

**Disclaimer:**

The following is a class assignment, a final paper for “Methods and Theories of Feminism and Gender”. It is a balance between fulfilling the needs of the paper, to have certain features such as being a proposed advocacy project, to apply the class readings, with the intention to use the paper as a start to work with Colorado Women Leading Government as well as share the results with other local government professionals through ELGL. This should not be mistaken for a fully vetted scholarly article in an official journal, but instead as research done over the span of a few months with limitations in both time and resources.

With this understanding in mind, the value I personally find this project is both my own self-reflection as a person in a very privileged position advocating for those who are not, as well as an overview of the ways and nuances men are involved with advocacy for women. This is not so much a set of clear instructions and conclusions, but a foundation to which the former can be hopefully reached through further facilitation and discussion. There is no perfect solution to the question of if and how to include men in advocating for women’s leadership, it is a matter of finding the best imperfect answers for the needs and wants of the effort, to be consistent and effective enough that CWLG can spend time and effort to other matters than men. After all, the overall point is to promote women, that by having the conversation about men today, we may better concentrate on women tomorrow.

Assisting Women Leading Colorado on the Consistent and Effective Inclusion of Men

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## **Colorado Women Leading Government**

Colorado Women Leading Government (CWLG) is a subcommittee of the Colorado City and County Managers Association (CCCMA) that is dedicated to seeing more women take on and succeed in executive positions in local government such as City Manager and County Administrator. Created in 2011, Colorado Women Leading Government started off small, its first event taking place the subsequent year. They've progressively expanded including creating the "Trailblazer Award" in 2015, a statewide award for an individual helping push for women's leadership in Colorado municipalities and counties, as well as hosting their first full conference in May 2019.

As the group grows its resources and ability to make an impact, CWLG more than any other organization is in a position to advocate for women's leadership in Colorado local government. It is for this reason that they are an ideal group to work with for advocacy, one with a great deal of potential, but still in a transition phase from a committee catering to a score of participants at a time to one that can reach hundreds or thousands. This paper will cover one advocacy project, a facilitation and discussion of men's involvement with their efforts.

### **Reflection as a Male Feminist**

There are two main considerations why supporting CWLG is the advocacy project I chose and feel confident that it meets a feminist framework. The first is regarding "action" as identified by Judith Cook and Mary Fonow as one of five elements of feminist methodology (Cancian, 626). As a local government administrator who is a member of CCCMA, I have a professional connection to CWLG. It was through this connection that I spoke with the CWLG

Chair, consulting her on what would benefit the committee, the cause, the question of if and how to include men one of several potential topics brought up.

The second consideration is the recognition that I am a cisgender, Caucasian male who is completing my first formal course in feminist methodologies. Although I am confident in what I have learned, it is integral for anyone in a position of privilege advocating for people they are not a member of to measure our level of understanding against the amount of change we're trying to enact. I do not feel I have earned whether through knowledge or any other merit to propose a more ambitious project starting from the ground up. I feel at this early stage, it is more meaningful to complement, to support those who have already been working hard to make positive change for women rather than try to lead the charge myself.

This follows at least some discussions of men's involvement. Men as feminists can and do receive the "pedestal effect" through gratuitous acclaim, heightened attention, unearned credibility, career mobility, and romantic attraction. (Peretz, 2). There is some practical reasoning for this, as men by virtue of their privileged gender status can sometimes more easily make inroads with certain audiences (primarily men) and certain institutions (those that follow more patriarchal mindsets). However, to accept this without some challenge, without some humility and effort to push the needle towards equity is to undermine feminist activism. Perhaps it's for this reason that "women who [identify] more strongly as feminists [report] that men are better allies when they take a backseat when addressing gender inequality instead of the driver's seat" (Wiley, 661). Although this statement can be contested, I feel that as a man pushing for my first feminist advocacy project, better to be too humble and do a little bit well at the start, than to be too arrogant and aim for a grander project poorly.

It is the dynamic between action and humility, knowing what connections I have, as well as my own limited perspective and experience, that leads to an advocacy project of support. The remainder of this essay will cover an overview of some of the literature surrounding women's career advancement in the public sector, then applying feminist methodologies and theories into how men can be involved in CWLG's three goals to systematically call out bias, provide professional development opportunities, and close the mentorship gap.

### **Local Government & Feminism**

There is extensive research that has been accomplished in regards to women, leadership, and public sector work. This research covers everything from the effectiveness of female leaders (D'Aostino, 533-4), values of female leaders (Hamidullah, 257), education of public administration students (Bishu, 156-8) (Scachter, 149), as well as intersectionality in the context of female leaders in local government (Bishu, 2). For local government in particular, only thirteen percent of top executives (city and town managers/administrators) are women (Bishu, 4), and this small percentage continues to draw academics to ask the question of why.

