

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP



Jessie Ramey, Dana Brown, and Rebecca Harris

“Proud to Be Educators in This Space”

A Conversation Around Women’s Leadership

Cara Gillotti, senior writer at Chatham University, sat down with Dana Brown, Ph.D., executive director, PA Center for Women and Politics; Rebecca Harris, MBA, executive director, Center for Women’s Entrepreneurship; and Jessie Ramey, Ph.D., director of the Chatham University Women’s Institute, to talk about women’s leadership in 2018.

CG: What is a tangible, irrefutable, bottom-line benefit to having women in positions of power?

RH: The primary research shows that when companies have women in the C-suite (e.g., CEO, CFO) and more women on the boards of directors, companies actually do better. The returns on investment are higher, the bottom lines are better. There is a tangible correlation.

DB: We know from political science research that when we increase the number of women serving in government, then we have an increase in transparency. We know also that as you have more women at the table there tends to be an increase in bipartisanship, and an increase in policy initiatives that have bipartisanship co-sponsorship, which makes the likelihood of bill passage much greater. And that means you have a body of public policy that is potentially more reflective of the people it’s trying to serve.

We also know that there are many public policy issues that are being brought to the table for the very first time because of women’s lived experiences. It has literally taken Acts of Congress for women to get credit cards in their own name and to get women’s bodies included in the National Institutes of Health studies.

JR: I was thinking about this in terms of women having more power. Not positions of power, but power more broadly, like economic

power. When we lift up women living in poverty, we are also lifting up children and improving entire communities. Last year, a really great study showed that 68% of Black girls under the age of five in the City of Pittsburgh live in poverty. And in thinking about this, how do we support them? It comes down to policy and economic empowerment.

CG: What is a question or misunderstanding you are most tired of hearing, and what would you like to say so that you would never have to address it again?

DB: One question I get quite often is why do we care if women are in elected office? Can’t men lead on these issues, too? But I think I just described why it matters to have descriptive representation of women. One thing I should underscore is that women elected leaders tend to lead around “care” issues, such as veteran’s issues or FMLA. So that’s why it matters.

JR: One of the frustrating things that keeps getting asked when I’m out giving talks I think stems from the fact that we do in fact have a few successful women running businesses; there are a few visible women out there, so there is a misunderstanding or misperception that if those women can do it, we must have successfully deconstructed all the barriers to women’s leadership. And if women

According to the Center for American Progress,
women make up a majority (50.8%) of the U.S. population.

- They earn almost 60% of undergraduate degrees and 60% of all master's degrees.
- They earn 47% of all law degrees and 48% of all medical degrees.
- They earn 38% of MBAs and 48% of specialized master's degrees.
- They account for 47% of the U.S. labor force and 49% of the college-educated workforce.

aren't getting into positions of power, it must be because they've made individual choices to not pursue leadership. So there is this erasure of what are still structural and institutional barriers to women's leadership and a lot of this then gets assumed or posed as women's individual choices.

RH: I am asked a lot why we need entrepreneurship centers for women. Why can't there just be general training for anyone who wants to be an entrepreneur? And my response is "Well, when women have the same opportunities to start businesses as men, and grow them as men, and get the same funding as men, then maybe we won't, but in the meantime the discrepancies are so profound."

When women and men finance their companies by getting loans, men get twice as much as women. The playing field is so unequal, even when starting a business. There is also research that shows that women who are learning in cohorts with other women tend to be less intimidated and will take more risks and be less afraid and actually do better in this learning environment. That's why the U.S. Small

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Business Administration, for example, has mandated that there's now 120 women's business centers across the country in addition to small business development centers which serve everybody. When you analyze the differences between having women in all the classes and having men and women in classes, the outcomes for women are much better, which translates into more successful businesses.

CG: What do you see as a major challenge to women in leadership today and how is your organization helping to address it?

DB: We know that voters do evaluate men and women candidates differently. They assume that women candidates are "better" on issues such as education and not as strong

on issues like foreign policy or tax. And that media outlets generally do report on women candidates differently, with more of an emphasis on her appearance, though this effect is lessening, but sometimes they will just cover female candidates less.

Women are great voters – women have outvoted men consistently now for decades. Women are now almost on par in terms of graduation from law school, and other grad schools so we see that women have these leadership traits; they have just as many degrees now as men, and so there's this weird assumption that somehow just naturally women are going to ascend to become the U.S. senator from wherever and that's just demonstrably false. We have to teach these young women

However:

- While they are 44% of the overall S&P 500 labor force, they are only 25% of executive- and senior-level officials and managers, hold only 20% of board seats, and are only 6% of CEOs.
- In medicine, they comprise 37% of all physicians and surgeons, but only 16% of permanent medical school deans.
- They were only 6% of partners in venture capital firms in 2013—down from 10% in 1999.

that there is a space for them, and teach them the skills with which to do it, and that there's nothing "natural" about it. This natural-born leader model is something that was created by men for men to create more male leaders.

So we try to demystify how to run a campaign through the Ready to Run campaign training, which offers skills-building and workshops on how to navigate this political party system which has been determined to be an institutional barrier for most women candidates. We're always trying to remind our participants that leadership can be taught and that running a campaign is not intuitive. These are all skills that can be gained, and we are proud to be educators in this space.

RH: If you look at the statistics, women are still running households as well as working. The shift has not been equalized between partners. There are only 24 hours in a day, so how do you make all those choices? One of the things we are doing effectively is teaching women (and students) to think entrepreneurially. That's going to be really important because the days of 40 years

in an organization and a gold watch don't really exist the way they used to. Many more people are going to be involved in a gig economy, going from one thing to another. Another thing is that through the prototype design lab, we're training women and students to use their minds in new and creative ways. The third thing is that there are many more opportunities now for millennials and women to get money through crowd-funding websites like Kickstarter. So you might not have to have credit or go into regular banking institutions. We try to make all these different types of lending opportunities available.

JR: One of the main challenges is that gender inequality is harder to see in some ways now than it was decades ago. It shows up more in ways like implicit bias. But what do you do about that? We are actually working on several fronts that I think are useful. One of the things, for instance, that we are doing this year which is brand new is co-hosting a negotiation skills clinic for undergraduate women in the spring. So absolutely we are continuing to provide skills training and helping women acquire those skills. We're also using a lot of the latest scholarship on implicit bias to help educate faculty and staff in service of promoting a welcoming, inclusive campus for everybody. ▀

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REBECCA HARRIS, MBA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP