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This dissertation, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the College of Graduate and Professional Studies of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership



Dr. Joey Cope, Dean of the
College of Graduate and
Professional Studies

October 1, 2020

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Abilene Christian University
School of Educational Leadership

Navigating the Role of Head of School as Perceived
by Female Heads of National Christian School Association Schools

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Jill C. Hartness

November 2020

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to May, with sincere apologies for raising you in a faith community that never valued your voice; at least you learned to yell.

Acknowledgments

If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know it didn't make it there alone. If you see initials after my name, it is certain I had a lot of help. There are many to whom gratitude is due. First and foremost, I am grateful to God for giving me grace daily, in this and every effort. I am grateful to my mother, who made this possible and supported me along the way. A sincere thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Peter Williams. You believed in me from the beginning, nurtured, and guided me as I found my way through my own labyrinth. Thank you for the countless hours of encouragement, sometimes over tacos. Thank you to Dr. McMichael and Dr. Goff; you asked the hard questions and made me better.

To my community who inspired me and told me yes, you can—I owe a debt of gratitude. You walked with me and reminded me of how strong I could be. Thank you for keeping me focused, occasionally distracted, but always sane, with special thanks to the women who spoke up and shared their stories.

To G & M, thank you for letting everything and everyone else borrow your mother and for loving me despite it. You are my best dream, my best accomplishment, and the best of me. This pales in comparison to the two of you. I'd rather be called mother than doctor any day. Thank you for supporting me being both.

To “the” Jeb, for every grilled cheese, summer sipper, late night popcorn, and good, good tea. For when you slept with the lights on and for living with me not sleeping at all. For holding up my arms through three degrees, two children, a career, a pandemic, tornadoes, floods, and everything in between. For your never-ending love and selflessness, thank you. You always believe in me and cheer me onto my next dream. I love our team, and I love you.

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Abstract

The current representation of women as heads of schools in U.S. independent schools is significantly less than that of men. With little research on independent female heads of schools, particularly in religious school communities, this qualitative study examined the perspectives of female heads of school from the National Christian School Association regarding perceptions and experiences in the leadership role within a conservative Christian school context. This study was framed through social role theory, muted group theory, authentic leadership theory, and emotional labor theory, and guided by one overarching research question: What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community? A sample of four current and former female heads were interviewed to understand their experiences. The study revealed seven common themes: (a) faith and calling, (b) influence of mentors, (c) learning to lead, (d) challenges, (e) conservative climate, (f) perseverance and strength, and (g) leadership redefined. Further, it supported the presence of a double bind and recognized the significant expense of emotional labor by the participants in their roles.

Keywords: academia, church of Christ, conservative Christian community, emotional labor theory, head of school, independent school, National Christian School Association, patriarchy, social role theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Would women leaders wield power differently? Would they be more humane? Would they perhaps even usher in some gleaming, renaissance era? And would men accept them? Now that we have this veritable club of women leaders across the globe—ruling, scheming, changing the rules and the world—we can begin to answer those questions. But the answers are no simpler than the questions themselves. — Georgie Anne Geyer (1989)

Over the past decade, research focusing on gender and leadership in different sectors, cultures, and industries has increased considerably. New books, blog posts, articles, stories, and studies are released daily, with the findings continuing to confirm what is already known—women are not perceived to be relevant within the structure of power (Beard, 2017; Madsen, 2017). However, in all the research regarding women, gender inequality in the workplace, and the persistent challenges to change, very little light is cast on a small dark corner: the world of religious independent schools, specifically within conservative Christian communities. The questions yet to be asked in this environment include the following: Can women lead? How do they lead? Whom do they lead? How have they learned to lead, and where did they learn? Do they lead in traditional ways and is that accepted? What does leading a religious independent school look like for a woman in a conservative Christian environment?

The conservative Christian environment specific to this study is the National Christian School Association (NCSA). Little is known about the trajectory and experiences of female heads of school within NCSA's member institutions. This study's purpose was to understand how female heads understand and describe their successful attainment to the head of school positions of NCSA institutions and to explore the experiences of these women within their

conservative Christian communities. This chapter introduces the problem of a lack of female leaders within organizations, extending into academia and predominantly into religious academic institutions such as member schools within the NCSA. This chapter also prepares the reader for subsequent chapters, including a background of the issue, problem of practice, purpose of the research, research questions, definition of key terms, summary, literature review, a description of the methodology, findings, and discussion of implications for policy and practice.

