. The author's progress includes identity and perseverance of faith in the face of oppression. Identity is developed when the woman identifies Jesus as Lord (v. 28) in a rebuttal to His response. When the woman identified Jesus as Lord (*kyrios* in Greek), her posture remained fallen at His feet (v. 25) as she submitted everything and offered respect. Her physical posture, words, and actions align with her spiritual acceptance of the Jew's *kyrios* - "He to whom a person belongs, or thing belongs, the one who has the power of deciding" (Strong et al., 2001, #2962). This progression, seen through repetition, expresses the Gentile nation accepting Jesus as Lord. He alone had the power to decide the Gentile fate. "The Jew's rejection had become the opportunity of the Gentiles" (Barclay, 201, p. 205).

The second occurrence of a progressive pattern is the respectful reply, which opens access to the power and authority of His Lordship (v. 28). The Gentile mother is portrayed as having persistent faith (Strauss, 2014). The conjunction 'but' identifies a progression pattern (v. 25 & 28). The double use of the term indicates advancement in the pericope (Henson et al., 2020). The woman's culture is one of idolatry and paganism. With each occurrence of 'but,' she opposes the Jewish and Gentile norms that diminish her. She opposed the privacy Jesus sought (v. 23) with her sense of urgency, which asserted that her situation mattered. She continues to antagonize when she reminds Jesus that Jews are first and are nourished from a high place. Still, the Gentiles receive the same meal but through humbleness (beneath the table, v. 28).

### ***Narrational Texture***

Narrational texture identifies the characters of the pericope and how they interact. Robbins (1996) describes this texture as understanding the voices from within the text. The narrational pattern identifies the pericope as a relational encounter between Jesus, the Gentiles, and the Jewish nation. The pericope has six narrative scenes where the narrator attributes speech to Jesus (v. 27 & 29), and the Gentile woman (v. 28). The Jewish cultural practice of second-generation gender bias and subsequent disapproval is represented by the disciples (v. 25), the upper echelon of leadership.

The narrational tone depicted the Gentiles as having access to Jesus despite what the culture required. Jesus responded from the Kingdom of God and not within the culture. The texture develops through language (e.g., the use of the double context for *dog* within the culture) and emotions (e.g., begged in v. 26). The Gentiles approach Jesus in faith, Jesus reminds them of the Jewish covenant, Gentiles respectfully disclose the understanding that positioning does not matter, and Jesus heals by authority alone.

### ***Open-Middle-Closing (OMC) and Argumentative Texture***

The fourth (OMC) and fifth (argumentative) textures represent the pericope perspective and plot. Argumentative texture explores inner reasoning by viewing opposites, contraries, and counterarguments (Robbins, 1996). The pericope uses three attributed speeches to present the argument, each forming the Middle of the OMC. The narrative opening (v. 24 & 25) follows the Gentile nation and begins the discussion. The plot consists of shalom (Opening with innocence), shalom shattered (crisis enters or the Middle), shalom sought (shalom is not restored for the protagonist, also the Middle), and denouement (restoration of shalom or Close) (Henson et al., 2020). Shalom sought (v. 26 & 28), and shalom shattered (v. 27) represent the expected cultural response to difference and provide a compelling counterargument to the norms of Jewish tradition. The closing pattern (v. 29 & 30) renders Jesus' acceptance of Gentiles by removing cultural barriers.

### ***Sensory-Aesthetic Texture***

The final form of inner texture represents "thought, emotion, sight, sound, touch, and smell" (Robbins, 1996, p. 29). Sensory-aesthetic texture incorporates how the body experiences the senses (Robbins, 1996). The pericope involves one verse regarding the possibility of touch (v. 25), two involving emotions (v. 25 & 26), and another regarding a sense of urgency (v. 25). The New Testament connotation of "at His feet" shadows the posture of disciples listening to the instruction of Jesus (Strong et al., 2001, #4228). His feet become the perspective the Syrophoenician woman views as she begs (v. 26) for His mercy. There is a sense of purposeful action when the narrator avoids the connection to the child other than the descriptor "little," allowing the reader to frame the daughter as frail or of young age. The child as a character aids the aim of the pericope, expressing the importance of motivation, words, and actions to change cultures. Within the woman-mother character were the attributes Jesus sought for the Kingdom of God: faith, humility, and spiritual discernment (Strauss, 2014).

