discipline cannot afford not to act. We need to disrupt and change the conversation if we hope to move our discipline and our profession forward.

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# Developing Experience, Networks, and Capacities: Leadership as Practiced in Feminist Human Rights Activism
*Brooke A. Ackerly, Vanderbilt University*

This essay draws on insights from research into human rights activism to propose a feminist human rights account of leadership that could be applied to political science. I advance the view that the practice of leadership is one of building networks and strengthening the capacity of others to advocate for themselves and their communities. In this view, leadership leverages the political and strategic capacities made possible by relative positions of privilege and so transforms the networks, capacities, and privileges of others. Mentoring is an integral part of this

activist approach to leadership. In this view, leadership and mentoring are about developing the networks that make transformation possible; they are collective and political. For illustration, I begin with insights about the importance of networks learned through a personal experience in Bangladesh and juxtapose that experience with the experience of Bangladeshi labor rights organizers before providing a more general account of two key aspects of this leadership: building networks and strengthening capacity in others.


## EXPERIENCE

Experience gives many of us a personal reference point for appreciating the political value of networking and capacity building as the cornerstones of leadership that strengthens people in political community. When I was 26 years old, I spent six months in Bangladesh researching the latest development trend, microcredit, and its impact on the family dynamics of people in poverty. I found that in those organizations that formally and informally encouraged women's capabilities, women knew more about the activities funded by their loans and more about the profitability of the enterprise funded by their loan whether it was their own enterprise (processing rice, for example) or their husband's (rickshaw driving, for example). To do this work, I developed qualitative and quantitative research techniques, I hired and managed research assistants (one of whom had his own ideas about the purpose of the research), and I learned the language enough to supervise the interviews or distract the crowds from the interviewing so that the interviewees could have some privacy. I learned that I had a little bit of privilege, being white, from the United States, educated in the United States, and a Fulbright scholar, but I learned that I was very dependent on others, being white, not knowing how to arrange transportation, and being dependent on interviewees to agree to be interviewed. I used my privilege and dependence judiciously, appreciating the host's making travel arrangements and writing to someone's boss (and copying the U.S. Consulate with some postcolonial self-criticism) when an interview subject did not show up for an interview. I learned these things by doing them both poorly and well and through the advice and mentorship of others.

On the day of my departure, my passport was stolen. This possibility was so common at the time that the U.S. government warned specifically not to

let your passport be stolen on the day of departure (oops!). When I discovered the problem, I marshaled my network of Bangladeshis and Americans. At the time, two Bangladeshis had special legal authority to be on both sides of immigration; they would meet official U.S. personnel on one side of immigration and shepherd them through to their transportation on the other side. I figured that one of those people could get me to the audience who would have the authority to let me leave without evidence — the visa in my passport — that I had been in the country legally. I went to the home of the cultural attaché of the U.S. Embassy, who wrote me a letter on official U.S. Embassy letterhead testifying that the photocopies of my visa and passport were not forgeries, that I had been in Bangladesh as a Fulbright scholar, and that I was known personally as who I said I was. Tariq, one of those two Bangladeshis, arrived while the cultural attaché was writing the letter and took me to the airport. The Embassy driver, confident I would be leaving, handed me a packet of mail from U.S. citizens, addressed to U.S. residents and stamped with first-class postage; I was to drop the mail in any mailbox upon my return to the United States. The wife of the cultural attaché who was my main embassy contact in Bangladesh, not confident I would be leaving, offered their Dalmatian-spotted bedroom and, for the next day, Christmas dinner. It was, however, Christmas Eve, and I was ready to be home with my family.

To cut to the chase, things did not go well at the airport, but I kept my cool. I wore a bright pink shalwar kameez — the same tired one I had been wearing all day — and negotiated my Bangla. Should I slide my "s" to be more rural, less educated, or have a crisp, "apni kamoon achen?" with a "ch" sound in my greeting to indicate my more formal training? Should I speak for myself, the privileged westerner, or should I be dependent on the Bangladeshi men to negotiate my future? Would the future feminist prospects of the women I interviewed be compromised if I acted like I couldn't be a party to these negotiations? When the chief officer at the airport said that he did not have the authority to make the decision, Tariq responded, "Who does?" That person was a phone call away, and the sun was setting. When we got through, the person on the other line said, "Namaj porche" — he is praying. The thought of Christmas Eve with strange Dalmatians overwhelmed me, tears came to my eyes, and I said in Bangla, "I love your country, but I want to go home to mine. Surely you have the authority under these conditions." The man said, "She is crying. Where do I stamp?" Tariq handed him the cultural attaché's letter, he stamped it, and Tariq whisked me out the door before

anyone could have second thoughts. I got on the plane and wrote in my journal a note to myself about the events, and my ultimate success due to the networks and privileges that enabled me to be seated before the man with the authority to let me go.

Experience teaches that human life is enriched and challenged by networks of people with different capacities and privileges, context-appropriate skills, acculturation (sometimes requiring degrees of ethical compromise), timing, and communication. Making use of these human resources is foundational to leadership in women's human rights activism.

