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MEANT TO LEAD: WOMEN, EQUITY, AND EDUCATION

By

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Educational Doctorate

Lynn University

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DEDICATION

“Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.” — *E.E. Cummings*

Meant to Lead: Women Equity and Education is the compilation of three years of research and writing, but its origins date to my journey from girl to woman to educational leader. I am one of the fortunate ones. I have always had the unwavering support and unconditional love of my parents, Alice and David Goodman, who instilled in me and my sisters the importance of education and never putting limits or boundaries on our success. This dissertation would never have been possible without their trust, belief, and encouragement, which throughout my lifetime, has given me the courage to follow my dreams.

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When I embarked on this educational journey, I had not been a degree-seeking student for several decades. And while I considered myself prepared for the challenge, I had more than a few moments of panic and doubtful thinking. “Why did I add such a huge commitment to an already full plate?” Achieving this milestone has been a personal and professional goal, and would not have been possible without the love, support, and encouragement of so many people I am fortunate to have in my life.

To all the friends and colleagues who have supported my evolution as a leader and who serve as role models, sounding boards, and creative collaborators, thank you for showing me the magic of synergy and the power of team.

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To Dr. Jennifer Lesh, an accomplished educator, a passionate leader, and a wonderful human being, I will always feel that I won the “Lynn lottery” having you serve as my dissertation chairperson. You are exactly what *Meant to Lead* is all about: women investing in and celebrating the success of other women.

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ABSTRACT

Women are underrepresented in K-12 educational leadership roles in public, independent, and international school settings. Numerous research studies have interviewed women who have attained leadership roles and documented the obstacles and enablers to success. Consistently, women indicate that gender bias, a lack of mentors, few role models, the challenge of work-life balance, and limited training programs and resources inhibited their progress. Conversely, when those barriers were removed, many were able to thrive as educational leaders.

This case study design explored the challenges and enablers perceived by current female educational leaders in attaining and thriving in an educational leadership role. Further, the study gathered feedback from current female educational leaders on the MNT2LEAD website, designed to serve as a “digital mentor,” closing a piece of the gap in support that exists for women aspiring to lead K-12 education. Through an online survey including a Likert scale and semi-structured questions administered to current female educational leaders, the research study answered the following two questions: *What are the relevant personal experiences that enable some women to reach the pinnacle of their profession; and what pertinent components should be included in a website designed to assist aspiring female educational leaders to reach their career goals?*

Survey responses were analyzed and thematically categorized. Enablers to success that emerged from participants’ personal experiences included: mentors and supportive supervisors, professional development and formal education, role models, and collaborative and collegial co-workers. Positive responses to the content, utility, and relevance of the MNT2LEAD website were evident from the research with over 90% indicating they would recommend the website to a

colleague or friend. Further research is needed to explore women's internal barriers to success and other non-traditional methods of mentorship and support.

Keywords: Gender bias, gender equity, mentor, work-life balance, independent school, head of school, headteacher

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction/Background

In 1848, thousands of courageous women began a movement to change their civil and political status to equal that of men. The women's suffrage movement, which had its roots in anti-slavery abolitionist activism, achieved a monumental victory with the passage of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote in 1920 (Pruitt, 2016). One hundred years later, women have ostensibly achieved personal and professional equality. Women in the United States have equal access to education; have achieved parity in military service; and hold leadership roles in industry, athletics, government, and education (Lennon, 2013). However, decades of perfect television mothers perpetuated social norms about the stereotypical role of women as wives and mothers in society (Boboltz, 2017). And, while many women have risen to the pinnacle of their profession, the percentage of women in significant leadership roles still lags far behind men (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, & Newcomb, 2017). Whereas women today may have more opportunity than their antecedents, a 2012 survey demonstrates that there has been a 6% increase in stay-at-home moms over the past decade, reversing a long-term trend (Cohn & Caumont, 2014).

A 2015 Pew Research Center study on women and leadership reports that, while women have made progress reaching high-level leadership roles, they still lag significantly behind their male counterparts. At the time of the study, women comprised 19% of Congress, almost doubling the number in the past 20 years. The share of female state legislators rose from 4.5% in 1971 to 24.2% in 2015. The number of female governors has also increased, although not significantly—as of March 2018, there were six female governors leading states. In 1965, 39%

of women over the age of 16 were in the labor force. In 2020, 71% of women with children work outside of the home. In 2013, women held 52% of managerial and professional occupations, an increase from 30.6% in 1968. Even with the increase of women in the workforce, they continue to lag far behind men in senior management positions. According to a survey of top industry leaders from businesses across the United States, only 22% of senior managers in 2014 were women (Pew, 2015). Additionally, only 5% of chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies are women, although there were none 20 years ago (Pew, 2015).

Statistics on women in leadership roles in education suggest similar trends. A study by Litmanovitz (2011) published in the *Harvard Kennedy School Review* explored gender equality in educational settings. While women comprise 76% of the public school teaching profession, only 50% held the role of principal. Although the percentage is significant, it is proportionally low based on the composition of the education workforce. There has, however, been an upward trajectory in women leading public schools. A Statistics in Brief prepared for the National Center for Educational Statistics study (2016) of demographic trends in schools reports the percentage of female principals increased in public schools between 1987–88 and 2011–12 from 25% to 52%. The percentage of female principals in private schools did not change; however, a greater percentage of private school principals were female compared with their public school counterparts across all school years, except for 2007–08 (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016). Fifty-four percent of new public school principals and 47% of experienced principals were women in 2011. These numbers showed growth from 1987 when 41% of new and 18% of experienced principals were women. Among new public school principals in 2011, 67% reported having a master's degree as their highest degree, more than their experienced counterparts at 54%, demonstrating a reversal from 1987 when 49% of new principals held a master's degree as their

highest degree compared with 57% of experienced principals (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016).

While there has been an observable increase in women at the helm of individual schools, female superintendents lead only 12 of the 50 largest school systems (Litmanovitz, 2011). Further, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) reports that of the 53 women to hold cabinet positions, only three have been U.S. secretaries of education (CAWP, 2019).

A study by Kerr, Kerr, and Miller (2016) examining bureaucratic, leadership, and workforce representation among teachers, assistant principals, and principals between 2002-2008 further illuminates the gender gap in leadership roles in education. The study found that women were proportionately overrepresented as classroom teachers compared to those in administrative roles (Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2016). Beyond numerical equality, the numbers are significant for organizational health and balance. It is a widely held belief that the increase of women in upper management roles is associated with more inclusive leadership, better communication, and greater levels of democracy (Gilligan, 1982). The study of women as superintendents, the highest role in public educational systems, has only been investigated for about the last 30 years. The School Superintendent Association study of women superintendents conducted in 2003 noted that only 18% of women held the superintendent position, but those women represented large, suburban, urban, and rural districts. The majority of women superintendents were former elementary school principals and had a focus on educating the whole child. Female superintendents felt that it was significantly more critical to support those at risk than their male counterparts (Bruner & Grogan, 2005). Reaching out to the community was a priority of women superintendents, and they regularly sought input from their constituents, including teachers (Bruner & Grogan, 2005). More women superintendents have backgrounds in curriculum and

instruction, which they see as significant facets of their role. They bring more years of classroom experience to the role and value continuing education for themselves (Grogan 2005).

It is interesting to note how Americans generally perceive leadership and gender. Findings from the Pew Research Center Survey on Women and Leadership (2015) show most Americans believe women to be equal in key leadership traits, such as intelligence and capacity for innovation. A significant number believe that women are more compassionate and organized leaders. Women and men believe equally that decisiveness, honesty, and intelligence are essential leadership qualities. More women (57%) than men (48%) believe that ambition is a crucial leadership trait. Some 14% say men generally make better political leaders than women, and 9% say women make better leaders than men. Among those surveyed, 80% believe that men and women make equally good business leaders. About one in five say women who want leadership positions in business are better off not having children at all (Pew, 2015).

Perspectives From Women in the Field

Examining the significant body of research and personal stories of women who, against the odds, have attained leadership roles of power and influence illuminates a light on the challenges they faced in their journey to the top. Sandra Gupton and Gloria Slick wrote the 1996 book, *Highly Successful Women Administrator: The Inside Story of How They Got There*, which Gupton revisited in 2009, illustrating the real-life obstacles faced by women leaders. Universally, women struggled with work-life balance, gender bias, insufficient role models and mentorship, and lack of self-confidence. These themes were echoed throughout the literature the researcher reviewed. In the phenomenological study by Gallagher (2017), interviews revealed the female leaders in the study found work-life balance, mentorship and support, and a gendered view of leadership as inhibitors to success. Women share experiences of gender bias in the interview

process, including being asked about childcare and family planning (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014). And when women do achieve leadership roles, they are often paid less than their male counterparts (Lamonte, 2014).

What appears lacking in the research is targeted, easily accessible support for aspiring and middle female leaders that respond to the documented challenges they face as they navigate a path to more advanced roles. Examples from higher education and other industries demonstrate that when an effort is made to support an underserved population to achieve parity, they achieve different levels of success. What is clear is that women in education are looking for support from women leaders and the opportunity to learn from their experiences (Litmanovitz, 2011).

Study Rationale

As a theoretical framework for an examination of the underrepresentation of women as educational leaders, social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) provides a foundational understanding of why the gap still exists. Social role theory is a socio-psychological theory that focuses on sex differences and similarities in social behavior. These behaviors are informed by societal expectations and cultural norms (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Men are typically associated with agentic qualities, while women's behaviors are associated more frequently with communal attributes. According to Eagly, "[t]hese beliefs are more than beliefs about the attributes of women and men: Many of these expectations are normative in the sense that they describe qualities or behavioral tendencies believed to be desirable for each sex" (Eagly & Karau, 2002). From societal and cultural expectations about gender differences, stereotypes form. Women seeking to attain leadership roles traditionally associated with male attributes are subject to the longstanding beliefs about the sexes that are illuminated by social role theory.

Much of the research reviewed illustrates the experiences of women attempting to achieve leadership roles most often held by men. Those experiences are echoed in a 2017 Pew Research Center study on gender and leadership. When asked what society values in men and women, survey respondents believe that society values honesty, morality, and professional success most in men—the qualities most indicated as valued for women are physical attractiveness and being nurturing and empathetic (Parker, Horowitz & Stepler, 2017). Men are much more likely to attribute differences in success in the workplace to biology, whereas women attribute differences to societal expectations (Parker, Horowitz & Stepler, 2017). Hence, deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal expectations are likely to exist for women seeking leadership roles in education, and those could potentially be an unconscious roadblock to success. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) report that longitudinal studies of gender stereotypes indicate that fundamental beliefs about typical male and female attributes remain, even with progress towards gender equity. Without more significant numbers of women reaching the top, there are fewer role models, mentors, and colleagues to help navigate the obstacles.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation in practice is to help women achieve gender equity in education by providing practical solutions for some of the most frequent challenges documented in the literature. The researcher designed an interactive website that allows aspiring female leaders an on-demand platform to get practical information, seek answers to questions, and receive guidance from leaders in the field on the challenges they face.

State the Research Problem

While women have made strides towards equity in educational leadership roles, a significant gender gap still exists. National data reveals that women average 75% of all K-12

public school teaching positions but only 30% of all educational leadership roles (Lennon, 2013). About 33% of independent school heads and 30% of college and university presidents are women, and only three U.S. secretaries of education have been female (Pincus, 2016, Richmond, 2017; Seltzer, (2017). Although statistics show that progress towards gender equity in the educational sector has been made, women are still underrepresented in roles at the highest levels of educational leadership. The 2010 U.S. Census reports that 50.8% of the total population is female, and school-aged children (5-17 years) comprise 17.5% of the total population (Howden & Meyer, 2011).

Further disaggregation of the data reveals that approximately 30 million females are of school age (age 5-19) with similar numbers for male students (Howden & Meyer, 2011). At the collegiate level, the number of female undergraduate students has increased significantly. Currently, 56% of undergraduate freshman are female, an increase from 42% in the 1970s (Marcus, 2017). The wide gap in attainment of educational leadership roles between men and women is significant because it leaves schools and school-aged children without the varied perspectives, styles, and influences of both genders.

Research Questions

Given the uneven rise in women in leadership roles in all occupations, and the gender disparity in the educational sector in particular, it is vital to seek practical ways to mitigate the documented challenges women face attempting to acquire leadership roles and while on the job. To enrich the public and private educational landscape for all students and better the profession for both women and men, the researcher proposes the following questions:

1. What are the relevant personal experiences that enable some women to reach the pinnacle of their profession?

2. What pertinent components should be included in a website designed to assist aspiring female educational leaders to reach their career goals?

Significance of the Study

Finding ways to increase the number of female educational leaders remains a challenge. Women comprise only about a third of the headships in the United States, about the same as the number as female superintendents in public schools (Pinkus, 2016). Achieving gender equity would allow for differing leadership styles, create cohesive and effective teams, and foster positive school culture (Pinkus, 2016). This study seeks to mitigate some of the most frequent challenges outlined in the research by developing an electronic platform where aspiring leaders can seek answers to questions, review anecdotes from experienced leaders, and create a network of support.

Goals/Objectives

The goal of this research study is:

- to synthesize from the body of research the obstacles women face attempting to achieve/maintain/advance roles as educational leaders; and
- to develop a website for aspiring female educational leaders utilizing the experiences of women who have “shattered the glass ceiling” to help advance their careers.

Definitions of Key Terms

1. Head of school: For this study, a head of school is the highest administrative and academic role in an independent (or private school). This role reports to a board of trustees.
2. Headteacher: For this study, a headteacher is a person in charge of a school in the United Kingdom.

3. Gender bias: For this study, gender bias is defined as a belief that specific qualities and traits can be attributed to gender.
4. Gender equity: For this study, gender equity is defined as having equal opportunity for advancement regardless of sex.
5. Independent school: For this study, an independent school is defined as a non-public, educational institution.
6. International school: For this study, an international school is defined as a school outside of the United States.
7. Mentor: For this study, a mentor is defined as a person who provides ongoing guidance and support.
8. Work-life balance: For this study, work-life balance is defined as a comfortable state of equilibrium achieved between an employee's primary priorities of their work and their personal life.

Summary

Addressing the issue of the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is an important step towards creating a more diverse and inclusive K-12 workplace. Identifying the challenges that exist, many of which have been previously documented extensively in the research, is a necessary foundation from which to begin to create solutions. This study aimed to add to the body of literature that exists by first reviewing the research that outlines the gaps, obstacles, and solutions women in educational leadership have experienced. Further, the researcher looked at how other industries have chosen to address the issue of underrepresentation in leadership for women or other marginalized populations. Last, this researcher developed a

website designed to fill the void that exists in mentor programs or practices intended to support women educational leaders.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Purpose

This literature review examines the research on the challenges and enablers for women to attain leadership roles in education today, and for the past several decades. The researcher explored the most recent statistical data on women in educational leadership, comparing those to other professions to assess the progress towards gender equity over time. This study reviewed research that illuminates the perceived personal experiences of women in public, private, and international school settings in order to document the enablers and barriers to attain positions of leadership at the top of educational organizations. Finally, the researcher looked at formal programs and practices that support women or other underrepresented groups to achieve roles in leadership.

Background

Women have always led, formally or informally, and this is illustrated throughout our North American history. *In Echoing Their Ancestors, Women Lead School Districts in the United States* (2005), Margaret Grogan, retells the story of women who demonstrated strength in adversity, skillful enterprise, and resilience during times of war, slavery, and suffrage. Grogan (2005) illustrates stories of women whose focus is on families and children and how that directly connects with women who currently serve as school superintendents, the majority of who first served as elementary school principals.

The quest for equal rights and opportunities for women is anchored in the abolitionist movement, wherein women raised their collective voice for the emancipation of slaves (Pruitt, 2016). Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony would become the architects

of the 19th Amendment, which secured the rights of women to vote, and thus, be considered equal to men in influencing the political landscape (Pruitt, 2016). The foundation for a changing mindset was laid, but almost 100 years later, the conversation regarding gender equity is far from over.

