Leadership and Sexuality

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Leadership and Sexuality: Power, Principles, and Processes

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What is the relationship between sexuality and leadership? What comes to mind first are vivid instances where individuals, thought to be acting as trusted stewards of their constituents’ best interests, become embroiled in a sex-related scandal. It is not hard to find examples of leaders whose careers and notable accomplishments are tarnished permanently by one revealed indiscretion. Technically, although guilty of marital infidelity, Bill Clinton’s crime with regard to Monica Lewinsky was not the affair but charges of perjury that stemmed from lying about the affair. Of course, he only lied because he knew there would be a scandal if the affair hit the newspapers. In other cases, such as the Eliot Spitzer prostitution scandal, the New York State governor and ex-attorney general, engaged in criminal activity by patronizing prostitutes.

Although the question of why rich and powerful men risk their careers by engaging in illicit sexual activity is an interesting one, we suggest that the connection between leadership and sexuality is much more important, complex, and broad than the phenomenon of a sex scandal. Sexual leadership can be viewed as operating at both macro- and micro-levels. Issues related to sexual leadership come into play when a nation decides in favor or against an abstinence-only policy with regard to sexual education, the Supreme Court rules in favor of gay marriage, or a husband and wife decide whether to try a new sexual position. Sexual leadership also comes into play in grey and black markets. What leadership dynamics are involved in recruiting, motivating, and managing women who work as strippers, or as prostitutes? The purpose of the proposed edited volume is to explore the largely ignored relationship between sexuality and leadership.

The two editors of the proposed volume represent a nice blend of expertise with regard to both human sexuality and leadership studies. James K. Beggan is a professor of sociology at the University of Louisville with expertise in human sexuality as well as a background in leadership studies. Scott T. Allison is a professor of psychology at Richmond who has published numerous articles and books on the characteristics of heroic leaders and authored several articles about human sexuality.

We have recruited authors who have expertise in areas that overlap in both sexual behavior and leadership studies. Our contributors include scholars who have a background in psychology, sociology, communication, education, and business. The proposed book will contain 12 chapters, including an introductory chapter. Each chapter will average between 6,000 and 7,000 words, including references, giving the volume a length of roughly 80,000 to 90,000 words. We expect that final drafts from authors would be in our possession no later than June of 2016.

An academic book that examines the role of sexuality and leadership will fill an important niche in both areas of study. A Google Scholar search for “sexual leadership” produced only 36 hits and none of them addressed issues raised by the proposed book. Leadership scholars and sexology researchers have not addressed problems leaders face at the intersection of human sexual and leadership concerns, despite numerous instances where leaders have acted in unethical and even illegal ways with regard to sexual matters. As public awareness
about sexually related abuses of leaders has increased, government laws and regulations have increased the culpability of leaders who fail to respond properly to issues involving sexual malfeasance. For example, the Title IX Clery Act requires universities to investigate instances of sexual harassment and carries the threat of fines up to $35,000 for the failure to do so. We anticipate that our book would be adopted for use in undergraduate and graduate courses on leadership, business management, sports administration, organizational psychology, and the sociology of work.

Section One (Introduction): The Study of Leadership Processes and Sexuality

Scholars and social critics have taken different approaches to understanding what sexuality is and why it is such a driving and potentially polarizing force in our lives. One end of the spectrum views sexuality as a biologically-based drive or need, similar to our need for food, oxygen, or water. Sociobiological and evolutionary approaches view sexual behavior as a consequence of selection pressures operating as a result of the different way men and women contribute to reproduction. More recent approaches, especially the pioneering work of Simon and Gagnon, moved away from biological, drive-based examinations of human sexuality and toward understanding sexuality in terms of the meaning it is given from society. From a social constructionist point of view, the importance and nature of sexuality is derived from how we, as a collective culture, choose to see it.

The tremendous variety in the way people express their sexuality can create conflicts between individuals, groups, and institutions. Although it is tempting to embrace diversity and defend individuals’ rights to express their sexuality in any way they see fit, certain expressions can be problematic for society and those individuals that make up society. If we think of ethics as an attempt to create a system of recommendations for how people should live, or a way to distinguish right from wrong, sexual ethics can be viewed as guiding principles for how people should express or restrain their sexual feelings. At one end of the spectrum are sexually related behaviors that most people abhor such as sexual violence. The other end would include activities that most individuals would see as acceptable, such as sexual activity between a consenting husband and wife. In between those extremes is a large range of behaviors where people may have strong differences in opinion about the expression of sexuality. These areas could include debates about the appropriate age of consent, the morality of premarital intercourse or sexual infidelity, sexual orientation, and the ethics of being consumers or providers of sexual services, such as prostitution.

