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A Multi-National Study of Women Educational Leaders

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Does Gender Matter?

A Multi-National Study of Women Educational Leaders

As educational attainment of girls and women increases globally, more women are assuming positions of leadership in educational institutions at the primary, secondary, tertiary, and governmental levels. While women are breaking glass ceilings globally, understanding about their career experiences and trajectories is lacking (Oplatka, 2006). The leadership literature that explores the intersection of culture, gender, and leadership from a multi-societal perspective is sparce. Those researchers that look at this important intersection multinationally are typically found in business (House, Hanges Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta and GLOBE Associates, 2004). In their 2013 review of the business literature related to gender, nationality, and leadership style, Sneabjornsson and Edvardsson, cited the dearth of studies related to top management. The researchers identified five types of studies:

1) Leaders' characteristics, behavior and style, 2) Perception regarding leaders, their traits and leadership styles, 3) Women's barriers towards leader positions, 4) Leadership outcome/results, 5) Effect of research methods on leader evaluation. (p.89)

Not only are these studies of business organizations, they are typically conducted through surveys (House, Hanges Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta and GLOBE Associates, 2004; Snaebjornsson and Edvardsson, 2013).

There are even fewer studies addressing the nexus of gender, nationality and leadership in the field of education. In education, the few studies that exist tend to involve bilateral comparisons and many times the subjects are classroom teachers or building-based leaders (Adams, 2009; Santamaria, Santamaria, Webber, & Pearson, 2014; Sperandio, 2010).

Recognizing the "slow but steady increase in studies charting and exploring the ongoing under-representation of women in educational leadership worldwide," (p. 716), Sperandio (2010) called for new frameworks for modeling cultural context to support the development of women educational leaders. She described the nuance of international, national, personal and organizational variables that inhibit women from obtaining leadership positions. Sperandio's framework foregrounds culture and nationality. The framework frames personal aspirations as a product of these environmental conditions rather than driver of career, thus, diminishing the role of personal agency.

This study utilizes a multi-national and cultural approach to determine transcendent themes about how women navigate and conceptualize their roles as leaders across educational systems. By utilizing a theoretical framework that takes into consideration nationality, culture, and the leadership styles that can derive from these factors, this study can help us understand more succinctly that which is a matter of gender and assist in preparing female leaders from a variety of cultures and countries.

Women are underrepresented in positions of leadership worldwide (Al-Jaradat, 2015). The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how education leaders, who are women, conceptualize leadership. Specifically, this study sought to determine (a) how women in a variety of education leadership positions navigate their roles as both women and leaders, the challenges they face in executing their leadership roles, and the ways in which they lead, and (b) discern ways in which women from different cultures conceptualize and experience their leadership roles. By using different national, cultural, and gender comparisons, the study guards against ascribing leadership characteristics to gender (being female) when the characteristics maybe a result of culture, nationality, or being in a leadership position per se.

Conceptions of leadership within countries influenced by organizational and historical factors, can be influenced by policy. For example, pathways to higher levels of leadership based on years of experience in field where women have not historically participated, can suppress their ability to obtain leadership positions (Sperandio, 2010). Understanding these trends at the local and national levels can help support policy leading to greater opportunities for women to move into leadership positions. Conceptions of leadership influenced by broader cultural attitudes about women in leadership require different approaches, such as specific promotion and development of high-level female education leaders to serve as exemplars to change attitudes. Understanding the experience of women in higher levels of leadership and the potential factors that influence their ability to obtain those positions can help identify approaches to breaking the "glass ceiling" and allowing more women to join the ranks of educational leadership.

Theoretical Framework

In this study we posit three discrete influencers that impact leadership: a) nationality, the country in which the leader resides; culture, "the effect of organizational understandings and ways of working" (Sperandio, 2010, p. 716) which distinguish groups and define subgroups within a society (Hofstede, 1991); b) gender; and c) leadership traits and behaviors.