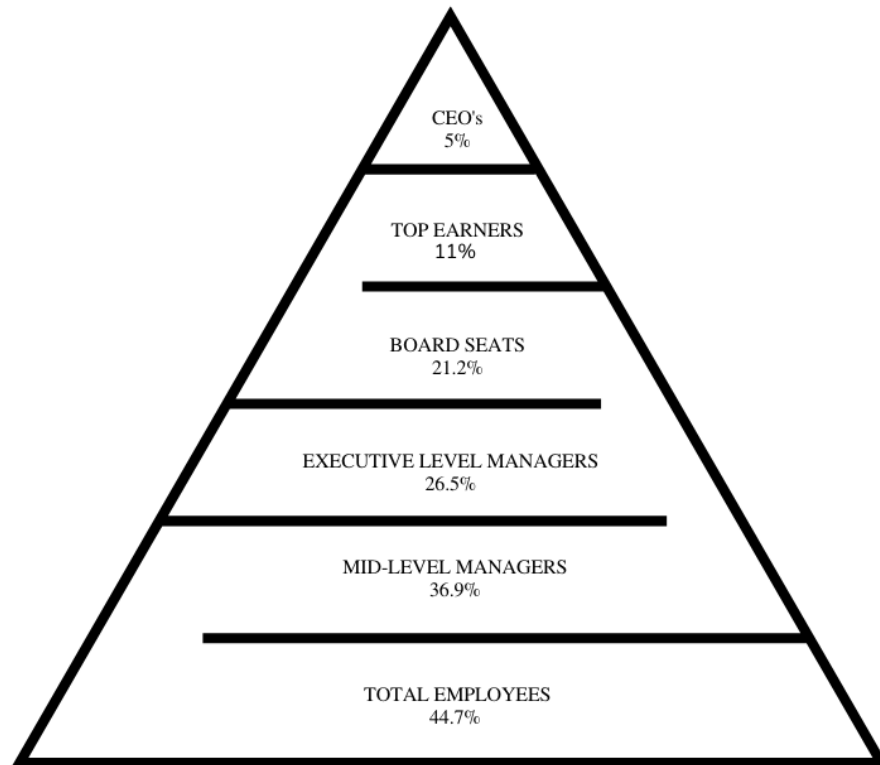
Background

In the United States, the year 2020 marks 100 years since the ratification of Amendment XIX to the U.S. Constitution, where women in America gained the right to vote. Ironically, this milestone is met with numerous examples of research-based literature pointing to a lack of progress in the representation of women in leadership roles (Madsen & Longman, 2020).

Referred to as the era of the concrete wall, the middle of the 20th century was a society wrought with lacking educational opportunities for women, male-dominated trades, and perpetuated gender roles leading to denied access for women to earn credentials, access interviews, and obtain jobs (Eagly & Carli, 2007). As exclusion barriers were lifted in the 1970s, the term *glass ceiling* was introduced in the 1980s as opportunities became more apparent but remained unattainable, specifically at the executive level. The glass ceiling was a popular metaphor used to explain the absence of women in senior organizational leadership positions with further expansion of the metaphor to include glass cliffs, glass walls, and glass escalators, among other ceilings (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Kumra, 2017). More recently, change can be seen as roles in society have changed, and women have been encouraged to seek opportunities outside of the home and beyond the glass walls of traditional nursing, teaching, and secretarial occupations. However, identifying and naming the barriers has not worked to address the

inequalities, and women remain vastly outnumbered in senior leadership positions (Kumra, 2017). Moreover, the glass metaphors have implied that women are afforded equal access to entry-level positions, assume the presence of a single, homogeneous, and absolute barrier, and fail to acknowledge the diverse strategies devised and necessary skills employed to overcome barriers. The barriers women now encounter no longer take the direct form of an exclusionary wall or impenetrable ceiling. As women discover and construct their unique paths, the route remains circuitous and has more accurately been labeled a labyrinth, with the number of women advancing to leadership positions still depressingly low (Cavanaugh, 2020; Dubeck et al., 1996; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Madsen & Longman, 2020).