We suggest that where there is debate, those in disagreement turn to their leaders to establish guiding principles or to enact and enforce rules and laws to govern the expression of sexuality. Leaders have a duty to provide for the well-being of their constituents, with well-being broadly defined to include a consideration of the physical, mental, moral, and spiritual health aspects of sexuality. Leaders vary in the degree to which their responsibilities overlap with issues that revolve around sexuality. We distinguish among three categories with regard to sexuality and leadership: (1) sexual leaders, (2) leaders who encounter issues related to sexuality, and (3) the sexuality of leaders. We further suggest that leaders need to address issues of well-being by using three distinct strategies: protection, exemplification, and growth.
What is the role of leaders with regard to sexuality? What we require or demand from leaders with regard to sexuality depends on how we view sexuality. Are sexual desires something we need to fight against or succumb to? Should we see sexuality as an outgrowth of our base, animal nature? If so, we need our leaders to protect us from ourselves. A leader can be seen as a moral compass that models appropriate behavior for us by fighting temptation or by creating systems and institutions that aid us in fighting those temptations. It is also possible to see leaders as those individuals who have challenged outdated beliefs about sexuality and, in the process, allowed us to grow as a society.

**Sexual leaders** are those leaders who aid individuals in creating and adhering to guiding principles that directly promote sexual well-being. In some instances, these leaders are geared toward *protection*. For example, policy makers who guide organizations such as Planned Parenthood operate as sexual leaders who are trying to protect their constituents from unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, or sexually-related assault. Other areas where individuals operate as sexual leaders include AIDS prevention and prevention and treatment of sexual violence. Joycelyn Elders, at the time Surgeon General of the United States, was fired from her position (ironically, by Bill Clinton) because she stated that promoting masturbation to young people was a reasonable policy response to decrease the likelihood of engaging in more risky sexual behaviors. Other sexual leaders can adopt an *exemplification* strategy and attempt to serve as a model for appropriate behavior in a sexual domain. Church officials are viewed as exemplars as sexual leaders by acting as a moral compass for their parishioners. *Growth* leaders operate like transformational leaders in that they attempt to introduce evolutionary changes in our views of sexual behavior. Sex researchers such as Kinsey and Masters and Johnson can be viewed as growth-oriented leaders because their research findings influenced people to think about human sexuality in new ways. Publishers such as Hugh Hefner, Bob Guccione, and Larry Flynt addressed issues of sexuality through their magazines *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*.

A second area of analysis involves **sexuality and leadership** and addresses the way human sexuality intersects with the responsibilities of leaders. Virtually all people in leadership roles must address issues of sexuality. Problems leaders face in this regard include dealing with consensual sexual relationships in the workplace, as well as sexual harassment and sexual violence. In this component of sexuality and leadership, protection takes two forms. Leaders must work to *protect* employees from unwanted sexual attention. Leaders must also work to protect themselves and the institution they represent from liability associated with unwanted or unsafe sexual practices. The Tailhook scandal, where more than one hundred aviation officers in the Navy and Marines were alleged to have committed sexual assault against at least 83 women and 7 men, during a military symposium in 1991, highlighted the need for leaders to have policies in place to deal with sexually-related matters. The Jerry Sandusky-Penn State sexual abuse scandal illustrates how people in leadership positions can misuse their institution-based authority to satisfy their own sexual desires. These scandals point out the need to have checks and balances in place to prevent these kinds of problems. Leaders must also act as *exemplars* for how to behave in sexual ways, even if their area of expertise does not directly involve sexual matters. Consider, for example, David Petraeus, the four-star general who had also served as Director of the CIA, and was being considered for a Presidential nomination, who was forced to resign because of an affair he was having with his biographer Paula Broadwell. Sexual abuse that
was conducted by Catholic priests and the subsequent cover-up of such activity is another example of how institutional leaders have failed to cope with the influence of sexuality among their representatives. Through their efforts of protection and exemplification, leaders can also act to institute changes to sexual policies.

The third area of study, the sexuality of leaders, refers to the way that a leader’s sexuality is affected by his or her role as a leader. As Henry Kissinger noted, “power is the ultimate aphrodisiac.” The power that leaders possess can make them more desirable in the eyes of others. This power can also increase their level of sexual desire. Power and the trappings of power may also undermine a leader’s decision making competency. As noted by former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, “There is something about a sense of entitlement and of having great power that skews people’s judgment.” In this section we explore a diverse range of topics, including findings that sexual masochism is most popular among well-educated men who come from higher socio-economic levels and also have privileged positions of power. We address the decision-making processes involved in starting a high-risk sexual relationship, with a special emphasis on how cognitive and motivational biases lead an individual to underestimate the risks and overestimate the benefits.

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