Women in Leadership

Insight into the current state of leadership is noted in several significant studies. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) examines public attitude and beliefs on gender and leadership today. The surveys conducted during two separate periods in 2014 focused on women leading in the business sector and political roles, but illustrated widespread beliefs about equity, skills, obstacles, and opportunities that are applicable across all professions. The report includes statistics and trends related to women in top positions in government and business while also looking at the public's views on the qualities of a good leader

The number of women holding leadership positions has increased significantly since the inception of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made gender discrimination in the workplace illegal. A 2015 Pew Research Center study on gender reported that women held 19% of positions in U.S. Congress, double the number held 20 years prior. There are 26 female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, where there were none in 1995. Women have increased their presence in corporate boardrooms from 10% to 17% between 1995-2013. At the time of the Pew study, more women than men enrolled and completed a college degree and sought advanced degrees, flipping the balance solidified in the 1960s and 1970s. Women occupied 52% of the country's managerial positions, but-were not advancing at the same rate into senior leadership roles (Pew, 2015).

Most significant are the general beliefs that women are equally capable of success in leadership with many “female” qualities and attributes that are perceived as advantages. Women are perceived as being more honest, organized, and compassionate than men, while seen as equal in intelligence and innovation (Pew, 2015). Men are rated slightly higher than women in risk-taking and negotiating, and women are viewed as better at creating compromise and guiding and mentoring others (Pew, 2015).

While there is a widespread belief that women and men are equally qualified to be leaders in all facets of professional life, the survey data confirms that women are still largely underrepresented in positions of power (Pew, 2015). The survey did not find consensus as to why this exists, and many ideas resonated with different people. Forty percent of those surveyed believed that higher standards for women and a lack of readiness of employers were reasons for the equity gap. Other reasons, including family responsibilities, inexperience, and gender stereotypes, were noted. Most shocking is the fact that 22% of those surveyed believed that women who want to reach the highest levels of leadership in business are better off not having children (Pew, 2015).

One might assume that statistics on female leadership in education might be different than other industries based on the number of women in the educational workforce. Women have held roles as teachers since the 1800s and the first female superintendent in Chicago Public Schools, Ella Flagg Young, was appointed in 1909 (Blount, 1998). At that time, the workforce was 70% female, not much different than it is in the present day (Blount, 1996; Litmanovitz, 2011, Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2014). Interestingly, women held a large percentage of leadership roles in education in the first half of the 20th century, declining steadily until after World War II (Blount, 2016).

Women in Educational Leadership

Public School

A study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2015) looked at the changing demographics of public and private school principals. The review compared data from seven administrations of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) over 25 years. Areas reviewed included gender, age experience, education, and salary. The research showed that women principals had increased from 24.6% in 1988 to 51.6% in 2012, and female teachers also increased during the same period from 70% to 76% (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016). The number of women principals in private schools was higher than in public schools each year and reached 55% in 2012. The number of white principals decreased from 87% to 80%, but the information was not broken down by gender, so the impact on women leaders specifically is not known (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016). The survey also compared the percentage of new to experienced principals. During the 2011–12 school year, 54% of new and 47% of experienced public school principals were women. The percentages were larger than in 1987–88, when 41% of new and 12% of experienced public school principals were women (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016).

Research on gender equity in educational leadership is the focus of an analysis by Kerr, Kerr, and Miller (2014), who use data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to answer several research questions: What is the gender composition of administrative, principal, assistant principal, and classroom teacher jobs in U. S. school districts? What are the levels of women's underrepresentation or overrepresentation in the areas of leadership representation and workforce representation? Are school districts making progress towards equity for women (based on new hire data)? The dataset examined reviewed 6,552

districts from 2002-2008. The researchers made the point that descriptive representation is used in the small amount of research on gender and equity in educational leadership, whereas using workforce representation as the benchmark provides a different picture. If the educational workforce is more than 70% female, then achieving equitable representation in leadership would be more than 50%, which is used as the typical marker for parity (Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2014).

The study concluded that although progress had been made, equity has not been reached (Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2014). Further, many districts have few to no women represented in administrative roles, and many with male-dominated administrative workforces are making little progress towards equity. Ongoing work and further study are needed to ensure that progress continues, and at a pace that more quickly closes the gap for women as educational leaders (Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2014).

The 2015 American Association of School Administrators Mid-Decade Survey adds to the body of research on gender equity in school leadership. Superintendents from districts across the U.S. responded to questions on experience, career path, mobility, stress, and family. The results demonstrate that women superintendents' profiles are becoming more like those of their male counterparts (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan & Newcomb, 2017). For example, survey data indicates that both genders appear to be less mobile than in previous years, have similar tenures in the classrooms, and seem to experience stress in similar ways. There are more pathways to the role, providing different opportunities for advancement for both genders. Gender differences were minimal in how men and women view relationships to their school boards, and they have similar views on the challenges they face in the role (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan & Newcomb, 2017).

While the survey confirms progress towards more significant equity, noteworthy gaps still exist for women—especially women of color (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan & Newcomb, 2017). Findings reveal that women superintendents are less likely to be married than male counterparts. Fifty-six percent of female superintendents indicated having one or no children compared to 18% of males in the same role. Women superintendents are more likely to serve in communities that have black students, students who are homeless, and students with disabilities. They are also more likely than their male counterparts to leave the role. Women and men of color lag behind their peers in having a mentor, with men of color least likely to have a mentor. Research suggests that women in the role are more child-centered, focused on curriculum, and value collaboration (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan & Newcomb, 2017).

Independent School

Having a richly diverse leadership pool is an area of study less frequently explored in independent schools compared to public schools. Currently, the percentage of female heads at the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) has remained around one-third for the past 16 years, similar to public school trends (Pinkus, 2016). Several reasons for the gender inequity were cited in a study conducted by NAIS regarding the hiring process for heads of schools. Often, the qualities that female candidates believed were most or least important were different from those used by search firms hired by schools to identify its next leader. Roles that women often occupy, such as admissions directors or diversity officers, are valued less than other administrative roles by search firms. Additionally, women's self-reported confidence level in attaining a head of school position was significantly lower than men's—43% confident versus 66% (Pinkus, 2016).

Adding to the body of evidence regarding the lack of equity in independent schools,

Rasdem, Kelly, Perry, and Reed (2017) presented the evidence of their comparative analysis of women leaders across independent school organizations at the 2017 North Carolina Association of Independent Schools (NCAIS) annual conference. They compared gender data from NAIS, NCAIS, and the Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS). In each case, men occupied over 70% of head of school roles. Women were more likely to lead a small school (100-200 students), most prevalently with a kindergarten to eighth-grade student body. Women were less likely to lead a kindergarten to twelfth-grade school (Rasdem, Kelly, Perry & Reed, 2017).

International School

Achieving parity in educational leadership is not limited to the United States as other countries report a lack of women attaining high-level administrative roles. A study by the Future Leaders Trust in the U.K. illustrates the gap in equity schools face. The current educational workforce is 74% female, but only 65% of headteachers are female (O'Connor, 2015). The number of women leaders in secondary schools is particularly disproportionate. In secondary schools, 38% of the workforce is male, and 62% is female, but only 36% of headteachers are women. Women applying for leadership roles cited multiple forms of gender bias, including a traditional mindset about gendered roles in leadership and a double standard for women, including being judged by age and appearance, as factors contributing to the underrepresentation of female educational leaders in the U.K. In order to close the gap, women need to support each other, hiring practices need to be re-examined, and positive examples of female leaders should be recognized and celebrated (O'Connor, 2015).

Adding to the discourse on women in educational leadership in England, U.K. Secretary for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities, Nicky Morgan, delivered a speech at

Newton Prep School a week after International Women's Day 2015. In the speech, she outlined the progress women have made across the industry in England, and the work still needed to ensure gender parity is achieved in the education sector. She cited that more women have entered the workforce, and as a result, there have been efforts to make childcare accessible and more affordable. However, women still lag far behind in attaining leadership roles across the education sector, especially in secondary schools where men far exceed women in reaching headteacher roles, even though the workforce is majority female (Morgan, 2015).

Obstacles to Attaining Leadership Roles

To gain first-hand perspective on the gender gap in educational leadership, Miki Litmanovitz, a Harvard University graduate student, interviewed top female leaders in the field including Michelle Rhee, founder of Students First and former chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, Shirley Hufstedler, the first U.S. secretary of education, and Wendy Kopp, the founder of Teach for America. When asked why women are underrepresented in leadership roles in education, several themes emerged. The lack of female leader role models perpetuated by the leadership stereotypes that exist was cited as reason for the gap (Litmanovitz, 2011). Maintaining a work-life balance was a contributing factor, as women still felt responsible for the traditional child-rearing and household responsibilities. Those interviewed felt that taking time off to raise children was also a reason women lag behind male counterparts in gaining leadership roles. One interesting perspective came from Lillian Lowery, Secretary of Education in Delaware. She felt that many women in the education workforce entered the profession to work with children and had no desire to move into administration (Litmanovitz, 2011).

A 2017 qualitative, phenomenological study of female leaders in independent schools

was conducted to understand the underrepresentation of female heads of school in the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools. The ten women leaders interviewed were asked to respond to three guiding questions: “What supports and/or constraints do women in independent schools experience when considering becoming a head of school; How does the culture of independent schools affect women becoming independent school leaders; and in what ways, if at all, does the organizational structure of independent schools create barriers for women to access top leadership position” (Gallagher, 2017). Research from the study substantiated the fact that women in independent schools face many of the same challenges as their public school counterparts, although there is a smaller body of research specific to the topic. Barriers to leadership repeated throughout the research were commonly categorized in themes of gender-role stereotypes, gender bias and discrimination, familial roles and obligations, and organizational structure and culture (Gallagher, 2017).

Interviews with the participants confirmed much of the data gathered in previous literature. In response to the questions regarding supports and constraints that women in independent schools experience when considering becoming a head of a school, the answers were categorized into three themes: work-life balance, mentorship and support, and a gendered view of leadership (Gallagher, 2017). The women interviewed perceived the struggle to achieve a work-life balance prevents some women from ascending to the top. All of the interviewees agreed that mentors play a decisive role in cultivating leadership, and most felt this lacking in their own experiences. The majority of women felt that independent school leadership structure was derived from traditional male-gendered roles and that this culture still permeates much of independent education (Gallagher, 2017). Interestingly, the women interviewed felt that collaboration was essential to an independent schools’ culture, and that in many cases, the roles

at the top were much more hierarchical. They cited this as a potential reason why women do not move into top roles as frequently as men since they perceive women as enjoying a more collaborative approach to work and leadership. The women also perceived independent schools as becoming increasingly more organized through a business model, and that women were either not interested or not perceived as capable of leading a business. This, coupled with managing a large board of directors, many of who bring their business background to their role, might prevent some women from being considered for the position based on gender bias or perceived priorities of the board (Gallagher, 2017).

In a journal article by Pernambuco-Wise (2014) for the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), based on a dissertation study of 19 female heads of school and 12 search firm associates, ascending to the top was equated to a labyrinth rather than a glass ceiling. Four inhibitors to success, referred to as “doors” in the study, were: unspoken biases, risky candidate, lifestyle versus job, and loneliness. Several examples of gender bias include the expectation that women had to be more prepared than male counterparts, particularly about financial literacy and business acumen, and the idea that women with school-aged children might be too distracted to navigate the challenges of the role. Men who demonstrated more typically female traits, such as relationship builder, on top of their male traits were given high marks, while women who showed typically male traits, such as assertiveness, were regarded less favorably. During the interview process, women but not men were often asked questions about childcare and family planning, and some opted out of seeking the head of school role because of the added pressure of traditional familial roles. Women were cited more often than men as not having anyone to share the challenges of the role with as a contributing factor to an overall feeling of loneliness, possibly a byproduct of how genders are raised to socialize.

Sandra Gupton and Gloria Appelt Slick's 1996 book, *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Story of How They Got There*, is based on a research project the two women professors conducted in 1996 and reflected upon in 2009. In their research, Gupton and Slick report that insufficient role-modeling, networking, and mentoring is ranked second, just below cultural stereotyping, as the reason for the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles. More than 70% cited insufficient supports as either the first, second, or third reason for the inequity in the workforce.

A case study by Sanderson and Whitehead (2016) conducted in an international school in Seoul, South Korea, examined the experiences of 11 women to understand the challenges women who aspire to leadership roles face. The setting, a well-established independent school in which approximately 25% of the leadership roles are held by women, offers a Western-style education and employs faculty and staff largely from England, United States, Australia, and Canada (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016). The study sought to find answers to the following questions: What do women managers in international schools recognize as the barriers preventing their career advancement; and how do women managers perceive these barriers can be overcome? The research reported that the women interviewed saw a cultural prejudice towards women as leaders as a contributing barrier preventing career advancement. Negative stereotypes about women in the workplace, as well as the gendered leadership qualities attributed to men, were reported as impeding women's progress towards equity in roles. Further perpetuating the gap is the hierarchical structure of the school and the belief that women would not be accepted at the highest levels of leadership (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016).

Those interviewed felt that three types of change needed to occur to remove the barriers for women in international schools: cultural change, organizational behavioral change, and

individual change (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016). It was noted that many women do not have the confidence to seek positions of power. Finding support networks, reexamining workloads and operational hours, and gaining the skills that enhance confidence were noted as important to break through barriers. Most notable was a perceived indifference by the male leadership to address the underrepresentation of women in administrative roles, and an acceptance on the part of the women that this was the way things are. Challenging the status quo, even with its perceived personal risk, was noted as a critical and necessary step towards achieving gender equity (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016).

Enablers to Attaining Leadership Roles

Capturing data from successful women leaders to better understand the challenges they face in the workplace and what factors contributed to their success was the aim of the research of Gupton and Slick (1996). They analyzed the survey responses from over 100 women leaders on topics such as women's issues in the workplace, career paths, life influences, leadership characteristics, and advice to future leaders. Fifteen women completed the second phase of the study that included sharing their personal stories, which was compiled into the book in the form of lessons.

Several themes emerge in the book that reinforce other research studies and illuminate real-world issues women in the education workforce face. In the chapter entitled "Be Prepared," the areas of preparation the leaders discussed moved far beyond academic credentials, although ensuring their credentials were beyond reproach was necessary. The women shared that female leaders must understand the political landscape for women in their district, must be prepared to handle sexual harassment and bias, which sometimes came from female colleagues, and to be prepared for the personal sacrifice and impact on family and home life (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Having a network of support is a crucial enabler to success shared by the women surveyed. Personal support systems—whether from a spouse, friend or extended family—were considered essential to achieving success, and many of the women interviewed felt fortunate to have strong relationships with which they could share familial responsibilities. Women who enjoyed a robust support system at work believed it was instrumental to their advancement. Developing a network through professional associations and organizations was also noted as essential (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

It is interesting to note that having a positive role model, defined as “one whose characteristics you admired and tried to emulate,” was pointed out as a significant enabler to success by 85% of the women surveyed, although 73% also indicated being influenced by a negative role model. A high percentage of women (74%) indicated having a mentor, defined as “one with whom you formed a professional interpersonal relationship and who provided beneficial career and psychosocial support to you” (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Ironically, the women surveyed felt that the lack of mentorship was also one of the biggest obstacles to reaching leadership career goals (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

In Litmanovitz’s study of highly successful female educational leaders (2011), participants were asked to identify what factors contributed to their ability to reach the positions they attained. Being supported both by women mentors on the job and by spouses and family at home enabled the women to reach positions most often held by men. Attending leadership training was important for some, and having a role model was significant to others. Personal qualities, such as persistence and talent, were identified as enablers of success (Litmanovitz, 2011).

To help foster the next generation of aspiring female leaders, the women interviewed suggested several strategies. Developing formal mentorship and leadership programs, specifically for women, would help close the equity gap. Job sharing, child care, and flexible hours are ways to support women balancing family responsibilities with work demands. Finally, those interviewed suggested that designing a leadership pipeline to identify potential leaders and support their growth is a way to close the equity gap (Litmanovitz, 2011).

In a journal article for NAIS entitled “Navigating a Labyrinth” (2014), author and head of school Pernambuco-Wise equates the experience of women reaching the top as more like a skilled and nuanced set of pathways and keys, rather than a linear ascension up a corporate ladder. Her doctoral dissertation, the basis for the article, is a grounded theory study that includes interviews with 19 heads of school and 12 search firm associates.