House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, Gupta and GLOBE Associates (2004) in their landmark 10-year study theorized six culturally endorsed, implicit leadership theories (charismatic, team-oriented, participative, humane, autonomous, and self-protective). Through extensive surveys of mid-level managers, surveys of selected top managers, and review of media, the countries clustered were found to variously value the six theories. Yet, Hofstede (1991) and Sperandio (2010) suggested that only relying on nationality is insufficient in understanding the

cultural influences on leadership. Hofstede defines culture as "patterns of thinking, feeling and acting" that distinguish groups within a society (1991, 4-5).

While typically culture is identified with ethnic origin (that is, geographically) or race, it could conceivably be used to describe other subgroups within a society, such as women or men. Consistent with this framework is Black Feminist theory that posits African American women experience life differently than being just Black, or just women, as a minority subgroup within the American culture (Collins, 2008). U.S. researchers have noted that these women are "outsiders within," and are disproportionately asked to lead troubled districts as superintendents. Their separateness allows them to work boldly, eschewing norms and focusing on the needs of children (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). In this way, their minority status impacts how they are treated in the work place and, reciprocally, how they approach the work place. As applied to this study, Black Feminist theory is extended to the notion that a woman who is not a member of the majority cultural group in a society can also live as an outsider within and may not necessarily hold the same values related to leadership as the dominant culture.

These influences – nationality, culture, and gender can all impact leadership behavior. By untangling behaviors related to nationality, leadership "best practices" as cited in the literature, and those leadership attributes associated with the "outsider within" we may be able to better understand what aspects of female leadership is essentially female.

The final aspect of the theoretical frame of this study is that of personal agency. That is, the focus of this study was on the ways in which women navigate their roles and lead, suggesting that the act of leadership is affirmative, based on strategic decisions, preparation, and the belief that one can move forward and be successful. Such job choices and decisions establish the

woman leader as an active participant in the process of leadership and in control of the results (Harrison 1996; Schwenk, 1995).

Research Method and Design

This study is an expansion of an original bi-national study of Bangladeshi women juxtaposed against a Western, Anglo literature on women in the U.S Superintendency (Roach, 2011). This qualitative study employed a constructivist grounded theory approach. A grounded theory approach seeks to generate theory related to a particular situation, in this case female leadership. A constructivist grounded theory approach not only gathers descriptive information about phenomena, but also seeks to understand the views, values, beliefs, feelings, and strategies of the respondents as a way to develop theory (Creswell, 1998, 2007).

A two-part interview process was designed. The interviews were designed to take place in two sessions as suggested by Creswell (1998), in a modified "zigzag process" (p. 57). In this way, the first interview serves to establish rapport with the participant and gather general data about how she approaches her position. The second interview builds upon the first, delves deeper, and engages the participant in analysis of the data. The first interview is conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol and the second interview begins by having respondents review the notes from the first interview and continuing questioning. (Protocol attached).

The second interview process as proposed by Creswell (1998) was modified by first asking a series of semi-structured interview questions, then conducting a Self in Relationship Interview (SIR) technique (Calverly, Fischer, & Ayoub 1994; Harter & Monsour, 1992). The SIR interview asks respondents to use one-word descriptors to describe different relationships, ascribing valence to those words and then positioning those words on a diagram in relation to the core of their being. In doing so, the respondent develops a detailed self-portrait that illuminates

the ways in which people "sublimate, foreground, or differentiate parts of themselves across different relationships," (Fischer & Ayoub, 1994; Ayoub, Raya, & Fischer, 1993 as cited in Wright, 2006). By asking the respondents to ascribe a valence (positive, negative or mixed) to each word, a sense of core self perception can emerge from the diagram. Respondents are asked to interpret the diagram which further explains their perceptions of self as leader across various contexts. Those data will be presented separately.

Finally, the researchers wrote reflective notes after each interview, capturing thoughts, impressions, and queries about that interview, implications for the second interview and other future interviews, and the relation of that interview to others. These reflective memos did not identify the subjects by name and only refer to a particular respondent by their pseudonym.

Data.

Many studies of female leaders in education still tend to focus on teacher leaders and principals and are dominated by western conceptions of leadership (Santamaria, Santamaria, Webber, & Pearson, 2014; Sperandio, 2010). The extant education literature tends to focus on female leaders at a particular level within the system, such as teacher, principal, or superintendent even when culture is considered, ignoring women who climb to higher levels of leadership (Al-Jaradat, 2014; Santamaria, Santamaria, Webber, & Pearson, 2014). Further, studies of women in leadership tend to view the subjects as monoliths, ignoring the impact of other subcultural factors that may impact attitudes and leadership behaviors (Sperandio, 2010). This study attempted to address these issues through the sample of participants. This study drew on four unique samples:

1. Ethiopian women educational leaders in Ethiopia (African developing nation, dominant culture);

2. Bangladeshi women educational leaders in Bangladesh (Southeast Asian developing nation, dominant culture);

3. Māori and Pacifica women educational leaders in New Zealand (Anglo-European developed nation, non-dominant culture); and

4. White women educational leaders in the United States (Anglo-European developed nation, dominant culture).

A purposeful sampling design was used for this study. As such, subjects were selected because of their potential for rich information about the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2001). Women interviewed for the study were recruited through direct contact, reputational nomination, and the leadership positions they held. While the preference was to interview women in higher levels of traditional primary and secondary level educational leadership beyond the classroom or school, the overall disposition of women in the workplace in the various countries required broadening the sample to also include the higher education system as well in Bangladesh, and New Zealand and school-level leaders in Ethiopia. While the breadth of positions of female participants in this study lends to reliability of the findings, findings must be viewed cautiously due to the heterogeneity of the sample. Further, given time constraints of the leaders, only some of the interviews were conducted in two sessions, as will be described in the sample section.

Sample.

Bangladesh.

Bangladesh, a developing nation, has focused aggressively on building its education system over the past 40 years. From 1990 to 2015 (projected) the overall literacy rates for adults, aged 15 and over, went from 35.3% to 61.4%. Importantly, the youth adult literacy rates increased during that time from 44.7% to 77.0%, largely based on the rapid increase in literacy rates among girls from 38.05 to a projected 78.5%. The country has a pre-primary, primary,

secondary (lower and upper) and public tertiary education system, encompassing ages 3 to 19. Compulsory attendance is five years (primary school) (UNESCO, n.d.). The government system of education is complemented by the Madrasah system (religious) and a system of non-governmental agencies that provide education for the extreme poor, most notable among them, BRAC, which educates over 1,000,000 children at the primary level (Sperandio, 2007 as cited in Sperandio, 2010).

As with other Muslim countries, Bangladeshi women have traditionally stayed in the home after marriage and not worked outside the home. As with many sectors of the labor force, at the school level, men are much more likely to lead and teach in the public school system. Over the past three decades, women generally have had more opportunities to teach and lead NGO schools (Sperandio, 2007 as cited in Sperandio, 2010). While Madrasah schools can be co-ed the teachers are primarily male. The management of the public school system, as with all major government agencies in the Bangladesh, is governed by the policies of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission. This system, colloquially known as the CADAR system, is a hold-over from Bengal colonialism in which the British government established a system of civil service examinations to qualify individuals for government service. Because the system is entirely examination based, it has been a chief vehicle for women moving into positions of leadership in providing technical assistance and management of public schools through the regional district and upasila system. It has also been a vehicle for government officials to move up to the highest levels of the central Ministry functions.