Beyond research there are organizations who are taking action. CWLG is one of fourteen affiliate organizations under the umbrella of The League of Women in Government (Colorado Women Leading Government, 4). There are groups across the nation advocating to push women into leadership. For CWLG in particular, their recent accomplishments cannot be understated, developing new spaces, new structures by and on behalf of women.

There appears to be two main theories of feminism behind current research and current movements of women. The first is Liberal Feminism, the focus on women attaining leadership in positions within an institution traditionally male, speaks more to "egalitarianism liberal feminism" that seeks to create a balance, fair opportunities (Tong, 29). Similarly, it is a push that

does favor and focus on well-educated professionals, women who have some privileges and standing already. Although this is a common critique of Liberal Feminism that it leaves out more poor, less educated women, in this instance for a group with a specific set of goals instead of a universal theory, it does hold merit to work with their target audience.

The second theory, or theories, are those that deal with intersectionality, including Third-Wave Feminism, Women of Color Feminisms, Queer Feminism, etc. It is not just women who are underrepresented in local government leadership, but other demographics based on race, gender, social class, and more. For this reason, some elements of these theories will also be applied.

What will not be included, but deserves special mention, is Radical Feminism, which tends to focus on the women's bodies more than minds, and in particular Radical Cultural Feminism that advocates for women to develop new, better systems that do not involve men. Although there is certainly merit to the idea of creating new institutions outside of patriarchal systems, the goals of CWLG is most decidedly looking to reform the system from within, to elevate women into our current forms of local government, not subvert them. For this reason alone, men will as a necessity be involved at some level.

### **Project: The Inclusion of Men**

The advocacy project in sum is to help advise and assist CWLG on its dilemma concerning men. To exclude men entirely will fail to create necessary links and bridges within local government management to promote equity. To involve men too heavily will dilute the benefits to women and fail to create substantial change. To take each training, event, and opportunity case by case will be a drain of time and other resources better spent on furthering the cause as a whole.

It will be participatory (Cancian, 627), and involve meeting with the CWLG members on working through each of their goals and how to establish agreed upon parameters and norms on if, when, and how to include men. How long this takes, how many meetings it will take, who specifically will be involved will be up to CWLG. It is their discretion that will determine the priority and implementation of this project compared to their other tasks. It is very likely these discussions will bring up other concerns, issues, ideas, which will be embraced as the question of men's involvement does not exist within a vacuum of CWLG's efforts. Although the initial scope is to focus on the consistent inclusion of men, any other benefit and topic that is brought up will be embraced, not denied as "not relating" to the task at hand.

The following sections for each goal of CWLG offer an initial guideline for the discussion, breaking down how men are and can be potentially involved.

- Systematically Call out Bias: Men being called out for their bias, men calling out bias in others, men as passive beneficiaries to bias.
- Provide Professional Development Opportunities: Men providing professional development, men receiving professional development.
- Close the Mentorship Gap: Men as mentors, men as mentees.

Each of these potential types and levels of involvement have their own nuances and considerations. Whether these seven categories/situations end up as the defining ways CWLG interacts with men or whether through this project a new, more effective categorization is developed, they offer a starting point.

Overall there are few specific details at this point, as the intent is to create a more genuine discussion that takes the lead from CWLG. The goal is facilitation, that is to guide the discussion regarding men, not to lecture the committee on the subject. This more flexible structure, starting

with a base of information that can be adapted, tweaked, improved upon, will overall help this project be more collaborative than an effort that assumes the step by step process prematurely.

### **Systematically Call out Bias**

Bias exists both explicitly through specific actions such as stereotyping, harassment, and other intentional acts as well as implicitly such as hiring norms and policies that favor male candidates or other specific demographics. What is often a harder challenge than finding bias is determining where to start when the very traditions of public administration were developed by men, for men.

For the scope of this project, not all kinds of bias are included. Women have the potential to adopt and perpetuate patriarchal systems, but are not the focus of the project. The same with institutional biases, covered a little in the third category of men under this goal, but not fully.

### ***Men being called out for their bias***

Men who are called out by CWLG for their bias are not volunteering and potentially not willing participants, yet they nevertheless are included within the three goals. Women find better success dealing with bias when they are the ones to define the event, the action. Sexual harassment as a positive example was predominately defined by women when made into law as opposed to other laws that have suffered from not having those most vulnerable help define them (MacKinnon, 105). It is therefore recommended that men committing bias do not define it themselves, but are instead engaged within CWLG's own framework and understanding.