The “keys” identified to unlock the doors to success included: foundation, skills, support, opportunity, voice, changing times, and changing position (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014). Having a foundation that allowed women to believe they could attain a high-powered position was a contributing factor for some women. The influence of parents, teachers, and school leaders was integral to the success of several of the women interviewed. Gaining the skills necessary to attain a head of school or other leadership position was considered essential and could be acquired through targeted professional development, sitting on boards of outside organizations, and job-embedded tasks. Identifying an advocate, different from a mentor, was considered essential to navigating the labyrinth. An advocate was defined as a person who would champion a female leader with the specific goal of career advancement. Being well-skilled in all facets of the contemporary head of school role including curriculum and instruction but also finance,

sustainability, and future-focused endeavors was critical as schools will have different needs for leadership at different times in a school's evolution (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014).

The author recommends several ideas for schools to contemplate to increase diversity and close the gender gap in independent educational leadership including: diversifying boards, adopting gender blind hiring practices, developing leadership from within for succession planning, advocating for aspiring heads, and establishing a "girls club" similar to the "ol' boys" network in order to foster collegiality among women. Recommendations for aspiring leaders of both genders include specific skills preparation such as fundraising, board management, and emotional intelligence, and acquiring a terminal degree. Other ideas involve gaining experience outside of schools by linking with other organizations, identifying mentors and advocates, and learning from women who have attained the head of school position (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014).

Current Leadership Programs and Practices

Understanding the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership alone does not effect change. Researchers have been studying women as leaders for decades, and yet progress towards parity is slow at best. One reason for the lack of progress lies in the absence of programs that specifically target women and the challenges they face to become and thrive as leaders in K-12 education. The researcher was challenged to find formalized support for women aspiring to leadership roles. However, there are examples in higher education and industry that have served women and other underserved populations to achieve leadership goals.

A study of the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI), designed and implemented at West Virginia University, was conducted in 2016 by DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer, and Wheatley. The program, modeled after a coaching method used at Harvard University's

Women's Leadership Forum, was instituted in 2012 and the evaluation occurred after three cohorts had completed the training. The impact of the training was gathered through the survey and focus groups with the participants.

The WLI was designed using self-determination theory (SDT) as the framework. Self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan in 1985, posits that people are most likely to engage and sustain in initiatives when they fulfill their basic needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The elements of the WLI and the program evaluation itself connected directly to fostering the aspiring leaders' competence, autonomy, and relatedness (DeFrank-Cole et. al., 2016). The training itself was comprised of four major components: small group "podwork," which included readings and activities; beginning- and end-of-year events; monthly breakfast meetings; and ongoing skill-building workshops using a variety of guest speakers and experts. The program was structured into small groups of four to five participants called "pods" and was facilitated by group leaders who were former participants themselves. The pods became a cohesive unit and bringing together the participants regularly fostered connections to each other and the university, thus fulfilling the need for relatedness, a component of SDT.

Surveys were administrated pre- and post-program and showed participants' self-assessed growth in several areas, including effectiveness at strategic thinking, effectiveness at influencing supervisors and those you supervise, effectiveness at speaking up and asking for what you need, and quantity and quality of professional networks. Focus group questions included: "Has your leadership style changed as a result of your participation in the WLI?; Do you find that you are better able to tackle a leadership challenge now, and if so, in what ways have your actions have been modified as a result of participation in WLI or the experiences you had subsequently?" The responses were recorded, transcribed, coded, and categorized within the three elements of

SDT: competency, autonomy, and relatedness. The program had a significantly positive impact on the participants, and the design, which focused on relatedness and building community, was a contributing factor to its success (DeFrank-Cole et. al., 2016).

As a model for other industry or educational settings, the WLI program has tremendous value. While the program initially hired two consultants to help design and facilitate the first cohort of aspiring leaders, “graduates” of the program and university staff led subsequent cohorts. The program design is researched-based, is easily replicable, and does not require a significant financial commitment impact (DeFrank-Cole et. al., 2016).

An interorganizational formal mentoring (IOFM) program is explored in a study conducted in 2008 through the Executive Leadership Council (ELC). The ELC is an independent, non-profit organization comprised of over 340 executives whose goal is to help others establish career paths and provide the tools necessary to reach top leadership roles, thereby increasing diversity in the corporate workplace (Murell, Blake-Beard, Porter & Perkins-Williams, 2008).

IOFM is defined as “formal mentoring activities, programs or experiences that cut across traditional organizational boundaries and target the unique developmental needs of a specific stakeholder or identity group” (Murell, Bake-Beard, et al. 2008). An IOFM is different from other mentoring programs in that it is a formal program that provides its mentees with access to those in positions of power and who share the same social identity groups outside of their current workplace. In this case, it focused on the development of 30 African American males in corporate settings.

The program matched senior-level African American managers with mentees based on three considerations: professional goals, personal factors, and geographic location (Murell, Bake-Beard, et al. 2008). Formal training was conducted over three half-days at the beginning of the

study on the mentoring relationship, and the pairs were then able to connect as frequently as desired in-person, by phone, or by electronic mediums. Results of the study were gathered at three points over 12 months using survey, phone interviews, and focus groups. Overall perceptions by both the mentee and the mentor were very positive. Mentees received both career and psychosocial advice, and as trust was built, more significant conversations about corporate culture, race, and other specific challenges were discussed. The IOFM offered the mentees a vehicle to receive unbiased feedback from a mentor with no political agenda or affiliation with the mentees' workplaces. However, while this was seen as mostly positive, it was also viewed as a challenge. Not knowing the political landscape and the key players within an organization were noted as a disadvantage (Murell, Bake-Beard, et al. 2008).

The program researchers summarized three advantages of the program based on the responses of the participants. First, the program sponsorship by the mentees' workplaces provided an elevated status. Second, matching the mentees with high-powered African American leaders provided the opportunity for professional and psychosocial support. Last, the program gave the mentees access to social capital they might not have been able to achieve on their own (Murell, Bake-Beard, et al. 2008).

Social Role Theory

Social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) is defined as a "social psychological theory that pertains to sex differences and similarities in social behavior." Its fundamental principle is that differences and similarities arise from the distribution of men and women into social roles within their society. Through socialization and the formation of gender roles, the behaviors of men and women generally support and sustain the division of labor" (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Women are more inclined to be caretakers or assume caretaker professional identities while men are typically

found as the full-time chief provider in roles that skew towards physical strength, leadership, or assertiveness (Eagly & Wood, 2016). Sorting of social roles is directly related to the physical and sexual attributes of each gender, child bearing and breastfeeding for women, and the size and strength of men. (Eagly & Wood, 2016).

Gender scholars recognize that gender is “not primarily an identity or role taught in childhood and enacted in family relations. Instead, gender is an institutionalized system of social practices for constituting people as two significantly different categories, men and women, and organizing social relations of inequality based on that difference” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The implications of this theory are that cultural beliefs and social-relational contexts play a significant role in gender systems. A person’s belief about gender roles inform their expectations for behavior and social norm. This is especially significant in social relational contexts, which is any interaction where one defines himself about others (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

As a theoretical framework for an examination of the underrepresentation of women as educational leaders, social role theory provides a foundational understanding of why the gap still exists. Much of the research reviewed illustrated the experiences of women attempting to achieve roles most often held by men. Hence, deep-rooted cultural beliefs and societal expectations are likely to exist, and could potentially be an unconscious roadblock to success. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) report that longitudinal studies of gender stereotypes indicate that fundamental beliefs about typical male and female attributes, even with progress towards gender equity still exist.

Summary

Several themes emerge from the research that adds to the discourse on women in educational leadership. While more women are attaining high -level leadership roles, they are still significantly underrepresented as leaders across public, independent, and international schools (Blount, 1998; Bruner & Grogan, 2005; Gallagher, 2017; Grogan, 2005; Hill, 2016; Kerr, 2014; Litmanovitz, 2011; Morgan, 2015; O’Conor, 2015; & Rasdem, 2017). Common, frequently noted perspectives on the barriers to achieving leadership roles include; gender expectations and cultural bias, work-life balance, and lack of support, including role models and mentorship (Gallagher, 2017, Grogan, 2005, Gupton, 1996, Hill, 2016, Kerr, 2014, Litmanovitz, 2011, Morgan, 2015, Pernambuco, 2014, Pincus, 2016, O’Conor, 2015, Sanderson, 2016).

Women who have attained leadership roles attest to several factors that contributed to their success. Personal qualities, such as talent, work ethic and perseverance, were factors as well as leadership training and experiences, support at home and work, and role models and mentors (Bruner, 2005; Gallagher, 2017; Gupton, 1996; Litmanovitz, 2011; & Pernambuco, 2014). In many studies, the data gathered is based on women’s personal experience. Largely left out of their anecdotes are any mention of formal programs that helped them navigate the challenges that accompany women ascending to the top of educational institutions. However, a common theme among the women was the desire for and need of formal programs that support women’s leadership goals and aspirations. While there is some research on formal leadership programs for aspiring women leaders across industries, research specific to educational leadership is sparse. The researcher looked across industry and other underrepresented groups to glean insight into the elements of programs aimed at achieving equity in leadership in the workplace

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The United States celebrated a landmark occasion on June 4th, 2019 marking the one-hundredth birthday of the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. Interestingly, the Senate vote at the time was 56 to 25, illustrating that many men were not willing to give women parity in shaping the discourse for the country (Pascus, 2019). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits an employer from discriminating against hiring anyone based on their race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and applies to a wide array of discrimination in employment practices by an employer with 15 or more employees, such as placement, promotion, demotion, transfer, termination, and discipline (Feder, 2015). Despite the legal rights women have earned over the past hundred years, and the steps forward women have taken to achieve professional and personal parity, the reality is that inequities still exist.

A 2015 Pew Research Center study on women and leadership reports that, while women have made progress reaching high-level leadership roles, they still lag significantly behind their male counterparts. Data from the University of Denver's Benchmarking Women's Leadership in the United States (2013) show that less than 20% of positional leaders across 14 sectors are held by women. In K-12 education specifically, women average 75% of teaching roles but only 30% of leadership roles (Lennon, 2013).

While the data are clear, the results of the efforts made to address the issue of gender equity in education are less so. Women who have achieved leadership roles report experiencing gender bias, few role models, and a pervasive lack of support (Grupton, 2009). The identification of a mentor has been studied and found to be beneficial in navigating one's

professional life (Murell, Bake-Beard, et al. 2008). It is essential to find solutions that enable K-12 education to achieve gender equity, creating a stronger workforce, and providing equal role models for all students, regardless of gender.

Philosophical and Theoretical Lens

Social role theory, the concept that examines gender differences and similarities in behavior, is the theoretical framework upon which this study of the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is viewed. Unlike biologists or economists, researchers of discreet disciplines who frame sex and behavior on a single cause or factor like Eagly and Wood (2007), the developers of social role theory, favor a broader perspective of gender and social roles. Their research concludes that differences in the behavior of men and women mirror the perception of social roles in a specific culture/society (Eagly & Wood, 2017).

Social role theory has roots in both psychological and sociological studies on the beliefs people hold about men, women, and gender. Psychological studies categorize men as agentic—assertive, competitive, and dominant—while women were seen as communal, concerned for others, friendly, and emotionally expressive (Eagly & Wood, 2017). Cecilia Ridgeway found that men are believed to have greater worth and value because of their access to societal power and influence, which in turn influenced group task outcomes in her 1984 study (Eagly & Wood, 2017). Studies like these strongly influence the development of social role theory.

There is an increasing number of gender researchers who support the concept that gender roles are significantly shaped by institutionalized norms, cultural beliefs, and social practices (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Social role theory seeks to unpack the reasons behind the ongoing gender stereotype beliefs that permeate modern society (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). It aids in the understanding of the statistical data on the underrepresentation of women in leadership, and

gives voice to the personal narratives that have illuminated the experiences of women who ascended to leadership roles.

MNT2LEAD

MNT2LEAD is a website created to assist women aspiring to a leadership role in education. It seeks to help women overcome some of the themes identified in the research outlined in Chapter 2 of this study. In the phenomenological study of female leaders by Gallagher (2017), work-life balance, mentorship and support, and a gendered view of leadership were noted as inhibitors to success. Gender bias and lack of support were also noted by Pernambuco-Wise (2014), and lack of confidence was reported by Pinkus (2016). MNT2LEAD is designed to be a convenient source of on-demand information on a variety of leadership topics curated by leaders in the field. MNT2LEAD aims to fill the mentorship and support void, which is documented in the research as a contributing factor to the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership (Gallagher, 2017; Grogan, 2005; Gupton, 1996; Hill, 2016; Kerr, 2014; Litmanovitz, 2011; Morgan, 2015; Pernambuco, 2014; Pincus, 2016; O’Conor, 2015; Sanderson, 2016).

By serving as a “digital mentor” for aspiring leaders, establishing a leadership community, and offering one-on-one mentoring services by appointment for those who cannot identify a supportive, available mentor in their professional life, MNT2LEAD will contribute positively to the community of women struggling to achieve parity in the educational leadership field.

Method Purpose

The researcher chose to use a case study design to explore two themes that permeated the body of research on women and educational leadership roles. First, the researcher sought to

understand what type of support(s) women believe they need to secure a position and thrive in an educational leadership role. Second, the researcher determined the usefulness of a website created to serve as a digital mentor that provides resources and support to aspiring female educational leaders. Since the researcher sought to understand the experiences of women who achieved a level of professional success as an educational leader, identify gaps in support, and offer a solution in the form of a website, a case study design approach was selected.

Case studies can “bring an evaluation to life. They can resonate for both case study participants on the ground, as well as for senior management and decision-makers” (Johnston, 2013). Case study design offers several approaches. Robert Stake differentiates case studies based on the purpose and design of the research using the categories, intrinsic, instrumental, and collective (Johnston, 2013). Robert Yin identifies three types of case studies based on the research phase: exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Johnston, 2013). Data gathered in these formats can be used to develop policy or examine programs (Johnston, 2013). Sharan Meriam also notes the positive uses of case study approach, as well as its limitations. Having insight into the authentic experiences could lead to a more generalized hypothesis, advancing knowledge in numerous fields, and proving to be useful in evaluating programs, processes, and policies, (Johnston, 2013). Since the nature of case study research is often small in scale, it can be harder to generalize and may be subject to bias. In response to this, Stake noted:

[K]nowledge transfer for case studies is inherently different: a researcher “will, like others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships—and fail to pass along others. They know that the reader, too, will add and subtract, invent and shape—reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it ... more likely to be personally useful. (2005, p. 455)

Further, while case studies are typically considered qualitative research, they can be quantitative or include a combination of qualitative and quantitative elements (Starman, 2013).

As the researcher will use a survey featuring structured, semi-structured, and open-ended questions to understand the resources accessible to women in the field and examine the usefulness of a website designed to promote female education leaders, case study design best supports this study.

Using a case study approach, the researcher sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the relevant personal experiences that enable some women to reach the pinnacle of their profession?
2. What pertinent components should be included in a website designed to assist aspiring female leaders to reach their career goals?

Population and Sample

The researcher used a purposive sample, focusing on women who have already attained a level of success as an educational leader. A purposive sample allows the researcher to “maximize understanding of the underlying phenomena” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Leveraging the experiences and perspectives of women who have overcome the odds to thrive as educational leaders will provide the most relevant data to authentically answer the research questions.

The research study was conducted with volunteer, self-identified female leaders within an international school organization comprised of 63 schools located in 28 countries around the world. The researcher selected this organization because its schools represent diverse settings, cultures, and contexts, and its employees have vast, differentiated, global experience in K-12 education.

Procedures

Since the goal of this research was to gain insight into a select group of experienced female leaders and then generalize their experiences to the larger population of aspiring female educational leaders, a case study approach is appropriate. The researcher employed a case study design utilizing a survey containing structured, semi-structured, and open-ended questions. Case study design allows the researcher to gain both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously using the same self-selected survey respondents (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Participants responded to closed-ended questions using a Likert scale to measure attitudes and the effectiveness of the website, as well as qualitative, open-ended questions about their experiences and personal sources of leadership support.