In the 2020 business world, only 5% of the FTSE (Financial Times Stock Exchange) 100 CEOs are women (Killian, 2020). The FTSE 250 is even further behind, with just 2%, and the FTSE 100 pay gap still exists, with the highest-paid male CEO earning significantly more than the highest-paid female executive (Killian, 2020). As evidenced by the thinning pyramid (see Figure 1), women enter into the industry in large numbers but drop off somewhere in the middle (Catalyst, 2019).

Figure 1*Women in S&P 500 Companies*

Note. Adapted from Catalyst, *Pyramid: Women in S&P 500 Companies*, January 15, 2020, (<https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-sp-500-companies/>) Copyright 2020 by Catalyst. Adapted with permission.

In education, women represent the majority of enrolled students and graduates at all degree levels yet are underrepresented in senior-level leadership roles at both the secondary and higher education levels throughout recent decades (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016; Cavanaugh, 2020; Eckel et al., 2009; Gagliardi et al., 2017; National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], 2019a; Ostos, 2012). According to the Data Analysis for School Leadership, 66% of NAIS (2019a) member schools had men as heads of school during the 2019–2020 school year. For coeducational schools, the percentage of male

heads increases to 70%, and when including grades nine to 12, the percentage rises to 76% (NAIS, 2019a). Within the NCSA, only 26% of heads are women, and that number decreases to 20% when including grades nine to 12 (NCSA, 2019a).

Underrepresentation is particularly noticeable in the area of independent and predominantly faith-based education, as noted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and as represented by institutions aligned with the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), the Council on Educational Standards and Accountability (CESA), and the NCSA (ACSI, 2019; CCCU, 2019; CESA, 2019; Longman et al., 2019; NCSA, 2019a). Independent schools, formerly referred to as private schools, are mission-driven, academically focused, and often smaller than public schools and enroll mostly college-bound students. Frequently affiliated with faith, independent schools teach character building, promote shared community, and focus on a well-rounded educational experience for each student, seeking to provide personalized attention and community support.

The lack of representation of female leaders is attributable to a wide variety of barriers, with research regarding these challenges highlighting persistent sex discrimination, family demands, and a lack of networking (AAUW, 2016). Further, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) pinpointed 27 deeply embedded, virtually invisible gender-based leadership barriers, including cultural constraints, exclusion, gender stereotypes, leadership perceptions, a lack of mentors, the glass cliff, identity, harassment, hierarchal culture, and bias. Separated into three categories—macro (societal), meso (organizational), and micro (individual)—each barrier was described as hidden and unconscious, with the barrier strength often greater in religious organizations.

Beyond the invisible barriers lies further inherent gender inequity. Within Christian organizations, Mason et al. (2016) noted that Christian men aspire to leadership regardless of perceived self-efficacy. However, the women surveyed were found to have equal self-esteem levels as men but did not aspire to leadership as often. Christian men had leadership aspirations regardless of self-esteem, given the traditional patriarchal nature of leadership and religion, leading them to obtain positions of power despite qualifications. Religious patriarchal culture further leads to issues of self-esteem and a lack of leadership aspirations by women. Ibarra et al. (2013) stated that placing women in leadership positions is not enough and that a fundamental identity shift to overcome second-generation gender bias, organizational hierarchies, and cultural beliefs that have erected obstacles to leadership is necessary. I have observed that within the conservative educational community, these barriers are not merely invisible but also quite visible. The perpetuation of gender bias disrupts the leadership learning cycle, and women raised in a setting with traditional gender roles may struggle in their identities as leaders (Hong & van der Wijst, 2013; Ibarra et al., 2013; Wallace & Wallin, 2015). Each obstacle prevents women from advancing in leadership, challenges women's contributions, discourages and prevents success, and limits organizational effectiveness, leading to interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

This study aims to shed light on how women from within this particular community have emerged as leaders despite this disruptive cycle and what lessons can be learned from their agency to garner leadership and navigate within the role.

Statement of the Problem

Despite considerable research outlining the advantages of gender diversity, women remain underrepresented in the leadership of many organizations (Adler, 2017; Bruckmüller &

Branscombe, 2010; Buse et al., 2016; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Deaconu & Rasca, 2015).

