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## The Journal of Academic Librarianship

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/jacalib](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/jacalib)

## Gender and Leadership in Academic Libraries

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Gender  
Leadership  
Personnel  
Perceptions  
Survey  
Organizations  
Family  
Traits  
Social capital

## ABSTRACT

This study considers academic library personnel perceptions of gender and leadership associated with three obstacles – family, “double binds”, social capital – identified by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli in 2007. A survey was created that provides prompts to measure perception of these obstacles as they apply to both genders. Ninety-two library personnel from a random sample completed the survey. Findings from a *t*-test that describe and interpret the results are presented, along with themes coded from survey comments. Suggestions Eagly and Carli offer to improve leadership equity are adapted specifically to academic libraries.

For many years, the “glass ceiling” metaphor arguably provided the most influential model in which to consider female leadership discrimination, and is still used (e.g. Fernandez & Campero, 2017). However, Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, in their article “Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership”, suggest obstacles female leaders face resemble navigating complex labyrinths more than hitting glass ceilings (Eagly and Carli, 2007). They identify three obstacles in particular: family, ‘double binds’, and social capital. According to Eagly and Carli, family becomes obstacle in that females who pursue families traditionally invest more time and effort into them than do male peers who do the same, thus sacrificing leadership opportunities. Double binds occur when female leadership is devalued or inhibited regardless traits or behaviors (e.g. if categorized as communal, then considered weak rather than warm; agentic, tyrannical rather than decisive). Social capital is power and influence that comes from networking and mentoring; the obstacle lies in organizational structures unfavorable to females (e.g. male leadership hierarchy). This article considers academic library personnel perceptions of gender and leadership; it presents responses to a survey built upon these obstacles Eagly and Carli identified, and measures perceptions according to and by gender.

## Literature review

According to Chemers (1997), gender and leadership issues were mostly ignored until the 1970s. He identifies two questions that fuel research on the topic: Which gender is better suited for leadership? Why are female leaders discriminated against in terms of opportunity and compensation? The following sources address those two questions, and

provide a chronological framework in which to view gender and leadership consideration in academic libraries.

Kaufman (1993) asserts gender is not critical to effective library leadership, but institutional structures seem to favor men; she sees this changing as organizations move from hierarchical to horizontal structures where communal traits (often associated with females) are more valued. Haipeng (2001) notes the absence of a universal library leadership definition, and stresses the importance of cultural context to leadership (including role of gender); he uses Australia, China, Russia, and the United States to illustrate. Turock (2001) describes the importance of history to the issue (e.g. until recently, library leadership was extremely male dominated) and social capital (especially in terms of mentoring); although academic libraries are more female dominated, she reminds readers that universities they serve are not, thus many organizational problems associated with gender discrimination apply. She recommends institutions adopt more learning model leadership structures as opposed to hierarchical, and that a national mentoring program for female leaders be established. Deyrup (2004) cites government and library statistics that show females have surpassed males in terms of academic library directorships (but not compensation), and notes that leadership styles rely more on institutional culture than gender. While encouraged by strides in equity, she is concerned about retention and recruitment of female library leaders. Mercado (2006) reports on the 2006 *Library Leadership and Management Association Women Administrators Discussion Group* where gender leadership differences were considered, and also ways to address associated problems. For example: the story of a male supervisor who excluded female colleagues was shared, along with recommendations on how to deal

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2018.02.003>

Received 15 December 2017; Received in revised form 26 January 2018; Accepted 6 February 2018  
0099-1333/ © 2018 Published by Elsevier Inc.

with such problems.

More recently, [Martin \(2015\)](#) differentiates transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles amongst academic library deans, directors, and university librarians. These style considerations reflect modern approaches to leadership studies, thus providing a theoretical model in which to analyze. His purpose is to identify if differences exist by and/or due to gender, age, experience, or institution type; he finds females more likely than males to use transformational leadership skills (the preferred approach of seminal leadership scholars). [Neigel \(2015\)](#) asserts that library literature, particularly that dealing with leadership, change, and library science curricula, does not account for librarianship's feminized nature nor the gender implications of those who choose it as a profession. Her primary purpose is to better question assumptions about library leadership. She examines this feminized nature (including experiences of female library leaders), contends it is poorly understood, and that adoption of masculinized practices is a response to the devaluation of "women's work" historically associated with librarianship. [Olin and Millet \(2015\)](#) cite sources that indicate a significant disparity between the number of females working in academic libraries and those who are leaders; they believe part of the problem is the gendered expectations that undermine female leadership (Eagly/Carli labyrinths and double binds are apparent in this article). They call for gender deliberate action in the form of human resources training, and more support from professional library organizations.

