Mormon Women in Leadership: The Influence of Their Religious Worldview

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SESSION PROPOSAL:
INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

THE IMPACT OF WORLDVIEWS ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Chair
Robbie P. Hertneky, Ph.D. serves on the faculty of the MBA in Organizational and Environmental Sustainability Program at Antioch University New England. She teaches courses in leadership, entrepreneurship, leading change for sustainable organizations, and leadership development. A higher education professional with over 20 years of leadership experience, in both academic and key administrative positions, Dr. Hertneky’s research focuses on women leaders in education, their perception of themselves as leaders, and the role of balance in their lives.

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Presenters/Authors
Susan R. Madsen is an Associate Professor of Management and a former Assistant Dean of Faculty in the Woodburn School of Business at Utah Valley University. She recently published two scholarly books on the development of women leaders and has authored/co-authored nearly 50 peer-reviewed articles primarily in the area of leadership, ethics, individual change, work-life issues, and strategic faculty development. Susan is currently continuing her research on the lifetime development of women leaders in the United Arab Emirates, China, and the U.S. She is also an independent leadership and change consultant.

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for the Best Book in Political Science, and the Otis Dudley Duncan Award for Best Book in Social Demography, resulting in feature stories in the *New York Times*, *The Economist*, 60 *Minutes*, and other news publications. Hudson was recently named to the list of *Foreign Policy* magazine’s Top 100 Global Thinkers for 2009. Winner of numerous teaching awards and recipient of a National Science Foundation research grant, she served as the director of graduate studies for the David M. Kennedy Center for International and Area Studies for eight years, and will serve as Vice President of the International Studies Association next year. Hudson is one of the Principal Investigators of the WomanStats Project, which includes the largest compilation of data on the status of women in the world today. She is also a founding editor of *SquareTwo*, a founding editorial board member of *Foreign Policy Analysis*, an editorial board member of *Politics and Gender*. She and her husband, David, are the parents of eight children.

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**Karen Longman** has served for the past four years as Professor of Higher Education at Azusa Pacific University, working with 75+ students in APU’s Ed.D. and Ph.D. programs in Higher Education. Longman had previously served for six years as Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Greenville College (IL) and for 19 years as Vice President for Professional Development and Research at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), based in Washington, D.C. After spearheading the creation and implementation of an Executive Leadership Development Institute initiative for the CCCU in the mid-1990s, Longman has continued to direct a series of Women’s Leadership Development Institutes designed to equip more women for senior-level leadership in faith-based higher education.

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Richard J. Wikkerink is the Associate Vice President, Student Development and Registrar at Redeemer University College and a doctoral student in Higher Education Leadership at Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA. His professional experience in the last 20 years has included Admissions, International Student Recruitment, Continuing Education, Academic Advising, and Student Services. Areas of research interest include leadership development and the role of gender in leadership.
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Session Short Description
The purpose of this session is to present findings from four recent studies focused on the impact of worldviews on women in leadership. Presentations will focus on the implications of the following worldviews for women in leadership: (1) Mormonism, (2) Evangelical Christian, (3) Lutheranism and, (4) Ubuntu.

Session Abstract
Worldview usually denotes a particular philosophical orientation. A fitting metaphor for a worldview is that of a lens (Johansen & McLean, 2006). Central to this lens is the development of “conscientization” in which learners engage in dialogue to develop an understanding of how they see the world (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Freire & Macedo, 1998). This session will focus on the impact of different worldviews or lenses on women in leadership. The four presentations are based on research in the USA (Mormonism, Evangelical Christian, Lutheran) and Africa (Ubuntu). Current leadership, management, and human resource development theories do not adequately address the issues and challenges faced by women around the world, whose lives are influenced by prevailing and/or competing worldviews within particular settings. The workplace, classrooms, and the world in general are becoming increasingly diverse (McLean & Johansen, 2006). The trend in historically male-dominated organizations is toward increased female leadership and participation (Carter & Rudd, 2005; Pini, 2005). To be effective in future research and application, scholars and practitioners must recognize how cultural background, assumptions, and worldviews implicate women’s experiences in leadership roles (Madsen, 2008). Consideration of four worldviews will encourage participants in this session to examine their own lens, to look through other lenses, and to develop a broader understanding of others. In so doing, this session will help participants become more reflective practitioners and scholars, contribute to more effective leadership, as well as improve models, theories, and research.

