Attitudes Toward Women in Ministry Leadership:

Implications and Interventions

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Abstract

Current student attitudes toward women in ministerial leadership were investigated. A sample of 108 students from a private Nazarene university (female = 64, male = 44) was used. Each participant was given a questionnaire that assessed perceived ability and desirability of a fictional character named Kerry. A multivariate analysis of variance test revealed that students held statistically significant gender-role stereotypes towards women, especially women in church leadership. The findings coincide with previous research, which states that despite changes in cultural attitudes towards women, women seeking church leadership still experience significant opposition based on gender.

Attitudes towards Women in Ministry Leadership: Implications and Interventions

In 1898, the Los Angeles Church of the Nazarene manual stated that women were eligible to become ordained ministers (Laird, 1993). When the Nazarene church first began, women led and gave considerable service within the denomination (1993). A primary example of a women minister in the early Nazarene church was Lucy Pierce Knott.

Lucy Pierce Knott first interacted with the beginning church of the Nazarene when she met Phineas Bresee, a primary supporter of the early Nazarene church, in 1887 (Laird, 1993). After her conversion in 1892 and sanctification in 1893, she quickly entered into ministry positions. One of her first ministry outreaches was Company E, a small-group that focused on studying the Bible and intercessory prayer. The small-group reached a peak attendance of over 250 members. After her ordination in 1899, Rev. Knott completed several major achievements; She helped a small street mission become the second largest church in the district for many years, developed an envelope system
for collecting offerings, opened the Emmanuel Private school for 1st to 9th graders, and from 1923 to until her death in 1940, faithfully served as associate pastor of the Hollywood Church of the Nazarene under the pastoral leadership of her son, J. Proctor Knott. Bresee wrote that Rev. Knott displayed immense devotion and ability as a pastor and leader. Nine years after Lucy Pierce Knott was ordained, 20 percent of clergy within the Nazarene church were women (Morgan, 1994).

By 1993, women led only one percent of Nazarene congregations in the USA (Morgan, 1994). Until the 1940's, the Nazarene church strongly supported the ordination of women (Laird, 1993). However, during the late 1940's, society's view towards women changed. As traditional values and gender-roles became a cornerstone in American society, the prospect of having a woman out of the home and teaching men became absurd and resented. Thus, ordained women pastors from the late 1940's into the 21st century had an increasingly difficult time finding a supportive church congregation.

Laird proposed that the Nazarene church, having become a recognized denomination in 1895, could not avoid adopting societal norms into their church beliefs. Although the 1993-1997 Nazarene manual states that women are allowed to enter leadership positions within the church (Huber & Stanley, 1993), the church has had a difficult time integrating women leaders, especially ordained women pastors, into the Nazarene community (Laird, 1993; Laird, 2000).

In 1955, *Housekeeping Monthly* published an article titled "A Good Wife's Guide". The article described how a wife should act in order to best please her husband. Some of the article’s suggestions included having dinner ready for him, cleaning the house, and welcoming him when he arrives. Other suggestions recommended allowing
the husband to govern conversations because his opinion was more important than his wife’s opinion, not questioning the man’s judgment or integrity, and not complaining if he is late for dinner or stays out the entire night. The article's most candid guideline for pleasing a husband declared the woman needed to know her place.

When "A Good Wife's Guide" was published in 1955, much of American society believed that a woman's place was in the home (Coleman & Ganong, 2001). However, American attitudes towards women and their place in society have changed significantly (Book, 2000; Wentworth & Chell, 2001). A reason for the difference in attitudes revolves around the growing education about the treatment of women (Hyde, 1996).

Within the last decade, researchers have increased their focus on gender-role stereotypes, especially concerning employment (Neuman, 1998; Book, 2000). Gender-role stereotypes are “a set of shared cultural beliefs about males’ and females’ behavior, personality traits, and other attributes” (Hyde, 1996, p 3). For example, Merrick found that women seeking to achieve management positions within a business faced increased opposition because they were working towards a position that society generally considered a male profession (2002). Consequently, when a woman wanted to enter into a business's leadership staff, she had to either adopt masculine characteristics, such as aggressiveness and analytical thinking or be considered too sensitive and gullible, stereotypical feminine traits (2002).