This leadership gap extends to the academic community, where the continued disparity is prevalent (Carnes et al., 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Women make up 18%–20% of superintendents in public education, represent approximately 30% of independent school heads, and only 23% are the head of school (HOS) within the NCSA (Feibelman & Haakmat, 2010; Fuller et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2013; NAIS, 2019a; NCSA, 2019; Wallace, 2014). Learned patriarchy, gender bias, elitism, social engineering, exclusion, male dominance, liminality, and hierarchical organizational culture are some of the barriers women experience on their path to leadership positions (Archard, 2013; Burkinshaw & White, 2017; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2018; Halls et al., 2018; Ibarra et al., 2010; Steele Flippin, 2017). These barriers are compounded with the cultural transmission of gender roles and traditional perpetuated exclusionary rules of participation in a religious school setting (Bryant, 2006; Gaines, 2018; Hiller & Baudin, 2016; Johnson & Sharp Penya, 2011; Mason et al., 2016).

Though much research has been conducted regarding women's leadership barriers, scant data exists regarding those women who do break through the glass ceiling (Steele Flippin, 2017), particularly in K–12 religious independent schools. Once in leadership positions, women face continued challenges such as self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 1997), sexism (Oliver et al., 2018), a lack of leadership preparation (Fuller et al., 2018; Young & McLeod, 2001), exclusion (Sadler & Linenberger, 2017), identity (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016; Wallace & Wallin, 2015), limited networking (Fuller et al., 2018), prejudice (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and a lack of mentors (Paterson & Chicola, 2017), along with conscious and unconscious bias (Bryant, 2006; DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Shnabel et al., 2016). The myriad of documented obstacles can lead to conflict within a female leader as well as with the school's religious community. These interpersonal and

intrapersonal conflicts can impact an already tenuous role (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018). The problem to be explored with this research is the lack of understanding of the lived experiences of women navigating the position of head of school within a conservative Christian school community. This research directed a spotlight onto those few women who have reached the top of a K–12 religious educational organization and examine their experience after attaining their positions, seeking to inform current female leaders and school boards to operate better within their context and educate others aspiring to these leadership positions in the future.

Purpose of the Study

This study's purpose was to explore the experiences of female heads of independent schools within conservative K–12 Christian communities, specifically member schools of the NCSA. This qualitative study used semistructured interviews and open-ended questions with four female heads of school.

Research Questions

The overarching question answered in this study was, What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community? Additionally, the following research questions explored this phenomenon.

Q1. How have female heads of school navigated their identity as Christians, women, and leaders within their community?

Q2. How have female heads of school learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

Significance

This study of the experiences of female heads of NCSA K–12 schools is important for several reasons. First, this study provides a significant yet missing piece of understanding of the

phenomenon of women leading schools within conservative Christian environments. Understanding the challenges women face in leadership is foundational; however, the conservative environment presents additional conflicts and obstructions (Hughes, 2008; Joeckel & Chesnes, 2009; Pedersen & Jule, 2012). Rules are formed by religious practices to maintain traditions, with conservatism being a strong predictor of gender role ideologies (Bang et al., 2005).

Additionally, female voices from independent leadership in K–12 education are nearly nonexistent (Gallagher, 2017), and there are no published studies on female NCSA leaders. This study provides a place for the voice of these women as they describe their journeys and experiences, presenting a complete understanding of this unique phenomenon. Exploring the experiences of these women, hearing their stories, and sharing their point of view provides perspective currently not found in the literature on women, leadership, and academia.

Lastly, this study of the female experience is important since it expands knowledge and understanding for the NCSA and other academic communities on how to support and promote female leaders better. This study is useful in discovering the participants' challenges and strategies for learning to lead while navigating conflict and identity.

Positionality

As a female head of school within a conservative religious community, I have observed a lack of women in leadership positions. Raised in this specific conservative Christian setting, I was neither encouraged to be aspirational nor afforded opportunities to lead. I both witnessed and experienced muted group theory (MGT) in the church, where women were taught overtly and covertly to be silent. Now, as an educator immersed in this same community and called to lead, I became burdened with the fact that little had changed, and I was compelled to investigate

the experiences of women who have attained leadership positions in similar communities. My positionality afforded me the opportunity to conduct qualitative research in the hope that my work would have bearing beyond my individual context.

Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions are intended to clarify the understanding of frequently used terms in this study.