Missing from the literature are studies on how library personnel perceive the issue. In terms of personnel performance, perceptions can be more important than reality – regardless how much personnel data or diversity initiatives human resource departments provide, gender bias perception (and reality) can still exist; if it does then morale and productivity can be compromised. Eagly and Carli offer good starting points to identify how and why gender bias and/or its perception occurs in terms of leadership. This study uses their concepts in an attempt to measure the perceptions in egalitarian fashion, i.e. consider both gender's perceptions of female and male academic library leadership support and opportunities.

**Methodology**

A survey was designed to learn about the perceptions of academic library personnel, males and females, regarding gender and leadership in relation to obstacles Eagly and Carli identify for females (see [Appendix](#)). Underlying concepts of institutional support, marriage and/or parenthood, communal traits, agentic traits, and social capital are explicitly expressed in the prompts, and respondents are able to rate their perceptions to each on a one to ten Likert-type Scale. A pretest for clarity was administered to female and male library personnel, then two-hundred-eighty library personnel from different institution types (e.g. for-profit, community college, research university) from twenty-two states across the United States were randomly selected and invited to complete the survey. The selection process involved accessing higher education institutions alphabetically listed on a Website then choosing the first employee listed on the library staff directory of each one: first a female librarian was chosen, then on succeeding Website, first female non librarian, then first male librarian, then first male non librarian, and so on for equal representation. A cultural limit is that only American institutions were selected. Another possible limit is definition: although the survey states "leadership is not limited to institutional position or rank", some may associate leadership exclusively by such things as position title (e.g. Library Director).

Ninety-two library personnel responded to the survey's ten prompts. Forty-seven identified themselves as Female, and forty-three as Male (two identified Other). A t-test was run to determine if there were differences in perceptions based on and according to gender.

**Table 1**  
Rate following according to institutional support of female and male leadership (one "horrid" to ten "immense")

Support of leadership	Female respondent	Male respondent	t	df	p
For females	6.83 (1.76)	7.6 (1.97)	-1.97	88	.052
For males	8.34 (1.24)	7.6 (1.94)	2.16	88	.033

**Table 2**  
Impact of marriage and/or parenthood on leadership and/or leadership opportunities (one "totally hinders" to ten "totally helps").

Marriage and/or parenthood impact	Female respondent	Male respondent	t	df	p
On female leaders	5.11 (1.76)	5.35 (1.45)	-0.71	88	.48
On male leaders	6.36 (1.76)	5.74 (1.53)	1.77	88	.08

**Findings**

The below tables are titled according to the survey prompt they represent. The first columns list the Eagly/Carli concept, and associate with the two genders. The second and third columns report response means (with standard deviations in parentheses) according to respondent gender. The last columns show t-value (t), degrees of freedom (df), and significance level (p), specifically a 2-tailed p-value.

Following the tables, the number of comments for each prompt by gender is shared. Descriptive coding followed by data synthesis was applied to identify themes ([Tables 1-4](#)).

According to the survey, female and male personnel perceive above average (5) institutional support for both female and male leadership. There is not enough evidence to suggest female and male perceptions regarding institutional leadership support for females significantly differs, but it is possible to state with confidence that females perceive institutional support for male leadership as 7% higher than for females.

Fifteen females commented on this prompt. Three themes emerge: gender equality, double standard, discrimination against the library. Some believe their schools equally support female and male leadership. One writes: "Both males and females are in leading positions within this library setting". Others see a double standard where female leadership is supported differently (and more often less positively) than male: "More resistance/questioning of female leaders and general acceptance of male ideas". Finally, some believe the two genders are treated differently due to the nature of the institution itself: "Support of female leadership within the library seems to be excellent (I would rate it an 8), but it gets tougher when you get to college and university level administrative support of female leadership. There I'd rate it a 4 or 5". This aligns with [Turock's \(2001\)](#) institutional structure concerns.

Eighteen males commented, and three themes emerge: gender equality, discrimination against females, discrimination against males. As with female colleagues, some males believe their schools equally support female and male leadership: "I don't think people really think about whether the leader is a man or a woman at our institution".

**Table 3**  
Impact of communal and agentic trait displays on leadership and/or leadership opportunities (one 'totally hinders' to ten 'totally helps').

	Female respondent	Male respondent	t	df	p
<b>Communal trait display impact</b>					
On female leaders	6 (2.04)	6.86 (2.04)	0.22	88	.53
On male leaders	6.85 (2.17)	6.58 (1.91)	0.62	88	.54
<b>Agentic trait display impact</b>					
On female leaders	4.36 (2.17)	4.35 (2.03)	0.029	88	.98
On male leaders	6.43 (2.37)	4.77 (2.28)	3.38	88	.001

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