

Jessica Flores

LE1B – Specific Mentoring

DML 813

I grew up in a home where men and women adhered to patriarchal gender roles. Men were the head of household. Men led the family, made the money and all decisions. The women were submissive, tended to the children and the household. In the context that I was raised the men had authority a voice and women did not. My mother feeling the oppression of these gender roles wanted different for me. She instilled in me the importance to ascertain an education and a desire to seek out more for my life. The role of the female that I was exposed to as a child did not feel natural to me. I did not like cleaning, cooking and not being able to truly express my feelings or desires. As I read Kadi Cole's words in "Developing Female Leaders", they resonated with me. I am not the only female who was raised with limiting beliefs around gender roles and women in leadership. These limiting beliefs have been passed down from generation to generation.

Progressively as time passes the role of women in leadership is evolving but still much work is needed in developing women leaders. For instance, my home church is a progressive urban church in the Bronx. I call it progressive because we do have women pastors and women leaders. But even in this context where women hold high positions in leadership, there are unspoken cultural norms and unclarified female roles in leadership that serve as barriers. There is the impression that certain female leaders are emotional and flakey. While others who are not emotional are perceived as aggressive or self-promoting and seen as offensive. There are a small select few who are taken seriously, those who find the balance between humble, kind, loving while moving in the authority of Christ.

I am the only female pastor on staff, and I am a part-time employee. In this position, I find that I mostly perform office managerial work and I am the lead pastor's assistant during paid work hours. The pastoral duties I perform, where I am developing teachings, leading ministries, counseling and overseeing ministries are mostly done after office work hours. All other female pastors are not paid staff

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employees. In seeing this one must ask, if this is a church that recognizes and utilizes women in leadership why are there not more paid leadership positions? The message the women are receiving is that there is an abundance of work for women leaders but there is no expectation to be able to support a family on this type of work. There is also the idea that you must work double as hard to be taken seriously.

For these reasons I believe Cole's methods for developing women leaders serve as beneficial and would work in my context. I genuinely believe the men in leadership in my church context, believe in empowering women leaders but are unaware of the unconscious biases they still hold despite of all the progress they have made. And most women are unaware of the conditioned responses to shrink, and not overstep a leadership boundary. Seeking to understand and clarifying roles will work in my context. I have seen spiritual growth and transformative change as we ask intentional questions, seek to understand and practice soul care. All parties male and female doing the inner healing work and abiding with Christ will help with self-awareness to truly progress in developing female leaders.

Building awareness speaking and having the hard conversations have been beneficial in my context. For this reason, I believe both male leaders and women would benefit exploring that culturally we have been conditioned to see successful powerful male leaders in a favorable light. And these same traits in women as not favorable. Educating people along these lines brings an awareness that was hidden in darkness before.

Although I do believe in the methods Cole posses to build up women in leadership. I know that this is a progressive work. We also need to acknowledge that we are still in a broken world, not everyone will be receptive to new ways of thinking. Not everyone will embrace that they may have

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gender bias, and some may not want to lose face or power. Despite this truth, the hard work to develop female leaders is necessary.