Academia. Academia includes topics relating to education or the life, community, or world of educational studies, institutions, or systems.

Authentic leadership theory. Authentic leadership theory (ALT) is centered around the authenticity of the leader and the characteristics of the individual. Shaped and refined by critical life events that trigger growth and authenticity, this leadership theory represents one of the newest areas of leadership research (Northouse, 2016).

Board of directors or trustees. The board of trustees is the governing body of an independent school. The head of school answers to the board of trustees. The board has the fiduciary responsibility of oversight for the school and oversees one employee: the head of school (NAIS, 2019a).

Church of Christ. The Church of Christ is a fellowship of believers aspiring to worship as First Century Christians, speaking where the Bible speaks and remaining silent where the Bible remains silent. It identifies separately from the Disciples of Christ, with a dominant view that women must remain silent in worship and subordinate to their husbands and other men. Traditionally, women are not allowed to serve as preachers, senior pastors, or elders (West, 1950). More recently, some congregations have explored a broader view of women's roles.

Conservative Christian community. The conservative Christian community follows a style of religious belief holding to traditional attitudes, values, rules, and practices (Johnson & Sharp Penya, 2011).

Council for Christian colleges and universities. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU) includes 150 member institutions located in the United States and Canada. Members have missions that are Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith (CCCCU, 2019).

Emotional labor theory. Emotional labor theory (ELT) is defined as the process by which individuals display appropriate emotions to satisfy organizational requirements and involves the exertion of energy to address the feelings of others, make them comfortable, or abide by social expectations (Gardner et al., 2009).

Glass ceiling. The glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier in organizations above which it is difficult for women to rise (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Glass cliff. The glass cliff refers to the idea that women are placed in leadership positions during times of organizational crisis (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010).

Head of school. The head of school (HOS) is the chief executive officer (CEO) and the highest educational administrative position at an independent school. The head is the sole employee of and evaluated by the board of trustees (NAIS, 2019a).

Independent school. An independent school is a nonpublic educational institution not funded by public funds and incorporated as a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization with a governing board of trustees. Independent schools are funded through tuition payments, charitable contributions, and endowment income (NAIS, 2019a).

Muted group theory. Muted group theory (MGT) asserts that population groups remain muted and powerless under a dominant class, specifically men (West & Turner, 2018).

National association of independent schools. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) is a national membership organization of independent schools with approximately 1,250 member schools (NAIS, 2019a).

National Christian school association. The National Christian School Association (NCSA) includes 73 member institutions located in the United States and Canada. Members stress academic excellence in a Christian environment. Membership in the NCSA requires institutions to provide and support Christ-centered education and have the following:

- A statement of faith or documentation identifying the spiritual guiding principles of the school.
- A comprehensive curriculum grounded in the arts and sciences with regional accreditation.
- A governance structure with a board of trustees and written board policies.
- A minimum enrollment of 60 students in at least four grades, with pre-K being the lowest grade.
- Fiscal responsibility with an annual financial audit and written financial policies.

Patriarchy. The patriarchy is a social construct marked by the supremacy of males.

Social role theory. Social role theory (SRT) asserts that gender stereotypes are developed from the gendered division of labor that characterizes a society (Eagly et al., 2000).

Stone–Campbell movement. A hermeneutic for interpreting scripture, this movement focused on New Testament teaching, the shared governance of autonomous congregations, baptism by immersion, ecumenism, and the regular celebration of communion (West, 1950).

Traditional. The term traditional means handed down or relating to tradition, adhering to practices from the past (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Women's role. The term women's role refers to roles, positions, services, or acts allowed by women in the Church of Christ based on their gender because of perceived traditional, cultural, and scriptural understandings.

Organization of the Study

The study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, positionality, and summary. Chapter 2 is a literature review of related research. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology design, participant selection process, data collection, and analysis, including the study's limitations and delimitations. Chapter 4 presents the findings that emerged from the four semistructured interviews, and Chapter 5 provides a summative review of the research question and subquestions, summary of the study, investigative method, and interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to current literature. Additionally, emergent themes in the data, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for further research are discussed. Chapter 5 includes my personal relationship to the study, concluding with a culminating reflection.

Chapter Summary

In summary, considerable research demonstrates many beneficial outcomes associated with women in leadership. Various obstacles continue to prevent women from assuming and thriving in leadership roles, and these obstacles extend into the academic world and further into the world of religious independent schools. Illuminated and better understood through the lenses of ALT, ELT, MGT, and SRT, the obstacles of workplace punishment, perpetuated gender

stereotypes, cognitive bias, low self-efficacy, a lack of leadership identity, exclusionary hierarchical culture, insufficient networking, and mentorship all present a clear disadvantage to women. These form a system that complicates the normal process of becoming a leader and internalizing a leadership identity (Ibarra, 2017). The addition of a conservative religious climate and traditional gender roles further exacerbate the experience of serving as a female leader in a conservative Christian academic community (Bem, 1993; Gorman, 2005; Heilman et al., 2004; Northouse, 2016). I sought to understand how women navigated the interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict of leading schools within this context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines pertinent research related to women in educational leadership, providing a foundational framework for this qualitative study to establish an inventory of categories and relationships to be investigated (McCracken, 1988). Several areas of study highlight the experiences and gender disparities within varying contexts. It should be noted that though there are commonalities between the superintendent position in public schools and that of a HOS, research related to independent schools is lacking.

The problem explored was the lack of understanding of lived experiences of women navigating the position of head of school within a conservative Christian school community, specifically the National Christian School Association (NCSA).

The purpose of this research was to generate knowledge and understanding about the experiences of female heads of independent schools within conservative Christian communities, specifically member schools of the NCSA. This study aimed to shed light on how women from within this particular community have emerged as leaders despite difficulties navigating a defective, gender-normative environment, and what lessons can be gleaned from their ascension to leadership and subsequent experience within the role. The research spotlighted the few women who have reached the top of a K–12 Christian educational organization and analyze their experiences after attaining their position.

The literature search strategy and conceptual framework lead to data purporting the benefits of women in leadership, particularly in the educational realm, followed by a brief overview of women in academia and current statistics from higher education to K–12 independent schools. A discussion of independent school governance and head of school responsibilities leads to the many obstacles women in leadership continue to face. Such obstacles

include the glass ceiling and the glass cliff, traditional gender roles, bias, hierarchical culture, and identity. As the influence of religion intensifies the barriers female leaders face (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016), a discussion of religion and gender, particularly in a conservative Christian climate and some background on Church of Christ theology, is addressed. Chapter 2 concludes with how women learn to lead within the context of a man's world, along with a theoretical framework. This framework explores viewing the women's experiences through the lenses of SRT and MGT to interpret better and understand the interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict surrounding them within this framework of leadership. Each topic discussed seeks to establish a deeper foundation for understanding the women's challenges in this study.

Literature Search Strategy

Though much research has been conducted regarding leadership barriers for women, scant data exists regarding those who manage to break through the glass ceiling (Steele Flippin, 2017), particularly in K–12 religious independent schools. Seeking research on the topic of K–12 religious independent schools led me to search for studies on women rising to leadership in academia overall. Significant research exists on leadership within public school systems and higher education. My search process established criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of literature, as suggested by Bryman (2006, 2007). Utilizing online search engines, I found that the majority of the literature was primarily from the last 20 years, seeking to inform current circumstances, with some research concerning pertinent legislation prior to 2000. Searches were made using the following criteria for inclusion:

- Years: 2000–2020
- Types of studies: quantitative and qualitative

- Types of publications: journals, books, dissertations, podcasts, and video presentations
- Key topics: glass ceiling, glass cliff, gender role, female school superintendent, female independent head of school, gender bias, gender discrimination, school administration women, liminality, leadership preparation, identity, covering, self-efficacy, barriers to leadership, double bind, Church of Christ theology, Christianity, women's role, head of school, practical theology, patriarchy, religious tradition, social role theory, and muted group theory
- Search: Abilene Christian University (ACU) library database, ERIC, nais.org, thewhitehouseproject.org, ProQuest, Sage, and scholar.google.com
- Excluded articles: leadership styles, leadership behaviors, management styles, management science theory, sociolinguistic approaches to gender and leadership theory, and gendered relationships
- Language: English

Value of Women in Leadership

Despite numerous studies documenting the benefits of gender diversity in organizational leadership, much has remained stagnant for women in the workplace (Madsen, 2015). Research clearly shows that many women are qualified, capable, intelligent transformational leaders who benefit organizations (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Buse et al., 2016; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). In their quantitative research, Deaconu and Rasca (2015) studied a triangle that included leadership, gender, and generation, exploring leadership characteristics, leadership styles, and employee preferences. Stating that effective leadership required strong emotional intelligence, flexibility, and people skills, they found that women tend to perform well in these

categories. With organizations shifting away from a transactional to a transformational leadership model, this research suggested that women exhibited extensive traits that were regularly associated with effective leadership and that their employees regarded them highly. Madsen (2015) found that women on boards or leadership teams strengthened the organizational climate, leveraged talent, and enhanced innovative and collective intelligence. Women tend to display boldness in risk-taking, thoughtfulness concerning competitive endeavors, and mainly focus on the success of the whole rather than the one. This promotes board diversity and healthier board dynamics, potentially leading to smart risks and better decision-making and outcomes (Adams, 2016).

Additionally, women in leadership are proven to increase organizational value, financial performance, growth, innovation, social responsiveness, philanthropy, and gender diversity in the workplace; moreover, gender diversity is crucial for effective governance and promoting heterogeneity in both critical and creative ideas (Buse et al., 2016; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Furthermore, a study of female university presidents found that women provided a more collaborative leadership atmosphere and strategically incorporated compromise into decision-making. This study went on to claim that women are advocates for the needs of others and prioritize the development of people and the organization, showing great sensitivity and awareness despite being held to patriarchal role expectations. One participant reflected on taking a personal inventory of limitations, committing to personal and professional development (Ford & Cavanaugh, 2017).

In all, research confirms that women strive to be authentic leaders who endeavor to know their true selves, maintain their personal values, and act accordingly, reflecting a positive organizational climate (Caza & Jackson, 2011; Northouse, 2016).

Value of Women in Education

Women still outnumber men as educators (Bitterman et al., 2013; Chubb, 2015; Gallagher, 2017). However, despite the overrepresentation of women in the field of education, there remains underrepresentation in top educational leadership positions such as a public school superintendent or independent HOS (Chubb, 2015; Wallace, 2014). The benefits of female leadership are well documented. Specifically in educational settings, women tend to lead schools purposefully, and their leadership often focuses on learning and social justice through spiritual and balanced leadership styles. Women are considered more relational leaders, accomplishing goals through collaboration and encouraging the input of others. Furthermore, they seek to lead horizontally rather than hierarchically and conceptualize power differently, amplifying all voices through the establishment of collective leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Grogan (1996) found that female educational leaders generally have a distinct ability to empower and enable others to do their work well. They do this through a spirit of inclusivity and by relying on diverse perspectives to craft new solutions to problems. These positive communication behaviors, such as being verbally involved, seeking others' opinions, instituting new ideas, and being firm but not rigid, account for the emergence of successful female leaders (Northouse, 2016). Women have been found to welcome innovation and deliberately tap into new voices, integrating outsider opinions and approaches that encourage responsibility and change (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Despite effective leadership, female educators in positions of authority often report a degree of discomfort with the power associated with traditional titles such as principal or superintendent. Feeling more at ease with collaborative teamwork, women reiterate the necessity of channeling that power to strengthen relationships and confront change rather than to control others (Brunner, 2000).

Women and Academia

Shakeshaft (1989) chronicled the role of women in education from the late 1700s onward. As the industry grew in the early 1800s, business opportunities led men away from teaching, and the profession became accessible to women. The feminization of teaching was supported by arguments that framed the teaching profession as a natural extension of other domestic roles such as traditional wife and mother. Teaching also offered single women the opportunity to earn a living independently until marriage. When the superintendent position emerged in the late 1800s, men primarily held these positions as they were considered to be better suited for both leadership and management. This structure led to the division between teachers and administrators, with administration becoming a male-dominated field (Adkison, 1985).

Today, women comprise the vast majority of educational employees, yet the observation that they hold so few leadership positions is of particular concern (Gangone & Lennon, 2014). The question as to why still so few women hold these positions continues to confound and discourage many who look to realize a more equitable and inclusive leadership model (Ford & Cavanaugh, 2017). Further, as students learn by example, the lack of women in key academic leadership positions communicates the continued existence of implicit gender boundaries for future generations. The pattern of underrepresentation has been documented both in higher education and with public school superintendents despite the fact that the majority of degrees, at every level, are earned by women (Johnson, 2017; Madsen & Longman, 2020; Pernambuco-Wise, 2012).