Twelve female leaders in Bangladesh were interviewed. Respondents included women who operated at the upasila level (supervisory level for approximately 200 primary schools); women who served at higher levels of a non-Governmental education organization; and women

who served at higher levels of the education ministry, including the highest ranking female education official in the country at the time. A further delimiter of the population is that all study subjects spoke English. While the first language of all the respondents was Bangali, the vast majority of women in higher-level leadership positions in the country are fluent in English. All respondents completed at least one post-secondary degree in English. The twelve women respondents recruited for this study were recruited by a partner institution, BRAC University-Institute for Educational Development in Bangladesh. All participation was voluntary. Of the twelve interviews, two respondents were interviewed only one due to scheduling constraints. Ten respondents were interviewed twice. After the first interview, a transcript was produced. Respondents reviewed the transcript at the second interview and offered an opportunity to change, modify, or add text. The two respondents who only had one interview were sent the text of the transcript and given the opportunity to make changes as needed.

Ethiopia.

Education in Ethiopia is at an interesting juncture. The gross enrollment rate two decades ago in primary and secondary education was only 20%; today, Ethiopia has increased this number to nearly 90%. The education structure consists of two cycles of primary education from grades 1 to 4 and grades 5 to 8. Secondary schools have two cycles from grades 9 to 10 and grades 11 to 12, and 3-6 years of higher education for undergraduate programs.

Women in traditional Ethiopia lacked the education benefit men had often enjoyed. The conventional wisdom in Ethiopian was such that a woman's place is in the home or working in the farm fields with her husband, not in the public (Teferra, 1991). These traditional beliefs about women's roles in the Ethiopian society are changing. Not only are there constitutional guarentees for gender equality (FDRE, 1995), there is a concerted effort by the government and donor

agencies towards gender equity and the empowerment of women in the country (UN Women, 2014). As a result, Ethiopia had improved female enrollment in education at all levels. Despite progresses made, females are still the minority in higher education in Ethiopia. Only one fourth of students enrolled in higher education constitute females; worse yet, only 40% of admitted female students persist to graduate from universities.

Study participants included eight Ethiopian women educational leaders selected from Addis Ababa, the capital city of the country. The women were identified through their former professors at the Addis Ababa University, and the selection criteria included participants with formal administrative roles as school principals or central office administrators. After receiving the informants' consent to participate in the study, the researcher conducted a 70-120 minute interview at his temporary office at Addis Ababa University. As the researcher's time in the country was limited, a follow-up interview was not conducted, although the respondents' contact information was received should a need arises for a follow-up study at later times. The interviews were held in Amharic, and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist at the Addis Ababa University. Later, the researcher translated the interviews into English. Even though all the participants had graduated from institutions in which English was the medium of instruction, a sustained and a natural conversation required to generate robust and thick data influenced the researcher's decision to conduct the interviews in Amharic.

New Zealand.

New Zealand's education system has three levels: [Early Childhood Education](#) (from birth to school entry age), [Primary and Secondary schools](#) (from 5 to 19 years of age), Tertiary education (university, college, and polytechnics). Eighty five percent of school-aged children attend the New Zealand also has a system of "state integrated" schools or "character schools."

These schools have a special focus, such as religion (e.g., Catholic), culture (e.g., Māori-medium education-Kura Kaupapa Māori), or pedagogical orientation (e.g., Montessori). Approximately 5% of all children attend private schools.

Women participating in leadership roles across sectors is one of the main priorities of New Zealand government (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010a). Statistics of women leaders in various sectors in New Zealand show that women are highly represented in leadership roles in the community sector, broadly equitable in public sector, and poorly represented in private sector in middle management roles. The number of women in leadership roles decreases as the seniority of positions increases, despite the fact that females are more likely to participate in tertiary education than males. Understanding and promoting Māori women's leadership is one of the priorities of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010b). However, data on Māori women in leadership roles in Māori sector is unknown (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2010b).