First, the researcher sought permission to email women working at the international school organization who hold director, division principal, head of school, or an equivalent role from the organization's chief executive officer (Appendix A). Once permission was secured and a list of email addresses was gathered, the researcher sent an introductory email with a call to action (Appendix B). Included in the email, if the recipient chose to participate, was a link to a SurveyMonkey consent form (Appendix C). Once participants completed the consent form, they were directed to complete a brief demographic survey (Appendix D). After the demographics were completed, they received access to the researcher developed MNT2LEAD website for review (Appendix F). Finally, the participants completed the survey to provide feedback on the website itself and share thoughts on personal leadership support and resources (Appendix E). When the participants responded to the survey and attempted to submit, they received their responses before the final submission. Once they were satisfied that their responses were

complete, they finalized and submitted, and their surveys were sent to the researcher's email address.

The use of surveys in research designs is “a set of research procedures in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe the attitudes, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors or characteristics of the population” (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). While surveys are often associated with quantitative design, the addition of open-ended and semi-structured questions allow the researcher to simultaneously accumulate qualitative data, as well (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). The researcher selected the use of an anonymous survey as a collection method to maximize data collection while minimizing the potential for personal influence or bias.

Data Collection

Data collection consisted of the administration of two surveys embedded together using SurveyMonkey: one a brief demographic survey (Appendix D), and the other the website feedback survey (Appendix F). The website feedback survey included responses requiring the use of a Likert scale and semi-structured and open-ended questions. Responses to survey statements were collected on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Statements that survey participants responded to included: The MNT2LEAD website is easy to access; The MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate, and The MNT2LEAD website offers useful information for women seeking educational leadership roles.

The semi-structured and open-ended questions allowed the participants to share what specific resources (human or otherwise) helped them to attain and thrive as educational leaders, and to list what other features they felt are important to include in a website for future women educational leaders.

Construction of the survey questions is critical to minimize question interpretation, confusion, and to ensure validity. As the researcher created the survey herself and did not use a preconstructed instrument, a pilot test was conducted with several doctoral students who were not part of the research study. A pilot study allows the researcher the opportunity to receive feedback on the individual questions, looking for jargon, multiple questions combined into one, or vague language (Creswell & Hirose, 2019).

Survey data from the female leaders helped the researcher answer the research questions. Responses to the Likert scale questions informed the content and features of the website. From the semi-structured and open-ended questions, themes emerged that informed the researcher's practice. Ultimately, the responses helped to shape a resource that will serve as a digital mentor to support female leaders to reach career aspirations and thrive, ultimately making K-12 education better for all students.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures used in this study were completed through the survey responses of the self-selected female leaders who choose to participate. Distribution of the survey was through SurveyMonkey to a purposive sample of female leaders employed by an international school organization. SurveyMonkey allows for anonymous responses by not providing the researcher with the IP addresses of participants. Biographical information, such as name or place of work, was not collected.

Survey collection data was conducted during the month of October 2019 with a potential respondent pool of 115 female leaders. Once collected, surveys that were found to be incomplete were excluded from the data set. Additionally, any respondent who decided that she

did not want her data used after survey completion could contact the researcher at any time without consequence.

Data Analysis

The researcher collected qualitative and quantitative data using a concurrent mixed-methods approach. This approach allows for the triangulation of both data sets (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). According to Creswell (2003), “[i]n concurrently gathering both forms of data at the same time, the researcher seeks to compare both forms of data to search for congruent findings (e.g., how the themes identified in the qualitative data collection compare with the statistical results in the quantitative analysis” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Further, a case study design is useful in gaining a thorough understanding of changes needed for a marginalized group, as well as for evaluating the outcomes of a program using both empirical and perspective data sets (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed separately using a side by side approach. In this approach, the researcher reports each data set separately and then develops comparison in a discussion of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, the researcher tallied the survey questions according to the point value they were assigned in the Likert scale. Descriptive statistics will include mean, mode, median, standard deviation, and average. Next, the semi-structured questions were analyzed, coded, and categorized under the themes that emerged. Finally, the researcher compared the two data sets to determine where there was convergence or divergence between the two sources of information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The researcher’s intent in selecting a concurrent case study using a survey instrument was twofold: first, to gather data on the MNT2LEAD website as a useful tool for female educational leaders; and second, to better understand the experiences and resources successful women

leaders have employed. This information will help better replicate those supports electronically for others who may not have access to them in their workplace.

Ethical Considerations

All participants signed an online consent form before participating in the study. This form outlined the process and reinforced the steps taken to ensure the anonymity of each individual. Participants had the option at any time during the survey or after completing to withdraw from the study. The researcher used SurveyMonkey, a highly reputable data-gathering site with an extensive privacy policy, and selected the option *not* to collect IP address information. According to the SurveyMonkey website, “[t]he Anonymous Responses collector option lets you choose whether or not to track and store identifiable respondent information in survey results. SurveyMonkey records respondent IP addresses in backend logs and deletes them after 13 months”.

Ensuring the privacy of the participants’ responses was paramount to the success of the study. Participants will not feel comfortable providing honest feedback if their anonymity is not protected. SurveyMonkey provides features that ensure the researcher at no time has access to participant geographical or other potentially identifying information. Further, the researcher kept the survey data on a password-protected flash drive and locked in a cabinet requiring a key. After three years, all data will be permanently destroyed.

Limitations

There were several limitations in the study related to the selection of participants. First, there was the potential of only a small number of women leaders responding to the survey, thereby limiting the researcher’s ability to make broad generalizations based on their feedback. Additionally, the researcher only offered the survey to educational leaders currently working in a

global organization of private schools. The survey did not include women leaders working in public schools. Further, the researcher did not survey male educational leaders or women leaders in other professions for their perspectives, so comparisons were not available for analysis.

There was the potential for bias in the use of a survey instrument that could limit the validity of the data. It was possible that participants might unintendedly respond to survey questions with a self-presentation bias. A self-presentation bias is a tendency for a participant to respond in a manner that makes them look good or to avoid looking bad (Kopcha & Sullivan, 2007). Confirmation bias is another limitation that should be acknowledged. Simply put, confirmation bias is to agree with or validate evidence that aligns with our own beliefs (Doyle, 2018). Finally, the respondents could respond with an unconscious intent to please the researcher.

The researcher attempted to limit these biases through a pilot study of the survey questions to ensure clear communication and avoid confusion and interpretation. The researcher cast a wide net within the international school organization to reach as many diverse perspectives as possible. Last, the researcher sent a clear message to the potential participants about the purpose of the survey and the importance and significance of honest feedback.

Risks and Benefits

The researcher took every precaution to minimize any risk to the participants, employing security measures throughout the data gathering, storing, and analysis phases of the study. The risks for this study were minimal as participants could opt-out at any point during the data gathering. Using SurveyMonkey as the data gathering tool ensured anonymity to all participants. As a benefit, participants may have experienced intrinsic satisfaction in providing feedback that could support future leaders. Additionally, they might have found the website useful in

supporting their own professional goals. It was the hope of the researcher that the female educational leaders who shared their expertise will inform, inspire, and empower future leaders and consequently choose to continue to aid in the development of women in the profession.

Summary of Problem and Significance

The study was significant for several reasons. First and foremost, there is still a wide gap in attainment of educational leadership roles between men and women, leaving schools without the varied perspectives, styles, and influences of both genders. According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), less than two thousand of the nation's almost fourteen thousand superintendents are women (Glass, n.d.). Second, the education industry has not done enough to close the gender gap in ways that meet the need of working women. There is an abundance of research that documents both the struggles of women as they attempt to navigate a career ladder, as well as the factors that enabled women to attain leadership roles. These include a lack of available resources, role models and mentors, gender bias, and work-life balance (Gallagher, 2017; Grogan, 2005; Gupton, 1996; Hill, 2016; Kerr, 2014; Litmanovitz, 2011; Morgan, 2015; Pernambuco, 2014; Pincus, 2016; O'Connor, 2015; Sanderson, 2016). Finding ways to support gender parity and address the challenges women in K-12 education face creates richer, more diverse schools that most effectively meet the needs of all students.

This chapter outlined the research design and the study procedures. First, it examined the philosophical foundation upon which the study was built, followed by an overview of the MNT2LEAD website. After that, the researcher outlined the use of a case study approach and the purposive population and sample. Next, the researcher detailed the description of data collection and instruments, as well as the procedures that were employed and the assumptions

that were examined. Lastly, the chapter concluded with a review of ethical considerations, considering the risks and benefits and the study's limitations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Overview

The aim of this dissertation was to identify the challenges unique to women seeking advancement in educational leadership that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles as well as the enablers to success. Through a thorough examination of the literature, the researcher built an online platform specifically for women educational leaders focused on the areas identified as potential barriers and enablers to success, which include gender bias, work-life balance, lack of support, few role models, and limited access to mentors. By creating an interactive website that provides women with on-demand practical solutions, guidance, support, and mentoring, the researcher hopes to move one step closer to closing the gap on gender equity in K-12 education.

The case study, which solicited the feedback and experiences of practicing female educational leaders, was comprised of two distinct surveys merged into one SurveyMonkey instrument. The first survey consisted of four demographic questions aimed at understanding the profiles of the research participants. The second survey consisted of both a Likert scale (quantitative) and open-ended and semi-structured (qualitative) questions. It required the participants to first review the MNT2LEAD website in order to respond to questions about its relevance, ease of use, and value. The Likert scale questions asked the participants to provide feedback on the different sections of the website while the semi-structured and open-ended questions were designed to better understand the personal experiences and resources that allowed the participants to achieve a level of success as educational leaders. Finally, the participants were asked to provide suggestions for additional content they believed might enrich the website.

The researcher emailed 115 potential participants who met the requirement of the purposive sample (a practicing female educational leader) culled from an international school group's individual school websites. The initial email was sent on October 15, 2019, and a reminder email was sent October 29, 2019. There were 48 participants who completed the survey (41.7% response rate). According to Lindemann (2019), based on nine separate survey sources, an email survey response rate of 30% was the average. Further, according to data site Genroe, a percentage above 25% is considered a good response rate (Ramshaw, n.d.).

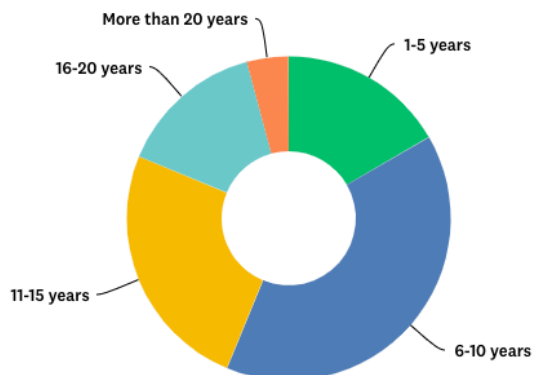
Survey Results: Demographic Profile

The demographic questions were aimed at understanding the profiles of the participants by asking about their professional experience and ethnic identification. Of the 48 participants, almost 40% responded that they served between 6-10 years as a leader, and 25% responded with 11-15 years. Almost 20% were relatively new to leadership while 4% were veterans having served more than 20 years in a leadership role. Figure 1 illustrates the participant's experience levels.

Figure 1. Demographic

How many years have you served in an educational leadership position?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ 1-5 years	16.67%	8
▼ 6-10 years	39.58%	19
▼ 11-15 years	25.00%	12
▼ 16-20 years	14.58%	7
▼ More than 20 years	4.17%	2
TOTAL		48

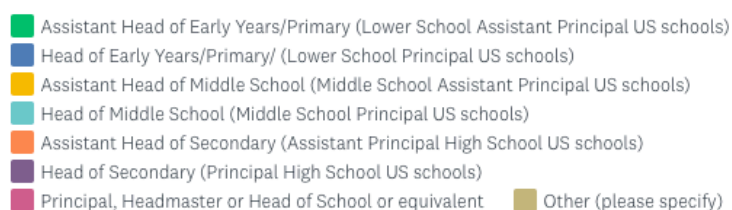
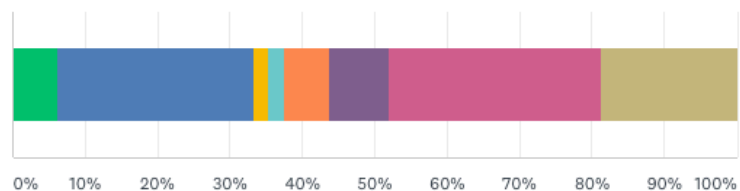
SurveyMonkey Years of Leadership Experience

Participants were also asked to identify their current role. Of the 48 respondents, the highest percentage identified as head of school, principal, or equivalent position, with the next highest identified as head of early years/primary or lower school principal. The nine respondents who identified as “Other” identified as an assistant head of school, academic and/or curriculum director, IT director, or other school administrator.

Figure 2. Demographic SurveyMonkey Current Role

Which best describes your current role?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



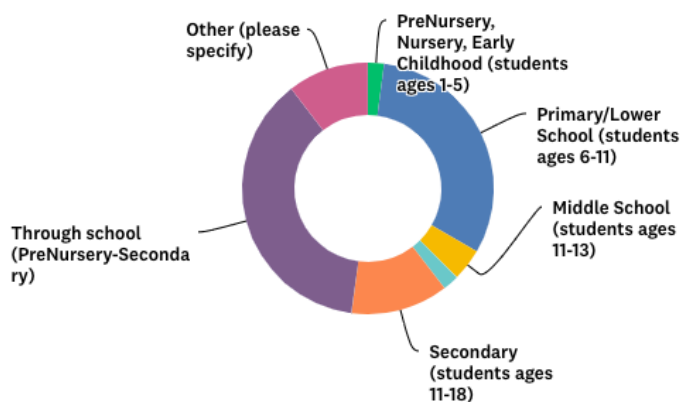
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Assistant Head of Early Years/Primary (Lower School Assistant Principal US schools)	6.25% 3
Head of Early Years/Primary/ (Lower School Principal US schools)	27.08% 13
Assistant Head of Middle School (Middle School Assistant Principal US schools)	2.08% 1
Head of Middle School (Middle School Principal US schools)	2.08% 1
Assistant Head of Secondary (Assistant Principal High School US schools)	6.25% 3
Head of Secondary (Principal High School US schools)	8.33% 4
Principal, Headmaster or Head of School or equivalent	29.17% 14
Other (please specify) Responses	18.75% 9

In addition to identifying their current role, participants were asked to select the setting in which they currently work. The largest percentage of respondents, 37.5 %, indicated that they work in a prekindergarten through twelfth grade school followed by 31.25% who work at a primary or lower school. The fewest number of respondents reported working in either a stand-alone high school or early childhood facility. Figure 3 illustrates these results.

Figure 3. Demographic SurveyMonkey Current Work Setting

My current role is in

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



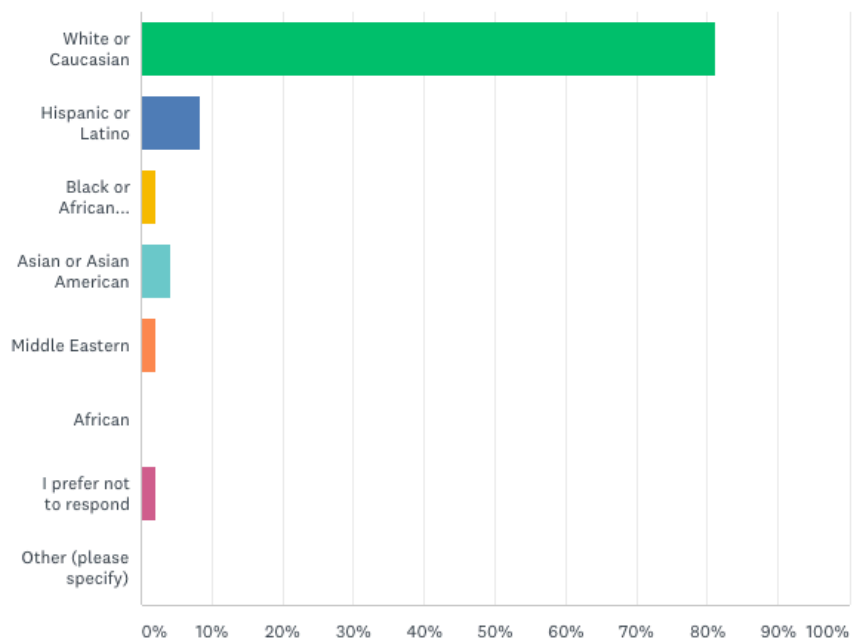
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
▼ PreNursery, Nursery, Early Childhood (students ages 1-5)	2.08%	1
▼ Primary/Lower School (students ages 6-11)	31.25%	15
▼ Middle School (students ages 11-13)	4.17%	2
▼ High School (students ages 14-18)	2.08%	1
▼ Secondary (students ages 11-18)	12.50%	6
▼ Through school (PreNursery-Secondary)	37.50%	18
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 10.42%	5
TOTAL		48

Moreover, of the 48 participants who responded to the survey, 39 identified as white, four as Hispanic or Latino, two as Asian or Asian American, one as Black or African American, one as Middle Eastern, and one who preferred not to respond. Figure 4 provides the graphic representation of these results.

