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TCWSE Monograph

**Women as School Executives:
Celebrating Diversity**

Diversity in Context

Diversity in Development

Diversity in Relationships

Diversity in Self

Diversity in Leadership Practice

Edited by

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The Texas Council of Women School Executives

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La Reina de la Casa quiere Democracia: Latina Executive Leaders and the Intersection of Home and the Workforce

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While preparing school administrators at the university, I often reflect on whether I am effectively preparing female students—not only academically, but also at a personal level—for their future careers as school administrators. Angelita, one of my advisees in the educational leadership master's-degree program, came to see me the other day to clarify her academic program. Our friendly conversation evolved into a profound discussion of how gender, ethnicity, and marriage (i.e., a dual-earning couple) had influenced her aspirations and decisions in pursuing a new career. This was not the first time I had engaged in a conversation with a female student about gender, ethnicity, and occupational barriers faced by dual-earning couples.

Angelita is married, has two young children, and has been teaching at a local elementary school for the past four years. Angelita's goal is to finish her master's-degree program expeditiously and move into an administrative position in the district. She mentioned that her husband supported her academic and career aspirations, even promoting a competition: He wanted to see whether she could sustain a 4.0 grade point average, a better average than he had when he completed his master's degree two years ago.

Angelita said that when her husband was working on his degree, she had sheltered him from the children's interruptions and household chores so that he could devote himself to his studies. However, even though he was supportive of her studies, now that it was her turn to pursue a master's degree, her husband did not reciprocate with a more supportive division of chores. We both agreed that part of her husband's behavior was rooted in family traditions. Angelita confided that her frustration sometimes translated into heated discussions at home. Most important, she added that it was hard to break the generational tradition of being *la reina de la casa* (the queen of the house) (Kinsella, 2006). Even when she asked her husband for help around the house, her husband, her parents, or her in-laws did not seem to understand her struggle. The struggle, as I perceived it, was not related simply to a transfer of chores; rather, it was an effort to challenge the *habitus of mind*, a confrontation of established *absolutes* (Klein & Myrdal, 1998), especially in situations in which they no longer apply.

This reflective essay focuses on Latinas and their development of leadership competencies in preparation for careers as executive leaders. The degree to which new forms of social patterns have emerged in the intersection of home and the workforce, especially for women in dual-earning-couples, is discussed. The preparation of future women executive leaders is significant not only as it pertains to issues of societal inequities experienced by women with varying degrees of educational, social, religious, political, and economic challenges, but also to female-specific leadership competencies that may pave the way for their future success.

Latinas and the Intersection of Home and the Workforce

Angelita's example immediately reconnected me to Mendez-Morse's (1997, 1999, 2000, 2004) contributions about the important representation of and roles played by Latinas in educational leadership positions, as well as her debunking of a number of stereotypes surrounding home role-conflicts, limited access to education, and limited role models. Perhaps the successful Latina educational leaders in Mendez-Morse's examples epitomized the culmination of a path that Angelita was just embarking on. For Angelita, this process of building her leadership competencies included challenging her own preconceived absolutes of old stereotypes, for instance, that she needed to be subservient to her husband, even though he fully supported her studies and career goals.

The challenges of Hispanic working women and dual-earning couples have been the focus of research for at least four decades (Bean, Curtis, & Marcum, 1977; Herrera & DelCampo, 1995; Lambert, 1991; Ybarra, 1982). Among other important discoveries, these studies indicated that dual-earning couples have different types of conjugal-role arrangements. Most of the arrangements depend on convenience and necessity. Curiously, Chicana wives in dual-earning couples internalized more guilt than did their spouses about not being there to care for their homes and children (Ybarra, 1982); even among those women who responded that they would not stop working if they could afford to stay at home. In addition, the same group also perceived that women's working outside of the home in general had negative effects on the family. Is it possible that professional ideal and home responsibilities are contradictory forces that torment and haunt women in the initial stages of their careers as executive leaders? If this is the case for Angelita and other neophyte educational leaders, personal negotiation of one's career as personal fulfillment and new social patterns at home is important, especially when contemporary working women still are challenging *absolutes* that consider the ideal for women to be *reinas de la casa*.