Study participants included ten women (five Māori, five Pacifica) in various roles of educational leadership, all above the role of classroom teacher or building leader, including higher education. The respondents were selected using both a snowballing technique and web search (Ministry of Education, Educational Review Office web site) for appropriate role. The interviews were conducted from August to November 2015. Eight of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, two were conducted via Skype. They were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to respondent time constraints, nine respondents were interviewed only once, and one participant was interviewed twice. All of the interviews were conducted in English as English was the first language of all the participants. They were speakers of their mother tongue as a second language. The official languages in New Zealand are Māori, English and sign

language. Yet, in the past, Māori was not taught in schools and speaking English was seen as the only way to have a pakeha (European) life. So there is a lost generation who speaks no Māori. In the last 20 years there is a movement to revitalize te reo (Māori language).

United States.

The primary responsibility for the education system in the United States rests at the state level, with federal involvement limited to ensuring equal rights for protected classes of students and offering financial support for specific education programs promoted by the U.S. Government. Public education is organized into approximately 15,000 local districts ranging from one school to hundreds within a district, ensuring virtually universal access to education from either age 4 (Pre-K in some jurisdictions) or age 5 (Kindergarten) up to the age of 18. Approximately 11% of all school-aged children attend private or parochial schools that do not receive government funding. Unlike Bangladesh and Ethiopia, there is not a national or federal priority for the education of girls and women as girls are fully represented in the primary and secondary education systems and are over represented in post secondary education (NCES, 2015).

According to Dobie and Hummel (2001), the school superintendency is the most male-dominated position within the field of education. In a 1992 study 72% of educators were women; however, only 13% of women held superintendent positions (Glass, 1992). In the 1995 survey of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), not a great deal of progress had been made, as only 18% of the school district CEOs were female (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). And, progress has slowed. As of 2015, women only made up 27% of the superintendencies in the United States, up a mere 2% from 2010 despite an overwhelmingly female teaching population (Finnan, et al., 2015a, 2015b). Other findings reported suggest differences in men and women

superintendents by age (women older), longevity in the position (men in the position longer), type of district employment (women in more economically challenged districts), and pay (median salary for women is higher) (Finnan et al., 2015b).

Eight sitting female superintendents participated in this study, all superintendents. The respondents were selected using web database searches for female superintendents from the mid-Atlantic states of Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. They were all recorded and transcribed verbatim. Due to respondent time constraints, all eight respondents were interviewed only once. All of the interviews were conducted in English as English was the first language of all the participants.

Findings

The major themes per country cohort will be described and then the themes that cut across the countries. The supposition is that those themes that transcend nationalities may be ascribed to women in leadership roles, while the themes that are specific to a given nationality cohort may be best ascribed to the history, societal structures, and culture in which they live.

Bangladesh.

The key themes that emerge from this data set are that women work hard, value and are regarded for their honesty (as opposed to men), think of subordinates as family, and ascribe leadership success to knowledge acquisition and skill development. In short, they are competent. The respondents were ambitious, they closely identified with their professional role, and persevered in their career despite societal and familial obstacles, (e.g., one woman was locked in a room in her house when she wanted to work outside the home). Leadership styles were characterized by hard work, decisive action, and courage, but also leading through collaboration, teamwork, and risk taking. Two respondents described themselves as distributive leaders and one

described herself as a servant leader. Most of the respondents got to their positions through the CADER system of civil examinations and advanced degrees. Not surprisingly, chief advice to aspiring female leaders was to obtain more education. Finally, their success was due, in part, to the support of their family and colleagues. While culturally they are expected to only work in side the home once married, respondents talked about the encouragement they received from parents, especially fathers, to take up careers. Conversely, fathers could work against a career. One respondent noted that she was a chemist upon graduation but went into education because her father thought it was a good career for women.

Ethiopia.