Figure 4. Demographic SurveyMonkey Ethnic Identification

What ethnicity best describes you?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



Quantitative Data Results: Addressing the Research Questions

The next series of questions embedded in the SurveyMonkey instrument required the participants to access the MNT2LEAD website. Upon completion of the demographic information, participants were provided a URL link and a password to access the website along with directions to ensure a thorough review of the content in the different sections. After reviewing the site, participants were asked to return to the survey to provide feedback. Responses to these quantitative questions address the research question, *what pertinent components should be included in a website designed to assist aspiring female educational leaders to reach their career goals?*

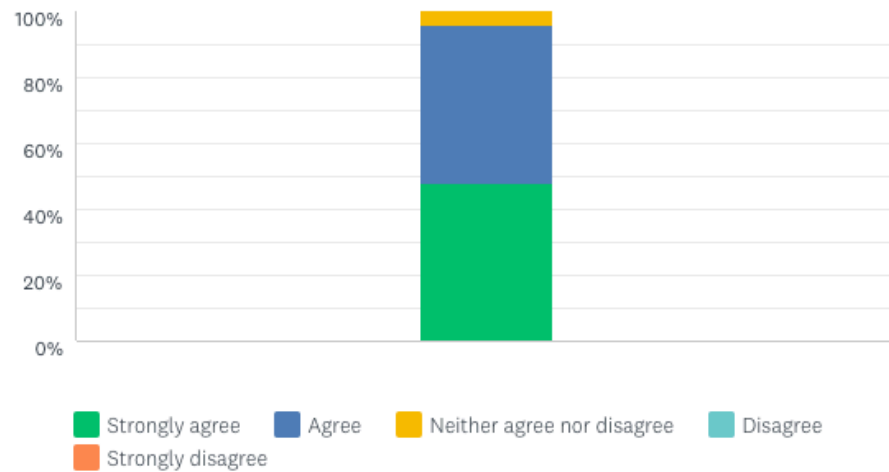
Survey questions six and seven requested feedback on the website's ease of use and readability. According to *Social Media Today*, an industry website operated by Industry Dive,

“usability is critical for the success of any website and should not be overlooked” (Singh, K. 2013). Survey results reveal that over 95% of the respondents agree that the MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate. Critical to the success of a website are well-planned architecture and well-formatted, easily scannable content (Singh, 2013). Figure 5 shows the female leaders’ responses to the ease of the website’s navigation features.

Figure 5. MNT2LEAD SurveyMonkey Website Navigation

The MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

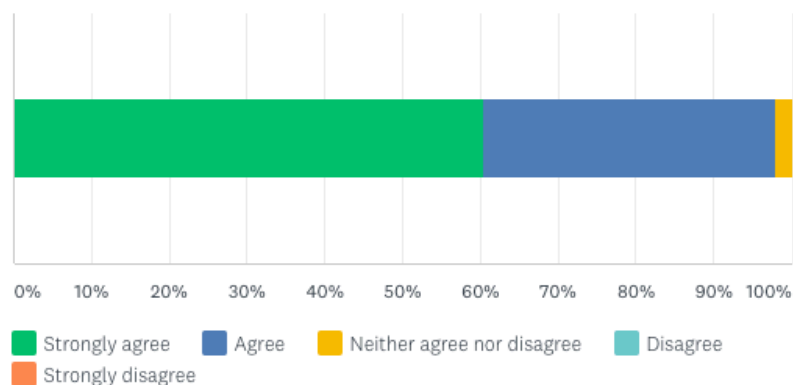


Additionally, more than 97% agree that the MNT2LEAD website is easy to understand. Figure 6 depicts the female leaders’ responses.

Figure 6. MNT2LEAD SurveyMonkey Website Comprehension

The information on the MNT2LEAD website is easy to understand.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

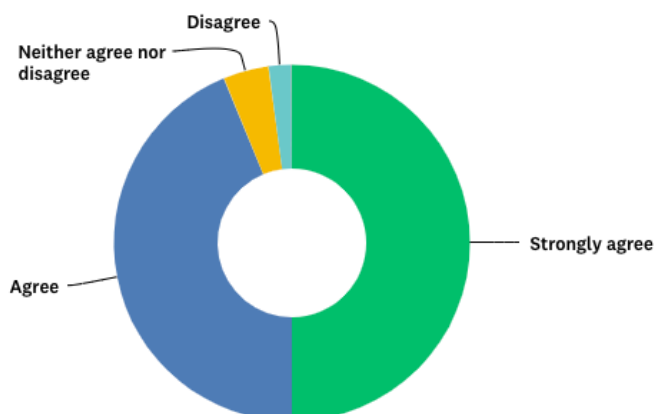


Following on, question eight required the participants to determine whether the MNT2LEAD website articulates the obstacles women face obtaining or maintaining an educational leadership role. This feedback was central to the researcher's core purpose in developing the MNT2LEAD website: to identify the obstacles women face, and develop content that could help women move beyond those limiting conditions. Almost 94% of the participants agreed that the website outlines the challenges that women face in their quest to achieve or thrive in a leadership role. Another 4% or two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, while 2% or one respondent, disagreed. Figure 7 graphically depicts the results.

Figure 7. MNT2LEAD SurveyMonkey Challenges

The MNT2LEAD website outlines challenges aspiring women leaders face in obtaining or maintaining a leadership role.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



The MNT2LEAD website is divided into multiple sections that include blog posts, advice from well-known international experts, and interviews with current female educational leaders, all aimed at demystifying challenges and supporting women on their leadership journey. In a phenomenological study in 2017, K. Gallagher shared that interviews with female leaders revealed that work-life balance, a lack of mentorship and support, and a gendered view of leadership were inhibitors to success (Gallagher, 2017). Questions nine through 12 delve into those sections to determine their relevance and utility.

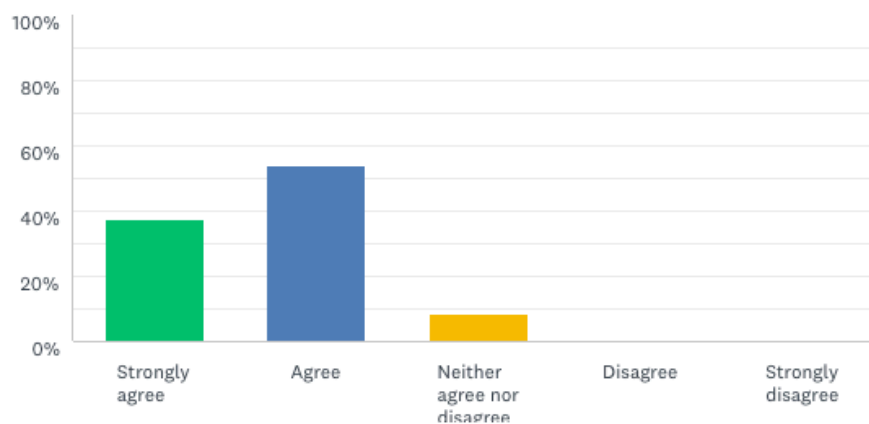
Included in the MNT2LEARN section of the website is a leadership primer comprised of collated TED Talks each with follow-up reflection questions organized around the following topics: confidence, gender bias, leadership, mentors /role models and support, work-life balance, and inspiration. Similarly, the MNT2READ section includes research-based blog posts with titles such including: “Confronting Gender Bias in the Workplace,” “Work-Life Balance — Setting the Expectations for Working Women,” and “Believe the Hype — You’re No Imposter.”

In her groundbreaking study on highly successful female educational leaders in 2011, Miki Litmanovitz researched factors that contributed to women’s ability to reach the positions they attained. Of the women interviewed, being supported by women mentors, attending leadership training, and having a role model were cited (Litmanovitz, 2011). Confirmation that the factors important to Litmanovitz’s subjects’ are still relevant to women leaders today is supported by the SurveyMonkey data. More than 91% of survey participants felt that the Leadership Primer is a useful tool for aspiring female leaders. Figures 8 illustrate the responses.

Figure 8. MNT2LEAD Leadership Primer

The Leadership Primer in the MNT2LEARN section is a beneficial tool for aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

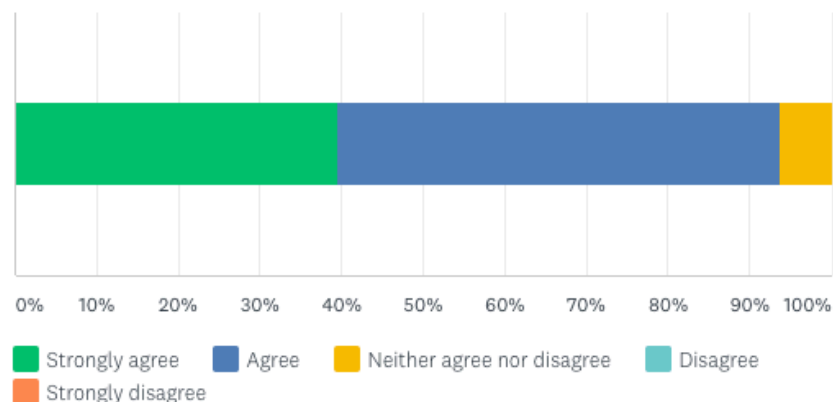


Further, over 93% agreed that the blogs in the MNT2READ website section are pertinent for aspiring female leaders. Figure 9 illustrates the responses.

Figure 9. MNT2READ Blog Posts

The blogs in the MNT2READ section highlight topics that are pertinent to aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



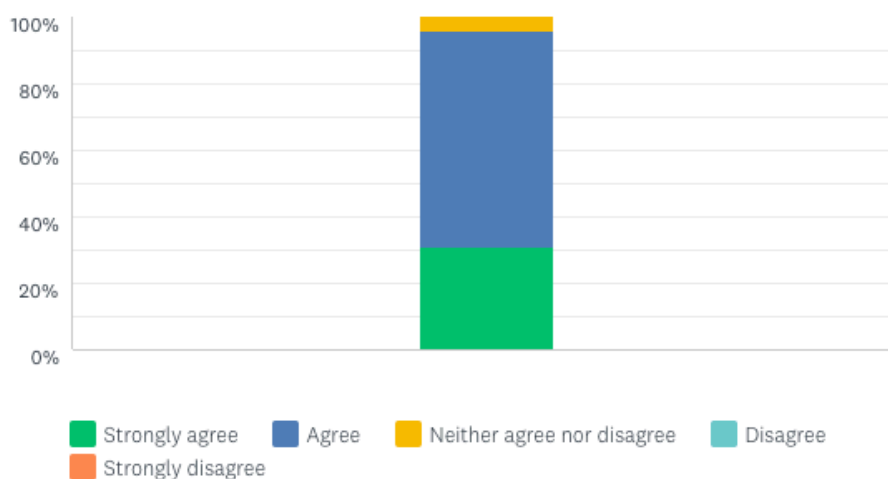
Deepening the researcher’s understanding of the website’s relevance, respondents were asked to explore the personal stories of women who have “shattered the glass ceiling.” The MNT2ACHIEVE section features interviews with current female leaders that focus on illuminating the universal challenges women face in attaining leadership roles, and offering practical advice for aspiring leaders. Interview questions with current women in the field include: What role have mentors played in your life; what is the most important leadership lesson you’ve learned; and what advice do you have for aspiring female leaders? Recognizing the powerful impact women have on influencing each other is a foundational theme of the research explored in this dissertation, and reinforces the need to share the stories of women who have attained success in their field. In the seminal work, *Echoing Their Ancestors, Women Lead School Districts in the United States* (2005), Margaret Grogan shares stories of women whose experiences paved the way for future public school superintendents (Grogan, 2005). Confirming that personal stories are still significant, 95% of female leaders surveyed agree that the

interviews in the MNT2ACHIEVE section are pertinent and useful for aspiring leaders. Figure 9 depicts the respondents' views on the significance of the personal leadership narratives in the MNT2ACHIEVE section of the website, and their willingness to share their own success story.

Figure 9. MNT2ACHIEVE Leadership Lessons

The leadership lesson interviews in the MNT2ACHIEVE section are informative for aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

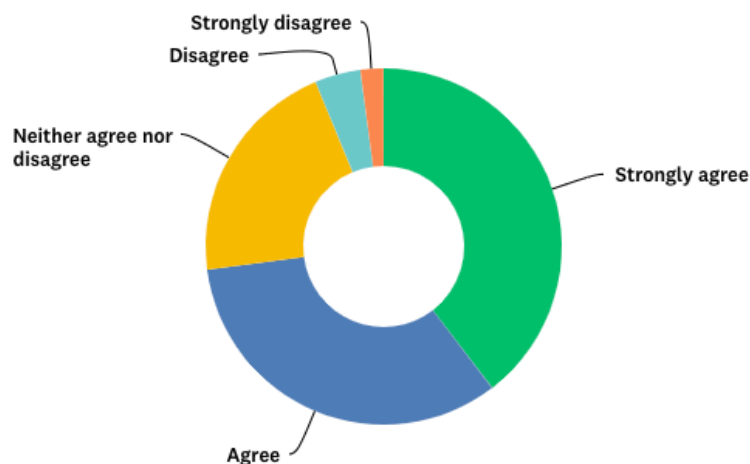


Interestingly, when asked whether the respondents are interested in sharing their leadership journey on the MNT2LEAD website, only 72% agreed, while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed and 6% disagreed. This is an area worth further exploration. Figure 10 highlights the responses.

Figure 10. MNT2LEAD Willingness to Share Leadership Experience

I would be interested in sharing my leadership experiences with aspiring female educational leaders on the MNT2LEAD website.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



While the entire website is designed to serve as a “digital mentor,” the MNT2CONNECT section lists optional services for one-on-one virtual mentoring. Researchers Gupton and Slick’s foundational book, *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Story of How They Got There* (1996), and Sandra Gupton’s 2005 follow-up article, “Women in Educational Leadership in the U.S.: Reflections of a 50 Year Veteran,” confirm the belief among women in the field that lack of access to mentors and role models is one of the greatest obstacles to success.

Throughout the literature, women repeatedly attribute much of their success to having a female mentor or sponsor who helped navigate the gendered challenges associated with being an aspiring female leader. Dr. Tekakwitha Pernambuco-Wise describes the importance of having a champion in a 2014 article based on her doctoral research with female heads of school, published in the *National Association Independent School* magazine. In “Navigating a Labyrinth,” she shares that women who identify a mentor in the workplace attribute that relationship to their

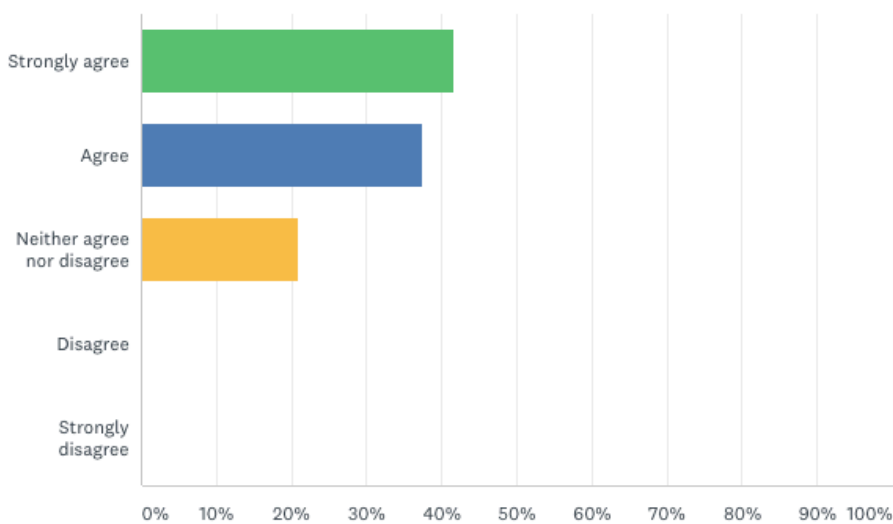
professional success (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014). Additionally, having a mentor supports the attainment of leadership goals. The Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI), which matched mentors to women in post-secondary education at West Virginia University, was found to have a positive impact on the participants (DeFrank-Cole, et al., 2016).