## BUILDING NETWORKS

In my research with more than 100 women's rights organizations over the last 20 years, I have found that activists for human rights, particularly women's rights leaders, also rely on networks of people with different capacities and privileges, context-appropriate skills, acculturation (sometimes requiring degrees of ethical compromise), timing, and communication. Most recently in Bangladesh, for example, labor leaders Kalpona Ahkter and Babul Akter mounted successful campaigns to improve factory working conditions using these tools, thus confirming what feminist movement scholars have discovered in multiple contexts: that these tools are crucial resources for advancing activist goals (Ferree 2008; Friedman 2003; Joachim 2003; Tripp 2006).

In similar ways, many women-led organizations work to transform societies and political economies around the world. More broadly, through working in collaboration with the Global Fund for Women and their grantees over the past five years (Ackerly 2012), I have come to appreciate that "connected activism" is the cornerstone of responsible ethics and change in the face of overwhelming obstacles — personal, political, and *professional*. Transformative change is as much about an approach to change as it is recognizing where it needs to take place. Connected activism is the practice of bringing about change by working in relation to others, aware of the ways in which one's work contributes not only to the objective at hand (in support of a particular rights claim), but also to the establishment and development of networks of allies that support rights enjoyment more generally (also through activism around particular issues and claims).

Feminist movements face obstacles that are seemingly impossible because they are imbricated with formal and informal institutions — the

consequence of the aggregate impact of a range of behavior from a range of actors, some of it intentional, some not, some intentionally justice-seeking, some of it not effectively so. There never is a single actor who is liable for gender injustices, nor a singular site of activism for change. Rather, around the world across a range of sites, women activists are making progress for gender justice by working through networks of people with different capacities and privileges, exercising context-appropriate skills, accommodating their arguments to their contexts and audiences, timing their arguments to take advantage of shifting political opportunities, and developing clear communication strategies.

## STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF OTHERS

Women activists do other things, too. They work in ways that open doors for others and that build the capacity of others to become rights advocates for themselves and others. They learn from their experiences. They develop partnerships with like-minded allies, and they develop relationships with stakeholders whose interests and strategies may not be aligned (Ackerly 2012).

The strategies of women's movements offer insights for women's leadership for transformative change within universities and within the political science discipline. The similarities are strong. As in the broader society, within universities there are certainly individuals who behave in sexist and discriminatory ways, but the environment of gender injustice cannot be blamed on individuals, and there are many potential sites of activism. There are really two goals here, and they are mutually reinforcing. The first is to enhance gender equality within political science and universities. The second is to use feminism and our gender-informed research to inspire more ambitious discovery and creativity within political science and universities. In the first, feminism improves the work environment. In the second, feminism improves the work.

How so? First, it enhances our awareness of the ways in which intersectionality, despite our continued efforts to define and use it, is a pretty slippery idea (Ackerly and McDermott 2012; Ackerly and True 2008; Crenshaw 1991; Davis 2008; Hancock 2007; Hancock 2011; Jordan-Zachery 2007; McCall 2005; Weldon 2008, 2006). In my study of activism, I assessed activists as using an intersectional analysis when they identified the complexity of social, political, and economic forces at work in the rights violations to which they were attending. Almost all of

those studied saw gender and poverty as intersecting social forces; generally, they saw these intersecting with race, ethnicity, immigrant status, caste, and indigenousness. Activists sometimes use "intersectionality" to describe their own work and when they do that, they often identify the particular identity groups with which they work. The former is more analytical and more directly related to the strategies they chose. The latter seemed necessary to garner the support of a particular ally or donor. This second use of intersectionality worries me, as it seems necessary for political support and yet can be articulated without political strategies reflecting intersectional analysis or identifying stakeholders (for example, government actors, whose aligned interests are essential for long-term change).

Mershon and Walsh (2013, 1) have affirmed that, "to enhance diversity and address discrimination within political science departments and universities, diverse women political scientists need to recruit powerful allies in their departments, home institutions, the discipline, and beyond." Yet the lesson we learn from the particular story of my departure from Bangladesh without the right paperwork and from the activism of so many women's rights activists is that recruiting "powerful allies" is the relatively easy part. What is harder — and yet essential for catalytic change — is developing productive working relationships with stakeholders whose interests are not obviously aligned. Working with nonaligned stakeholders puts the individual negotiator in a potentially compromised position. What will her allies think of her partnering with someone whose values conflict so profoundly? What will be the consequence for her institution of working with an ally who is much more powerful and potentially able to corrupt her efforts or exploit her institution's legitimacy? Within political science and the university, discovery and creativity can be significantly impaired if we require our research partners to share our methodologies. Yet, because there is significant epistemological and ontological commitment embedded in various methodologies, building networks across these commitments is difficult. If university and political science leadership is guided by risk avoidance, rather than merely constrained by it, then such creativity in responding to internal problems of injustice may not be possible. By contrast, if university leadership is guided by fostering creativity and discovery toward research that serves humanity, then the ability to work across differences and remove obstacles to rendering the ability of marginalized groups to make contributions that are heard is essential to the university mission. Political science, particularly feminist political

science, has the research expertise to identify institutional and cultural obstacles to achieving this mission.