Recent research demonstrated that feminine traits, such as open communication, listening, and development of others, were desirable in business leaders by the current American cultures (Paris, 2002). Paris also stated that the inclusion of feminine characteristics contributes to a more versatile and complete leader (2000). Merrick’s
research has shown a positive trend towards a leader that has a balance of both masculine and feminine characteristics (2002). Merrick also found that participants found managers with mainly masculine-oriented traits to be cold and egotistical (2002).

As America continues to struggle with the role of women, so does the Christian community. The role of women, especially within church leadership, continues as a significant issue (e.g. Laird, 2000; Groothuis, 1997). One area of debate is scriptural directives regarding gender roles. For example, passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-5 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 that seemingly contradict one another concerning the position of women within the Christian faith, especially in positions of leadership within the church (Hayter, 1987; Groothuis, 1997; Martos & Hégy).

One example includes passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, which states:

33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, 
34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 
35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (NIV)

From a first reading, the passage seemingly sends a very specific message to the reader that women ought to remain silent and submissive within the church (Huber & Stanley, 1999; Hayter, 1987; Groothuis, 1997). However, Hayter theorizes that the author may have written the passage to protect a specific Corinthian church from problematic behaviors that disrupted the church's ministry and worship (1987). The possible problem may have been disruptive speaking, which was common during the author's time.
(Groothuis, 1997), especially during a time when Roman women were not supposed to draw attention to themselves through public or political speaking (Cotter, 1994). Consequently, the author stated the Corinthian church might temporarily withhold some personal rights and privileges to uphold the Corinthian church's order and ministry (Hayter, 1987; Groothuis, 1997). In addition, if the passage meant a global silencing of women in the church, the text would contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5, which discusses women praying or prophesying (Huber & Stanley, 1999; Hayter, 1987; Groothuis, 1997).

Just as 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 seems very candid concerning the position of women in the church, Galatians 3:28 also seems very open about the position of women. The passage states, "There is neither Jew or Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (NIV). A literal interpretation of this passage would state that men and women are free from gender-specific roles and restrictions through Christ (Tucker & Liefeld, 1987; Groothuis, 1997). Tucker and Liefeld stated that readers could choose from a spectrum of possible degrees of freedom from this verse, including a complete freedom from traditional Jewish laws and traditions or only the freedom of salvation (1987). If Galatians 2:28 refers to a freedom from Jewish regulations, then freedom from sexual inferiority would be a component of the liberation in Christ, since Jewish culture in biblical times had a very restrained and negative view towards women (Huber & Stanley, 1999, Martos & Hégy). However, if freedom in Christ only pertains to salvation, then the historic gender regulations for men and women would still be in affect, consequently keeping women from attaining church positions (Arichea & Nida, 1993; Dunn, 1993).
Perhaps the most controversial verses in the Bible concerning women in leadership are 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (Belleville, 2000). The passage states:

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (NIV)

The author of 1 Timothy wrote to the Ephesus church when the church was dealing with multiple severe problems, including false teachers, quarrelsome congregates, and two expelled church leaders (Belleville, 2000). The author sent the letter to help realign the church and resolve the difficulties within the congregation (Belleville, 2000; Köstenberger, Schreiner, & Baldwin, 2000). According to Huber and Stanley, Paul decided to lean towards traditions that were more conservative rather than have the possibility of implying pagan practices within the church (1999). Thus, the reader should understand the author's statements about a woman's position within the church, especially leadership positions, as the response to a specific situation in which the church temporarily implemented restrictions to a person's rights (Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992; Groothuis, 1997). In addition, the statement of women being saved through childbearing glaringly contradicts the Christian belief (cf. Ephesians 2:8, Romans 1:16-17) that salvation comes by faith, not good works (Huber & Stanley, 1999). Consequently, the author must be referring to a specific situation within the Ephesus church, perhaps to
combat the Gnostic notion that childbearing makes women less religious, which needs strict and direct intervention (Groothuis, 1997).

Perhaps only direct intervention will change cultural attitudes toward a woman’s abilities and competency in current American culture. Despite empirical data supporting that women and men have similar general intelligence levels, American culture tends to view women as less competent than males (Hyde, 1996). Hyde stated that culture holds significant gender-role stereotypes towards women and men (1996). For example, many American citizens consider mathematical prowess a masculine trait. As a result, women who hold strong mathematical abilities may be considered manlier or may meet increased resistance as they seek mathematically oriented occupations. Hyde stated that although men show a significantly higher ability at certain spatial reasoning tests, which is critical in engineering professions, the significance does not explain why only 1% of engineers in America are women (1996). In addition, women tend to do better in academic studies, and yet men receive more prestigious occupations in the business world than women (Hyde, 1996). Society’s attitudes toward women create a discrepancy between a woman’s abilities and her status in society.

