

Book Review: Higher Education, Leadership and Women Vice Chancellors: Fitting into Communities of Practice of Masculinities

By Paula Burkinshaw.
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 156 pp.
ISBN: 978-1-137-44403-5.

The paucity of women leaders in higher education continues despite advancement by women on other fronts of the educational pipeline. Today, more women are attending and graduating from college in the United States, but something occurs en route to the top-level leadership positions in these same college settings. The portrait of college leaders continues to consist of White men, as it has since the initial founding of universities. Paula Burkinshaw analyzes the situation of the missing women leaders in the United Kingdom, specifically in the position of Vice Chancellor. Burkinshaw's long career in leadership development in university settings initially provided her with an awareness of the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. As she began her doctoral studies, she had an opportunity to ask, "where are the women?" Her book builds on her dissertation research, which involved one-on-one interviews with 18 women who were vice chancellors.

It is clear that the volume builds on dissertation research as the chapters align with a typical dissertation format, namely an introduction, a literature review, a methods chapter, presentation of the findings, and a concluding chapter. On the one hand, this format serves the topic well as the research is situated in a rich, deep literature base. On the other hand, the findings chapters seem scant given the expanse of the data collected. No doubt a trade-off existed in publishing the dissertation research in a popular press format. Despite this short-coming, the voices of the women leaders run strong throughout the volume in the form of quotes from her interviews.

The introductory chapter provides a good background regarding Burkinshaw's personal interest in pursuing the topic of women in leadership and also details the author's learning process during her doctoral research. The book provides a good argument regarding the benefits of structuralism and post-structuralism, and Burkinshaw takes the reader through her own thought process of self-questioning of her own beliefs regarding gender and leadership, and her approaches to research. This introduction

serves as a good model for other qualitative researchers intending to conduct and analyze interview data.

Perhaps the most robust chapter of the volume is chapter 2, which provides background to the literature and specifically addresses the gender-neutral myth in higher education. Here, research is presented regarding a tipping point at which women achieve a critical mass (typically assumed to be around 30% of leaders), and how it is only at this point that prevailing communities of practice built on male norms are questioned. Indeed, the author argues that it is against men's self-interest to disrupt the current culture that preferences and rewards current practices. In summary, Burkinshaw concludes there are three approaches that need attention to "fix" the problem of underrepresentation of women in higher education leadership: (1) fixing the women, (2) fixing the organization, and (3) fixing the knowledge (p. 58). The tripartite argument provides a framework that is referenced throughout the volume. Clear in the literature review is the double-bind women face in work relative to men and the role-conflict that emerges as a result of current organizational structures that reward a narrow band of leadership behaviors. The transformation of university settings from a community of scholars to work places points to the ways in which neo-liberal managerialism has taken root in university cultures.

A chapter on the research methods employed in the study provides a thorough background that is particularly useful for doctoral students preparing their own dissertation work. The level of detail provided builds trust in the findings that emerged from the study. Two chapters are devoted to presenting the findings. A selection of incisive quotes showcases the lived experiences of the participants and supports the arguments presented regarding "acceptable leadership" behaviors that promote fitting into communities of practice built on masculinities. A benefit of participation in the project was that the women vice chancellors noted how the reflexive process of the interview itself provided them with an opportunity to think differently about their experiences.

Present in the participants' narratives was how the language of leadership is male. These women were well aware of the boundaries they were crossing, but little in the volume speaks to the role of boundary spanners. Instead, the discussion uses a binary of an in-group or out-group as the borders for men and women's leadership. Perhaps more boundary-spanning behavior will emerge once a critical mass of women is achieved. The evidence of choice by these top-level women leaders is questionable given the communities of practice of masculinities. In particular, the commentary by the participants makes apparent how much gender performativity undergirds leadership behavior. But perhaps the more important questions become what behavior is valued and who gets to have opportunities to hone leadership experiences needed to lead institutions of higher education? A central point of the book is how discourse reinforces historic norms that favor men in leadership.

Ultimately, not tapping women as higher education leaders is a waste of talent—just at a time when the sector is under siege of public scrutiny and faces the need to educate innovative graduates to address global challenges. The profession needs all-hands-on-deck to move institutions of higher education into the future. Burkinshaw argues that historically it has always been women who had to change to fit the confines of the institution versus the organization changing to become more inclusive. To achieve the outcome of more women in leadership, three recommendations are given: (1) offering women only leadership development (fixing women), (2) gender mainstreaming (fixing the organization), and (3) research at a national level (fixing knowledge). Beyond the listing of these recommendations, little attention is given to how these changes may occur or what type of leadership is required to help support the recommended changes.

In the end, Burkinshaw does not present an optimistic future. Her participants were resigned to the status quo and they accepted performing emotional labor in their institutions, being “sanguine about having to do so” (p. 131). This acceptance of performativity of traditional female roles represents the experiences of the current vice chancellors, who all come from a particular generation. What remains unknown is how up-and-coming generations of women leaders will fare. Without changes to the current communities of practice of masculinity, the answer will no doubt be: not well. The strength of the book is how the study was situated in the broad literature base of gendered leadership that dispels the gender-neutral myth. Absent from the discussion is investigation of what is occurring for women of color or for those identifying on a broader gender spectrum. The author's passion for pointing out the problem of women missing in the top echelon of higher education leadership and advocating for building a

critical mass of women leaders is evident and provides an important contribution to the literature.

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