## Discussion

The biblical and traditional status quo operates in a culture where men determine the rules. An environment where women are judged on their performance while men are judged on their potential requires a gender-sensitive eye to revise policies and practices (Ely et al., 2011; McCracken, 2000). Leadership development builds the collective capacity of teams to effectively lead volatile and uncertain climates (Ely et al., 2011). The Syrophoenician mother made sense of her situation by creating a shared meaning of the intention of God's mercy to include Gentiles, thus adding value to the Kingdom of God. Purpose, self-confidence, and sense of self are EQ attributes (Bennis, 2009) exhibited by the woman. Jesus' initial response reflected cultural values, but His final word repositioned what was acceptable going forward. Leaders are in positions of power to change and transform negative cultures. The pericope modeled the need to support EQ and cross-cultural leadership development for contemporary leaders to experience inclusivity and belonging.

Aristotle stated that purpose is ineffective when not deployed (Kempster, 2011). Having the ability to fulfill one's potential aids in determining the guides one will use to accomplish "a good human life" sourced by the happiness originating from faithfulness "to a worthy purpose" (Kempster, 2011, p. 321). Leaders are most effective and viewed as authentic when their values align with an organizational purpose (Ely et al., 2011), such as improving global welfare or committing to a grassroots neighborhood project. The basic human need to be relational is satisfied by this alignment. When leaders are committed to a shared purpose, performance becomes significantly impacted (Kempster, 2011), comfort zones are challenged, possibilities increase, and courageous actions are performed (Ely et al., 2011). Bennis (2009) posited that authentic leaders are the endangered species keeping organizations afloat. As the Syrophoenician women proved, the Gentile's "quality of life depends on the quality of our leaders" (Bennis, 2009, p. 4). A collective mindset improves EQ by inspiring trust, increasing motivation, and aiding in sense-making (Ely et al., 2011). Effective WDLPs consider the existing second-generation gender biases lying subtly beneath the plurality of policies and procedures, EQ capacity of self and others, how inclusion practices can exclude, and the importance of encouragement.

## Second-Generation Gender Biases

Second-generation gender biases in organizations harbor the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. The invisible barriers of second-generation gender biases are formed from "cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men" (Ely et al., 2011, p. 475). Women are to be more participative, and their democratic approach "make[s] females particularly adept at managing crises" (Liu et al., 2015, p. 239). The Syrophoenician mother was similar to the Roman Centurion who approached Jesus for mercy on behalf of another (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, *Matt.* 8:5-13), two examples of man and woman possessing extraordinary faith. Both Gentiles received dramatically different responses to the same request to help a voice-less character in the narrative. The Centurion was rewarded immediately for his prescriptive behavior, while the mother was shamed for her counter-cultural descriptive behavior.

Her violation of the stereotypical behavior prescription created disapproval – "disapproval that can result in penalties for the violator" (Heilman, 2001, p. 661). The difference depicted in Mark (Syrophoenician woman) and Matthew (Roman Centurian) is second-generation gender bias. Men are celebrated when they are "aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive (Heilman, 2001, p. 658), while a woman's kindness, helpfulness, sympathy, and concern about others are considered a deficit in the workplace. The Syrophoenician woman managed the crisis and dissolved a Jewish tradition through emotional self-regulation and perseverance of faith.

The need for WLDPs separate from co-ed options derives from the ideology that gender does not matter in developing leaders. Still, the existence of the glass ceiling and glass cliff testify otherwise. One perspective views women as victims of leadership development (Ely et al., 2011). Another perspective views women as the problem - a blaming mentality that convicts women of lacking the skills to compete against their male counterparts. Ely et al. (2011) argued that leadership development for women begins with identity work. WLDPs assist in developing leader identity, solidifying purposes more significant than the self that sustains the motivation to inform courageous actions required of leadership roles (Ely et al., 2011). The demand for diversity, integrity, and competency created a market for WLDPs to respond to the industry's need for the best and brightest (McCracken, 2000).

## Identity

Day (2000) extends the idea that leadership development is rooted in identity. Leader development protects human capital and constructs independent identities (Day, 2000). Self-awareness (e.g., emotional awareness and self-confidence), self-regulation (e.g., trustworthiness, self-control), self-motivation (e.g., initiative and optimism), and possessing a sense of purpose helps to shape the internalized identity of leaders (Day, 2000; Ely et al., 2011; Sadri, 2012). It is this identity that informs actions. When women are appointed to declining organizations, the negative implication is that they will unlikely have the professional capital to receive other leadership positions (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2009). Women leaders have comparatively fewer role models to learn from and with. Male leaders relate to other males and tend to pull them up the ranks when positions open, further diminishing the identity of leaders within women.

The agency of a leader's identity emerges through others providing confidence and support. The bold and successful encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician mother encourages other women to ask courageously. The transition from second-generation biased environments is challenging, and focusing on skill, capacity, and acquirement is insufficient - "a growing sense of identity must accompany the learning" (Grover, 2015, p. 4). As Christian leaders who find their identity in Christ (*John* 1:12-13), a response fitting the Kingdom of God is appropriate. The pericope modeled for contemporary leaders the need to keep the larger vision of individual identity in front of human resource management.