Bias extends beyond the workplace and interpersonal relations, the outcomes of projects may also exhibit clear biases. One clear example is "workfare", discussed by Jane L. Collins researching the results of Wisconsin's workfare program in the early 2000s.



“The women who are being forced into work are mothers raising children. Because of their poverty and because of the demands of raising children, these women need flexible jobs more than most of us. But as we have seen, the jobs they are able to get in fast food, retail, care work, and housekeeping are among the least flexible in the economy. These also have the most punitive work rules.” (Collins, 149).

This is the sort of bias that goes to the heart of leaders’ commitment to the public, to residents. It is not enough to focus on how women in the workplace are treated, how we engage in our work and the results of that work are areas of bias that must be called out as well.

Finally, bias is not only based on gender and sex. Other dimensions include race, to sexual-orientation, to economic status, educational attainment, ability, the list is extensive. “The problem with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, as some critics charge, but rather the opposite—that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw, 1242). As CWLG engages with men (and women, and institutional norms) that are biased, it is crucial that it doesn’t assume bias is equal for all women, but that differences among women play out differently and what may not be biased against some women is still biased against others.

### ***Men calling out bias***

Men, just as women, have the potential to call out bias in others. Whether it is a man calling out bias against himself for any number of reasons such as those listed above, or whether calling out bias on behalf of others, they can become active participants in CWLG’s first goal. There is historical precedence such as with John Stuart Mill, a famed 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and academic, “he insisted intellectual achievement gaps between women and men simply results from men’s more thorough education and privileged position” (Tuong, 18). Whether such

men are allowed to speak up about bias with CWLG's support, encouragement, training, or if some other more formal relationship is formed, some men will engage positively with systematically calling out bias.

***Men as passive beneficiaries to bias***

The final group is those men, most if not all, who benefit from existing biases who do not take an active role in it. Men do not need to actively promote gender-biased policies and traditions to benefit from those already in place. Even if they do not wish to benefit from such norms cannot always deny privileges that are more subtle and systemic. One group that highlights how strong these systems can be are with transmen.

“On an organization level, some employers rehire transmen as men, institutionally sanctioning their transition into a man's career track... Employers also issue top-down dictates that give transmen access to men's restrooms and lockers and ask coworkers to change names and pronouns with their transgender colleague. These employer responses show how gender boundaries can shift-former women can be accepted as men-without a change in structural gender relations or organizational policies.” (Schilt, 447)

When traditionally male-associated traits like rationality, decisiveness, objectivity are valued higher than female-associated traits like empathy, care, and communication, there is an advantage men have, more naturally assumed to have the more valued traits and more rewarded for exhibiting them. From less social pressures to spend time with raising a family to not having to deal with explicit bias, men as passive beneficiaries are more likely to achieve the position of City Manager or County Administrator all other variables the same.

Since these men are more difficult to engage with since there are more of them, and since the overall problem is not something they alone can fix as individuals, new space and methods

are needed. One example of a new space, a new method is the “presencing” of indigenous women and girls in Canada. They essentially meet in public spaces in a way that is not a traditional protest for they don’t wield signs and messages, but instead live and engage in their culture in a way that challenges their invisibility and their status as victims (de Finney, 29). Presencing is specific to the culture it stems from, but other efforts can be done that match the practices of female leaders in local government. The CWLG Annual Conference is a perfect example, a new space created by women. Men as passive beneficiaries of bias do engage (albeit passively) with these new spaces as well, exist with the new opportunities for women just as they exist with their privileges.

### **Provide Professional Development Opportunities**

Of the three goals, providing professional development is the most straightforward and easy to understand. Still, like the others there are different ways men are and can be involved. Just as the other goals, there is nuance within each.

#### ***Men providing professional development***

Local government leadership is complex. It requires working knowledge in many disciplines such as management, budgeting, law, planning, law enforcement, utilities, public works, and more, and depending on the needs of the community may require greater expertise in one or more of those fields. To be prepared for the role requires a great deal of professional development. In this way, these executive positions share a similarity with feminist thought, that generally seeks truth by looking into a situation through multiple lens. *Women, Power, and Politics in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Iran*, a critical examination of the female condition in Iran that engages in law, art, economics, and other fields (Rostami-Povey, 8-12), so too are local government leaders best when weighing multiple layers of information as opposed to assuming one inherent truth.

