

Contextual and Conceptual Framework

The statement *ex Africa semper aliquid novi*, attributed to Pliny the Elder, is translated as *out of Africa, always something new*. Apparently the saying was often used derisively, because there was little known about the Dark Continent. Through this book, however, out of Africa becomes something new, something worth celebrating. Rather than stories of war and rumors of war, hunger and disease, and corruption and mismanagement of government coffers, herein are stories of women who are working hard at their own emancipation from these and other man-made evils. These are women who lead with courage and conviction, spirit and strength, serving their communities and changing the status quo for the sake of social and economic justice. There is enough bad news coming out of Africa on a frequent basis to make the rest of the world think that nothing good comes out of the Continent. In contradistinction, this book illustrates that there are beacons of light and hope in the women of Africa, beacons of change for a better world. The *Endarkened* Continent can no longer be dismissed as a place of ignorance and disease; these stories demonstrate that there is something the rest of the world can learn from their black African sisters. From these leadership stories, we learn that our African sisters are resourceful problem solvers who collectivize to resolve their common problems, who are not silent in the face of severe challenges but instead are spirited social justice leaders who serve with a servant's heart and a tempered radicalism necessary to achieve their goals for healing community and restoring justice to the marginalized.

Five Steps Forward, Three Steps Back

Africa's women have made tremendous progress in politics, economics, and educational attainments in the last half century. Prior to

independence, Africa's women actively participated in freeing their nations from colonial domination as freedom fighters engaged in armed warfare, or by offering spiritual and material support to their freedom fighters, or by keeping the home fires burning while their men fought. In this section, I introduce the status of women in various arenas and how the participants in this study fit as leaders in those areas. As Muthoni Likimani, a prolific writer, indicated, even though the historical canon in many African countries may be silent on women's agency in the anti-colonial struggle, this does not diminish their [women's] contribution to freedom and nation building.

Muthoni Wanyeki, a human rights, women's rights, and development expert, indicated that women's active engagement continued after independence. Women organized themselves into national women's organizations that were instrumental in bringing about rural development in many regions across Africa between 1960 and 1980. Furthermore, Wanyeki noted that in the last 30 years, Africa's women have been at the forefront of the fight for democracy in their nations and for closer unity among African countries through Pan-African organizations such as FEMNET (African Women Communication and Development Network, which she directed for 7 years). Such Pan-African organizations helped articulate the needs of women in the nationalist development agendas. In their native countries, Africa's women organized into civil society organizations through which they agitated for democracy, good governance, and human and women's rights, resulting in more women participating in elected political positions in the new century. Many of the women who now serve as elected members of parliament in many African countries started their activism and engagement through the civil commons.

As of October 2008, when the Inter-Parliamentary Union last updated its records, one African country is leading the world in women's participation in parliament. Rwanda leads the world; 58.3% of Parliamentarians are women—the average for Africa is only 17.9%. The table that follows contains other leading African countries' ranking as of October 2008.

My own native Kenya lags behind at 106th, with only a 9.8% representation of women in the current (as of March 2008) parliament. The stories of Honorable Beth Mugo and Honorable Charity Ngilu, who are members of the cabinet in Kenya, are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to women's struggles to serve their communities in parliament. Wahu Kaara has tried and failed to get into parliament the last three general elections. Part of the struggle for women in Kenya is that they do not have the financial wherewithal to play the political

Table 1. Representation of Women in Parliaments in Africa, Global Rankings

<i>Country</i>	<i>Global ranking</i>	<i>Percentage of women in parliament</i>
Rwanda	1	56.3%
Angola	13	34.8%
South Africa	17	33%
Uganda	21	30.7%
Burundi	22	30.5%
Tanzania	23	30.4%
Namibia	30	26.9%

Data from Inter-Parliamentary Union website at <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

games that their male counterparts play, such as giving handouts to voters to “buy” their votes. Furthermore, women wanting to lead in the political arena find themselves facing the threat of physical harm and harassment from male voters who are not ready to be led by women, or hooligans hired by male candidates to intimidate them (*A journey of courage: Kenyan women’s experience of the 2002 General Elections*, 2004). As such, political leadership at the national level remains an unequal playing ground in Kenya, as in many other African countries other than those presented in the table that have between 25% and 56% representation. One of Africa’s celebrated heroines is Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first African woman to be elected to the presidency, who serves as a source of inspiration to other women as they aspire to parliamentary positions as well as the presidency. Rwanda and Uganda have both had women serving as vice presidents; the hope is that as Johnson-Sirleaf has shattered that political glass ceiling and proven that *the hand that stirs the pot can also run the country*, African nations will move toward a more equitable distribution of political power.