Since the Internet has only been widely available since the early 1990s, the concept of online mentoring is relatively new. However, 79% of survey respondents agreed that the services outlined in the MNT2CONNECT section are a positive alternative to a workplace mentor, while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. Figure 11 displays the results.

Figure 11. MNT2CONNECT Mentoring Services

The mentoring service offered on MNT2LEAD is a positive alternative method of support for aspiring female educational leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



The final two quantitative questions, numbers 13 and 14, assess the overall impact of the MNT2LEAD website. Current female leaders were asked if the website was a useful tool and if

they would recommend the site to a friend or colleague. Over 93% endorsed the website's utility and 89.5% would recommend the MNT2LEAD website to someone else.

Qualitative Data Results: Answering the Research Questions

The final two questions asked respondents to share personal experiences or offer website recommendations based on their own journey to become an educational leader. Prompted by the question, *in your experience, what resource or support was most impactful in your leadership career*, women leaders provided rich, personal narratives of their experiences. Examination of the responses through the use of thematic analysis was foundational to answering the final research question, *what are the relevant personal experiences that enable some women to reach the pinnacle of their profession?*

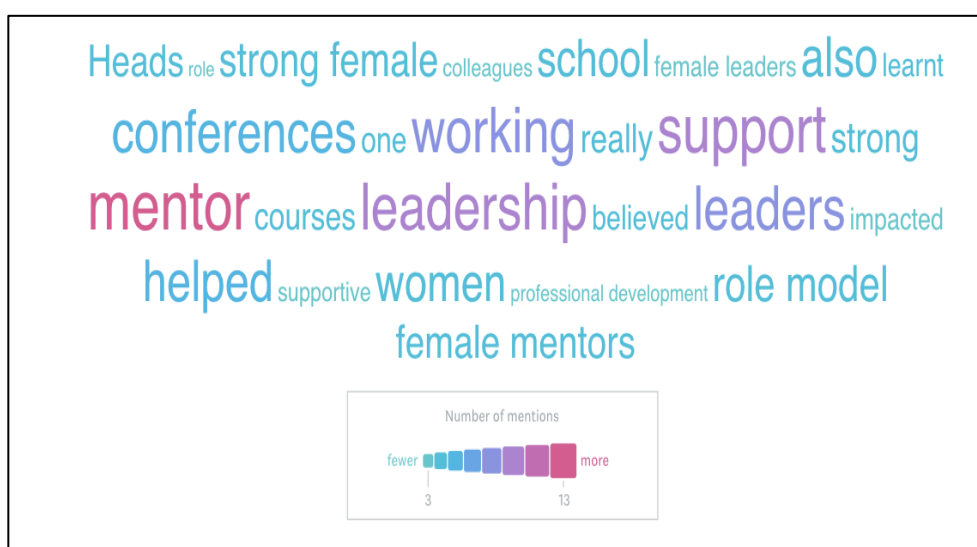
To unpack the rich qualitative data within the responses, the researcher used thematic analysis. In the 2017 study, *Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria*, authors Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, explain “thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions. It is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set” (Nowell et al., 2017). Further, thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be adapted for the needs of many studies, providing a detailed and layered understanding of the data (Nowell, et al., 2017). The authors offer a six-phase, research-based method that includes: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Nowell, et al., 2017).

The researcher combined the method outlined above with the analytics provided through the SurveyMonkey website to develop the themes that emerged from the responses.

SurveyMonkey provides a count of the most frequently used words in semi-structured responses, which provided the researcher with a reference point upon which to build themes.

For example, 13 out of 48 respondents, or 27.8 %, used the word “mentor” in response to the survey question followed by ten out of 48, or 20.83%, who used the word “support” when asked to identify what was most impactful to them in their career. Figure 11 is a graphic depiction of the most frequent words written by survey respondents.

Figure 11. MNT2LEAD Most Frequent Semi Structured Response



Ultimately, the researcher identified four themes that were prevalent in the responses: mentors and/or a supportive supervisor, professional development and formal education, role models (both positive and negative), and collaborative and collegial teams/co-workers. Survey participants were not limited to identifying one thing that positively impacted their career trajectory, so many of these themes were embedded in each individual response. These elements are explored further as follows.

Theme 1: Mentors and Supportive Supervisors

More than 25% of the female leaders who responded to the survey attributed their success to mentors or supervisors who encouraged and supported their goals. Several responses shared

the impact mentors had on their self-efficacy and confidence. Having someone recognize and believe in the respondents' abilities was often career altering. Below is a selection of verbatim quotations from the respondents.

- “During my leadership career the most impactful resource has been other people, the right people, a strong mentor who built confidence helped dispel the imposter syndrome myth in my own head.”
- “Having a female mentor who believed in me more than I believed in myself.”
- “Having mentors that I could share my reflections about my actions and decisions has been very helpful.”
- “Having a mentor is a huge support and if you have a female colleague who is also in the same career space as you then the peer-support works well.”
- “A Head who empowered me to just go ahead and do it! The fact that delegation was done in earnest but my efforts were recognised helped me thrive.”
- “Nothing is more useful than face to face mentoring from someone who really believes in your possibilities.”

Theme 2: Professional Development and Formal Education

Preparation for a leadership role is a theme that permeated the research and is reinforced by the women in this survey. Women interviewed in numerous studies cite preparation through professional studies and leadership experiences as critical to advancement (Gallagher, 2017; Grogan, 2005; Gupton, 1996; Hill, 2016; Kerr, 2014; Litmanovitz, 2011; Morgan, 2015; Pernambuco, 2014; Sanderson, 2016). Respondents credit several specific professional development programs as well as formal education opportunities as helpful in their roles. Included below are a few of their responses.

- “Opportunities that challenged me to recognize my strengths and areas for growth.”
- “Participating in the NAIS Leadership Institute and completing a 360 took my development as a leader to the next level.”

- “In the UK I was able to join the National College for School Leaders as it was then. There was a blend of training programmes, networking, forums and research material that I could use to inform my practice and to use in coaching meetings with my Head Teacher. It made me feel valued and empowered as a leader to think about my leadership and its impact.”
- “Doing a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Management and studying about many leadership issues for women.”
- “Face to face courses & conferences aimed at aspiring women leaders are also invaluable.”
- “Harvard Graduate School of Education Professional Development programs”.

Theme 3: Role Models

A prevailing theme in the research is the lack of role models many female leaders noted as a barrier to success. This is highly correlative to the documented studies illustrating the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. Studies by Bruner and Grogan (2005) examine the gender gap in leadership in the superintendent role, Hill, et al. (2016) examine trends in public and private school administration, and Kerr and et al. (2014) report on gender-based workforce representation. If women are not equitably represented in positions of authority, then they cannot serve as role models for aspiring leaders. When females had identified role models, they attributed them to their success (Gallagher, 2017; Litmanovitz, 2011).

Survey respondents indicated that positive role models were integral to their success as leaders. Moreover, several respondents cited their mother as an important role model, particularly if she was a “working mom.” Conversely, several respondents noted negative role models as having significant impact on their leadership career. Some of their comments are captured as follows.

- “Having very strong female role models from my mother and grandmother when I was young to colleagues in roles that I wanted in the school.”

- “Strong role models.”
- “And working with one terrible leader. I also learnt from their mistakes.”
- “It was actually watching poor leaders funnily enough. They taught me how I didn’t want to lead and I effectively learnt from their mistakes.”
- “Family. My mother as a role model for successful working mom.”
- “Also, having a strong female role model who has taught me how to consider each decision from many angles.”

Theme 4: Collaborative and Collegial Teams/Co-workers

Having a collaborative workplace with supportive colleagues was the final theme that emerged from the survey question, *in your experience, what resource or support was most impactful in your leadership career?* Many respondents articulated the value of collegial relationships and teamwork and the impact those had on their ability to attain leadership goals. While this theme is less pronounced in the researcher’s findings, it mirrors the idea of support echoed throughout the literature. It illustrates women’s ability to ascend to leadership roles when not held back by gendered workplaces. Collaborative work environments that are equitable and hospitable to both men and women are enablers to success noted by Pernambuco-Wise (2014), Pincus (2016), and Sanderson and Whitehead (2016), among others. Included below are several comments by respondents.

- “Collaborating and reaching out to other female leaders.”
- “Working in a collaborative team.”
- “My team.”
- “Network of colleagues around the world.”
- “Supportive colleagues - both male and female, like so many women, I suffer from imposter syndrome, so having reassurance and encourage helps slowly chip away at this.”

- “Collaboration.”
- “Strong support network, both personal and professional.”
- “Quality and trusting deputies.”

The last semi-structured question asked the participants, based on their expertise as female educational leaders, to make suggestions for additions to the website. Again, these responses were analyzed using a thematic approach. A wide variety of suggestions and comments were collated and sorted into categories from which three themes emerged: additional resources/tools, diverse perspectives, and connections. Figure 12 illustrates the themes and paraphrased comments.

Figure 12. MNT2LEAD Additional Content

Additional Resources/Tools	Diverse Perspectives	Connections
Practical resources. e.g. how to write an assertive CV, letter of application	More role models in different cultures	A section where people can suggest topics/articles
List of books, articles, links to online courses	Diversity	A forum where ideas can be shared live
Upcoming conferences, seminars	Include some women achievers from Asia.	I would like to simply connect, like a storyboard.
Job board	Articles on female leadership from the male perspective since they are often the decision-makers. We need to know what we are up against.	A consortium
Additional strategies for work-life balance		Organize regular conferences for direct sharing of experiences, expertise, etc.
Quizzes/tools to further investigate your leadership style and strengths and weaknesses		Lists of mentors

In lieu of additional content, many of the women surveyed chose to provide affirming comments regarding the MNT2LEAD website. Below is a sampling of feedback.

- “I can’t think of anything else. It seems very complete.”
- “I liked its focused content so didn’t see any obvious gaps.”
- “It’s really comprehensive. At this time, I can’t think of anything more to add.”

- “A really refreshing website with much to offer in its infancy, one I would certainly recommend to my faculty.”
- “I think it is very easy to navigate and provides valuable information.”
- “This website is very complete.”
- “Nothing I can perceive at this point.”
- “I think it has it all.”

Summary of Findings

The feedback from the female leaders who participated in this case study confirms the barriers to achieving gender equity in educational leadership and underscore their collective experience. Further, the feedback affirms that women who have an identified mentor believe that she plays an important role in helping them to reach their leadership aspirations. The researcher’s findings aligned to previous studies, including one by Pernambuco-Wise (2014) in which 19 female heads of school interviewed shared personal anecdotes of their leadership journeys. Among the many similarities, they cited mentors as a contributing factor to their success. Studies by Gallagher (2017) and Sanderson and Whitehead (2016) echoed many of the same themes. Unpacking the complexities of these phenomena, both the barriers to and enablers of leadership success are seminal in the researcher’s design of the MNT2LEAD website.

The aim of MNT2LEAD is to provide aspiring and current female educational leaders with the information, support, and resources necessary to advance their careers. Serving as a “digital mentor,” the site can fill a piece of the gap that exists in formal mentoring programs for women educational leaders. It is clear from the survey responses that this is needed and valued, and that the content on MNT2LEAD is relevant and supportive of women aspiring to leadership roles.

What was most significant about the responses to the website was the clear desire of women to identify ways in which they can connect with others facing similar challenges. Ironically, the need for women to support other women in their leadership journey is a theme that has not changed a great deal since documented by Gupton and Slick (1996). This deep sense of community was palpable and confirmed through several unsolicited emails received by the researcher from participants. Feedback such as, *What a wonderful idea. I wish I had had such a resource available to me at the start of my career; I love the idea of women supporting other women; Navigating through the website was both empowering and inspiring; and I am proud to see the work other women have done*, illustrates the desire for women to engage with each other and find support through extended networks. Enhancing the MNT2LEAD website's ability to connect women is a definite next step.

The pervasive and ongoing challenge to eliminate gender inequities and increase the representation of women in educational leadership cannot be eliminated by one website. However, the ability to positively effect an infinite number of women aspiring to lead schools across the globe is possible. Having access to a system of support, strategies, information, mentors, and a community for women with similar aspirations is wholeheartedly endorsed by the female leaders surveyed in this study. Further, in the semi-structured questions, they shared strategic, thoughtful, and varied ideas for additional topics to be included on the MNT2LEAD website. One can infer that broadening the content scope to feature more practical, how-to information is needed because it is not readily available to all aspiring leaders, further confirming the need for increased gender specific career leadership support. In conclusion, the findings from this case study confirm that less traditional methods of mentoring, such as the

guidance offered through the MNT2LEAD website, are impactful and have the potential to positively influence women as they strive to reach their goals as educational leaders.

Recommendations

This case study focused on the many external barriers that women face as they attempt to attain leadership roles, strikingly similar to the struggles documented by Blount in *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency 1873-1995* (1998). Often referred to as a “glass ceiling“, a term coined over 40 years ago by Marilyn Loden (2017), these obstacles often prevent women from reaching their full potential. These have been well documented in the literature (Blount, 1998, Gallagher, 2017, Gupton, 2009, Litmanovitz, 2007, Pernambuco-Wise, 2014) and confirmed by the participants in this research study. The very real challenges, including gender bias, gendered workplaces, work-life balance, lack of support, limited role models, particularly diverse role models, and few mentors, still exist in public, private, and international schools. As described in the research study on gendered leadership in international schools by Sanderson and Whitehead (2015), these barriers permeate the culture and make advancement difficult. It is clear that there is much work to do to remove these barriers for women, and the researcher is encouraged by the focus on gender equity that has sparked our collective consciousness. Born out of the #MeToo movement and with a heightened focus on the plight of women, grass roots social change initiatives are on the rise and gaining momentum. One only has to look to social media to see movements that advocate for equity, beginning with young children in school. Groups like Girls Who Code and Girl Rising illustrate the awareness that we must start early and prioritize gender equity education in our schools. And while equity for women is the focus of this dissertation in practice, priority must be given to education that illuminates the challenges faced by all marginalized groups.

What the researcher discovered through this research and own heightened awareness of gender equity issues in leadership is the real and often overlooked phenomena of the “sticky floor” for women. While the sticky floor used to refer to women in low level positions with few opportunities for advancement, the contemporary definition has evolved to refer to self-limiting beliefs. Wyra (2017) states that “[s]ticky floors are our self-limiting beliefs, assumptions, and sabotaging behaviours that undermine not only our own ability, but that of other women—to achieve their career goals and maximise the value we can bring to our teams and organisations. These sticky floors keep dragging us down every time we get a foot up the ladder.” This theme of self-doubt, lack of confidence, and imposter syndrome are areas for extensive further exploration.

Understanding why so many women report feelings of insecurity and self-doubt that limit their potential is vital to the well-being of the population. Examining parenting practices and unconscious bias that begins in a child’s infancy and seeps into educational settings are necessary first steps. Parenting education is a must. Additionally, increasing the number of programs that authentically foster confidence in young girls and teens so they can thrive as women is critical. As explained by Eagly and Wood (2016) and Ridegway and Correll (2004), social role theory underscores the beliefs and expectations of boys and girls as they grow up, and can influence self-efficacy. Examining societal norms such as pink and blue brains that “explain” why boys are better at math, reduces the potential of all children to flourish. And until society can rectify these limiting beliefs, women and men must actively influence the generations of women who currently live in their own “sticky floors”.

There is already an awareness beginning to take shape that addresses women and their lack of self-efficacy. Books such as *Brave Not Perfect*, *Empower Our Girls* and *10% Braver* are

aimed at reducing the “sticky floor” stigma while reducing self-limiting beliefs. But much more work is needed. The researcher recommends further examination on how women can overcome their personal internal challenges as well as the external institutional barriers to thrive as women and educational leaders.