In this study, I evaluated current attitudes towards women in ministerial leadership, especially whether participants would attend a church with a woman senior pastor compared to an equally qualified male senior pastor. The independent variables are the gender and age of the person in each of four scenarios and the gender of the participants. The hypotheses are (1) college aged men and women, will rate the female character lower on the positive personality characteristics, (2) participants will rate the older character (both male and female) lower on the positive personality characteristics,
(3) participants will rank the female characters as more qualified for occupations with less status (i.e. homemaking), (4) participants will rate the young male character as the most desirable minister.

**Method**

**Participants**

All participants (n = 108) were currently students from a Nazarene university. The total included 64 females and 44 males, with an age range from 18 – 29. They were all full-time students except one participant. The sample included first-year, sophomores, juniors and seniors. One participant’s scores were excluded because the participant’s age was significantly different than the rest of the students.

**Materials**

A scenario was created using a non-gender specific name for the character, Kerry. Different scenarios were developed by changing the gender of “Kerry” and the age resulting in four separate scenarios; young female, young male, older female and older male (See Appendix). Each scenario was followed by a short survey in which the participant was instructed to rank what occupation Kerry would be most qualified for, rate Kerry’s perceived attributes, and indicate how likely the participant would be to attend the church where Kerry was the senior pastor or work for Kerry’s business.

**Design and Procedure**

A 2X2X2 Factorial Design was used. Participants were selected using a convenience sample from a private Nazarene university. Each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire about the study of characteristics and occupations. Students
who chose to participate following the brief description of the study and task were given one of the four scenarios to read individually. After reading the scenario, each participant responded to a ranking question, nine attribution questions, two questions about whether the participant would attend Kerry’s church or work for Kerry’s company, and demographic information. The researcher was in the room while the participant was reading the scenario and responding to the questions, but was far enough away to allow for confidentiality. When the participant was finished with the questions, she or he put the scenario and survey into an envelope on the front desk of the classroom or near the researcher.

Scoring

A summed score was used for the attribution score using the nine attribution questions. The occupation rankings, desirability ratings for attending Kerry’s church or working for Kerry’s business were all recorded for each participant. Pertaining to occupational rankings, Kerry’s “qualification” for a position increased with a higher score.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the data. Overall, a main effect was found for Kerry’s Gender, $F(3,97) = 3.364, p = .022$. As a female, Kerry was rated significantly higher across all dependent variables combined.

For the attribution scores looking at between-subject effects, no main effects or interactions reached significance (See Table 1 for statistical sentences and means). Subjects stated that Kerry, in each of the four scenarios, possessed relatively the same ability (male = 46.39 vs. female = 46.97).
A significant main effect for Kerry’s gender was found for the desirability rating for attending a church with Kerry as a senior pastor, $F(1,97) = 7.418, p = .008$. Kerry as a male was rated higher ($M = 4.61$) than Kerry as a female ($M = 4.07$). No main effect was found for age with young pastors receiving a mean rating of 4.30 and older pastors a mean rating of 4.33. A trend was found for the participant gender $F(1,97) = 3.229, p = .07$. Female participants gave slightly higher ratings ($M = 4.51$) than male participants ($M = 4.05$). No significant interactions were found for desirability ratings.

No significant main effects were found for any of the variables regarding working for Kerry in a business.

The rankings of the “appropriate” occupations for Kerry were analyzed using an ANOVA. Each occupation was analyzed using the average rank given as the score. The between-subjects group was Kerry’s gender. A significant difference was found for the following occupations: Homemaker ($F(1,100) = 13.833, p < .0001$) with Kerry as a female rated as more qualified than Kerry as a male ($M = 4.13$, 2.66 respectively), Journalist ($F(1,100) = 5.191, p = .025$) with Kerry as female rated more qualified than Kerry as male ($M = 4.36$, 3.72 respectively), and senior pastor of a suburban church ($F(1,100) = 3.963, p = .049$) with Kerry as a female rated less qualified than Kerry as a male ($M = 4.29$, 5.06). Although it did not reach statistical significance, the experiment showed a trend suggesting that participants were more likely to view a male Kerry as more qualified for a college professor position, $F(1,102) = 3.247, p = .075$.