Professional development should and must come from multiple sources. Although ideally other women can provide this professional development synthesizing their professional expertise with life experiences as women, sometimes they are not available. It is also asking much for women to bear the burden alone to train other women. As such, men at minimum can offer their expertise within their relevant fields, potentially mitigating any gender bias with additional training or support. This will be dependent on beneficiaries, understanding their own needs best to what degree they seek professional development that is catered to women, and/or that covers specific technical skills.

### ***Men receiving professional development***

On the surface level, men obtaining professional development does not fit the goals of CWLG and is therefore not necessary. CWLG may provide technical skills to men if it wishes, but refraining is perfectly fine and does not compromise the mission of advocating for women in leadership positions. What may be of use though is considering providing professional development to men on sex and gender whether explicit or implicit. Explicitly training men on equity, bias, other barriers to women's career can win allies, may encourage men receiving professional development to more likely also engage with CWLG in favorable ways (calling out bias, providing professional development and mentorship) and less likely to engage with CWLG in negative ways (being called out for bias).

Implicitly, there may also be benefit to training men in projects, practices, and methods that are developed by women. In another profession, architecture, Jane Rendell lists five main contributions women have made to their work, namely collectivity, interiority, alterity, performativity, and materiality (Rendell, 20). Just as any architect, man or woman, can be inspired and bring a more feminist approach to their work using one or more of those themes, so

too can both men and women be inspired by and imitate the best practices of female professionals in local government and be influenced more indirectly.

### **Close the Mentorship Gap**

Mentors, experienced leaders helping to raise new leaders, is similar but distinct to professional development. Mentorship is more personal, takes more time, builds on a deeper relationship than a class, seminar, or workshop. It is for this reason it takes different considerations regarding the question of men's involvement.

#### ***Men as mentors***

Ideally, as with professional development, a female executive leader in local government can serve as a mentor figure to aspiring women leaders. They will likely have overall the most relatable experience. However, with only 13% of these positions filled by women nationally, it's not realistic or fair to put the burden on these professionals alone to mentor the next generation of female leaders. Men may need to serve as mentors both because of sheer numbers and also to share the work and care it takes to mentor.

Just as a female mentee will have different hardships than men, it is possible for a male mentor to have their own oppression on sexual-orientation, race, and others, even falling under intersectionality where two or more of these categories meet (Tuong, 30). Of course, there are likely potential male mentors who fall under every privileged category, but there is the potential for mentors with different societal challenges to offer their experiences.

Regardless, a male mentor does bring up certain questions and concerns to whether they can understand and guide a female mentee well enough, whether they can balance their own experience with allowing room for their mentee's experiences and perspectives to also flourish.

This may take additional training, effort, consideration, and conversation to make such mentors effective.

### ***Men as mentees***

If the goal is to have women in leadership, it is natural then for these leaders to supervise and manage men. Although men mentoring other men is beyond the scope and point of CWLG's mission, women mentoring men holds some promise. Whether it is mentoring men who have their own disadvantaged status, or simply mentoring future male leaders who being accustomed to, influenced by, and acknowledging of women as leaders too, the male mentee of women today may become the male mentor of women tomorrow.

This does not mean CWLG needs to or should encourage male mentees over female mentees and likely shouldn't. However, when it happens naturally it is not necessarily a step back for women's progress in the profession. It can help serve to normalize women's leadership.

### **Next Steps and Conclusion**

These seven categories of men serve as a starting point to assist CWLG in determining how to consistently and effectively engage with men. They bring up related concerns that are outside the scope of this paper, but not necessarily the project once implemented, such as biased systems and other forms of oppression. So long as CWLG keeps its values, its goals at heart, and spends the time to consider the pros and cons of working with men, they can only benefit by having a set of standards or understandings to avoid unnecessarily conflicts or indecisiveness when questions arise.

There are some common themes that come to light through the initial overview of men's roles through feminist frameworks. One question is concerning educating and training men in a variety of capacities whether as mentor, providing professional development, or passively

benefiting. If such training is developed, what specifically should men be trained in, what priority skills and knowledge will enable them to be quality allies? Another question concerns new space and methods. What are new ways beyond current successes such as the annual conference and Trailblazer Award that will be defined by women that in turn men can either observe or participate in? Finally, a third question is a matter of priorities. Although there is potential in all seven ways men can be engaged within the three goals, it is unlikely that all seven can be engaged equally and within the same timeframe. It then leads the question of which men to start with, which may best lead to the promotion and success of women leading Colorado local government? These are questions that may be answered during implementation, working directly with CWLG.

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