Ethiopian respondents paint a picture of strength through their responses. A strong sense of social justice emboldened some respondents to speak out against injustices at the risk of losing one's job or violence. They draw strength from their love of education and through their passion for the work. Of the four countries represented in this study, Ethiopia has the lowest rate of adult literacy and the highest gap in female to male enrollment in formal education. Culturally, women in Ethiopia work very hard and are expected to juggle multiple family and home responsibilities while at the same time going to school. These women, by assuming leadership roles, are beating the odds in an environment and culture that traditionally expected women to stay at home or in the fields, and not in the public. Respondents noted the adversities they had to overcome to obtain an education while young, made them strong; a resource they drew upon as they fought for freedom for others (particularly the underserved populations in their schools). Respondents described their leadership style as specific, meticulous, hands-on, "doers, not talkers." Respondents described themselves as risk takers and leading by example.

New Zealand.

All of the respondents in the New Zealand sample are ethnic minorities in their country. One of the overriding themes of these school leaders is their strong sense of self-identity. Respondents noted their determination and grounded identity as keys to their success. They also ascribed to their leadership styles to ethnic heritage. Māori women described their upbringing and "Whānau values" and they, along with the Pacific respondents, described a leadership style characterized by togetherness, family, connections, trust, and building relationships. Support from others: partners, colleagues, family, and mentors were all listed as key contributers to success. Service to others and caring are seen as strong Māori values that are shared by the Pacifica community as well.

At the same time the Māori and Pacifica respondents discussed the cultural contributions of their ethnic heritage, they noted the struggle they faced with being "outsiders within," (Collins, 2008; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Māori women spoke of their struggles as young, non-native speakers of their mother tongue in a culture that values native mother-tongue speakers as well as the elders in the community. Similarly, a mixed-race Pacifica respondent noted how she was glad she was mixed race so she does not readily fit into a "box" of who she is and what she does. Respondents from this cohort noted that reflection and feedback were both drivers of their success.

United States.

Much like the sample from Bangladesh, the cohort from the United States largely came to their positions as superintendents through a multi-year career of moving up "through the ranks" from teacher to principal to the central office directorship to deputy or assistant superintendent to superintendent. Many of these respondents moved through these positions in the same school district or region of the state in which they now served as superintendents.

Interestingly, a number of respondents reported that they neither sought the superintendency nor did they set out to become superintendents. Rather, they gradually grew into the position through their own experiences and feedback from others in the workplace who encouraged them. Their own advancement sounds somewhat serendipitous. Several respondents noted, "an opportunity came up and I took it." Despite these descriptions of their own success, respondents noted that junior colleagues should seek out mentors, work hard and have a vision of where they want to go. These leaders describe themselves as flexible and reflective, but also committed to establishing plans, goals, and executing those goals. They further describe themselves as distributive leaders, who are collaborative. They build supportive, trusting relationships and invest in direct reports. While respondents from Bangladesh cite education and training and as the key to further career success, the U.S. respondents noted enhancing one's education and skills through advanced degrees as a precursor to obtaining the superintendency. Indeed, this degree is often required, and certainly preferred in by many U. S. school boards as they search for new superintendents.

Cross-nationality findings.

While each of the four country samples had it's own unique characteristics, several cross-cultural themes emerged. Each of the samples noted hard work as a key factor in successful leadership. These women reported having to prove themselves as worthy of the leadership positions they obtained throughout their career. Credibility was created through hard work, leading to positive results. In those areas in which respondents noted less positive outcomes in the course of their careers, times when they had not been so successful, the lack of success was often related to the pace of change they had envisioned.

Education was also mentioned by all four respondent cohorts as influencing the climb to leadership. Education was a necessary tool for advancement in Bangladesh, the United States, and Ethiopia. New Zealand respondents were all characterized as having a love of learning. Across all four countries these women were successful students and reached the highest levels of academic achievement. The leaders ascribed their own academic achievements to early socialization to formal learning through comments such as "there was never any discussion of whether you would go to college, education was of the utmost importance," and "my father thought education was more important for women than men, men can do other things without education, but women can't." Fathers in particular were seen as having a strong influence on the educational patterns of the women leaders. In addition to the validating impact of the degrees earned, several respondents across the countries spoke of the benefits of the education itself. Ayane noted, "education is an eye opener." Tara noted, "My MBA taught me to work under pressure. At the University of London, I learned theory, conceptual clarity, analysis, synthesis and how I can have an opinion and contribute in the theoretical sense."

