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## Narratives of Engaging Women in Perceptions about Library Leadership

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Narratives of Engaging Women in Perceptions about Library Leadership

Elizabeth A. Curry

### **When Did I *Feel* Like a Leader? Engaging Women in Perceptions of Library Leadership**

#### **Pushy Broad**

My nerves were really on edge when the white van with the county government license plate finally pulled into the parking lot of the hotel. John, Michael and Sid casually tumbled out of the van and ambled slowly toward me. I inhaled deeply on my cigarette and concentrated on not spewing a stream of curses at them. I said with controlled voice, "You're almost an hour late, what happened?"

John methodically tapped out a cigarette, flicked open his lighter and replied sweetly, "No big deal, we're here now. We needed to stop for coffee so we could get charged up."

"You know we couldn't let you down, girl," Michael said almost a bit too flirtatiously.

A burning frustration built in my gut. I silently ground my teeth and felt the beginning of a pounding nausea-producing headache. But there wasn't time to argue. I needed to get these guys motivated and moving. "It is a very big deal because every library director in the state is here. It is our chance to prove ourselves. So let's show them that the library video association can really kick-ass! We need to be wired in thirty to forty-five minutes, so let's get the truck unloaded and set-up the meeting room." They seemed perfectly content to let me organize the set-up and make decisions.

Michael smirked with an exaggerated southern drawl, "Just tell me where you want it, honey."

I was the lowly gopher but I ended up in the limelight that day. As an eager new librarian I was assigned to handle local arrangements for a state legislative seminar that was offered only to library directors, "Dealing with Hostile Media." The video taping was a critical element of the session. It was my suggestion and it was a first for the new statewide library video association. Sitting in the back of the room I breathed a sigh of relief when everything was set-up. The nationally acclaimed workshop speaker, Art Burger, was introduced.

Unexpectedly, Mr. Burger called me to the stage. I thought that perhaps he was going to thank me for organizing the local arrangements. Art said in a booming voice, "Young lady I've been watching you set up for the meeting. Are you a PB?"

I hesitated, "I don't know what that means."

"Are you a Pushy Broad?" he loudly asked.

People laughed nervously. My eyes widened a bit but I responded, "I try to do whatever it takes to make things run smoothly for my boss."

The library directors clapped and hooted with laughter! I was used as an example throughout the seminar. (This was considered a good example of replying with a positive statement, rather than denying a negative.) Unfortunately, PB became a label that stuck. For years the story has survived, usually told after a few drinks in the bar. "Did you know that Elizabeth is a PB, Pushy Broad?"

I felt proud that I didn't fall into the speaker's "trap" that day and I somehow knew instinctively how to handle the media. He tried to embarrass me and I surprised him in front of the directors. I was also proud of the fact that the workshop arrangements were an overwhelming success and the video taping went more smoothly than anyone (even I) dreamed.

That's why I was shocked when later I heard that the guys from the video association were telling people, "Elizabeth was really difficult to work with -- difficult and demanding!"

These comments made me feel like I had been punched in the stomach! The whole experience taught me a lesson. I was offended by the label "PB - Pushy Broad" but I laughed with the others because I felt like the story made me part of the crowd. I didn't want to confirm the story by acting like a pushy broad and telling everyone to stop talking about it. I wondered what the difference was between an assertive leader and a Pushy Broad.



## **INTRODUCTION**

*Is the oldest child always the bossy one?  
Talent is a God-given gift, don't put yourself above others.  
Smart girls aren't the pretty girls.  
Fun girls aren't the smart girls.  
Don't be aggressive, men don't like it.  
Be charming, don't make waves.  
Men are decisive. Women are nurturing.  
Feminists don't have a sense of humor.  
Feminism means women are equal? the same? better? different?  
Leaders have power and control.*

*Why do we hesitate to be called leaders?  
Let's re-define leadership and ourselves!*

## **Questioning**

This paper is a collage of women's perceptions about leadership. It focuses on women in library leadership. The impetus for this study is one of personal reflection, as well as an introductory excursion into qualitative research. I was interested in clarifying my own feelings and thoughts about leadership and learning more about the way other library leaders perceive themselves as leaders. I wanted to understand how women defined leadership and their roles as leaders. A related purpose was to see how people characterize themselves and develop an image of leadership according to the opinions of others. Participants had served as officers in state-level professional associations, so ideas about the role of library associations in leadership also arose.

I have been a librarian for twenty years, working for local government, state government and non-profit library consortia. In the past few years I have become involved in planning and implementing leadership development institutes. This work has led me to see that leadership is hard to define yet many books and articles are written on the subject. I had questions about how I felt about defining myself as a leader. I believe leadership is a very personal journey of self-development and I wanted to explore the stories women had to tell about leadership. I wanted to know more about what women said made them feel like leaders.

## **Personal Reflection**

During a conversation with one of the participants I talked about a perception of leadership that I had not known about myself previously. I have a sense now, very strongly, that I am a leader. I have various personal characteristics of a leader. I have demonstrated leadership but I am almost ashamed to say that I think I'm a leader. I am not supposed to say it. I think it is inappropriate to tell people that I think I am a leader. I was instilled with my family's philosophy that any talent or ability is a God-given gift that includes many responsibilities. Pride comes before the fall. Do not put yourself above others. Be service oriented because we are all part of the same community.

Another part of my reluctance stems from the messages that society has communicated to women and continues to send to women. These messages were part of growing up, the media, high school, college and work. Women were not expected to be aggressive or even assertive. Men were. Leaders were defined as powerful and aggressive decision-makers. As a feminist

since the 1960s and 1970s I was surprised by my thoughts. Then I realized that perhaps it was the definition of leadership that clouded my vision. The conflict might be the word leader. If I defined leadership as collaboration, I felt comfortable. If someone asked, "Are you a collaborator?" I would say with no hesitation, "Yes, and damn proud of it!" I see other people who know how to foster collaboration as skilled leaders. So I took my personal questions and reflections to the field, to ask others what they thought.

### **Conceptual Area of Inquiry**

The status as a leader may be defined as the achievement of certain practices and may be defined by certain skills. These definitions may vary in different settings or with different context. Communication may be an essential component in defining self and relations to others. Power, authority and influence are involved. Collaboration, emotional intelligence and servant leadership are related concepts that may apply, particularly to a feminized professions such as librarianship.

### **Rationale & Significance**

Women have been and continue to be subjected to mixed messages about leadership -- at home, school, work and through the media. The women who are library leaders came of age in the 1950's and 1960s. The feminist movements have changed several times since that time. [ Need more info here] Librarianship is a historically feminized profession and there are many opportunities for women to assume leadership positions. I know many highly competent professional women in libraries. Eighty percent (80%) [1991 figure, to be confirmed/updated] of the profession are women but men still predominate in the highest paid executive positions. Eighty percent (80%) of library administrators are men. Even women who become library directors, generally report to male supervisors on the academic, corporate or local government structure.

Historically, libraries have moved from the role of warehousing materials to a mission of preserving democracy with open access to information. Now libraries face challenges for the future with technology and people's impressions of information literacy and access. Librarians need to understand leadership more than ever before, as they shape their roles and institutions. Leadership will be critical if society is to maintain free access to information that has increasingly become a profitable commodity. Leadership is not a new or unique topic; however, as part of the library culture I've seen renewed interest in the topic with the dramatic changes of

technology in libraries. In society overall, technology and specifically the Internet are contributing to a changing leadership paradigm. The information world is ubiquitous and interdependent and new concepts of leadership are emerging.



## **PART I: PERSONAL STORIES**

### **Sweet or Bossy?**

"You're not the boss of me," grunted my sister, Peggy. Her dark curls were flopping in her face as she tried to escape. I sat on her chest, holding her down on the cold terrazzo floor. "You're making that face, you're gonna bite your tongue off," she tried to pitch me off. I released the hold my teeth had on my tongue. I pulled my tongue back into my mouth.

"You can't get up until you promise to clean up my fort you little shrimp-bait," I growled. "And stay out of my stuff!" The fort was just an old blue sheet draped over a card table but it was my quiet spot to read without being interrupted.

Skinny arms suddenly encircled my throat and yanked me backwards, so I fell off Peggy. My little brother, Jimmy, had me in a full body grip with his legs entwined around my waist. "Stop it! Leave her alone. You can't make us do nothing," he asserted protectively.

"Mommy! Mommy, Mooommmmy!" my sister and brother screamed "Elizabeth isn't playing fair! She's trying to boss us. She won't share the fort!"

Mom's response was typical, "Elizabeth, you're the oldest and you should act like my big girl." I wasn't completely sure I understood what that meant but I often heard it. "Jimmy, Peggy you know that I don't want you wrestling with your sister." When mom turned her back my sister and brother would quietly whisper one word, "Weeze". They knew how to wound deeply. In my family we did not fight overtly. We generally disguised our barbs in humor, humor that hurts. "Elizabeth is so much like Aunt Louise. She's the bossy one!" Eventually they would say "just like Louise" or simply "Weeze." We all knew that my dad didn't have a close relationship with Aunt Louise, his oldest sister. In fact, he didn't like Aunt Louise and they would argue when they were together. He much preferred the company of Aunt Mimi, the sweet one. So the comparison was even worse for me. As a child I wanted my daddy's approval.

When we were very young we would all visit Aunt Mimi and Aunt Louise each summer in Pennsylvania. When I hugged my aunts, my arms would wrap around their waists and my head would be in their bellies. Aunt Mimi was soft and squishy. She smelled like roses. Her

dress would be a pastel jersey and her hat was hand knitted. Aunt Mimi was almost comically frumpy but I didn't realize it until I was much older. When I hugged Aunt Louise she was hard and tight, her girdle cinched her into her straight skirts. She was smooth and tailored in scratchy gray, brown, beige or navy tweeds. Aunt Mimi was delightfully silly. She giggled in a high pitched, tiny voice. She would set up lemonade tea parties in the garden for us, Tarzan, the old threadbare monkey puppet and Genevieve, the fragile antique doll. We could have as many sugar cubes as we wanted in our lemonade.

Aunt Louise would dismiss many things as too silly. She was often tight lipped, and practical but I could get her to laugh sometimes. She was serious but loving, she would send me books and painting supplies. She sent us all the most beautiful clothes and was very generous. When Aunt Louise died we found savings bonds that she had amassed for all of us. When Aunt Mimi died she had saved for us the Tarzan, Genevieve, the Spoof card game, my father's letters from World War II and all the postcards I sent her from my travels.

I loved Aunt Louise and Aunt Mimi -- for different reasons. Even as a young girl I knew that Aunt Louise was the organizer. If we wanted to go into the mountains for our annual picnic at Spruce Creek, Aunt Louise was the one we asked. I couldn't believe that Aunt Mimi didn't even drive because it was too scary -- a grown woman who couldn't drive. Aunt Louise had the car and drove both of them wherever they went. Aunt Louise never got married. She went to college and had a job in the government. Aunt Mimi stayed home, got married and took care of the house. She wrote stories and sent letters to the newspaper.

I had a very close relationship with both aunts until they died about ten years ago. I admired them both for different reasons. But I still feel wounded every time the family jokes about me being "bossy like Aunt Louise." I also feel like I have betrayed Aunt Louise in my discomfort. But I try to remember that when there is an emergency or something needs to be decided, the family looks to the bossy one to be the responsible one, the organizer.



### **Lesbian First Lady**

"Did you know that Hillary Clinton is a lesbian?" No preliminary greeting but I recognized my dad's voice. He called at the same time each day. When my father lost his eyesight he started calling to chat frequently. He was so lonely and he felt impotent because he had become dependent on others.

"Hey dad. What's the punch line?"

"No I mean it. I heard it on the radio," he replied emphatically.

"You know some people on talk radio get carried away. They just want attention but I can't quite believe this craziness."

"Yes, but what do you think about having a lesbian for a first lady?" dad persisted.

"Why do they think she's a lesbian?" I asked with a sigh. Dad had always been an ultra conservative Archie Bunker type. At almost eighty years old he was getting a bit foggy, as my mother would say.

"Well she doesn't act like a first lady. She tries to act like a man. She keeps butting into her husband's work, like she's smarter than he is, with that health care stuff. And Clinton keeps looking for girlfriends. He wouldn't do that if she was a real wife." It came pouring out in a stream from my dad.

I was stunned. I almost couldn't believe I was hearing the conversation. He had never gone this far before. No matter how ridiculous I said it was he kept harping on the things they said on the radio. I tried to derail the conversation about why she was a lesbian by quipping, "So if she is a lesbian what difference would it make?"

Dad exploded, " WHAT DO YOU MEAN! You don't care?"

I realized he was over the edge now but I continued, "No, it wouldn't really affect me either way. I don't care."

"Well you are out of your mind, we can't have a lesbian for a First Lady! It isn't natural," he roared.

It was time to be firm, "I hear you Pop but I'm absolutely sure she isn't a lesbian. I don't want to discuss it further." He wanted to keep me on the line but it wasn't easy to change the subject. "I'm worried about your brother's job," he began.

I wasn't shocked by dad's lack of understanding about homosexual lifestyles. But I was stunned by why he thought the First Lady was a lesbian, and what people on talk radio discussed. The message I heard was that they thought smart women weren't good wives, and they must be lesbians if their husbands had affairs. I have a masters degree, an executive job and I'm divorced.



## **Act Good or Act Bad?**



Throughout my career I have been attuned to mixed messages about leadership. I remember that day my colleagues confronted me with my "bad group behavior." The mountains were truly majestic. As a Florida native, I've always marveled at the beauty of the colorful fall leaves. The weather was crisp and invigorating. The lodge was an ideal location for a library managers' team building retreat. As the staff development coordinator I was pleased by the success of the local arrangements.

Maggie, the facilitator, led us in an exercise on meeting behavior. "I want you to think about your meetings and what kind of behavior can make a meeting effective. Take the worksheet and use both columns. List all the ways you can act during a meeting, what are good and bad behaviors. Then we need volunteers to be part of role playing a group meeting."

People were very reluctant so I volunteered first and convinced my friend Sally to join me. She was one of the few bolder ones. Maggie gently encouraged several others to participate in the fish bowl exercise.

"I want each of you to pick a card, but don't show anyone. Act out either your good meeting behaviors or your bad behaviors depending on what your card says," Maggie instructed. When the scene was completed Maggie announced, "Now it is time to process what we watched." I'm going to ask our observers to tell us who had the ACT GOOD Card and who had the ACT BAD Card."

Maggie began charting the responses on the flip chart. When the group got to me, everyone agreed that I had an ACT BAD Card. I couldn't believe it! I thought to myself, They must have misunderstood the question.

"She talked too much."

"She put new ideas on the table instead of agreeing to Mary's first idea."

"She questioned the chair and other people. She pushed people into volunteering and scheduling activities." The group continued to make comments.

I was devastated inside and trying to make sense of it without looking visibly shaken. Maggie, the facilitator, seemed unsure of exactly how to proceed. I showed the group my ACT GOOD card. The room became very quiet. People were confused -- including me.

It wasn't her turn to reveal her card, but my friend Sally suddenly stood up and showed her ACT GOOD card too. She said, "I'm feeling really angry now. This shows what's wrong with our whole damn group! No one wants to rock the boat. Everyone is so busy agreeing and

being quiet that we can't change anything! If you ask me, it's your job to have an idea once in awhile, instead of just sitting at meetings like lumps!"

That experience was an epiphany for me! I was often frustrated by our lack-luster meetings, but I kept trying to interest others in new ideas. I finally understood why the other managers so rarely spoke during meetings. They thought they were supposed to be compliant and agreeable with the chair of the meeting, who was usually the "highest ranking" librarian from the administrative team. They went to meetings to get their "orders", not to participate in shaping the project. I can't sit quietly and be "good"! I can only be "good" at looking for ideas, planning activities, organizing change, and trying to be creative. I think it can be a "high" to share ideas and work together on projects. I guess that's a risk that some of them couldn't take.



### **Famous Librarians & Mentoring**

Jill and I were sprawled on the hotel beds pouring over the national conference program book, a hundred pages of opportunities and ads. We were outlining our conference schedules that had every minute packed with meetings, exhibits and programs. It was our second time at the conference, and we were becoming real pros.

"Don't forget the after dinner social at 10:00 PM Sunday night with Liz. It's in the President's Suite," I reminded Jill.

"Do you think we'll have any sightings of 'famous librarians'?" Jill giggled.

"Of course, that's the point." I laughed too.

It was our inside, somewhat cynical joke. After all, how famous is a 'famous librarian' in the larger scheme of things, we wondered. Fame wasn't really the point anyway in a service-oriented profession. We both knew that we were just being defensive because we felt embarrassed to be new librarians who were going to meet the icons in our profession.

"I just hope I recognize the really famous ones before I make a fool of myself. I am so bad with names and they don't wear their nametags."

"Yeah, they all know each other. You are so good at working the room, Elizabeth. Sometimes I just don't know what to talk about," Jill groaned.

"OK. Here are my secrets. Admit you are newly graduated and eager to get involved. Ask for their advice about the conference and the association. Ask them to tell you about their career path. I try to get them talking, which isn't too hard. In a pinch we can talk about Liz since

that's mainly what we have in common. When all else fails excuse yourself to go to the bar or the bathroom."

"Yeah, I feel like I need to explain why I'm there. I try not to get too far away from Liz. You know, some of them are polite, some even seem a bit interested but in general they stick to their famous librarians' clique," Jill sighed

"I know, Liz is different. She makes time for her students at conferences! Let's be sure and tell her that we appreciate her help. When we're famous librarians, we should make time for the little people," I clowned. We both howled with laughter.

At almost the same time we both asked, "What are you going to wear?"



Many years later, I was invited to be part of a leadership development institute. We were asked to describe what our mentors did for us as a way of planning the institute. To my surprise some people didn't have memories of mentors. I enthusiastically shared my experiences, "I've actually had several mentors but the first was the strongest or most memorable. Liz Futas was my professor and my mentor in graduate school. She became a close friend and colleague. Liz helped me get involved in library associations and especially nationally. She dragged me to numerous social events, programs and meetings. It was a bit embarrassing but she told her friends that she wanted them to find committee appointments for me. Liz taught me the importance of making a contribution to the profession and our obligation to empower others." I could tell that my description had not captured the true spirit of my relationship with my mentor. "Let me tell you about one important episode in our relationship."

After ten years of participation in the American Library Association (ALA), I was invited to serve on a presidential task force. I met the president through Liz who was also on the task force. At the organizational meeting my relationship with Liz was put to a unique test. The ALA president passed out a list of people she wanted to chair subcommittees. She had selected me as chair of the editorial subcommittee to prepare two books for publication. I was thrilled and terrified, but also comforted because Liz was listed as a member of the committee I was chairing. This was really the opportunity of a lifetime. After the meeting Liz and I went to lunch and she unexpectedly, but characteristically blew up!

"I don't know why Pat appointed you as chair of the editorial subcommittee!" She raved as she pointed her finger at me. Her voice was rising, "I have much more experience. You've only edited journals. You've never done a book before! What was she thinking!"

I was wide-eyed, but not intimidated. I was accustomed to her outbursts and highly demonstrative temperament. I was just so surprised that I gaped for moment, in mid mouthful, before responding. "Liz, just stop and listen for a second! I assume that Pat is giving me this opportunity because she respects your judgement. You brought me into the group, you introduced us. She knows this is a special opportunity for me. But Pat's no fool. She also hedged her bets by putting you on the editorial subcommittee. She knows that you'll make sure that I succeed and the group succeeds. She knows that you are my mentor as well as my friend."

Liz was stunned speechless, not a common occurrence. "You're right," she said brusquely. "I just didn't see it. Now, after lunch we can spend some time outlining an editorial schedule. OK?"

Throughout the next two years of work, Liz was at my side, generously supporting me during the subcommittee meetings and between meetings. This was a time when the mentoring relationship began to shift toward a relationship between colleagues. The books were my first nationally distributed monographs and in retrospect I think maybe the project was a step toward becoming one of those famous librarians. But personally I was just amazed that I had met Gloria Steinem and Cesar Chavez and edited their conference speeches for the books.

As I finished my story one of the leadership development planning committee members said, "You were certainly lucky to have such a mentor!"

Another person commented, "We need to set up the framework for mentoring but I think we need to remember that it is a relationship that grows between two people."

"I agree," I told the group. "But I have one more part of the story, an ending and a beginning or sorts, that I want to share."



For fifteen years Liz and I spent time together at conferences. We still went to social events together and we always tried to make time for at least one meal together where we could talk about our families and our personal lives. But the conference in Philadelphia was an emotional disaster.

I made excuses as I left the Network Managers Discussion group early, because I had to walk to the other side of the convention hall to meet Liz. I wanted to consult her on the strategy for our Chapter Relations project. We had really made an impact with our protest on behalf of state chapters. The black buttons had been more effective than I could have imagined. I saw Kathleen standing in the hall. She came up and hugged me, which was unusual; she wasn't typically a hugger. She looked tired, a common conference state.

"Have you heard?" she asked slowly and softly.

I thought there was news about the Chapters Relations project. "No, I have just escaped a morning of meetings, I'm on my way to meet Liz. Want to walk with me? You know she hates it if people are late," I prattled cheerfully.

Kathleen became very still. "Oh no, You haven't heard. Liz died in the Council meeting a few minutes ago."

"Died..." I couldn't process the word. The frantic activity in the hall seemed suspended; the voices became a hum. I just stared at Kathleen. I remember the almost psychedelic pattern in the carpet. She hugged me again and I noticed how short she seemed. I felt large and bulky.

"I'm supposed to have lunch with her," I said softly. "You know she was only 50. She was coming to visit me in two weeks. I got tickets to a play." I don't know why that mattered.

"Everyone is in Pat's suite. No one knew where you were, so I came to find you. I'll take you to the suite."

I let Kathleen guide me, but I thought to myself, they couldn't find me because I don't really fit in their crowd. I'm part of so many other groups.

When we opened the door to the presidential suite I saw many familiar faces. Many of those I once thought of as the "famous librarians" were now acquaintances, friends and colleagues. There were tears and lots of wadded, soggy tissues. I saw Kathleen leave, I knew instinctively that she wanted to grieve alone. I needed company. Pat hugged me, not a polite conference hello hug but a long, warm full body hug with soothing caresses along my back.

"Come, sit down. Do you want coffee, coke, a drink?"

"I'll have a double gin and tonic, and a cigarette, it's going to be a rough day." The room was a haze of smoke. Everyone was smoking, even those of us who had quit.

Pat said, "Liz would be so mad at us if she was here now. She hated smoke and she didn't drink any more." We laughed and sort of groaned, but then I started to sob, my shoulders

were shaking and my body was making noises I couldn't control. It occurred to me that I was wailing in front of the famous librarians.

"It is just too hard. My dad died two months ago in an accident," I gasped. I didn't think I could say the words to tell them how awful his death had been.

"We know, Liz told us about it. She was really looking forward to visiting you. It was all she talked about last week." Carol squeezed my arm, patted my hand, and held my hand tightly.

I realized how much Liz connected all of us. We began reminiscing and telling stories about Liz. All kinds of people came to the suite. It was almost like the ritual of the funeral home viewing. I had a very strange thought, it was better that Liz died at the conference, than at home alone. Better for her and for us -- so we could mourn together. It was a long day and night of stories, liquor, smoking and tears. The next day the Council business was cancelled in order to hold a tribute to Liz. All that association business just didn't seem important any more.

Attendance at the memorial was overwhelming and our sense of loss made the air in the room seem very heavy. People talked about Liz's professional accomplishments which were many. But most of all they told stories about her character, personality, dedication and personal relationships. In the midst of this professional conference, I was dramatically reminded that relationships are the most important part of our work.



### **Feeling Like a Leader**

As part of my research I asked women to tell me about their feelings concerning leadership. We often talked about the definition of leadership. We also discussed experiences that made us feel like leaders. I thought about two experiences that I rediscovered about myself while having a conversation with Betty. I recall feeling like a leader when a young librarian told me that I had inspired her and when I developed the system-wide Friends Council.

### **Inspiration**

I was rushing through the revolving door of the conference hotel, I got lost and so I was late for the board reception. It was so cold in Chicago. I was wrapped in a heavy gray wool cape and purple scarf. My briefcase was bulging and cumbersome. As I emerged into the lobby I stopped to catch my breath. I noticed lots of librarians sitting on the edge of the stone wall around the planter. A thin woman with long blonde hair carrying a tote bag loaded with exhibit

freebies approached me. I scanned her shoulder for her nametag, I couldn't read the name but the band of color at the bottom told me she was a student.

"Ms. Curry, sorry to bother you. You don't really know me, but I heard you speak yesterday morning at the editors' publication program," she said quickly. "You really inspired me. You made it seem simple - well not simple really, you know what I mean, clear." She seemed so nervous now.

I smiled, the meeting upstairs didn't seem that important right now. "Thanks, I wasn't sure I could make sense so early for a Sunday morning. I appreciate the compliment."

"I'm Susan Rink, I'm a student at Valley University. I know you are busy but do you have a few minutes now or maybe later in the conference? I need some advice. I tried to see you this morning but you were mobbed after your presentation. Would you read an article I wrote? I've read your work and I want my style to be like yours."

I was momentarily surprised and flattered. I hadn't published that much. One part of me resisted the request because time was so scarce now that I was editing the journal. Then I thought of the many people who had helped me in the past. I relaxed. "Susan, I have a few minutes now, let's sit on the planter. Then we can schedule some follow-up time. Here's my card. Tell me about your article." Later on the way to the reception I was pensive. As I stood in the elevator I realized that Susan thought I was a famous librarian. I didn't see myself in those terms, until I was looking through her eyes. I thought she was going to do well, she had the ability to connect, and she did not seem to have a mentor to introduce her. On that day I think I really felt like a leader. I felt proud yet humbled by the experience.

### **Friends Council**

"Congratulations, I don't know how you did it but everyone is happy! Even Sally Harper is enthusiastic," my library director gushed during the Friends of the Library Council reception.

She doesn't know how I did it? Where has she been for the past eighteen months? I thought to myself as I smiled and returned her hug. "It was your vision Mrs. Lane and it wouldn't have worked without all the efforts of the branch librarians."

"OK, let's keep circulating. I'm glad the ceremony is over, my feet hurt."

"Great food! Well, I guess all those meetings with the branch managers really made a difference," Jane the coordinator of branch libraries somewhat begrudgingly stated. I was so pleased that she was coming around. I needed to cultivate her support constantly.

"Yes, the branch managers are the people who handle Friends on daily basis," I responded. "They needed to refine their collaborative skills, to let community members lead but also still firmly communicate library policy before problems start to grow."

Angela, the newly installed president of the Friends Council, walked over to me. "A celebration really brings out the best in us all, doesn't it? I was surprised by so many politicians here." We laughed together. " Seriously, this is a milestone in the library. We'll be able to do great things now that all the local groups can get together and see the overall system too. You were right on target with the idea of the president's Council. A separate system group would have made everyone angry."

Before I could reply, Sally interrupted us, "Can I steal Elizabeth for just a minute? I'm on my way out. Thanks, walk me to the car will you?" I welcomed the fresh air and Sally was president of one of the local Friends of the Library groups. When we arrived at her car, she pulled out a flat package wrapped in brown paper tied with string. "This is to thank you for your patience, and support. You helped my group and you managed to get all our groups together."

I unwrapped the package. I was awed; it was a stunning abstract design of a woman with her arms stretched over several children in an enveloping sphere, a swirl of color. "Is this one of your pieces?" At first I didn't have words to respond.

"Yes, it's a new series I'm creating. This is all about nurturing and that's what I see in you. You are the spirit of this print. You guided me and the group -- firmly at times -- but you did it with genuine caring. And humor too, I guess you need your sense of humor with seven groups to juggle."

"I will treasure this. Thank you so much. It really means a lot to me. It will be my reminder and inspiration, when my patience flags." It all seemed worth it at that moment -- all the months of attending meetings on evenings when I wanted to be at home, stretching my patience while listening to objections, looking for a common bond and project, facilitating staff workshops, and forging agreements concerning funding and then planning the reception.

I wrote an article about the Council and was invited to talk to other libraries that faced similar challenges. People would ask me, "How did you talk all the local groups into cooperating with the system?"

I would outline the timetable in detail for the audience but I would start with the short answer, "I listened to them. I joined them. It was just a bunch of meetings and talking with a



bunch of people. We moved carefully with small successes, like the system-wide Friends newsletter. So we helped people see the possibilities. It was persuasion not power."

### **Bon Voyage & Scrapbooks**

When I leave a job, I feel a sense of loss. It is a time of reflection and even grieving. It is a time when people give you lots of compliments. They feel that they need to tell you all the things they neglected to communicate as you worked together throughout the years. The bon-voyage experience is a little like a funeral, except you can use the comments as you define yourself for the "next world", the next job.

I treasure a message that Chuck, one of my former supervisors, wrote in my bon-voyage scrapbook: *"When Spring arrives, the seeds of the previous season push new growth through the hardened ground and the debris on the surface with persistent effort. This is an example for us all in our efforts to get our new ideas initiated. Elizabeth is another good example for us all."*

Another message from a colleague, Pamela, touched me, *"Elizabeth, I've watched you seek the "good" in other people for nine years. Sometimes I am amazed how you can find and cultivate something special in each person. You have pushed us and made us all better people and better professionals. You manage to blend your professionalism with warmth and a sense of humor. I admire your style, your collaborative skills and the way you develop relationships."*



### **PART II: CONVERSATIONS WITH OTHERS**

I spent a good deal of self-reflexive time for this project. I tried to think of library leaders I knew, the kinds of messages about leadership that had shaped my career, how I defined leadership, and the times that I really felt like a leader. I explored the meaning in my life but I wondered how other women defined leadership and felt about library leadership.

### **Method & Participants**

For this paper I had conversations with six women who were library leaders. (Two other conversations were scheduled but had to be cancelled due to participants' personal difficulties.) Initially, it was very difficult for me to decide who should be a part of the research. I considered: experienced leaders, emerging leaders, male leaders, female leaders or minority leaders. I spent many hours thinking about who I thought were leaders and why. I decided to talk with women who had served as president of a library association on the state level. I had served in this role

and it seemed to be a fit with my personal quest to understand leadership. Since members of the various professional associations elected the participants, this was some indication that the participants had the respect of their peers. It also was an indicator that the woman was established in her career. Five of the women were state presidents. All the state presidents were from one state.

I sent e-mail messages to the leaders from state association level in advance. The messages outlined a qualitative method based on informal open-ended conversation, the possibility of publication outside the classroom project and leadership questions I was interested in pursuing. I initially tried to get resumes/vitas from those I interviewed but I did not get responses from all the participants and I did not use the resumes I received.

All the participants have at least a masters degree in library and information management. Most have been adjunct instructors for the university library classes on the masters level. Betty and Amy participated in our conversations in-person and I tape-recorded the sessions. Amy and I spoke for about ninety minutes in her office before lunching together. My conversation with Betty lasted about four hours in her office after we had lunch. Carol, Doris and Frances spoke to me by telephone for about 60 minutes each. I did not record the phone conversations but took notes as we conversed. Doris also sent me some ideas in reply to my preliminary e-mail request for participation.

I had no difficulty contacting participants or getting their consent to work with me on the research. I knew all of the participants from my professional library activities. Some of the participants I have known for over ten years. Most of the participants are women I know professionally but two are personal friends as well as colleagues. I found it significant that I had never had a conversation about leadership with these women until I began this project. The women have served in the presidential role within the last ten years. One served as vice-president when I was president of the association. Most of the participants are between mid-40-50 years of age. All except one participant has the position of director. The participants represent a cross section of experience in community academic, public, school and special libraries. The academic participant was from community college since no woman university librarian has served as president of the state association in recent years. (Males have.)

I added several other categories to the study after serendipitous encounters; presidents on national library level (male and female) and a woman who was not a librarian but

had been state association president in her profession. Those from the national library scene are not from the same state. One woman was president of a national library association. The conversation with her was a brief in-person event prior to a speech she was delivering to local students. We chatted informally for about twenty minutes in person at the university. She volunteered her feelings readily and her remarks seemed particularly relevant to the research. In the same way, I included a brief comment from a telephone conversation with a man who had served as president on the national library level. This comment was included as a comparison and to provoke ideas for future research.

The woman who was not a librarian was someone I met in an airport on a night of delayed flights. As we shared our stories I discovered that she had much in common with the women library leaders. She was in a medical profession and she had served as president of her state association. I added her thoughts on leadership to the report because her remarks were thought provoking and pertinent to the gender issue.

I want the voices of the participants to be privileged in this paper. I have chosen to present selected pieces of their stories but to let each participant's words remain in one section. Hopefully, the reader will see how each woman is different and see how their thoughts and feelings are similar.

#### **BETTY'S VOICE ..... SELECTED PIECES**

*There have been times in my professional career that I felt like I was a leader and I was pretty sure I was a leader, and I knew I was a leader. And, there have been times since then that I thought I might have been mistaken. (She laughed.)*

*Do leaders question whether or not they're leaders? Up until some point you don't realize you're a leader. And then, you get that feeling there's evidence that says you're a leader. What do we think of ourselves as leaders? Maybe it's easier to think about who else is a leader?" And, then we'd figure out what that means.*

*A job, a certain job description or a job title might be an indicator of leadership. Certainly, I see "executive director" has all of a sudden made me a leader again. Six months ago I wasn't working as an executive director and I wasn't a leader then. What happened in six months? It was just a title change.*

*If you're active in the professional associations and get elected to something. Does that make us leaders? Or, is that where we are leaders...and that's why we got elected? But again, it's validation. Somehow we're saying to themselves, 'Oh gee, I guess if I'm president maybe I'm supposed to be representing my profession. Maybe I need to be comfortable being a leader.' I agreed to run for president of the association because I wanted to make something happen. I wanted to be in a position of authority or a change agent position. My goal was to bring librarians together, for greater communication and collaboration. My ideas about leadership have evolved since then.*

*One of the ways that I know I'm a leader is that I'm trying not to control every meeting and every project in which I'm involved. What it means is that...I want and have the ability to lead, which sometimes gets confused with control. I don't always have to lead. Just because I can doesn't mean I have to lead. What makes me think that I'm the only leader in the room? I'm talking about collaboration at highest level, empowerment or whatever word we use. It is changing your focus from doing the project to serving as a vessel that the energy flows through.*

*Until recently, women in leadership positions simply mirrored men. Their clothing, their styles, everything. You know, the little button ties, little rosettes. I hated those. (She laughed.) When I worked at the corporate library we starched our shirts. We wore men's jackets; we did wear women's skirts, because pants weren't allowed. But, the little rosettes, we looked just like they did. So, there wasn't any sense of your own style.*

*I felt like a leader when I was asked to testify at a legislative hearing. I realized that I was sitting behind one of the senators. In fact, she was a woman senator. I didn't end up having to testify, and, I was ever so grateful for that. But, just the fact that I was called upon to testify for the state librarian, to a senate committee was certainly one of those leadership moments.*

*I think another time when I remember feeling like a leader was when I had the Internet report published and my name was on the front. While that may simply have been authorship, it was a marker, so to speak. The idea of being published in something that was more than an article, not*

*quite a book. In doing the project, there were probably examples of leadership all along the way. But, somehow the publication was a milestone. It got distributed to a lot of people -- it got recognized.*

*Whether this example is leadership or not, I don't know a way we define it. But, I will tell you that I felt like a leader when I debated John Berry. I wasn't nervous even though he was such a big deal. I not only held my own, but I walked away and thought I did a good job. The subject matter was whether the MLCs [multitype library cooperatives] were dinosaurs or rising phoenixes. I said that they were rising phoenixes. That was my point of the debate. And, his was that they were, of course, dinosaurs. I found an editorial that he had written a couple of years before where he lauded and applauded MLC's. I was able to call him on that very distinctly. I remember just thinking, that was the biggest hit of my life. Of course, I had to take about ten Prozac that day. (laughter)*

*I've never had any formal leadership training. I'm actually attending a series of leadership workshops. We were talking about service and how we thought leaders would be service oriented or see themselves as serving their followers. That wasn't a new idea, but at this workshop they talked about making sure you really knew your followers - your clients. While that may be, somewhat, part of management it's also a piece of leadership. How can you lead a group if you don't know, really, who they are? Maybe that's easier for us as women in libraries because we came up through the ranks more slowly than men did - many of us did. I don't know if I could document this but my guess is that men don't spend long on the front line. They're promoted more rapidly than women are.*

*I think that redefining and promoting leadership has something to do with sharing one's experience. The only way that another person can say, "Oh, oh, I might be a leader, too," is if they know what leaders think and feel. And so, by leaders sharing their experience, verbally or written, someone else might relate to pieces of it and say, "Oh, that might be me." So, I think that's important. You have to have a personal identification with something.*



## **FRANCES' VOICE ..... SELECTED PIECES**

*I'm at the 50 year mark and thinking that there is more to life than career but I'm also at the point where I'm comfortable taking more risks as I get older. I feel that I'm focusing on learning more about myself and understanding myself.*

*Do I think of myself as a leader? Yes, but it took a long time.*

*I defined my self by what others said about me. Like when you asked me to run for Florida Library Association president, it was such an honor. It hadn't been one of my goals but it gratified my ego. Right now I get a great deal of validation at the local level -- but I don't take it for granted. I didn't always have the self-confidence to accept such validation. Now I say "Damn straight!" Of course, I'm not ostentatious about it, I keep my humble side too. But I've become better at library promotion and self-promotion.*

*Participation in the association can support leadership growth. I felt really connected on the legislative committee and I contributed to that work. The chair created a very cooperative environment. She valued everyone's input. Sometimes, however, association politics can be very depleting. Sometimes I prefer to put my energy into local successes. But the association does have a responsibility to develop future leaders. There are segments of the membership that are starved for this.*

*I've been looking for clues within myself ever since I got your e-mail message. And a strange thing happened -- I opened the newspaper and there was a list of the top twenty-five leaders in the county and there was a list of twenty-five people in the honorable mention category. I got honorable mention. It is a small county but I'm proud of the library system's progress. We are a team. We collaborate. The library has a fantastic PR image. It's fabulous, but I don't take it for granted. We work at it. Everything happens through relationships.*

*It is how I treat people. I make them feel good about themselves and I think leaders feel good about themselves. I have the ability to do it with pizzazz and enthusiasm -- and still have substance. I surround myself with people who complement my skills. I'm aware of my weaknesses; I have a dynamite team with my assistant director.*

*It was hard to get to this point. I had many self esteem issues, now I feel OK!*

*Now I'm part of a male dominated group. I'm the only female department head in the group of twelve. There is an "underground" good old boy network but they are "charmed" by me, they don't dish me. I can hold my own and I haven't held back. I use charm and a message. I stroke egos. Again it is all about relationships, building communication. I have fun with them in the group setting, the sense of play comes out. I use humor to blend in.*

*Can I remember a time when I felt like a leader? Recently I felt like a leader because the county started a new leadership development program. The county administrator invited me to be part of the inaugural class.*

*Another example was when I left Smith County to become the Director in Maple County- to make the decision to come to unknown territory. This boosted my confidence, at the same time it eroded a bit because there were so many new responsibilities in new place, new people, citizens, staff etc. Sometimes it was like a roller coaster of self-confidence. But I knew that I could take a risk, I could step out of my cocoon and change. I wasn't afraid to tell people that I don't have all the answers --but we'll figure it out together.*

*A student from one of my classes told me she remembered what I had said to her. To be a leader don't be arrogant, holier than thou. Remember where you came from, consider others, and never look down. Have confidence. Seek understanding.*

*Our conversation has been helpful to me, I don't think we talk about leadership enough. That's one reason I'm looking forward to the county leadership program. I'm going to try and talk to my colleagues more.*



#### **DORIS' VOICE ..... SELECTED PIECES**

*I don't feel like I'm a leader, but I am in a leadership position so I try to do what I can.*

*How did I get to a position of leadership? When library system was forming I was reference librarian. I attended a meeting about transition. I made a suggestion that they needed to let people know what was available in all the 'branch' libraries. The library director appointed me to handle public relations and I asked lots of people for advice. I organized it even though I didn't really know how, but I contacted others who had experience. We told library story, library system grew. I started with an idea, a vision. As we talk about it I realize that I have been in leadership positions.*

*I felt honored to be elected president of the association. Of course, I had to run three times before I was elected. I don't know why I got elected. I had been on the association board and committees for years. The professional association helped me feel more confident.*

*It was hard to follow you as president of the state association. I look up to you as a library leader and I felt intimidated because I don't put myself in the same caliber as you. So I developed my own vision and worked with people to develop their ideas. It was good to work with you too.*

*After I got your e-mail message I asked a few people if they thought I was a leader. It was a hard question to ask them. It was hard for them to answer. They said I was approachable. People respect my opinion. I could get people to do what needs done without resistance. But I still have my doubts about being a leader.*

*There are certain desirable characteristics of leaders, but not everyone has all those characteristics. It's very personal. People I see as leaders can admit being wrong, be very strong or firm; see problems and try to correct them; act more assertive and have vision. Some leaders are visionary but don't have people skills. Leaders must be tolerant and listen to ideas from others. Maybe we need teams of leaders, bringing together different skills.*

*What would make me feel more like a leader? I would like to be more articulate, be clearer to others. I would like to speak more, do more public speaking. I would like to be more self-assured when I speak.*





## **AMY'S VOICE ..... SELECTED PIECES**

*Our profession has a tendency to attract people who are not strong leaders, not people who say they are going to set the world on fire today. So our challenge is to help people find their strengths and confidence.*

*I was working in the community college and I had some personal things happen to me. I realized that it would be important to be able to take care of myself as an independent woman and take care of my children. The best way to do that in the community college was to get better job. I pursued getting my doctorate. My goal was to get a better job. I wanted to take a leadership role in library area.*

*Leadership is when you have personal goals you want to achieve, so you are willing to accept challenges. You will say, 'OK I will do this because I want something to happen.' Then there are professional goals that are sometimes the same as personal goals. Sometimes I'm trying to make a difference. Three to five years ago I might have had a different definition. Because sometimes you think you know what you are doing, then after you reflect on it for awhile you are not as self-confident. You are not as confident that is exactly the way it is.*

*Even in our profession many library administrators are men or administrators were predominately men -- for a long time. More recently those positions have become more & more available to women. We still see a lot of men at top echelon. We still see the pyramid model even today especially in the university. Top down, authority filters down. Many people want someone at the top saying this is the way it is going to be. That doesn't foster the growth of people below. A lot of times they think they don't have to deal with something because 'someone up there' will deal with it. So 4-5 years ago I would have said I have the answer. We would look at other organizations or businesses, or corporations but that's changed. So I looked at the team approach, I really still believe in that.*

*Leadership is challenging and interesting and even fun. But you can't just decide to do it one day because you think, 'I can do good job. I can be in charge'. It doesn't work like that. There*

*is a lot to learn. It was learning process. I try to create opportunities for staff to practice leadership skills in committees and with smaller projects, like periodicals or even distance learning. Unfortunately, I've seen a few examples where people don't know how to handle being 'in charge'. It becomes an ego trip, a power trip. They become difficult for the team. People find out that everyone makes mistakes. Rules can't be more important than the students' needs. You can't set yourself up as a perfectionist. It is not going to work. But I still believe that every librarian can be a leader -- in some way.*

*What I have done is taken offices in organizations and associations because I had a reason that I wanted to do it at that particular time and reason. When I got nominated for the presidency of the state association I thought they were going to be really nice to me give me flowers. (She laughed.) But it turned out to be real hard work. If you're not prepared for hard work you shouldn't do it.*

*Passion is part of why people participate in professional organizations. When I was a state councilor for ALA I wanted to change the conference policy. I thought it was critical to get the national association to become more cognizant of the needs of the state and regional associations. They had been needlessly rude and unprofessional. We changed the policy and I also learned a great deal about national governance.*

*Another part of leadership is having goal, having global view of where things are going. I think that's a real important key to leadership. All of us sit around and read our journals, but some people are more inclined to look for trends. Ways we need to go. That's a leadership trait - to be able to see the direction to go in and then to try to convince people to come along in that direction. Convince people to follow.*



#### **CAROL'S VOICE ..... SELECTED PIECES**

*My family was a major influence on me. In our household we were told that we were extraordinary, wonderful people who could do anything! This gave me a positive outlook on life. Although I may have occasional misgivings personally, I know I have the support of my immediate family and extended family. I felt like a leader in high school. I participated in*

*activities, got elected to offices. I liked to bring people together toward action. I was "egotistical" enough to think I could do it.*

*I started in libraries as a paraprofessional. I was a teacher but couldn't find a job, I thought library work would be an interim job. After six to seven years I decided to pursue a masters degree. The assistant director of library was so encouraging, a mentor. When I was a paraprofessional my mentor allowed several of us to go to the library conference which was very unusual. I perceived it as a reward. It was big commitment and cost for the library. I still remember it. It was an honor to be chosen. It really set me on fire to be able to participate in a professional organization and decision-making.*

*I wanted to participate and serve in the organization but I didn't dream of being president. I was gratified by the vote of confidence. It was a tremendous honor and big responsibility. I was "astonished" when I was elected because I had not been on the board; I had only served on committees and gone to conferences. I took this as a message that my leadership on the local level was being seen as indication of my leadership abilities. Being president made me "feel" like a leader. It was confirmation.*

*There was a time at the end of my term when the state librarian complimented me on my tenure as president. He also made comments that he was glad I was on legislative committee because it was a tough year. These compliments made me feel like a leader.*

*I always felt that I had good ideas to share. You must believe in yourself to be a leader. And you need people to come along. People need to be involved. This sounds cliched but I believe it. Sure there are moments of self-doubt but I deal with it. I've looked behind me and found no one was there but I just re-grouped.*

*I don't want to sound prejudiced but most of the leadership models we had were men and I think men are more autocratic, not that I put them "all in the same bag". I recognize the danger of stereotyping anyone. But the ways of leading were different for women and men. Even more importantly, men don't seem to support woman as leaders.*

*I've experienced many interesting situations over many years. I have had to prove myself with county government and legislators. At one point I had to take male library trustee to talk to legislator who wouldn't take a woman seriously. I acknowledged the problem and didn't make an issue of it -- for the good of the library. I pick my battles.*

*I learned years after I became director that the county clerk of the court was convinced a woman couldn't administer and manage the library. He thought he should take over. I'm glad I didn't learn this for several years. I have finally learned to really believe in myself.*

*The chairman of the board of trustees was like a mentor. He gave me s much encouragement, even when I was new to the job. He has continued to believe I was the right person for the job.*

*My strongest skill is that I surround myself with good people. I share as much information as possible.*



## **National Scene & Gender**

I wondered do presidents of national associations feel the same way as those from state associations? I thought I would defer this line of questioning for a later study, but serendipity provided several opportunities for me to talk with national leaders, Gloria and Bob. (Note: The American Library Association (ALA) has over 50,000 members and it is the largest library association in the world. Presidents are active in national politics, media relations and external relations, as well as internal activities with librarians.)

*"You might be surprised how I feel. Sure, I was the first woman to be elected treasurer of the American Library Association. I was president of the ALA. I've been president of my own publishing business for over 20 years! But I've always hated being called a leader. I wasn't comfortable at all until I learned about servant leadership. Then I could see it. I feel comfortable talking about service. With my work as ALA president and my involvement in leadership development activities I've had some time to think about it -- service, vision, power and relationships. Working together is the key. We need new models, not just the models of control."*

I thought I should talk with men who were association leaders to see if their perceptions were different, but there wasn't time for this report. One day I had a brief informal telephone conversation with Bob, a library director and past-president on the national level. After we concluded our business I told him I was starting a project on leadership. I did not mention gender. I casually asked him, "So do you think of yourself as a leader?"

*"Yeah sure. I think of myself as a leader -- but I always knew I was a leader. Some people just aren't leaders, but I'm the type that can lead easily."*

I started my research conversations because I wondered if women in a feminized profession like libraries would have a strong sense of their leadership abilities. I thought that women in the feminized environment would have models of other women leaders. On the other hand, I wondered if I would find women unsure of themselves as leaders. I met a woman in the airport who was not a library leader but she still seemed to have a feminized view of herself concerning leadership. She had been a dentist for over ten years and she owned a successful practice that employed seven people. She is currently studying for her MBA.

*I'm not the leader type. But yes I do participate in state and national associations, committees, conferences and such. They only elected me to be president of the state association because I'm a doer. I get things done when I say I will. I just don't have the personality to be a leader. In high school I wasn't one of those popular girls. You have to be popular to be a leader. I went to dental school to support my children after a divorce. I've always wanted an MBA so now at 45 years old I'm back in school. But I still don't see myself becoming a leader.*



### **PART III: MEANING & LITERATURE REVIEW**

How do we know if we are leaders? When do we feel like leaders? How important is the opinion of others? Do women feel there is a gender difference in these questions? How do we define leadership? These were the questions that formed the nucleus of my quest for meaning. Initially I was interested in specific examples of communication between librarians (women leaders with authority) and technical staff (who may often be highly analytical even autocratic males). This proved to be on the periphery of my conversations. There was not time in one interview to explore the implications of these relationships. In conversations where we did touch on the topic I found indications that this would be an area for a future study. Participants spent more time describing their personal feelings, opinions and stories. Technology is still an issue

because the technological rate of changing is dramatically affecting the information world. With rapid change libraries, like other organizations, need confident leaders to plan for the future. Leadership was the topic of my study; technology was the reason I am interested in leadership.

Women in my study, including myself as participant, seemed to find it difficult to describe ourselves as leaders. I was defining the participants as leaders, just by contacting them for my project. I told them that I selected them because they had been association presidents. Yet, it was still difficult for the women to strongly proclaim their leadership status. One participant even clearly stated she didn't feel like a leader. Betty and I joked that what we needed was a checklist of forty questions. If we could answer the questions we would know we were leaders. In my conversations I would frequently end by asking what leadership skills the women thought were most important. Responses were predictable, standard catalog of skills: goal-oriented, visionary, articulate, risk taking. The descriptions also included a group of more interpersonal comments: develop talents of others, involve others, motivate others, build relationships, understand and consider others, know yourself, serve, listen and be humble. The cooperative, sharing, collaborative skills are basic to librarians and the library philosophy.

In several cases participants cited me as a leader they admired. This made me uncomfortable and I tried to change the direction of the conversation after only cursory acknowledgement. I knew their comments were sincere and accurate. However, I thought that it would seem self-serving if I asked follow-up questions about their assessment of my leadership or impact on them. One woman characterized the library profession as a group of people who have typically not been aggressive or dynamic -- not leader types. I agree that historically the library attracted quieter people who wanted to organize materials. In recent decade the library and information management field has changed and so have the expectations. An important point is how women (the majority of librarians) perceive the profession as leadership oriented.

RELATED LITERATURE: Marty Field Belenky et al, Women's Ways of Knowing: Development of Self, Voice and Mind, 1986, Nancy Goldberger et al, Knowledge, Difference and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing, 1996. Women's way of knowing is more internal, subjective, based on listening and speaking. This is contrasted with a more distanced approach to knowledge. Women focus on connections and relationships. Women's style (hesitant, qualified, question-posing) and content (practical, relationship oriented) of communication is typically devalued. This book could be cited in several sections of analysis.

Our conversations were often like a pendulum, we might think we are leaders but we question our own perception. In some cases participants would say that they had come to think of themselves as a leader but then they would add a comment about working on a team, or continuing process of defining themselves. People talked about being humble and not ostentatious. One person used the word egotistical. In Western culture women have not been characterized as articulate, competent, decision-makers. Even with strong affirming family support one participant mentioned she still had occasional misgivings. Other participants discussed self-esteem and the need for self-assurance. A telling phrase was the "roller coaster of self confidence." RELATED LITERATURE: Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership, 1995.

[Might need paragraph that briefly traces feminist thought/theory from 1960's to 1990s. This is important in the movement from women thinking they should become the same as men, then the move to be different but equal, then better, then more diversity etc. The ages of women in study would be related to trends. Where are we now?]

The women with whom I talked frequently mentioned validation or confirmation from someone. A job title made a big difference, like director of an institution or president of an association. A compliment from someone in power was important. Being asked to present ideas at a conference or publish a paper were seen as indicators of leadership because other people value your knowledge. These activities are part of the on-going process of learning to understand self.

Being nominated and elected as association president made the women feel validation of leadership potential and skills. Yet many mentioned that they were surprised to be selected or did not know why they were elected. It was an unexpected honor. One participant clearly felt comfortable and actually sought the presidential nomination. She had goals that she wanted to achieve. I declined the nomination several times but eventually I ran for president out of a sense of duty to represent multitype library cooperatives. Several participants agreed that the professional association had a role to play in leadership development, several questioned the cause and effect. We did not dwell on specifics. A study of professional associations and women in leadership could be another related study. RELATED LITERATURE: ? [Anything on associations --might be too far outside focus of this paper.]



Several people mentioned the lack of dialogue about leadership. Women in this study had not discussed leadership extensively or on a personal basis. I found the conversations to be affirming and the participants mentioned a similar feeling. One woman, who began our conversation saying that she definitely did not feel like a leader, later mentioned that she began to see herself as a leader during our conversation. RELATED LITERATURE: Mikal Bakhtin (theory of constructing self through dialogue). Also find cite for Art Bochner (description of other necessarily implies definition of self). James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995 also talk about general need for dialogue, modeling, telling stories, and celebrating success.

Power is or has been confused with leadership. The theoretical leadership paradigm is changing but people are struggling to change their image and behaviors. Participants were personally affected by the autocratic male dominated model of leadership - dominance. I heard about the pyramid, top-down, academic authority and controlled corporate style. The most telling examples showed that women feel men do not support women in leadership positions. There are exceptions to the example but the problem is very real to the women I interviewed. One participant had an excellent relationship with her male group of managers; she charmed them with her humor and knowledge. RELATED LITERATURE: Dorothy W. Cantor and Toni Bernay, *Women in Power: The Secrets of Leadership*, 1992. Patricia Glass Schuman, "Women, Power and Libraries", *Library Journal*, 1984 [president of American Library Association]. Mary R. Somerville, "Yin Management in a Yang World", *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 1995 [president of American Library Association].

In all our conversations about leadership women clarified their leadership in terms of the team. Even the participant who received recognition for county leadership quickly mentioned the support of her team and library public relations. She did not talk about herself. Participants focused on empowering others and working with teams. Participants talked about surrounding themselves with people who had complementary skills. The women mentioned sharing, listening and seeking understanding. This is the position where I found my comfort level. I redefined leadership as a facilitator of collaborative activities. The participant who was president on the national level was more comfortable by redefining leadership as service, servant leadership.

Librarianship is a feminized profession but it is still subject to the larger world picture of women and leadership. Even in libraries the leadership positions have been masculine. As

women have assumed more and more leadership positions, they have made an impact on leadership styles. I think participants in this study represent the movement toward the new leadership paradigm, a more feminized model. RELATED LITERATURE: Sally Helgesen, The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership, 1990. Margaret Wheatley, [need to check out her work]. Patricia Glass Schuman, "Leaders Manage the Dream", Wilson Library Bulletin, 1994 [president of American Library Association]. Two other trends that are related include the increasing interest in servant leadership and emotional intelligence. Women in libraries embody the leadership by serving and stewardship. RELATED LITERATURE: Larry C. Spears ed. Insights on Leadership, 1998 (essays by Peter Block, Ken Blanchard, Stephen Covey, Margaret Wheatley). Joe Batten, "Servant Leadership: A Passion to Serve, Patricia Sellers, These Women Rule", Fortune, 1999. Daniel P. Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, 1997 and "What Makes a Leader", Harvard Business Review, 1998. The five components of emotional intelligence and the ramifications of applying these with leaders seem directly related to this study of women library leaders: realistic self-awareness, self regulation & comfort with ambiguity, organizational commitment and optimism, empathy, expertise in building teams and managing relationships.

At one point at the early stages of this study I was feeling that women should be able to assert their belief in their leadership abilities. I wondered why I was hesitant. Why were we so tentative in our statements?! Now I see our comments as a very realistic and represent the healthy search for meaning. We are leaders precisely because we continue to seek knowledge and self-understanding. We continue to refocus, redefine, and seek to understand ourselves in relation to others. We are pursuing the women's way of knowing. Yet perhaps we have not recognized and valued this behavior. The difficulty may be in the expectations of others for definitive statements. RELATED LITERATURE: Mary Catherine Bateson, Composing a Life, 1989. Eric Eisenberg, "Flirting With Meaning", Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 1998. Eisenberg discusses ambiguity as the opportunity to challenge or re-invent identity, a way of flirting with new and different notions of self and world.

## **SO WHAT?**

In library literature little has been written about women in leadership in the past nineteen years, 11 records in index of library literature. Leadership overall as a topic (not defined by women) resulted in 410 citations. Women in management expanded the result to 20 citations. [I

still feel the need to check dissertations and books as well as articles in library literature.] Two of the most comprehensive articles I found to date were "Gender Differences in Leadership" by Barbara B. Moran, 1992 and "Library Leadership: Does Gender Make a Difference", 1993. Both are theoretical and historical, not qualitative/ethnographic. These authors begin to focus on relationships and less gender stereotyping. They do not want to define leadership by male or female characteristics, but suggest diversity. [This might be related to feminist movement theory at that time -- need further work.] Yet they recognize cultural changes. Moran's article traces the historical changes in perception of gender and leadership. She concludes by saying when women are fully accepted as leaders, it will be the springboard for men to change their style. [I need to work on this section a bit more.]

I propose that women need more opportunities to talk about leadership. In libraries we see more and more leadership institutes for the new and emerging leaders. We need to expand the activities to include seasoned library leaders. RELATED LITERATURE: James W. Carey, "A Cultural Approach to Communication", Communication As Culture, 1988. [maybe find better cite]. The idea to conclude is that we construct our sense of reality by the words we choose to communicate. This may tie back into dialogue and co-construction of self. Women library leaders have many leadership characteristics and are seeking other capabilities. They are trying to understand new leadership models; they are part of shaping new models. Yet they were in the process of forming their leadership styles during past 25-30 years. They were affected by previous hierarchical, male models. These women have been successfully flirting with ambiguity but they need to talk about it more, and learn to feel comfortable with their way of knowing and seeking. During our conversations we faltered in our self-definitions; but our story telling was a powerful tool that we can continue to aim toward understanding women and library leadership.

I present this collage of perceptions as an assemblage of women who are library leaders. A collage is more than the sum total of pieces; it becomes something different because the pieces are brought together. A collage is art not science. A collage represents the thoughts, feelings designs and a sense of beauty by someone who assembles the pieces. The assembler is like a catalyst but a collage is not possible without the contributions from many people.