## CONCLUSION

Let us return to recognizing that the hardest cases of global injustices, such as gender injustice in everyday life, are complex (Ackerly 2013). They involve formal and informal structural processes and the aggregated impact of innumerable actors, each with different impacts on the society (Ackerly 2013). When we shift the concern with injustice to those within a particular university institution or profession (of political science), that same complexity is there. While we may find that individual actors hold particular sway in one context or another, like the Bangladeshi immigration officer in need of a place to stamp, their power is also limited.

By developing networks individually and institutionally, we can strengthen our institutions in ways that strengthen our ability to partner with allies. Networks can help us convert stakeholders to allies. In light of the centrality of such networks, "leadership" is pursued well through building the capacity of others to become advocates for themselves and by using one's privilege to build networks with potential stakeholders, particularly when being engaged in such bridge building might pose risks to certain people. That is, leadership in the service of fulfilling the university's mission entails building the networks and capacities of all those within it.

Leadership develops the networks and capacities of an organization and the people within it; mentoring focuses specifically on developing the networks and capacities of individuals. Both are collective and political, and both support the transformation of community — even the intellectual community of the university. Seen as a collective political project, mentoring, then, is the essential skill of successful mission-led leadership in academe. Yet, "mentoring" does have the political baggage of patronage even though many "mentoring" roles do not fit within an individualistic patronage model of mentoring. If we review all of the things that mentors do — open doors, advise, criticize, cheer up, introduce, protect, explain, advocate, listen — we recognize that no single mentor could do all of these things — not just due to time constraints, but because some of these capacities conflict. If I am a cheer-up mentor, then I might not be the best critic. If I am an advocate mentor, then I should not have the information of a confidante.

Leadership means developing the networks within your institution so that all of its people have mentors with these capacities. This view of mentoring does not treat mentees as passive recipients of patronage. Each develops her or his professional networks among peers, senior colleagues, and junior colleagues, and she or he can come to recognize that her or his social networks are part of these professionally useful and potentially transforming networks if she allows them to be. As she or he does this, the networks for mentoring become more developed. If we misunderstand mentoring as some form of patronage, then such a well-networked scholar may feel like she is treating these relationships instrumentally when she thinks about the particular roles she would like each person in her network to fill. Maybe, but this is true only if she is encouraged to look at these relationships as patronage. Some leaders and institutional organizations encourage patronage, but such a leadership style is not conducive to creativity and discovery being part of a university's mission. It is possible to develop and use professional networks for creativity and discovery merely by being an agent in the building of such networks and in facilitating their use by others.

Decades ago the university was a more autonomous entity than it is today, and discrimination cases were possible. There were not many women throughout any rank of academe. Now, the university is less autonomous, more of a business. Women are present throughout the ranks, although still few at the level of full professor and few in certain subfields; yet discrimination cases based on such patterns are nearly impossible to win without explicit incriminating discriminatory remarks. These conditions make the university world look more like the rest of the professional world. In order to make our institutions more just working environments and to be more just actors in the world, we need to work in ways that build our networks and those of our institutions with allies and with stakeholders whose interests can potentially be aligned.

As Cyndi Daniels argues elsewhere in this symposium (Daniels 2014), the adversarial model created moments for change, but transformation cannot happen through opportunistic moments in the gender opportunity structure alone (Friedman 2000). Gaining permission of authorities, transforming labor conditions, and improving the ethical practices of our institutions internally and externally are processes that require our taking responsibility where we can, working in partnership with those our capacities and privileges put in our network, and working to strengthen the networks, capacities, and privileges of others. That is, leadership for transformative change — whether leadership among those

in struggle or leadership among their allies in positions of institutional authority — requires cultivating the networks and capacities of others.

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# Transforming a Department, Transforming a Discipline

## *Cynthia R. Daniels, Rutgers University*

The Department of Political Science at Rutgers has a deep and sustained commitment to the principle of diversity. A diverse scholarly community is crucial to the development of cutting edge social science research, the recruitment and training of diverse graduate students, the quality of pedagogical experiences in our undergraduate classrooms and to the vibrancy and life of the University. (unanimously affirmed, May 2011)

In the fall of 2009, I became the first woman chair of the political science department at Rutgers University. I entered the position on the heels of a major gender discrimination case involving all of the women in the department, who claimed salary inequities and also put forward a series of informal complaints about hostile work environment. The case had taken two years to settle and, at its conclusion, the dean of the School of Arts and Sciences suggested that the department consider electing one of the women as chair. Needless to say, the challenges before the department were quite daunting.

Despite my reluctance to accept my nomination as chair, my personal and professional history motivated me take on the challenge. I had benefited from the mentoring of senior women faculty, both as a student and junior faculty member. I understood that the simple presence of a diverse faculty member could open doors for undergraduates, graduate students, and upcoming faculty. In addition, I also had organizational skills from previous years in applied politics, when I had built political coalitions between women's, labor, and health organizations. My long-standing commitments to gender and racial equity led me to accept the