This session will include four presentations, each representing a specific worldview (i.e., Mormonism, Evangelical Christian, Lutheranism and Ubuntu) with discussion of the influences of that worldview for women and leadership. Implications for practice, theory, and future research will also be presented.

Paper 1: Mormon Women in Leadership: The Influence of Their Religious Worldview

Short Description
This paper will focus on the impact of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) worldview on women in leadership. The presentation will focus on four areas: (1) why examine the LDS worldview; (2), the LDS worldview concerning mortal progression, (3) the LDS culture, and (4) leadership development for LDS women.
Presentation Abstract
One of the top areas of concern in all types of organizations today and in countries throughout the world is how to prepare more effective leaders, and developing women for these roles is to an emerging topic of ongoing dialogue. Understanding the impact of different worldviews on women and leadership will provide insight to those who want to develop these women for influential roles in any paid or unpaid sector (e.g., business, government, nonprofit, community, and home). As the editors of a worldview theme issue of Human Resource Development Quarterly have argued, “The workplace, classrooms, and the world in general are becoming increasingly diverse” and the “trend in historically male-dominated organizations is toward increased female leadership and participation” (Tunheim & McLean, Call for Paper, 2010). To be most effective in working one-on-one or in groups with emerging women leaders, leadership scholars and practitioners must recognize how worldviews (e.g., cultural background, values, and assumptions) may influence, among other aspects, a woman’s understanding of and aspirations toward leading.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism or the LDS Church) has become one of the fastest growing religions in America and in other countries around the globe. Because of its origins in upstate New York and the church’s headquarters being located in Salt Lake City, Utah, it is commonly viewed as a U.S.-based religion. However, by 2004 more than half of the religion’s 12.3 million members reside outside the United States, with a substantial percentage living in South America and Mexico. In the United States, LDS members make up the fourth largest religious denomination behind Catholics, Southern Baptists, and United Methodists (Lindner, 2005). These statistics signify that for organizations around the world, and particularly for those in the Western hemisphere, it is increasingly likely that LDS female members will comprise at least a noticeable portion of the workforce (Nielson, Madsen, & Hammond, 2006).

This paper presentation will focus on the impact of the LDS worldview on women in leadership, with attention given to four areas of focus: (1) why examine the LDS worldview; (2) the LDS worldview concerning mortal progression, (3) the LDS culture, and (4) leadership development for LDS women.

1. Why Examine the LDS Worldview? This section will present data regarding the LDS church being the fastest growing religion in America and how it has a growing international presence. It will also outline explicit LDS Church encouragement for women to become educated.

2. The LDS Worldview Concerning Mortal Progression: This section with provide a brief overview of the teleology of mortal existence and its importance within the theme of individual progression. It will discuss the emphasis on education as part of this continuing progression and outline the related doctrines of equality between men and women. It will conclude with relevant information and statements from the well-known “Proclamation on the Family.”

3. LDS Culture: This portion of the presentation will provide insight into the LDS Church as a source of strength for women in leadership, leadership being a common experience for women in a lay church. It will also provide a brief description of the LDS Relief Society and its link to this worldview. This section will also address the LDS Church as a source of challenge for women in leadership, who struggle with an either/or mindset concerning gender roles and work-life balance issues of special sensitivity.
4. **Human Resource Development of LDS Women:** The article will conclude with a section specifically related to how (1) knowing the doctrine, and differentiating it from the culture, may aid such development; and (2) knowledge of examples of LDS women in leadership may offer positive role models. This section will also address implications for HRD theory, research, and practice.

In conclusion, the LDS Church is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States, and at this time there are more “Mormons” in the U.S. than Jews. The LDS Church strongly encourages both women and men to gain an education, which places LDS women in a position to ascend to leadership in the private and public sectors of the workplace. Nevertheless, an examination of the LDS religious worldview with an eye to how those beliefs would influence LDS women in leadership positions has never yet been undertaken. This presentation will initiate that examination.

**Paper 2: Women’s Leadership in an Evangelical Christian Context: Gendered Realities**

**Short Description**

Certain “gendered realities” are experienced by women working in an evangelical Christian context. While this worldview purports to honor the dignity of every person, evangelicalism has been largely patriarchal in practice. An evangelical worldview adds complexities on both individuals and organizational culture as women navigate the “labyrinth” of leadership.