CHAPTER V

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Problem in Practice

One hundred years ago, women achieved a landmark victory in the passing of the 19th Amendment, giving them the right to vote (Pruitt, 2016). Almost 60 years ago, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 made clear that employment discrimination based on numerous criteria including race, color, religion, sex, or national origin was illegal (Feder, 2015). Despite the legal rights women have fought valiantly to earn, and the positive steps forward they have taken to achieve personal and professional parity, underrepresentation in leadership remains (Pew, 2015).

One might assume, based on the number of women who enter the education profession, that equity in leadership would exist. However, a significant gender gap remains. According to a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), women hold about 51% of principal roles, most predominantly in elementary schools. However, the number of female teachers is approximately 76% (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016). The percentage of women serving as district superintendents remains around 27% (AASA, 2015). Women hold approximately 33% of head of school roles in independent schools (Pinkus, 2016). In England, women comprise 62% of the workforce in secondary schools, but only 36% of headteacher roles (O’Conor, 2015).

The question remains: If women represent such a large portion of the workforce, why have they not achieved equity in educational leadership roles? Numerous research studies have interviewed women who have attained leadership roles and documented the obstacles and enablers to success. Several recurring themes emerged from the research. Women indicated that

gender bias, leadership stereotypes, a lack of mentoring programs, few role models, little support at work or home, and limited gender-specific training programs and resources inhibited their progress (Gallagher, 2017; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Litmanovitz, 2011).

Understanding the foundational problems that contribute to the underrepresentation of women as educational leaders provided the researcher with a framework to create MNT2LEAD, a website aimed at supporting women in their quest to attain and thrive in educational leadership roles. MNT2LEAD helps to fill the mentorship and role model void, which permeates the research. The website was designed as a “digital mentor” for aspiring leaders, establishing a collaborative community and offering information and support through interviews with women in the field, topical blogs, and a leadership primer. Through the collection of survey data and feedback related to its functionality, relevance, and value, female leaders working for an international school organization evaluated the website.

Summary of Major Findings in the Literature

Examining the statistical data on women in educational leadership was a foundational step in understanding the magnitude of the gender equity gap. However, the primary focus of this study explored the challenges perceived by women in attaining leadership roles in education. Reviewing narrative research studies illuminating the personal experiences of women in public, private, and international school settings, the researcher documented the enablers and barriers to attaining positions of leadership at the top of educational organizations. Since there were few studies on mentoring programs specifically for aspiring female educational leaders, the researcher looked at formal mentoring programs and practices in other industries that focused on closing the leadership equity gap. Collectively these findings became the basis of the content developed for the MNT2LEAD website.

The Gender Equity Gap

While women have made strides towards equity in educational leadership roles, a significant gender gap still exists. National data reveals that women average 75% of all K-12 public school teaching positions but only 30% of all educational leadership roles (Lennon, 2013). About 33% of independent school heads and 30% of college and university presidents are women, and only three United States secretaries of education have been female (Pincus, 2016, Richmond, 2017; Seltzer, 2017).

Research on gender equity in educational leadership is the focus of an analysis by Kerr, Kerr, and Miller (2014), who use data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to answer several research questions, including, *what is the gender composition of administrative, principal, assistant principal, and classroom teacher jobs in U. S. school districts?* The dataset examined reviewed 6,552 districts from 2002-2008. The researchers made the point that descriptive representation is used in the small amount of research on gender and equity in educational leadership, whereas using workforce representation as the benchmark provides a different picture. If the educational workforce is more than 70% female, then achieving equitable representation in leadership would be more than 50%, the typical marker for parity (Kerr, Kerr & Miller, 2014).

The 2015 American Association of School Administrators Mid-Decade Survey is noteworthy in its examination of gender equity in school leadership. Findings reveal that female superintendents lead fewer than 30% of all districts and are less likely to be married than male counterparts. Female superintendents are more likely to serve in communities that have black students, students who are homeless, and students with disabilities (Robinson et al., 2017).

Adding to the discourse on the gender equity gap, Rasdem, Kelly, Perry, and Reed (2017) presented the evidence of their comparative analysis of women leaders across three independent school organizations at the 2017 North Carolina Association of Independent Schools (NCAIS) annual conference. In each case, men occupied over 70% of the head of school roles. Women were more likely to lead a small school that terminates at fifth or eighth grade (100-200 students), and are less likely to lead a kindergarten to twelfth-grade school (Rasdem, Kelly, Perry & Reed, 2017).

Obstacles to Attaining a Leadership Role

An exploration into the barriers perceived by women in attaining leadership roles was a focus for the researcher, and reinforced the need for readily accessible leadership guidance and support. The book, *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Story of How They Got There* (1996), by Sandra Gupton and Gloria Appelt Slick, is based on a research project the two women professors conducted in 1996 and reflected upon by Gupton in 2009. In their research, Gupton and Slick surveyed women leaders who reported cultural stereotyping, insufficient role-modeling, lack of mentors, and available networks were notable among the many challenges they encountered.

The lack of female leader role models was prominent in a study of successful women leaders (Litmanovitz, 2011). Maintaining a work-life balance was seen as an obstacle as women still felt responsible for traditional child-rearing and household responsibilities. Those interviewed felt that taking time off to raise children was a perceived obstacle and contributed to the equity gap in leadership roles.

A study was conducted to understand the underrepresentation of female heads of school in the Connecticut Association of Independent Schools. Barriers to leadership repeated throughout

the study were commonly categorized in themes of gender-role stereotypes, gender bias and discrimination, familial roles and obligations, and organizational structure and culture (Gallagher, 2017).

A case study by Sanderson and Whitehead (2016) conducted in an international school in Seoul, South Korea, examined the experiences of 11 women to understand the challenges women who aspire to leadership roles face. A cultural prejudice towards women as leaders was seen as a contributing barrier preventing career advancement. Further perpetuating the gap is the hierarchal structure of the school and the belief that women would not be accepted at the highest levels of leadership (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016). Finding support networks, reexamining workloads, and gaining the skills that enhance confidence were noted as essential to break through barriers (Sanderson & Whitehead, 2016).

Enablers to Attaining a Leadership Role

Capturing data from successful women leaders to better understand the challenges they face in the workplace and what factors contributed to their success was the aim of the research of Gupton and Slick (1996), among others. Having positive role models, defined as “one whose characteristics you admired and tried to emulate,” or mentors described as “one with whom you formed a professional interpersonal relationship and who provided beneficial career and psychosocial support to you,” were contributing factors (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

In Litmanovitz’s (2011) study of highly successful female educational leaders, participants were asked to identify what factors contributed to their ability to reach the positions they attained. Being supported both by female mentors on the job and by spouses and family at home enabled the women to reach positions most often held by men. Attending leadership training

was important for some, and having a role model was significant to others. Personal qualities, such as persistence and talent, were identified as enablers of success (Litmanovitz, 2011).

In a journal article for NAIS entitled “Navigating a Labyrinth” (2014), author and head of school, Pernambuco-Wise, equates the experience of women reaching the top as more like a skilled and nuanced set of pathways and keys rather than a linear ascension up a corporate ladder. Her doctoral dissertation, the basis for the article, is a grounded theory study that includes interviews with 19 heads of school and 12 search firm associates.

The “keys” identified to unlock the doors to success included: foundation, skills, support, opportunity, voice, changing times, and changing position (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014). The influence of parents, teachers, and school leaders was integral to the success of several women, and gaining the skills necessary to attain a leadership position was important to others. Identifying an advocate—different from a mentor—was considered essential to navigating the labyrinth (Pernambuco-Wise, 2014).

Mentoring Programs

Several research-based programs that support underserved populations across industries were examined to identify elements that could be replicated in the MNT2LEAD website. One such program is the Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI), designed and implemented at West Virginia University. The program, modeled after a coaching method used at Harvard University’s Women’s Leadership Forum, was instituted in 2012, and the evaluation occurred after three cohorts had completed the training. The elements of the WLI connected directly to fostering the aspiring leaders’ competence, autonomy, and relatedness. The program provided small cohort meetings led by a group leader, access to experts, and job-related professional development. However, it was the sense of community and belonging that had the most

significant impact (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer & Wheatley, 2016). Providing resources, access to experts, and developing a collaborative, supportive community is the foundation upon which the MNT2LEAD website was built.

Context and Methodology of the Study

The researcher selected a case study design to explore two themes that permeated the body of research on women and educational leadership roles. First, the researcher sought to understand what type of support(s) women believe they need to secure a position and thrive in an educational leadership role. Second, the researcher determined what relevant features and information the MNT2LEAD website should include to best support the aspirations of female educational leaders. Through a survey that included Likert scale and semi-structured questions administered to current female educational leaders, this research study answered the following two questions:

1. What are the relevant personal experiences that enable some women to reach the pinnacle of their profession?
2. What pertinent components should be included in a website designed to assist aspiring female educational leaders to reach their career goals?

The MNT2LEAD website, as previously described, was designed to help female leaders navigate the obstacles delineated in the research by serving as a digital mentor, one of the most frequently noted enablers to success. A website was selected because of the on-demand nature of the Internet, allowing women access anywhere and at any time that fit their schedule, an acknowledgment of the numerous studies that cite work-life balance as an obstacle. Further, a website can build a collaborative community through the opportunity to interact with content and the exchange of information.

The MNT2LEAD website is divided into multiple sections that include blog posts, advice from well-known international experts, and interviews with current female educational leaders, all aimed at demystifying challenges and supporting women on their leadership journeys. In a phenomenological study in 2017, Gallagher shared that interviews with female leaders revealed that work-life balance, a lack of mentorship and support, and a gendered view of leadership were inhibitors to success (Gallagher, 2017). The MNT2READ section features informative and humorous blog posts on relevant topics, such as combatting gender bias, achieving work-life, and feeling confident. The MNT2ACHIEVE section showcases women leaders through candid interviews, wherein they share their stories of success. The MNT2LEARN section of the website contains a leadership primer, and inspiring and informative TED talk videos with discussion guides. These carefully curated and pertinent lessons in leadership can be completed on-demand based on interest and need, independently or with a colleague or group. The MNT2CONNECT and MNT2COLLABORATE sections are a vehicle to collaborate, ask questions, receive one-on-one mentoring, and build a community of support.

Participants

The researcher used a purposive sample, focusing on women who have already attained a level of success as educational leaders. Leveraging the experiences of women who have already overcome the odds to thrive as school leaders provided the most authentic data to answer the research questions. The participants were volunteers and self-selected female leaders within an international school organization with school locations in countries around the world.

Methodology

The study was designed to evaluate the relevance and functionality of the MNT2LEAD website, as well as to understand the enablers to success for women already serving as leaders in

the field. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered using a survey conducted through SurveyMonkey, which provided convenience and anonymity to the participants and data analytics to the researcher. An introductory email explained the rationale for the study and included a link to an electronic consent form. Once completed, the participants received a link to the password-protected MNT2LEAD website, as well as the survey instrument.

The survey consisted of four initial demographic questions to gather background data on the participants. Feedback on each of the sections on the MNT2LEAD website was gathered through ten Likert scale questions and two short answer questions regarding the participants' personal experiences attaining a leadership role. Survey data was collected during October 2019 with a potential respondent pool of 115 female leaders.

Ensuring the participants' comfort and anonymity was paramount to the success of the study. SurveyMonkey did not provide the researcher with the IP addresses of the participants, and no biographical information, such as name or place of work, was collected. There were no risks to the participants, as they could decide not to complete the survey or have their data included at any time. These considerations allowed for candid, authentic feedback.

Summary of Results

Forty-eight female leaders from a potential pool of 115 participated in the research study, a 41.7% response rate. According to Lindemann (2019), based on nine separate survey sources, an email survey response of 30% was the average. Further, data site Genroe states a response rate above 25% is considered good (Ramshaw, n.d.).

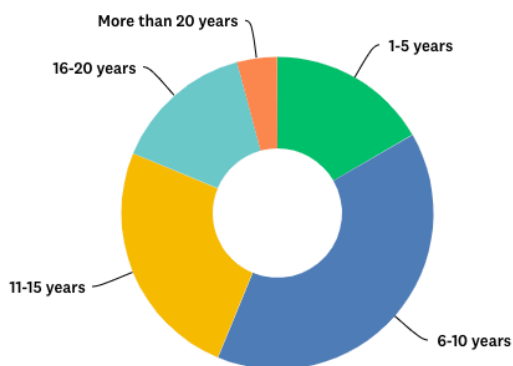
Demographic results revealed that the respondents had varied years of experience and leadership roles. The largest group of the respondents (40%) had between six-10 years of

experience while the smallest group (4%) were veterans, having more than 20 years as an educational leader.

Figure 1. Demographic SurveyMonkey Years of Leadership Experience

How many years have you served in an educational leadership position?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



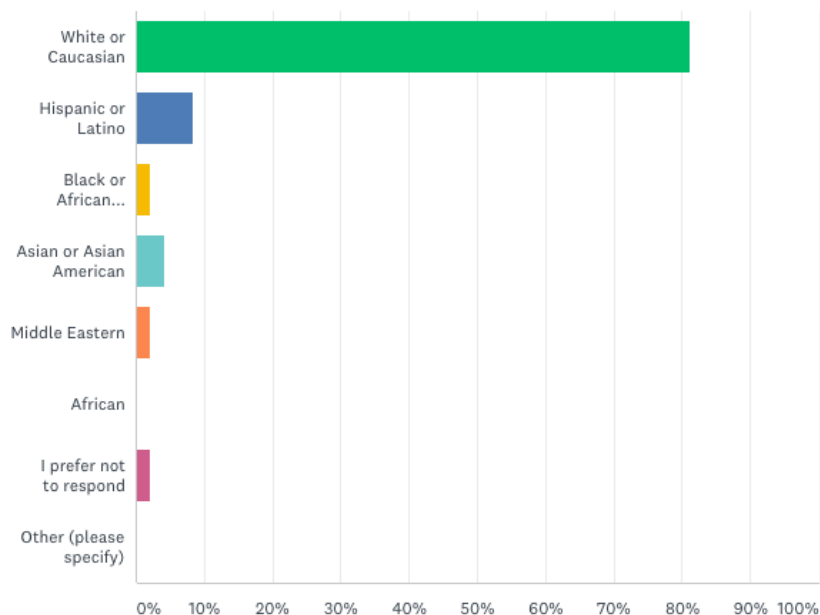
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
1-5 years	16.67% 8
6-10 years	39.58% 19
11-15 years	25.00% 12
16-20 years	14.58% 7
More than 20 years	4.17% 2
TOTAL	48

Participants were also asked to classify their current roles. Of the 48 respondents, the highest percentage identified as head of school, principal, or equivalent position, with the next highest identified as head of early years/primary or lower school principal. Additionally, of the 48 participants who responded to the survey, 39 identified as white, four as Hispanic or Latino, two as Asian or Asian American, one as Black or African American, one as Middle Eastern, and one who preferred not to respond.

Figure 2. Demographic SurveyMonkey Ethnic Identification

What ethnicity best describes you?

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



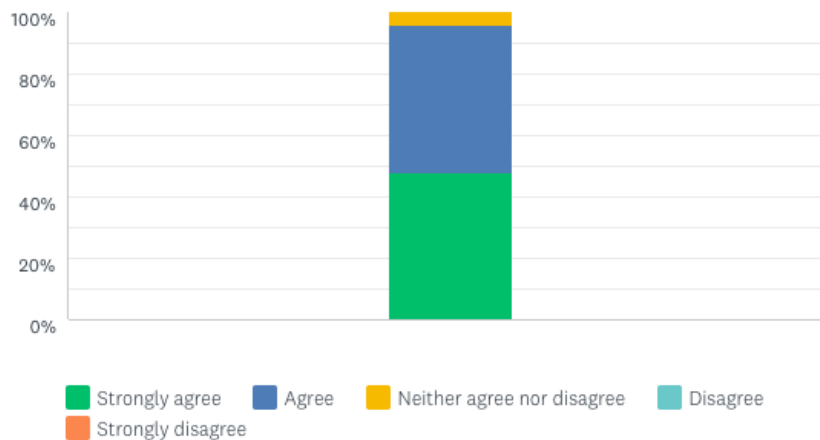
Quantitative Data

A series of Likert scale questions that could only be completed after the participant reviewed each section of the MNT2LEAD website followed the demographic information. Initial questions gathered quantitative data focused on the ease of use, navigation, and readability of the MNT2LEAD website. According to *Social Media Today*, an industry website operated by Industry Dive, “usability is critical for the success of any website and should not be overlooked” (Singh, 2013). Survey results reveal that over 95% of the respondents agree that the MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate. Further, more than 97% agreed that the MNT2LEAD website is easy to read.