Perhaps the area where women are most likely to be found in leadership positions in many African countries is within the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Civil Society Organization (CSO). Most of the participants in this study serve or have served in leadership positions in an NGO or a CSO. In the area of human and women’s rights, women have been active in advocacy work. Judy Thongori, a lawyer, served as executive director for the Federation of

Women Lawyers (FIDA), Kenya chapter, for 5 years, and during this time she was instrumental in putting into place structures to advocate for economically marginalized women, particularly on issues of property rights. Muthoni Wanyeki served for 7 years as the executive director of FEMNET before she moved to a similar position at the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KNHRC), an NGO concerned with human rights abuses. The KNHRC was instrumental in exposing police brutality and politicians' collusion with hooligans in the chaos that rocked Kenya after the December 2007 general elections. These women are just two of the many women who are involved in advocating for justice in a country where a culture of impunity has reigned supreme for several decades now, so that those in positions of power get away with corruption, abuse of power, and denying those without power their rights.

In matters of economic justice, women in Africa agitate and act toward changing the status quo at the local, national, continental, and global levels. For example, Eunice Ole Marima is involved in helping women in Maasai land to gain some level of economic independence through self-help projects at the grassroots level. At the national level, Jeniffer Riria leads Kenya Women's Finance Trust, a women's credit and loan institution that provides low-income women entrepreneurs with loans and business training—credit facilities that have for a long time been out of their reach in commercial banks (Ngunjiri, 2007a). At the global level, Wahu Kaara is active in the Global Campaign against Poverty (GCAP), the World Social Forum, and debt relief campaigns. As these three women's stories demonstrate, African women are not sitting back in silence; rather, they are actively engaged in their own, their communities, and their nation's economic emancipation.

In the educational arena, women can be found at various levels of leadership, with the highest concentration being at the primary school headmistress level. For example, in Kenya, one study found that 44% of primary school heads in two districts were women (Ombati, 2003). At the university level, though, women are not as well represented, both as tenured faculty and in administrative roles, as demonstrated by studies from Kenya (Kamau, 2004) and South Africa (Chisholm 2001, Mabokela 2003a, b). In Kenya, there is only one woman serving as a vice chancellor (equivalent to a college president) in a public university, out of a total of 12. Among private universities, 3 out of 21 women are serving as vice chancellors. Only one woman serves as the top leader of a religious university in Kenya, even though these institutions form the bulk of the private universities in the country (13 out of the 21 private universities have religious affiliations as theological institutions or church-sponsored universities). In this climate, the stories of Esther

Mombo (academic dean, St. Paul's University) and Faith Nguru (director of research and consultancy, Daystar University) illustrate some of the challenges that women face in religious academic institutions.

In other religious institutions, women do not fare well in rising to the top—in fact, there is still no female bishop in the Anglican Church of Kenya, and no women at the top levels of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, the Africa Inland Church, and the Methodist Church of Kenya, the four largest Protestant denominations. As such, Esther Mombo's work as a laywoman who has actively advocated for the ordination of women in the Anglican Church in Kenya, and through her involvement in the worldwide Anglican Communion, is illustrative of one woman's untiring agency. Agnes Abuom (vice president, World Religions for Peace) has demonstrated that sometimes women who may not necessarily fare so well in the ecclesial ranks in their own country might still be able to break the celestial ceiling on a global arena. Abuom served as president for the World Council of Churches for Africa for 2 years, the first time an African woman played that role. Both Abuom and Mombo are well regarded on the global ecumenical and Anglican scenes as leaders who are instrumental in bringing about positive changes to these religious institutions. Their stories illustrate some of the ways that women break the celestial ceiling to serve in religious institutions that have global reach.

In local congregations, women often find it difficult to become ordained and to serve as pastors. Sometimes it takes them instituting independent congregations to be able to serve as they feel called. However, Reverend Judy Mbugua (coordinator, Pan-African Christian Women's Association) has served as a trailblazer, one of the premier women to become ordained. Due to her courageous action, the celestial ceiling has cracked minimally, although some traditional denominations now ordain women. However, women clergy find that they are limited to small, rural, or poor congregations and to lower-level positions—the playing ground is still far from equal. That has been part of the story of Reverend Joyce Kariuki, who finds that ordination does not automatically lead to acceptance, nor does credibility transfer from context to context. While serving as the general secretary of the Council of Anglican Provinces in Africa (CAPA), which includes all of the archbishops from the Continent, she found that sometimes she was not allowed into meetings to take minutes because she was a woman! The CAPA headquarters are in Nairobi, where she also serves as vicar of a local congregation. The stories from these women leaders are examples of how biblical patriarchy, Christian patriarchy, and African patriarchy combine to form a potent barrier to women's participation

in ecclesial leadership. The stories of Reverend Joyce and Reverend Mbugua serve as illustrations of women's struggles and successes in local congregations and Pan-African religious institutions.

One of the Millennium Development Goals is to have equality of access to primary education by 2015. There has been tremendous success in this area in sub-Saharan Africa, where for the longest time tuition fees formed a formidable barrier to girls' access to primary school education. Various sub-Saharan African countries have abolished primary school tuition fees as a means to decrease the gap between boys' and girls' access to education, including Kenya, Liberia, Ghana, Burundi, Tanzania, Malawi, and Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, in spite of such policy advances, enrollments have risen but have not been sustained to lead to equality in graduation rates from primary schools. In addition, whereas school fees formed a formidable barrier, other issues are at play in girls' access to education. Among the Maasai and other pastoralist communities in Kenya, one barrier has to do with the fact that these communities do not value education at the same level as others in the country do. Living a pastoral existence that is dependent on livestock sometimes means that such communities do not perceive literacy and education as necessary for their children, particularly girls. Forced early marriages and female circumcision (which apparently prepares girls for marriage) are two of the biggest barriers to Maasai girls' retention in primary schools. Eunice Ole Marima and Agnes Nangurai are two educated Maasai women who have been actively engaged in providing Maasai girls with a safe space in which to complete their primary education and to also ensure that such girls are able to proceed to secondary schools and colleges by finding them bursaries to pay for their education. The two women's stories illustrate the challenges faced and the responses to those challenges by Maasai women in resolving their communities' low literacy rates and economic hardships. At the national level, Shiphrah Gichaga served as the national coordinator for the Forum for African Women Educationists (FAWE), Kenya chapter, which works with the Ministry of Education and the government in ensuring that girls from marginalized communities have access to education.

Defining Leadership

Leadership scholars acknowledge that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are leadership scholars and theorists. As Yukl (2006) argues, leadership is a term "taken from common vocabulary and incorporated into technical vocabulary of a scientific discipline

without being precisely redefined” (p. 2). Kouzes and Posner regard leadership as mobilizing people to get extraordinary things done, the most effective leaders according to their research being those who lead by example, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart of their constituents (Kouzes and Posner, 2003). In order to be successful, Kouzes and Posner add that leaders have to be credible to their constituents. According to Burns (1978), leadership is “a structure of action that engages persons, to varying degrees, throughout the levels and among the interstices of society. Only the inert, the alienated, and the powerless are unengaged” (p. 2). Further, Burns argues that leadership is distinct from power holding and advocates for transforming leadership where the “transforming leader recognizes and exploits an existing need or demand of a potential follower . . . looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (p. 3).

In order to direct my interrogation of leadership among African women, I have defined leadership as a process involving intentional influence upon people to guide and facilitate their activities and relationships in a group or an organization (Yukl, 2001). Leadership is also a process of meaning making among people to engender commitment to common goals, expressed in a community of practice (Drath & Palus, 1994). Furthermore, I think of leadership as more than a position (Burns, 1978); rather, it is the ability of one person to respond to a call to her or his life that necessitates action toward achieving social justice ideals, my area of interest. In seeking participants for the study, I asked several women in the community to recommend those they felt were leaders for social justice, thus the 16 participants in the study. Community nomination assured that the women selected were considered credible in their own communities of practice.

Conceptual Framework

Guiding this study was the following question: What does it mean to be a woman leader in an African context? That is, I was interested in finding out how women make meaning of their experiences as leaders, including how they are able to thrive and be effective in spite of challenges to their authority. The a priori conceptual framework consisted of three elements: Africana spirituality, tempered radicalism, and servant leadership. This was derived from an extensive literature review of

leadership studies of Black women in United States and informed by the limited studies of Africa women leaders in the Continent. As with their counterparts in the United States, the participants were likely to be guided by a spiritual focus that would help them as they attempted to lead as active change agents and servant leaders.

The study of women's leadership has contributed to the understanding of leadership in general from various perspectives. Of significance to the study of women in leadership is the recognition that women may or may not lead differently than men, depending on the context in which they lead. Parker and ogilvie (1996) observed that for African American women executives, surviving and thriving within the context of racism and sexism demanded an androgynous leadership style. My conceptual framework will incorporate ideas from the research of Dr. Judy Alston (2000, 2005) and Dr. Khaula Murtadha (1999), both of whom have extensive experience in studying African American female educational administrators. Dr. Sharyn Jones's (2003) dissertation research on African American women educational administrators, especially pertaining to spirituality and tempered radicals, was also useful in formulating this frame.

My conceptual frame is also informed by Black feminist and Africana womanist scholars who posited an epistemology informed by the experiences of Black women in Africa and the Diaspora (Collins, 1996, 1998, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 1997; Ntiri, 2001). According to Collins, Hudson-Weems, and Ntiri, Black feminist and Africana womanist theorizing advocates the use of Black women's experiences in theory building as a valid and constructive scholarly endeavor in the pursuit of an understanding of Black and African women. This framework is developed with the understanding that a study of African women's leadership must be informed by distinctive interpretations of African women's oppression under racism, sexism, colonialism, neocolonialism, and patriarchal culture, as well as African women's use of alternative means of producing and validating knowledge (Alston, 2000; Amadiume, 1997; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003; Collins, 1996; Murtadha-Watts, 1999; Oyewumi, 2002).

The conceptual framework consists of three interrelated components understood within the scaffold of women's experience, which are useful in understanding the leadership experiences of African women: Africana spirituality, tempered radicalism, and servant leadership.

Africana Spirituality

In his seminal work, Paris (1995) described an Africana spirituality that is shared by all people of African ascent:

Africans brought their worldviews with them into the Diaspora, and as a result of their interaction with their new environments, their African worldviews were gradually altered into a new-African consciousness . . . *religion permeates every dimension of African life*. [emphasis added]. In spite of the many and varied religious systems the ubiquity of religious consciousness among African peoples constitutes their single most important common characteristic. (pp. 24, 27)

African peoples all over the globe share a spirituality (not a religion) that has been recognized as distinctively African in its explanations of phenomena and its understanding of God as the definitive source and sustainer of life (Paris, 1995; Shorter, 1974). This spiritual worldview has been found to undergird the leadership experiences and practices of African American women (Jones, 2003; Murtadha-Watts, 1999; Reid-Merritt, 1996). Researchers find that a profound spirituality imbued African American women's leadership experiences and consistently served as a source of resiliency amidst structural sexism and racism. Murtadha-Watts (1999) referred to the participants in her study as spirited sisters, Black women leaders for whom spirituality was a constant source of inner strength, divine direction, and courage under fire.

Tempered Radicals

The notion of tempered radicals arose out of the research of Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully (1995), who conducted interviews and observations of leaders in different occupations to understand how those who did not fit the majority mold exercised leadership. According to Meyerson (2001), tempered radicals are men and women who find themselves as poor fits with the dominant culture of their organizations: "Tempered radicals want to fit in and they want to retain what makes them different. They want to rock the boat, and they want to stay in it" (p. 4). These are people who are intent on leading change but who also understand that they must tread with care in order not to endanger their organizational credibility. According to Meyerson, tempered radicals include women who refuse to act like men in a male-dominated institution and people of color who want to expand their boundaries of inclusion in predominantly White institutions. In a pilot study, I found that the idea of a tempered radical resonated with my participants as women leading in predominantly male institutions within a predominantly patriarchal culture. Jones's (2003) study with African American women educational administrators found that these

women "had strong beliefs about what a leader ought to be, yet their values were often at odds with societal beliefs about what is thought of as leadership" (p. 189). That is, Jones's participants were exhibiting tempered radicalism in order to stimulate change, even while remaining within the organizations they wanted to change. Tempered radicals work from within the system in order to positively change it (Meyerson, 2001). As leaders in organizations where others consider them deviant and different, such women exhibit and utilize certain strategies to survive, thrive, and bring about change. As Meyerson observed:

Tempered radicals reflect important aspects of leadership that are absent in the more traditional portraits. It is leadership that tends to be less visible, less coordinated, and less vested with formal authority; it is also more local, more diffuse, more opportunistic, and more humble than the activity attributed to the modern-day hero. This version of leadership depends not on charismatic flair, instant success, or inspirational visions, but on qualities such as patience, self-knowledge, humility, flexibility, idealism, vigilance and commitment. And, although tempered radicals often act as individual agents of change, they are not lone heroes . . . they are quick to acknowledge they cannot do it alone. (p. 171)

Researchers have found that of necessity, Black women leaders, particularly those invested in social justice agendas, tend to be tempered radicals who attempt to act as change agents from within the structures that are otherwise inhospitable to them as women and as racial minorities (Alston, 2000, 2005; Jones, 2003; Meyerson, 2001)

Servant Leadership

The notion of servant leadership is countercultural as far as traditional leadership is concerned (Greenleaf, 1977); that is, it runs counter to the notions of "powerful, dynamic individuals who command victorious armies, direct corporate empires from atop gleaming skyscrapers, or shape the course of nations" (Yukl 2006, p. 1). Greenleaf posited the idea of servant leaders as leaders who would serve with skill, understanding, and spirit. For Greenleaf, greatness in leadership arose out of being a servant first. Greenleaf considered servant leadership as less coercive and more collaborative than the prevailing notions of traditional leadership. A servant leader does not withdraw from engagement

with the system but rather critically engages the system in search of social justice. That is, servant leaders do not merely criticize corruption, injustice, and other structural malaise; rather, they ponder what they can do about it and engage in action and advocacy. As Greenleaf observed, "Criticism has its place, but as a total preoccupation it is sterile" (p. 11). Instead, servant leaders creatively engage with an imperfect world. For Greenleaf, "The servant leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 13). Scholars in the area of Black women's leadership have found that these leaders exhibited servant leader characteristics, such as deep spirituality, a keen sense of vision and direction, a strong sense of efficacy, a dedication to community building, collaborative leadership styles, and a commitment to their mission or calling (Alston, 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Jones, 2003).

Whereas Greenleaf popularized the notion of servant leadership resulting in its being utilized in diverse business and educational institutions, the idea of servant leadership is older than his writing of the *Servant as Leader* essay (1970/1991). Indeed, servant leadership as understood by Christians derives from Jesus' example to his disciples by washing their feet (John 13:1–13) and exhorting them to not "Lord it over" those they lead, as was the norm in their particular sociocultural context (Luke 22). Greenleaf popularized the notion and dissociated it from its religious underpinnings, although there are still those who are uncomfortable with servant leadership because they feel it has religious connotations. The women participating in this study had no such qualms, except for one who was uncomfortable with any language that reeks of religion.

Alston (2005) created a conceptual framework appropriate in research on Black women's leadership consisting of tempered radicals and servant leaders. Murtadha-Watts (1999) study of Black women's leadership used the lens of spirituality to understand their experiences and tenacity in the face of racist and sexist discrimination. Both scholars used women's experience as a valid tool toward theory creation and understanding of phenomena as explored by Black feminist and African womanist theorizing (Collins, 1996, 1998; Hudson-Weems, 1997). I combined and adapted the three sets of ideas for the conceptual framework for the present study, as shown in Figure 1.1 (see next page). The portraits and theme chapters will illustrate how spirituality forms the foundation upon which life and leadership are experienced, understood, and critiqued for the study participants. It is the basis for the women's choice or calling to become leaders, choosing their battles