**Session Abstract**

Individuals adhering to evangelical beliefs may view leadership – either consciously or subconsciously – through a set of presuppositions that are detrimental to women’s advancement into leadership positions. This premise is supported by findings from a national research project funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. In part, the study explored the extent to which gender hierarchy and egalitarianism characterize the perspectives of contemporary evangelicals. One researcher, commenting on the findings, noted that the “vision of a hierarchically ordered universe has been drawn on with great success historically and continues as the orienting gender story among the majority of conservative Protestants today” (Gallagher, 2004). A consequence of this belief system is the potential of a “stained glass ceiling” that hinders the advancement of women working in these settings (Mock, 2005).

Research has made clear that organizational environments are themselves gendered. O’Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria (2008) argue that this gendered nature of organizational structures “ensures that women have limited access to positions of power in the organizational hierarchy” (p. 736). The systemic constraints that often discourage women from pursuing senior level leadership may be influenced by deeply-rooted perceptions of gender roles. Such constraints appear to be extenuated within the subculture of American evangelicalism. The resulting “stained glass ceiling” effect within evangelical organizations necessitates additional research to understand how more women who have evidenced leadership potential can be encouraged and prepared for senior-level positions.

The research base for this presentation is drawn from a decade-long initiative to identify and equip more women for senior administrative leadership in the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), an association of 111 member institutions drawn from more than 30 Christian denominations. Although the undergraduate student population across the CCCU
membership is 60 per cent female, a 2010 analysis of the composition of senior leadership on these campuses revealed only five per cent of the CCCU presidents and 19 per cent of the chief academic officers were women (Longman & Anderson, in press). This compares with findings from the American Council on Education “Pathways to the Presidency” study (ACE, 2008) indicating that nationally 23 per cent of the presidents and 38 per cent of the chief academic officers were women. Clearly, women are under-represented in leadership positions across the CCCU. Research by Schoening (2009) has focused on the concern that minority status within an organization may lead to marginalization or disenfranchisement, possibly contributing to minorities leaving the organization and perpetuating a negative cycle of exclusion.

Based on research involving participants in leadership development initiatives offered by the CCCU over the past three years, one key to motivating and preparing more women for senior-level leadership is the concept of calling. Gordon T. Smith, in his book *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*, challenges readers to honor the giftedness within themselves through obedience to their calling: “Come to a full realization of who you are and what you have been gifted to do, and embrace it eagerly. Do it. Be true to who you are. Be true to your call, true to how God has made you” (p. 52).

Current understandings of calling in the lives of 17 emerging leaders in faith-based higher education were elicited using an interview technique adapted from Bennis and Thomas (2007) involving a “Leadership Time Line.” Participants were asked to identify with an “x” and a brief label any major defining moments on the individual’s journey of leadership; they were then asked to respond to two open-ended questions:

- *The term “calling” means lots of things to lots of people. What does the term mean to you?*
- *Looking over your Leadership Time Line, do any of the defining moments you’ve identified coincide with a time when you felt a sense of calling? If so, tell me about that.*

Only limited research has been conducted relative to the experiences of women leaders within an evangelical culture (Bryant, 2006) and even less is known about the influence of perceived calling on the leadership journeys of women within evangelicalism. This research-based session, which begins to address this gap, will focus on questions such as: In what ways does a culture that reflects an evangelical worldview influence women’s interest in pursuing more senior leadership positions? To what extent does awareness of gifts and abilities lend confidence to women in pursuing leadership? In what ways does obedience to a leadership “calling” guide women in overcoming internal or external resistance? The explicit and implicit implications of an evangelical worldview on women’s leadership experiences will be discussed.

**Paper 3: Women’s Leadership in an African Cultural Context: Explicating Ubuntu Worldview**

**Short Description**
This presentation will explore women’s leadership in the context of Ubuntu African worldview, including the principles of interdependence, spirituality, community, unity, and compassion as
enacted by African women leaders. It will provide lessons on relational leadership, and draw implications for leadership theory and praxis.

**Session Abstract**

Although there are women leading in various sectors within African societies and institutions, very little research has been done to explore and explain their experiences within their cultural, economic, social, historical, and political context (Ngunjiri, 2010a, 2010b; Ngunjiri & Lengel, 2007; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). In order to have a broader and deeper understanding of women’s leadership globally, there must be studies of women’s leadership within specific local contexts. This presentation will focus on explicating the Ubuntu African worldview and relate its impact on women’s leadership. Such an exploration will strengthen our understanding of leadership within the African context, which in turn adds to our knowledge on a broader global scale.

