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How is it that the double bind of social expectations for women to be nurturing and for leaders to be assertive actually can strengthen women's leadership? This question created the portal through which the ELAM Class of 2010 entered its exploration of Women's Ways of Leading. It is the golden thread for every woman who finds herself in a senior leadership position, and one that we continue following as ELAM Alumnae and supporters.

The lesson has its roots in the 1986 publication, [Women's Ways of Knowing \(Belenky Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule\)](#), in which four pioneering women educators challenged the prevailing gender-neutral assumptions of human social and intellectual development by interviewing a wide range of adult women about how they come to understand, "to know," their worlds and themselves. They made distinctions between traditional "separate knowing" of critical analysis through impersonal rules and "connected knowing" of meaning-making through relationships. The classic text concludes:

We believe that connected knowing comes more easily to many women than does separate knowing.... Educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. These are the lessons we have learned in listening to women's voices.

These conclusions spawned a decade of new dialogue about gender differences in education and leadership.

Today, we recognize that men and women have capacity for both critical, analytic behaviors and connected leadership. Many of the differences we observe occur as a result of the experience of applying them as men and as women. Society continues to have well-embedded expectations of how a proper lady and a strong man should behave, and that infuses our expectations of our leaders. Linda Carli and Alice Eagly describe the research on gender and leadership in their book, [Through the Labyrinth \(Harvard Business School Publishing 2007\)](#); summarized in HBR September 2007 article), which affirms the importance and abilities of men and women to be effective, adaptable leaders. The opportunities for and experiences of leadership differ significantly, however, with those of women complicated by their roles as primary family caretakers, prejudice that shows in limited advancement and rewards, resistance to assertive leadership behaviors and devaluing of compassionate traits as leader-like, and underinvested social capital that results from networking with professional colleagues.

In 2004, the Catalyst organization published a research report describing the double bind of women being expected to be communal, e.g. compassionate, nurturing, and not excessively decisive, ambitious, and assertive (referred to as agentic behaviors). Subtitled [Damned if You](#)

[Do, Doomed if You Don't](#), it described the dilemma of women's leadership as often competing social expectations. Reading it made me wonder if somewhere in the crowd attending Joan of Arc's trial and execution, there were men and women thinking, "She had such potential as a leader--if only she had learned to work better with others." The good news is that despite the paradox, there are approaches that can work and research that provides support for their effectiveness. The recent Analysis in Brief from the AAMC, [Unconscious Bias in Faculty and Leadership Recruitment: A Literature Review](#) gives an excellent summary of effective institutional approaches.

The ELAM fellows showed remarkable insight into the dilemmas, and each has become a scholar of her own leadership effectiveness. If you would like to replicate the opening lessons of the ELAM class of 2009-2010, begin with reading these two references and then complement them with two very different and perceptive readings on leadership: [Learning to Love the Swamp: Reshaping Education for Public Service](#) (Schall 1995) and [A Continuum of Leadership Development: A Model for Sustained Success for Women Leaders in Academic Medicine](#) (Morahan et al 2009). Once you have digested these background readings, attend one of your own leadership meetings (not one that you must run, but one of the regular faculty or staff decision-making meetings that you attend) as though you were "a fly on the wall" or a "camera lens in the corner." Make no judgments; just observe the behaviors of communication. Who arrives first? Who sits in the power positions of immediate right or left or opposite the team leader? Who interrupts and who never speaks? As Yogi Berra is quoted as saying, "You can learn a lot by watching." And our Fellows learned a lot—about how hard it is to observe without casting judgment, and how leadership can be exhibited by anyone around the table.

With this knowledge in your head, and these observations in your pocket, consider then the opening question—How do the apparent barriers to women's leadership actually contribute to our strength as leaders? I've posted some of the ELAM fellows' wisdom on the [ELAM LinkedIn site](#). (You didn't think I would share it all here, did you?), and hope you will contribute to our "connected knowing" of women's leadership effectiveness through the ELAM network. That itself is one of the answers as to how women find their way through the Labyrinth of Leadership and out of the double bind. We are unbound by each other's hands as we validate our experiences and mentor each other's success. We traverse the labyrinth with assistance from each other's sights and insights.

I hope you will share your experiences and wisdom by contributing to the [LinkedIn discussion](#), by joining us at the ELAM Teas at the AAMC Meeting in Boston, November 8, and the ADEA meeting in Washington, DC, February 28, as well as by mentoring and learning from the ELAM fellows in your institution and professional societies.

References

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