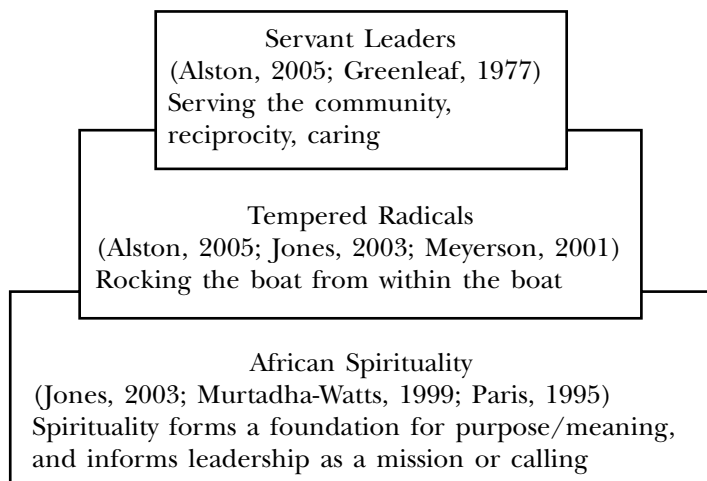


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

as tempered radicals, and serving the common good of the race or the community through a search for social justice.

Studying Women Leaders in Africa

In order to provide the reader with both narratives about the women leaders and lessons learned or emerging themes that illustrate elements of the conceptual framework, I employed portraiture as the biographical approach. I aimed at celebrating and learning from the resiliency and strength of the women leaders in the face of adversities and challenges to their authority as leaders rather than concentrating on the deficit or *pathologizing* their experiences. Portraiture as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) blends several qualitative approaches, concentrating on a search for goodness that aided me in producing authentic portraits of the women leaders. Portraiture lays great emphasis on context (from ethnography), concentrates on the individual (from biography/life history), attempts to comprehend the phenomenon as it is experienced by those individuals (phenomenology), and whereas it encourages a priori conceptual framework, portraiture leaves it open to change/reinterpretation by the data.

Participant Selection and Research Procedures

To qualify for the study, each participant had to be at least 40 years of age and been in leadership for a minimum of 10 years so that each would have a story to tell. Additionally, each participant's leadership had to be for social justice purposes and had to be perceived as such by the community—this was important because I was interested in social justice leadership that attempts to respond to the many challenges and struggles inherent to the African context. I also ensured that the group was diverse in terms of ethnicity—the women were from Gikuyu, Kamba, Nandi, Gikuyu/Canadian mix, Meru, Maasai, and Dinka (Southern Sudanese). All of the participants were selected through a process of recommendations—the liaison, the oldest participant, and several of the participants let me know who the credible social justice-oriented leaders were. The 16 participants are not part of an exhaustive list of all women who lead for social justice, but they are the ones who were available and willing to speak with me during the 3 months I spent collecting data in the summer of 2005.

The primary data sources were the in-depth, face-to-face conversations I had with the participants, ranging from 1 ½ to 4 hours each. These conversations took place between June 1 and September 4, 2005, in Nairobi and Kajiado. I had interview prompts set around three themes: women's lives prior to becoming leaders (life history), women's lives as leaders, and women's visions for the future. A concluding focus group helped further clarify emerging themes as I had the women discuss topics that I selected based on data from individual interviews. The material was updated in January 2009 to indicate the leadership roles the women play.

In the chapters on themes, it became increasingly clear that the three main components of the conceptual framework intersect in practice. As such, even though I separated them in the discussions, in reality the women are both tempered radicals and servant leaders, and their spirituality impacts and is impacted by both. This is an important redefinition of the relationship among the three elements of the conceptual framework. As such, the three—spirituality, servant leadership, and tempered radicalism—are distinguishable, but in the experiences of these African women leaders, they are inseparable elements that create a gestalt that I refer to as spirited leadership: courageous, committed, conviction-filled, and spirit-inspired leadership.

This book focuses on elite women, that is, women who by their economic status and educational attainments are set apart from the majority. All of the women in this study are educated, ranging from

associate to doctorate degrees, placing them within the middle class or higher in social status. This in no way disregards the fact that women have been leading historically and in contemporary society in their families, in rural communities, in urban slums, and in other arenas. As Carli and Eagly (2001) warned, "Focusing on women who occupy such leadership positions should not cause us to forget that women have always exercised leadership, particularly in families and throughout communities" (p. 629).