Ubuntu is a term taken from IsiXhosa, a Southern African language group, yet the meaning is shared amongst other bantu languages in sub-Saharan Africa. The meaning reflects the African understanding of the essence of humanity, *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu* – a person is human through relationships, or, “I am because we are.” It speaks of a spiritual worldview, where relationships amongst people are important for the purpose of community wellbeing (Mbigi, 1996; Murithi, 2007; Poovan, Du Toit, & Engelbrecht, 2006).

Several principles of leadership emerge out of Ubuntu, including spirituality, interdependence, unit, communality and compassion (Mangaliso, 2001; Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong, & Holtam, 2010), and communality and compassion. Women leaders in African communities and organizations have been found to embrace these principles in diverse African contexts including Kenya (Ngunjiri, 2010a, b) and South Africa (Mabokela, 2003; Mogadime et al., 2010) where they lead their organizations and communities with courage, conviction, and competence. They lead with courage because they often deal with seemingly insurmountable challenges at the intersection of African patriarchy, cultural malpractices, economic disenfranchisement, political marginalization, and educational inequality. They lead with conviction as they employ the strength of their spiritual worldview to work for social justice ideals. And they lead competently, having acquired through struggle the education they need, and being resourceful problem solvers in the face of continuing barriers.

This presentation is based on qualitative research aimed at explicating women’s leadership from the perspective of the Ubuntu worldview. Data is derived from interviews with women leaders and archival data about contemporary and historical women leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa. Participants are drawn from women whose leadership includes a social justice agenda.

The presentation will be significant for practice in African and global organizations as it informs local and expatriate managers/leaders about relational leadership. Furthermore, in considering organizations as sites for community, the presentation will enhance practical application of meeting employees’ spiritual and relational needs as the literature on spirituality in organizations recommends (e.g., Benefiel, 2008; Fry, 2003, 2008). In terms of implications for theory and
research, this presentation will contribute to a small emerging body of work on non-western leadership principles that will resonate with the global audience of ILA.

**Paper 4: The Impact of a Lutheran Worldview on Women in Leadership**

**Short Description**
There are 72 million Lutherans in the world, with numbers increasing in Asia and Africa (Lutheran World Federation, 2008). This research-based presentation describes the impact of a Lutheran worldview on women in leadership. The findings suggest that women are encouraged to get educated and commonly treated as equals in key leadership roles.

**Session Abstract**
The history of Lutheranism dates back to 1517 when Martin Luther pioneered the Protestant Reformation in Europe in Germany (Simmons, 1998). Luther valued education highly for both young men and young women – quite remarkable for his day! He felt that both men and women needed to learn about what had been done in the past – what had worked and what had not. From this awareness, wisdom could be gained to lead families, households, farms, and communities (Dovre, 2006). From a Lutheran perspective, education – then and now – is primarily to equip people to serve their neighbor and the community in wholesome and effective ways (Christenson, 2004).

From this conviction, girls and women held an unusual role in the school, church, community, and family that is still evident today. Women can serve as pastors in the Lutheran Church (ELCA, 2011). Women teach and hold positions of leadership in Lutheran colleges and seminaries. While there are several more conservative branches of the Lutheran Church (e.g., the Missouri Synod Lutherans, the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America is the largest and most open to women in positions of leadership in churches and educational institutions (Jodock, 2011).

The purpose of this presentation is to summarize findings from a qualitative study. Twenty five women in leadership with a Lutheran worldview were interviewed to learn of their beliefs and experiences in leadership. The interviewees were asked questions such as: How would you articulate a Lutheran worldview relative to women in leadership? What has been your personal experience as a Lutheran woman in leadership? Have you experienced any resistance to your leadership due to your Lutheran worldview from other women or men? What have you learned as a woman in leadership with a Lutheran worldview? What are your hopes and advice for younger women with a Lutheran worldview? The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Texts were coded and themes were identified. Recommendations will be provided for both leadership research and practice. Results from this study will increase future dialogue and research aimed at understanding the impact of a Lutheran worldview on women in leadership.

**Time request – 90 minutes**