Instead of feelings of accomplishment for her success on her path to become an educational leader and as a spouse, Angelita felt guilt. Even though women have fully participated in the workforce since the preindustrialization era and substituted for their men in industrial production during World War II, some women still consider the image of the family woman and the ideal of a stay-at-home-mom to be the norm (Bird, Bird, & Scruggs, 1984).

It is important to recognize the milestone established by advances in the lives of Hispanic women in the 21st century. Hispanic women are attaining more access to education than in previous generations (Gandara, 1982; Vasquez, 1982) and are increasingly able to exercise economic and political rights (Gutierrez, Melendez, & Noyola, 2006), with democratic participation under the principles of social equality. In addition, more literature is reflecting the successful performance of women executive leaders (Brunner, 1999; Mendez-Morse, 2000; Ortiz, 1998), including the unique form of support Latinas receive from parents and extended family (Klein & Myrdal, 1998), even though, in the U.S., the tradition of Hispanic families and the elderly living together is now more and more compartmentalized across generations (in laws, parents, or grandparents now live in separate homes).

Introducing future Latina educational leaders to female-specific leadership competencies may contribute to their success, not only with focus on the societal inequalities of women experiencing different degrees of educational, social, religious, political, and

economic challenges. Latinas in dual-earning couples' arrangements can attain personal and professional fulfillment when they are prepared for leadership competencies that include a satisfying compromise between their female leadership roles at home and in the workforce.

Developing Women's Leadership Competencies

Women's leadership competencies can be developed through interpersonal agency (such as the development of self-awareness and the ability to foster awareness in others) and advocacy necessary to clearly define equitable roles and responsibilities. Women's leadership competencies relate to democratic values when the principles of social equality and respect for women are at play, not only in the workplace but also at home. The development of women's leadership competencies evokes from both men and women ethical considerations in the exercise of equal educational, social, religious, political, and economic rights (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Oakley, 2000). The movement to develop women's leadership competencies is by no means new; rather, it reached a peak in the 1980s and 1990s, and was supported by the United Nations and the European Union. These organizations recognized that economic strategies alone were not improving institutional barriers to the progress of women (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991). Despite the economic progress made by many countries, cultural barriers still perpetuate the notion that women's contributions do not have a productive value, especially in rural areas.

One of the obstacles to the widespread understanding of new roles for women in dual-earning couples is that early studies on gender-related issues were focused primarily on girls and women. This led to the assumption that gender equity as a field of study was only about women. This perception was the death knell to efforts to represent both men and women in gender-equity studies. The assumption that gender-equity studies were related just to women ignored gender equality as advocacy for the fundamental values of equity and human justice (Deem, 2002; Wilcox-Frazier, Murakami-Ramalho, & Benham, 2002).

The exploration of women's leadership competencies is based on the distinction between reproductive and productive (Marx, 1887, 1967) roles. How do these roles play out in the lives of women in contemporary times? How much have we progressed in our perceptions, in our negotiation of gender spaces, and in sharing responsibilities for reproductive and productive activities, especially on the part of Latinas and other women of color? What are the new roles of women in the home and in the labor force? Even though the new socioeconomic times of industrialization and division of labor have transformed the lives of men and women in professional fields, to what extent do we still carry limiting perceptions of gender and race in social spaces that combine home and work? The divide between reproductive and productive roles of women may have contributed to the perpetuation of restrictive perceptions. In the following pages, I explore some scenarios of women in the workforce and women in the home that may help us understand women's negotiation between the workforce and the home.

Women in the Workforce

The intersection of race, class, and ethnicity is strongly connected with issues of inequity in the workplace (Fennema 1988; Marshall 1993; Tyson 1998). Scholars have shown how women and people of color are disproportionately affected by certain em-

ployment practices (Bailey, 1998). Bailey affirmed that as long as our society continues to differentiate individuals' values and rewards on the basis of sex, race, and ethnicity, a commitment to affirmative action is necessary for securing a more genuinely equitable society.