Figure 3. MNT2LEAD SurveyMonkey Website Navigation

The MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

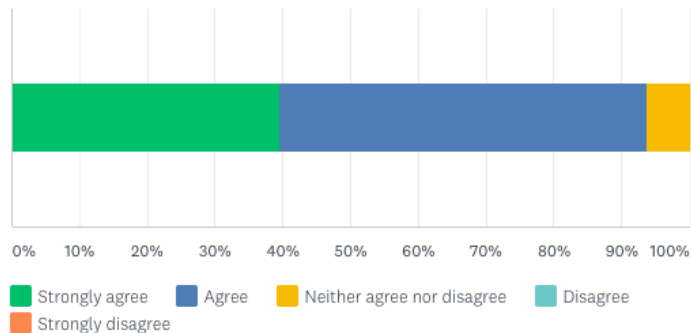


The next series of questions were content specific, examining each section of the website. Over 93% of the respondents agreed that the blogs in the MNT2READ website section, which include titles “Confronting Gender Bias in the Workplace” and “Work-Life Balance: Setting the Expectations for Working Women,” are pertinent for aspiring female leaders.

Figure 4. MNT2READ Blog Posts

The blogs in the MNT2READ section highlight topics that are pertinent to aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

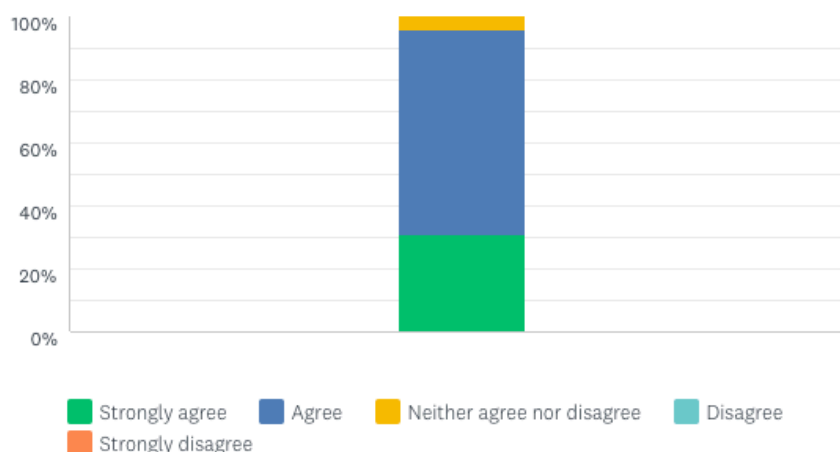


The MNT2ACHIEVE section features interviews with current female leaders, which focus on illuminating the universal challenges women face in attaining leadership roles and offering practical advice for aspiring leaders. More than 95% of the respondents agree that these leadership lessons are informative for aspiring leaders.

Figure 5. MNT2ACHIEVE Leadership Lessons

The leadership lesson interviews in the MNT2ACHIEVE section are informative for aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0

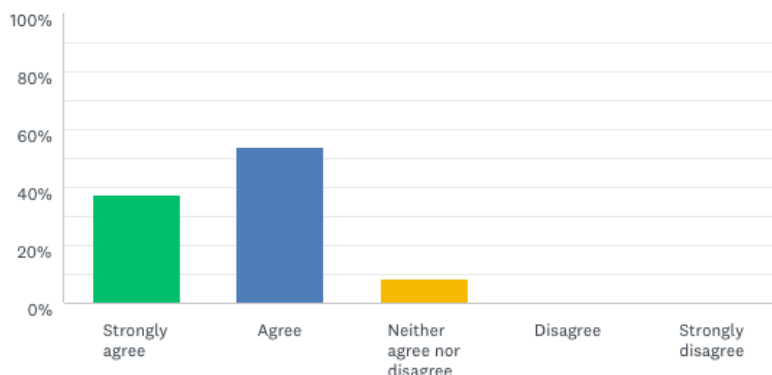


Included in the MNT2LEARN section of the website is a leadership primer comprised of collated TED Talks, each with follow-up reflection questions organized around the following topics: confidence, gender bias, leadership, mentors/role models and support, work-life balance, and inspiration. Survey results show that 91% of respondents feel this is useful for female leaders.

Figure 6. MNT2LEARN Leadership Primer

The Leadership Primer in the MNT2LEARN section is a beneficial tool for aspiring female leaders.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 0



Two of the quantitative questions assess the overall impact of the MNT2LEAD website. Current female leaders were asked if the website was a useful tool and if they would recommend the site to a friend or colleague. Over 93% endorsed the website's utility, and 89.5% would recommend the MNT2LEAD website to someone else.

Qualitative Data

The final two questions asked the respondents to share personal experiences or offer website recommendations based on their journey to become an educational leader. Prompted by the question, *In your experience, what resource or support was most impactful in your leadership career*, women leaders provided rich, personal narratives of their experiences.

The researcher identified four themes using the SurveyMonkey analytics and thematic analysis that were prevalent in the responses: mentors and/or a supportive supervisor, professional development and formal education, role models (both positive and negative), and collaborative and collegial teams/co-workers. Survey participants were not limited to identifying

one thing that positively impacted their career trajectory, so many of these themes were embedded in each response.

Theme 1: Mentors and Supportive Supervisors

More than 25% of the female leaders who responded to the survey attributed their success to mentors or supervisors who encouraged and supported their goals. Several responses shared the impact mentors had on their self-efficacy, and confidence. As an example, one respondent shared the following: “During my leadership career, the most impactful resource has been other people, the right people, a strong mentor who built confidence helped dispel the imposter syndrome myth in my own head.”

Theme 2: Professional Development and Formal Education

Preparation for a leadership role is a theme that permeated the research and is reinforced by women in this survey. Respondents credit several specific professional development programs as well as formal education opportunities as helpful in their roles.

Theme 3: Role Models

A prevailing theme in the research is the lack of role models many female leaders noted as a barrier to success. When women had identified role models, they attributed them to their success (Gallagher, 2017; Litmanovitz, 2011). MNT2LEAD survey respondents indicated that positive role models were integral to their success as leaders. One respondent shared, “Having very strong female role models from my mother and grandmother when I was young to colleagues in roles that I wanted in the school.”

Theme 4: Collaborative and Collegial Teams/Co-workers

Having a collaborative workplace with supportive colleagues was the final theme that emerged from the survey question: *In your experience, what resource or support was most*

impactful in your leadership career? Many respondents articulated the value of collegial relationships and teamwork and the impact those had on their ability to attain leadership goals. While this theme is less pronounced in the researcher's findings, it mirrors the idea of support echoed throughout the literature.

The last question asked participants, based on their expertise as female educational leaders, to make suggestions for additions to the website. Again, these responses were analyzed using a thematic approach. A wide variety of ideas and comments were collated and sorted into categories from which three themes emerged: additional resources/tools, diverse perspectives, and connections. Many of these thoughtful suggestions are being developed for inclusion in the MNT2LEAD website.

MNT2LEAD aims to provide aspiring and current female educational leaders with the information, support, and resources necessary to advance their careers. Serving as a “digital mentor,” the site can fill a portion of the gap that exists for women educational leaders. It is clear from the survey responses that this is needed and valued, and that the content on MNT2LEAD is relevant and supportive of women aspiring to leadership roles.

Limitations and Recommendations

This research study gathered data from female leaders within an independent, international school organization, and the majority of the respondents identified as white. While the data collected was candid and insightful, a larger, more diverse sample, including women leaders working in public schools, would offer a broader perspective. Including a user feedback form on the MNT2LEAD website when it becomes public is a vital step in continuing to assess and refine the content.

This study focused on the many external barriers that women face as they attempt to attain leadership roles. Often referred to as a “glass ceiling,” a term coined over 40 years ago by Marilyn Loden (2017), these obstacles often prevent women from reaching their full potential. The genuine challenges, which include gender bias, work-life balance, lack of support, limited role models, mentors, and help still exist. What the researcher discovered through this research and her own heightened awareness of gender equity issues in leadership is the internal barrier, often referred to as the “sticky floor” for women. Wyra (2017) states that “[s]ticky floors are our self-limiting beliefs, assumptions, and sabotaging behaviours that undermine not only our own ability, but that of other women—to achieve their career goals and maximise the value we can bring to our teams and organisations.” This theme of self-doubt, lack of confidence, and imposter syndrome are areas for additional exploration. The researcher will use the MNT2LEAD platform to further explore how women can overcome their internal challenges to thrive as educational leaders.

The pervasive and ongoing challenge to eliminate gender inequities and increase the representation of women in educational leadership cannot be removed by one website. However, the ability to positively affect an infinite number of women aspiring to lead schools across the globe is possible. Having access to a system of support, strategies, information, mentors, and a community for women with similar aspirations is wholeheartedly endorsed by the female leaders surveyed in this study. The MNT2LEAD website is necessary and impactful, and its potential to assist aspiring female leaders is limitless.

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APPENDIX A [PERMISSION REQUEST]

Mr. Andrew Fitzmaurice
Chief Executive Officer
Nord Anglia Education

August 1, 2019

Dear Andrew,

I am writing to ask your permission to seek feedback from female leaders working in Nord Anglia Education schools on a website I have developed aimed at supporting aspiring female educational leaders. As you are aware, I am working on my doctoral degree in educational leadership and my dissertation is focused on the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles. I know this is a topic of importance to you as well.

What I have discovered in my research is that the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is similar in public, private and international schools.

- In United States public schools, women average 75% of all roles but only 30% of leadership roles (including school-based administration, district offices, and school boards).
- Approximately 33% of the United States independent school heads of school are women.
- In U.K. secondary schools, approximately 36% of headteachers are women, although women comprise 62% of the workforce.

Equally similar to the statistics are the challenges women face in the workplace attaining and thriving in leadership roles. Numerous studies that interviewed women who have “shattered the glass ceiling” repeat several recurring themes; gendered workplaces, lack of mentors and role models, lack of support, self-efficacy and familial obligations as barriers to overcome.

The MNT2LEAD website that I have developed is designed to serve as a “digital mentor,” providing on-demand relevant resources and support. These include interviews with women in the field, topical blog posts, resource lists, and a leadership primer, all focused on the identified barriers women have faced when navigating their leadership journey.

I am requesting permission to email female leaders within our Nord Anglia Education schools and regional offices to review the site, which is not public yet, and provide feedback, through an anonymous survey on its content and utility for aspiring leaders. The request would be strictly voluntary, and the survey conducted using SurveyMonkey, which will not collect email addresses or any identifying information on the participants. Gathering feedback from such a diverse group of female leaders would provide me with invaluable insight which I would use to

make adjustments to the website as needed. I've attached a hard copy of the survey for your review.

Achieving gender equity in leadership is important for the health and success of all schools, and most especially for students to have access to a wide variety of diverse role models. The MNT2LEAD website is my way of contributing to this global issue.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions you might have. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Warm regards,

Elise

APPENDIX B [EMAIL CONTACT]

E-mail Request to Participate in a Website Evaluation Survey

From: Elise Ecoff

To: Female Leaders within Nord Anglia Education

Subject: Feedback Requested - Website Survey

Call to action:

I am writing to request your participation in a survey of a website I have developed as part of my doctoral research on the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. A few facts:

- In United States public schools, women average 75% of all roles but only 30% of leadership roles (including school-based administration, district offices, and school boards.
- Approximately 33% of the United States independent school heads of school are women.
- In U.K. secondary schools, approximately 36% of headteachers are women, although women comprise 62% of the workforce.

Equally similar to the statistics are the challenges women face in the workplace attaining and thriving in leadership roles. Numerous studies that interviewed women who have “shattered the glass ceiling” repeat several recurring themes; gendered workplaces, lack of mentors and role models, lack of support, self-efficacy and familial obligations as barriers to overcome.

My goal as a fellow female educational leader is to assist aspiring leaders in navigating their journey to attaining a leadership role. The MNT2LEAD website is designed to serve as a “digital mentor,” providing on-demand relevant resources and support.

Why YOU were selected:

As a current female educational leader, you have personal experience and expertise that would be invaluable for this project! Please complete the initial consent forms, survey, and website evaluation to assist me in providing the most relevant information and support for future female educational leaders.

How to Access the Survey:

The survey will begin with a brief consent form. Please note that you may click out at any time, and your answers will not be submitted unless you hit “complete”. The initial survey will only take about three minutes to complete. Once that is complete, you will receive a link to access the website as well as a survey evaluation.

Clickable Link:

Survey link:

Confidential and Voluntary:

Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary and all of your responses are anonymous. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses to any reports of these data.

Contact Information:

Contact me with any questions, concerns, or comments at [REDACTED]. Further, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Lesh, Chair at [REDACTED] and Dr. Patrick Cooper, IRB Committee for Lynn, at [REDACTED].

APPENDIX C [PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM]

Consent Form for MNT2LEAD website

You are invited to participate in a web-based, online survey evaluation of the MNT2LEAD website.

This is a research project being conducted by Elise Ecoff, doctoral candidate student at Lynn University. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete both survey evaluations once the website is reviewed.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

Although you may not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research study, your responses may help me learn more about what resources and support are valuable to aspiring leaders, based on your personal experience.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. SurveyMonkey does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me, Elise Ecoff via email at [REDACTED]. Further you may contact Dr. Jennifer Lesh, Chair at [REDACTED] and Dr. Patrick Cooper, IRB Committee for Lynn, at [REDACTED].

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the Lynn University Institutional Review Board at 3601 North Military Trail, Boca Raton, Florida, 33431.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are 18 years of age or older.

- Agree
- Disagree

QUESTION 3:

* 3. My current leadership role is in:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> PreNursery/Nursery/Early Childhood (students age 1-5) | <input type="radio"/> High School (children age 14-18) |
| <input type="radio"/> Primary/Lower School (children age 6-11) | <input type="radio"/> Secondary (children 11-18) |
| <input type="radio"/> Middle School (children age 11-13) | <input type="radio"/> Through school (PreNursery-High School) |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

QUESTION 4:

4. What ethnicity best describes you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> White or Caucasian | <input type="radio"/> Asian or Asian American |
| <input type="radio"/> Hispanic or Latino | <input type="radio"/> Middle Eastern |
| <input type="radio"/> Black or African American | <input type="radio"/> African |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

DONE

Powered by
 SurveyMonkey
See how easy it is to [create a survey](#).

APPENDIX E [WEBSITE SURVEY]

Survey : Feedback on MNT2LEAD website Survey ID:

Please complete AFTER reviewing the MNT2LEAD website. Thank you

Q1: The MNT2LEAD website is easy to navigate.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q2: The information on the MNT2LEAD website is easy to understand.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q3: The MNT2LEAD website outlines challenges aspiring women leaders face in obtaining or maintaining a leadership role.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q4: The Leadership Primer in the MNT2LEARN section is a beneficial tool for aspiring female leaders.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q5: The blogs in the MNT2READ section highlight topics that are pertinent to aspiring female leaders.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q6: The leadership lesson interviews in the MNT2ACHIEVE section are informative for aspiring female leaders.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q7: The mentoring services outlined in the MNT2LEAD section is a positive alternative method of support for aspiring female educational leaders.

5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neither Or N/A	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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Q8: Overall, I think that the **MNT2LEAD** website is a useful tool for aspiring and/or current female educational leaders.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Q9: I would recommend the **MNT2LEAD** website to a colleague and/or friend.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Q10: I would be interested in sharing my leadership experiences with aspiring female educational leaders on the **MNT2LEAD** website.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Or N/A	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Q11: In your experience, what resource or support was most impactful in your leadership career?

Q12: What else could be included on the **MNT2LEAD** website?

APPENDIX F [WEBSITE LINK]

www.MNT2LEAD.com (password protected)