Regarding participant gender and perceived most qualified professions, no statistical significances were found. However, a trend occurred in which female participants rated Kerry was more qualified, $F(1,101) = 3.340, p = .071$, as a homemaker
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(M = 3.77) than did male participants (M=3.00). With an alpha level of .05, the gender of Kerry and the participants were found to have statistically significant effects on attitudes towards women in leadership, especially women in ministerial leadership. Concerning professions that participants felt Kerry was most qualified for based on age, two jobs reached statistical significance. Participants stated that a young Kerry was significantly, $F(1,101) = 4.788, p = .031$, more qualified to be a CEO for an international company (M = 3.84 young, M= 2.96 older). Next, subjects perceived that an older Kerry was significantly, $F(1,105) = 4.162, p = .044$), more qualified as director of an inner city rescue mission (M = 5.45) than a young Kerry (M = 4.54).

**Discussion**

The current study concurs with previous studies concerning gender-role stereotypes towards women in leadership (Perkins, 1994; Huber & Stanley, 1999; Morgan, 1994). Previous studies found that women seeking leadership positions, both in business and church, received opposition because of gender (Laird, 2000; Merrick, 2002). The current data support the hypothesis that male and female students at Northwest Nazarene University hold significant gender-role stereotypes towards women in leadership, including ministerial leadership. Students viewed a male pastor as more desirable than female pastor, despite the female Kerry being rated equally with the male Kerry on attributes. This result may mean that students do not base a person’s capacity to pastor on experience or ability, but on the gender of the person. However, participants did not hold the same attitudes towards Kerry outside of the church. Instead, participants were equally willing to have Kerry as a boss.
Participants’ found Kerry’s age significantly desirable for CEO of an international company and director of an inner city rescue mission. Students designated a younger Kerry more desirable as a CEO, because the participants possibly considered younger CEOs more able to serve the current generation. Another possible reason for the significance is that these students, since they are receiving a higher education, may have the same aspirations and desires to become renowned leaders. In contrast, students felt that an older Kerry was more qualified as a director of an inner city rescue mission. Regarding occupations that include spiritual topics, students possibly believed that older, more experienced adults are better qualified as spiritual leaders.

Nevertheless, students still hold historical cultural attitudes towards a women’s occupation in society. Most participants believed that a female Kerry was more qualified as a Homemaker and a Journalist than a male Kerry. These occupations are generally considered feminine and very gender-role stereotypical. In addition, participants perceived a female Kerry as less qualified than a male Kerry to pastor a suburban church. Again, students seem to attribute a person’s qualification based on gender, which can have little or no relationship to a person’s abilities.

This experiment evaluated current views that students at Northwest Nazarene University hold towards women in ministerial positions. This topic is important because even though the Nazarene church warmly welcomes women to seminary and to seek pastoral or high leadership positions within the church, these women have a difficult time finding a church or congregation that will accept them once they have completed the educational training (Perkins, 1994). In addition, this discrepancy is sometimes scripturally based on only two verses, both of which are ambiguous in comparison and
contradictory to additional scripture concerning women in ministry and the church. It appears that many laypersons of the Nazarene church accept the historical cultural view that women cannot become ordained ministers or church leaders without any objective biblical analysis (Huber & Stanley, 1999; Köstenberger, Schreiner, & Baldwin, 1995).

As with all research, it will be important to expand this study. Although students who choose to attend Nazarene institutions of higher education may have many similar characteristics, it would be interesting to study whether attitudes differ between the institutions. This may suggest that subcultures across the United States differ in terms of valuing and supporting women in ministry. Thus increasing the sample to include college students from all Nazarene universities and colleges would be interesting. In addition, it would be valuable to compare the attitudes of college students with those of persons from church congregations. This would help to understand the extent of the opinions. Students develop their attitudes from their environments. Many students in Nazarene colleges and universities have been raised within Nazarene congregations or ones similar to Nazarene. By expanding the sample to include people from various Nazarene congregations and even other congregations, a more in depth understanding of the attitudes and values can be understood. Other groups to study regarding attitudes toward women in ministry would be seminary students and faculty, current church leadership at local, regional and national levels.

These results show that despite the institutional push towards gender equality in church leadership, emerging leaders in the Nazarene church still hold significantly negative attitudes towards women in leadership positions. These data are disconcerting since the Nazarene denomination openly states that they welcome ordained women
ministers and that women are allowed to have the same high-level positions in the church that men hold.