## Emotional Intelligence

EQ is the process of emotions informing cognitive capabilities and managing emotions cognitively (Kerr et al., 2006). The continual global increase in ethical and

moral dilemmas (e.g., 1984 Bhopal Gas disaster at Union Carbide, 1989 Exxon Valdez Oil spill, 2001 Enron financial scandal, 2015 Volkswagen emissions evasion) lean towards incorporating EQs' two sides, feeling and thinking, into leadership learning. The quality of EQ arguably determines the emotional climate and social interactions that influence all levels of organizational life (Kerr et al., 2006). People's actions and behaviors are formed from cultural (Schein & Schein, 2017) and socially constructed (Day, 2000) identities. Leadership development is intrinsically an emotional process; leaders recognize, evoke, and regulate personal and follower emotions. Leadership development involves capitalizing on the social resources embedded in relationships by "expanding the collective capacity...to engage effectively" (Day, 2000, p. 582). Leaders manage problems and people.

As a component of leadership development, EQ helps create the connection needed to transform cultures to develop positive relationships (Sosik & Jung, 2018). Sadri (2012) argued that EQ links personal and social competencies to leadership development. Personal competencies include self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation. Social competencies include empathy and social skills. Women leaders are often categorized by their emotions. Latinas are overemotional, Asians are reserved and passive, and African-American and Black women are passionate. These are strengths thought to "disqualify women in leadership" (Ely et al., 2011, p. 477). After the GFC, these characteristics are sought in the new leadership paradigm as the missing elements of traditional male traits. The Syrophoenician-mother managed her emotions as well as those of her audience. Jesus exhibited EQ when He regarded the Syrophoenician woman as deserving of mercy. Jesus concedes that His follower is correct and He is wrong (Strauss, 2014). In His approach to releasing healing, Jesus modeled feeling and thinking, both sides of EQ.

## **Inclusion**

Second-gender biases impact networking, negotiations, leading change, and managing career transitions (Ely et al., 2011). By including the Gentiles, Jesus expanded the Kingdom of God and accepted those things the cultures denied. By following the example of Jesus, leaders have the model to adjust cultures for what is good for all – the birth of a future that is coming but has not yet arrived - leaders who consistently explore new frontiers open doors for possibilities and full potential. When Deloitte realized their most talented women were exiting at a far greater rate than men, Deloitte's CEO initiated a cultural revolution to retain talented women (McCracken, 2000). Deloitte's senior management embraced the new direction; they went public with the Women's Initiative and required gender-focused workshops to explore the self-fulfilling assumptions that disadvantage women. Future research can explore the barriers that inclusion removes and the inadvertent barriers that inclusion unconsciously builds.

## **Conclusion**

Effective leadership casts the vision for an organization's desirable future (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). In that case, the socially constructed concept of leadership requires a paradigm shift inclusive of gender diversity. Using the power of effective communication to transform chaos (Baldoni, 2003) is non-gendered. The glass



cliff is a socially constructed breakdown in the relationship between women and men (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). Jesus initiated an inclusivity revolution for differences to be included in the salvation narratives. The Roman and Jewish cultures systematically dismissed the potential of women and Gentiles. However, there was a culturally acknowledged difference between women and men, even among the Gentiles. As an organization, Deloitte prepped for a culture change, and Jesus began the embryonic stage of God's universal mission (Osborne, 2010) in sending His Word to the Gentiles (*English Standard Version*, 2001/2016, Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 8:5-13). Jesus chose to impact culture by developing leaders through effective constructs (Mizzell, 2022).

Contemporary leadership development offers a significant opportunity to eradicate the glass cliff phenomenon through the development of women identifying and removing barriers. Increasing a woman's self-efficacy and intrapersonal relationship as an effective leader is a bold start to empowerment, confidence, and self-actualization. For women to *Boss*, new molds are formed as women entrepreneurs change the paradigm, become visual mentors, and be agentic and communal. Excising the male reference of leadership creates a new space for women to operate within their identity as agentic and communal leaders. Her leadership identity incorporated the characteristics of a Roman soldier. The Syrophoenician-mother-leader was aggressive, kind, forceful, sympathetic, independent, decisive, and concerned for others and represented the Gentile nation. Women are effective leaders with the right attributes for upper-echelon executive leadership. As members of a contemporary society, the inclusivity of one's inherent identity and sex is essential in leadership development programs. Leaders, organizational designers, and consultants must take charge and disassociate effective leadership from masculinity and end role incongruity and second-generation gender bias.

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