Courage and risk taking was another characteristic that cut across the cohorts. In some instances this was courage related to taking principled stances in the face of political opposition. In some instances, respondents needed courage to take the risk to work outside the home in the face of opposition from husbands and other members of the family. In some instances, it was courage to stand up to governing boards in pursuit of social justice, against fraud, and under threat of bodily harm. These woman described being the "only" the "first" and the risk inherent in meeting a high standard as a trailblazer for others.

Finally, these leaders encouraged other aspiring female teachers to "be brave," "take risks," "define your own destiny," and "have your own vision and go for it." In essence, they were suggesting that new women leaders follow in their footstep and do as they did.

Interestingly, while many studies suggest that female leaders are distinctively collaborative, this is not a characteristic that was born out across all four countries.

Leadership and gender.

A final area of commonality among the four-nation sample was the gendered experience of these leaders. In each country, respondents noted barriers to leadership by virtue of being a woman. Barriers cited included being treated differently by male co-workers, having their authority questioned, being on the outside of professional networks, and accusations that job attainment was the result of government policy versus ability (New Zealand). In both Bangladesh and Ethiopia, respondents noted a specific split between government policy regarding equity for work in the labor force and the actual behaviors of men in the workplace. Many respondents attributed this gap in credulity to the fact that there are still comparatively few women in higher-level leadership positions in education, even in the United States where gender parity is presumed to be attained.

Conclusions

Preliminary findings suggest that regardless of the nationality or culture, these women had gendered leadership experiences, enduring barriers to their work and roadblocks to their ambition based on the fact that they were women. Women described death threats and assaults in developing countries, and subtle micro-aggressions based on gender in the U.S. and New Zealand, questioning their competence to perform their jobs. Māori and Ethiopian women described challenges related to cultural expectations related to raising children, but Bangladesh

and U.S. respondents did not. These results suggest that at least part of the leadership aspirations of women in the field of education will need to be addressed through hiring policies that aggressively bring larger cohorts into higher levels of education leadership to create a "new normal."

Similarly, obtaining higher levels of education seems to be an attribute that cuts across nationalities, which suggests it may be related to what it means to be a woman leader. Not only does the education develop the analytic skills needed to reflect and make effective decisions, it is a symbolic marker that can be used as a proxy for competence for male colleagues to are suspicious of female leaders. Governments who want to promote advancement of more women into higher levels of education leadership can assist this by providing scholarships and other opportunities for women to pursue education credentials at prestigious higher education institutions.

While these first two attributes of what it means to be a female leader lend themselves to clear policy and programmatic remedies, working hard, and risk taking and courage are attributes that are not as easily addressed. Programs that foster networks of female education leaders can embolden their members to take risks in pursuit of academic excellence as well as mentor women in how to take calculated risks in the work place. Specific training in how to read the political aspects of educational leadership as well as how to effectively manage change can also foster calculated risk taking among female leaders.

While the full analysis of the SIR data will be addressed separately, all four groups of women described themselves on the SIR interview as assertive, transparent, reflective, problem solvers. Having a supportive husband was considered a key factor in leadership success across all four groups. Valences were positive, reflecting positive self-ego and resiliency, which was

reflected in the work in which they were engaged. Organizing peer support networks, and mentors for new female leaders can bolster resiliency to ensure that more women go into higher levels of education leadership and stay in those positions.

This study suggests that, while there are leadership characteristics that are context-specific across countries, there clearly are characteristics that transcend countries, which we can call uniquely female and address through policy and programs that will ultimately shape cultures worldwide and secure the place of women in the highest levels of educational leadership around the world.

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