After assessing the results, I see several areas that the Nazarene church must address in order to help integrate women called to pastor into the Nazarene community. First, the bias towards women pastors seems to reside mainly in the congregations, not in the higher levels of the Nazarene church. Thus, higher division church leaders need to implement educational plans for the lay people concerning the Nazarene church’s stance towards women ministers and the coinciding biblical references that uphold the belief that God can call males and females to leadership positions within the church. Second, women seem to be their own worst critics, stating that an educated woman is most qualified for a homemaker and less desirable as a senior pastor of a suburban church. Consequently, the Nazarene church especially needs to educate and support women that God does desire that women enter into church leadership, if called, and understand that the Nazarene church fully supports women ministers within the church. A major obstruction for the acceptance of women leaders within the Nazarene church revolves around misinterpretation and ambiguity of the Bible’s stance towards this issue. For change to occur, the Nazarene church needs to educate their leaders, who will then educate the congregations, about the Nazarene church’s attitude towards women in church leadership.

The Nazarene church should include qualified women in church leadership, such as District Superintendents and General Superintendents. The best way for any church, including the Nazarene church, to teach is by example. Unless we are an institution that follows its doctrine, the Nazarene church may only further complicate the issue of
women in ministerial leadership. Thus, the Nazarene church must not only give examples but also be an example and show that God does call women to pastor and govern the church.
References


**Table 1**

*Attribution Scores*

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<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
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<td>.433</td>
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Appendix

A Study of Characteristics and Occupations

The following is a short scenario with a few questions asking you to rate characteristics of a person. Please read the scenario carefully, then respond to each item based upon your reaction to the scenario. This is not a test of intelligence. Your responses will be kept confidential and you will remain anonymous. Any personal information requested is solely for the purpose of identifying the general type of person responding. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

With a passion for God and a determined heart, Kerry has accomplished much in her 32 years of life. Growing up, Kerry dealt with a challenging home life, enduring several early losses. Kerry was without direction during much of her adolescence, and struggled with several friendships and against discipline. However, when Kerry accepted Christ into her heart at the age of 16 years, her life changed drastically. She faithfully attended Sunday school, church worship services, and Wednesday night Bible Study group. As Kerry entered college, she felt that God called her into a special ministry of some type. She worked diligently for four years, and graduated magna cum laude. She was involved in student government and ministry clubs, and worked as a tutor in an after school program for elementary kids. She received several awards during her college years for performances in speech, debate and drama. Kerry continued to excel in graduate school and received her degree. She is now at the point of making decisions about the direction of her career. She has several opportunities available to her.

1. What position do you think Kerry is most prepared for from the following choices? Please rank each choice beginning with “1” as the occupation you believe Kerry is least prepared for and “7” the occupation Kerry is most prepared for.

_____ Homemaker
_____ Real Estate Broker
_____ College Professor
_____ Senior Pastor of a Suburban Church
_____ CEO for an international company
_____ Director of an inner city rescue mission
_____ Journalist

Please rate Kerry on the following characteristics:

2. Drive to Succeed

  1  2  3  4  5  6
very low            very strong

3. Intelligence

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

4. Social Skills

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

5. Managing People

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

6. Educational Ability

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

7. Completing Tasks

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very poor} & & & & & \\
\text{very strong} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

8. Relationship Building

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very poor} & & & & & \\
\text{very strong} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

9. Initiative

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]

10. Personal integrity

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 \\
\text{very low} & & & & & \\
\text{very high} & & & & & \\
\end{array}
\]
11. If Kerry were the senior pastor of a church near you, what is the likelihood that you would attend the church services?

1  2  3  4  5  6
very low            very high

Please provide a short explanation for your rating of item #11.

12. If Kerry were the president of a company in your field of expertise, what is the likelihood you would consider working for or with Kerry?

1  2  3  4  5  6
very low            very high

Please provide a short explanation for your rating of item #12.

Please circle your age category:
18-29  30-39  40-49  50-59  60-69  70-79  80-89

Please circle your gender: Female    Male

Please circle your highest education level completed:
8th grade   9th grade   10th grade   11th grade   high school diploma
GED    AA    BA/BS    MA/MS    Doctoral Level degree

Are you currently a student? No  Yes, part-time  Yes, full-time

Are you currently employed? YES   NO

If YES, what type of occupation?

Thank you for your time and responses. Please return the survey to
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