The work of Lovell (1994) and Fernandez-Kelly (1989) related to gender and development is particularly significant in the study of Latinas. These researchers focused on men and women's roles, with special attention to gender and race in urban areas. Lovell revealed a new round of theoretical debates among feminist scholars, suggesting that gender inequality was still reinforced during the era of Latin American economic growth and modernization (Bossen, 1984; Nash & Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Nash & Safa, 1985; Saffioti, 1985; Young, as cited in Lovell 1994). Historically, women's participation in the labor force has been based on inflexible gendered perceptions of roles. For example, women were accepted only in semi-skilled types of jobs, such as teachers, nurses, or seamstresses. Jobs were gendered and division of labor was enforced until after World War II, when the division of labor was radically challenged and broken down (Thistle, 2004) due to economic necessity. Thistle suggested that, since then, old beliefs and perceptions have been radically transformed to give way to tolerance and later acceptance of women in different jobs and careers than those that were customary before World War II.

The increasing acceptance of women in the labor force coincided with the irreversible economic forces that brought women into the factories when male workers were away at war. A movie (circa 1942) about the Ford factories in Michigan (Michigan Historical Museum, 2007) during those times depicted women producing army artifacts, operating machinery that once had been operated primarily by men producing automobile parts. The need to supply factory workers to substitute for men during the war broke down barriers to jobs for which only males had been considered fit. This event is significant when perceived as a collapse in patriarchal frames of mind. Thistle contended that the collapse related to "a radical difference between men's almost complete control of women's labor when women had little access to support other than performance tasks within marriage" (p. 281). Nonetheless, it is important to note that factory work was and, in most cases, still is carried out under the auspices of male supervisors.

The disparities in the labor force still exist when men in privileged positions maintain women's disadvantage by determining gendered wage scales and stratifying the access of women to organizations' higher ranks. Women lag behind men in the pay scale, supposedly because women are more prone to be absent from work due to family needs, or due to a nurturing and less competitive nature. When women accept less pay and fewer privileges in the work place, they are still relating their work to the idea of "helping" the family (now the organizational family). Therefore, women face key issues that are part of the "unfolding social transformation which is at the heart of modernity" (Thistle, 2004, p. 281) when claiming their position on new economic, political, and ideological terrains. In school leadership, women face similar struggles in terms of establishing themselves in positions of power (Brunner, 2000; Ball & Reay, 2000; Shakeshaft, Nowell, & Perry, 1991), especially if these positions were traditionally represented by men. It is perceived, however, that women, especially of color continue to face unwritten rules and bias, starting with the recruitment and selection processes (Hearn & Piekari, 2005; Tallerico, 2000).

Women in the Home

Thistle raised another significant point about the historical turn for women in the labor force. Because of inflexible perceptions of roles following World War II, there was a strong relationship between women's rapid movement into the labor force and a sharp rise in the divorce rate. The rising divorce rate resulted in alterations of laws surrounding marriage, bitter battles over women's rights, a striking increase in female-headed families and their presence among the poor, and much controversy surrounding social welfare policy. Thistle saw the phenomenon as part of an irreversible economic transition comparable to men's movement off the land to the industrialized world, not just a loosening of attitudes toward marriage and sex.

The same patriarchal beliefs that delimited jobs based on gender also delimited home as a woman's space. However, there is evidence that there has been a change in the division of household labor (Brines, 1994). Latino husbands are participating more in their households today than in the 1960s (Herrera & DelCampo, 1995). Nevertheless, behind the patriarchal belief still lies an even deeper conception, one of capitalism and of the division of labor rooted in materialistic exchanges between the positions of "main breadwinner" and "dependent"—what Brines defined as a dependency model. Brines explained that "the exchange relation between the main breadwinners and dependents is contractual; money is exchanged for labor under a code stipulating the rights and obligations of parties to the contract—here, of marriage" (p. 655). The main problem with this exchange is the asymmetry that paved the way to exploitation. Brines clarified:

The marriage contract ensures that the conditions of trade between the main breadwinner and the dependent approach those of a bilateral monopoly (England & Farkas, 1986). But the nature of what the dependent has to trade introduces an asymmetry. Housework—unpaid labor performed within the household—is by definition without exchange value in the classic sense; that is, it is nonportable or illiquid as a form of currency beyond the specific relationship, unlike what the main breadwinner brings to the trade. (p. 656)

The unfairness of this trade, Thistle (2004) elaborated (referring to Marx), defined the difference between productive and unproductive labor. According to Thistle, Marx (1887; 1967) defined productive labor as "that which yielded a profit which could be invested in further capital creating yet more profit" (p. 284). Thistle asserted that wage workers are perceived as essential to economic growth, whereas housewives "simply sustain and reproduce these laborers (children) and are thus engaged in unproductive or less important work" (p. 284). So the asymmetry can be observed when, no matter how much the breadwinner contributes to the household income, the dependent is always expected to contribute with completed labor. The most interesting aspect in Thistle's study is that when wives became the breadwinners, their husbands did not immediately assume the position of dependents by incorporating more housework into their activities. The disengaged behavior by husbands could be perceived as selfish. However it could also be due mainly to the negative reaction from family and friends upon discovering that the husband was taking care of the baby, for example, instead of performing "expected" male-traditional roles.

Equally significant was Hochschild and Machung's 1989 study (as cited in Brines, 1994) of 50 dual-earner couples. The authors discovered that one-fifth of the husbands

who earned more than their wives shared the housework, and one-third of the husbands who earned about the same as their wives shared the housework; however, none of those who earned less than their wives shared the housework. The findings from that study corroborate the fact that males respond negatively when they find themselves in reproductive roles.

Conclusion

Education is paramount in providing women like Angelita with tools to develop their leadership competencies. Through education, women are empowered with examples of socioeconomic and political issues as they learn about successful women's participation in the workforce and become aware of contemporary situations (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Banks, 1994) that perpetuate the existence of a glass ceiling (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Oakley, 2000; Sadker, Sadker, & Shakeshaft, 1987; Wright & Baxter, 2000). Through education, Latina women can build stronger communities (Dodd & Konzal, 2002), and will not necessarily associate early marriage, for example, with well-being and stability. Throughout the world, education is also strongly correlated with women's choices to decrease teen pregnancy, domestic violence, and sexually transmitted infections (*United Nations Handbook*, 2003). Education may help Angelita have a better chance to develop leadership competencies applicable to her new job and to exercise her freedom of choice.

Mendez-Morse's (2004) examples of Latinas as trailblazers and pioneers then become models for future students aspiring to leadership positions in education. The difficulty lies in establishing venues to better prepare female Latina leaders to develop their leadership competencies within institutional settings. Students can be exposed to forums or panels of female leaders that talk about some of these struggles, or be connected to local mentors (Ehrich, 1994) as they may provide examples of how to negotiate the pressures in the intersection between home and work. A previous student who has been an assistant principal for the past three years provides a good example. She has struck an agreement with her husband: She will not come home and discuss job-related problems. She therefore calls her best friend—her husband—to talk about her job worries before arriving home. Sometimes, she says with a smile, she is parked in the driveway for a few extra minutes because she arrives home before the conversation is ended. According to this assistant principal, the arrangement has contributed to a healthier family relationship.

Angelita's example displays a process of transformation that is simultaneously occurring in different countries and to varying degrees. Thus, even though the participation of women in society has changed, the influence of patriarchal authority is still pervasive. Perceptions of women in the home and the labor force must be updated so that women can be perceived as legitimate socioeconomic contributors, even among the women themselves. Instead of a revolutionary perspective, this reflection invites the reader to consider taking small steps in the preparation of future women executive leaders—to challenge our own preconceived notions of male-dominant images. Historically, women have participated fully in society, but their contributions should no longer be perceived as based solely on household value or detached from explicit exchange values.

Women's leadership competencies include being aware that there is a difference between sex and gender. Sex is "a biologically determined variable that is easily mea-

sured" (Calas & Smircich, 1992, p. 229). Even though initial feminist theories made a distinction between "sex" (which is biological) and "gender" (a social construction) (Oakley, 1972), theories have evolved, claiming that "through gender relations . . . 'men' and 'women,' two categories of persons, are created, and their bodies [are then] connected to culture" (Calas & Smircich, 1992, p. 229). Sociologists like Ridgeway and Correll (2000) have suggested that gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, males and females, and that relations of inequality around that difference are purely artificially organized notions. Gender is therefore perceived as a cultural construction of deeply rooted perceptions ingrained in the fabric of society—sometimes so deeply rooted that women themselves react negatively when other women cross gender-determined spaces (Noddings, 1992).

As more Latinas and other women of color reach executive positions, their leadership competencies become of utmost importance (Hill & Ragland, 1995; Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Rosener, 1995). Through their advocacy, women can observe whether equal rights are fully realized or whether mythical justifications such as "women are not interested in leadership positions" still are propounded (Schwartz, 1989). Myths and stereotypical standpoints (Mirande, 1977) still determine the way in which women's roles are perceived. The lack of leadership competencies prevents women from recognizing their rights or knowing how to improve their well-being and balance their roles between home and the workforce (Bean et al., 1977; Mirande, 1977; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Cultural change and increased stability with regard to issues of gender and leadership may not be promoted by simply describing what is unjust about women's or men's experiences at home and at work. Improvements can be achieved through the articulation of perpetuated and invisible norms so that men and women become aware of and advocate for ways of minimizing oppression.

Unfortunately, social and interactional pressures conspire against men's and women's well-being, especially when masculinity is fundamentally defined by a rejection of that which is "female" (Brines, 1994; Chodorow, 1975, 1978; Williams, 1989). It is relevant to consider works of scholars like Patai (1992, 1998), who cautioned about heterophobic movements among feminist theorists that are too extremist and may not help in resolving these issues. This reflection is not about theories of heterophobic feminism (Patai, 1992), but an attempt to ameliorate the situation of men and women in relation to certain tensions that are perpetuated by societal beliefs.

The number of Latinas attending universities and earning degrees has increased (Hackett, Betz, & Doty, 2004; Rodriguez, 2000; Vasquez, 1982), but women in general have not advanced in the workforce (Stromquist, 1993). Inconsistencies between education and wages still evidence provincial and pervasive behaviors that link women with education and poverty—allowing for more education but with continued poverty. Both men and women, then, have an enormous responsibility as child bearers to avoid the perpetuation of gender roles and inequalities starting at home. Davies (1993) "explored the processes through which our maleness and femaleness are established and maintained during childhood and the radical possibility of giving children the capacity to disrupt the dominant storylines through which gender is held in place" (p. 31). It is our responsibility to avoid behaviors such as "saving" boys from certain household chores, or saying that "it is 'OK' if boys do not organize their rooms so well," with their mothers going into the room to "finish" cleaning up after them.

Conversely, mothers may still be reinforcing the notion that girls need to learn how to organize their rooms “until it is done well”; otherwise, they will not become “good” mothers or wives someday. We may still be perpetuating the message that boys just “help” in the house, when in reality, boys and girls should share equal responsibilities and rights at home. The magnitude of these habits is disturbing when we find women who are now part of the capitalist labor force, organizing the office in the same way they were raised to organize and “clean” the home (Sadker & Sadker, 2002).

Thistle (2004) reminded us of the need to gain a theoretical grasp of the recent transformations in women’s well-being and participation in the workforce. *La reina de la casa* no longer expects fairy-tale versions of life or wants to live in terms of sovereignty or subjugation. Women executive leaders want democratic participation in their homes in the same way they are preparing students for a democratic future (Giroux, 1992a, 1992b). Even though some people may have seen culture, gender, class, and racial issues as challenging the “apparent egalitarianism and progressive universalism of the dominant western culture” (Firestone et al., 1999, p. 313), this may be the right time to prepare for an ontological renewal, transforming deficient models of inequitable cultural negotiations that may restrain women like Angelita from fully exercising their freedom of choice, agency, and advocacy, and successfully participating in society.

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