Research concerning the lack of women in school leadership and on female leaders at the university level and in public K–12 institutions is abundant. The current representation of women as heads of independent schools is far below that of men. Additionally, the representation of

women in top leadership positions remains far beneath the overall representation of women in independent school education altogether (Chubb, 2015; Gallagher, 2017; Ostos, 2012). Minimal studies have been performed on this topic within independent schools as smaller institutions have limited funding for large-scale research (McLay & Brown, 2000). Further research is warranted to understand the barriers to leadership for women in independent schools fully (Gallagher, 2017), and this study seeks to follow the example of higher education, focusing on women and leadership. Understanding the role of an independent school leader, or head of school, is essential to this study and will be addressed in the following section.

Independent Schools

Independent schools provide an alternative to public school education. Independent schools are tuition-driven rather than publicly funded, and all school operations are funded by tuition, fees, and fundraising efforts (Dolin, 2012). Independent schools may be boarding or day schools, offer education at any grade level, and serve across the gender spectrum. Some independent schools cater to students with learning challenges while others are primarily focused on advanced and gifted students. There is a wide variety of independent school offerings with over 34,000 independent schools in the United States (NAIS, 2019a). The leader of an independent school is titled as the head of school. The head of school, formerly called the headmaster, reports to a board of directors in overseeing both the academic and the business aspects of the school program (Chubb, 2015; Dolin, 2012).

Governance structures at an independent school mimic for-profit businesses or nonprofit organizations with a board of trustees who oversee one employee: the head of school (Jorgenson, 2006). Whereas in public schools, the academic leader of a school system is the superintendent, the independent school head operates as a CEO, overseeing all aspects of the school. The school

head is the highest-ranking executive in an independent school, reports to the board, and is ultimately responsible for all missional, academic, athletic, cocurricular, admissions, parent relations, legal issues, physical plant, food services, human resources, alumni, custodial, marketing, development, operational, and financial decisions within the school's operation (Jeynes, 2008; Jorgenson, 2006). Heads of school are entrusted with implementing the strategic plan and policies of the board. An independent school's success or failure is frequently attributed to the head, with the typical tenure for an independent school head being five years (NAIS, 2019b). In a religious school, the head is also considered the school community's spiritual leader, which can lead to potential conflict if a woman is the head of a Christian school within a conservative Christian community that is patriarchal by tradition (Gaines, 2018). Private schools establish a cultural linkage that invites a cultivated social order founded on norms, values, and traditions. This cultivated social order (Madsen, 2015) results in independent schools having a distinct culture. The ideal goal is for the school's mission to drive all operations and decisions, with each member of the school community working to collaboratively achieve the school's objectives. The constant reiteration of school mission, values, and objectives often results in a culture that develops over time and is heavily steeped in community traditions (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

Obstacles

The literature supports the view that despite growing awareness, intent, and opportunity regarding women in leadership, internal and external obstacles continue to prevent women from assuming and thriving in leadership positions (Archard, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely et al., 2011; Ibarra et al., 2013). The palpable and ever-present glass ceiling, as well as the evolving glass cliff phenomenon, describe the barrier prohibiting women from reaching top leadership

roles. Some of the obstacles women confront that contribute to the glass ceiling are perceived gender roles, bias, hierarchical culture, and religious climate. In addition, within the context of a Christian school, traditional gender roles paired with conservative theology commingle to form supplemental challenges women must confront as they form their workplace identity and learn to lead in their respective environments. The myriad of documented obstacles can lead to internal conflict within a female leader in terms of identity and external conflict with the school's religious community. These interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts may present an additional layer of challenges upon an already tenuous role (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018).

Women and Glass

In the leadership literature, many glass metaphors exist to describe the persistent yet invisible barriers confronting women. The first is the term glass ceiling, first introduced in 1986 to describe the obscure yet real barrier women face while achieving upward mobility in executive management (Klenke, 2011). The dominant phrase illustrates situations where women are promoted to certain levels but not beyond due to an invisible barrier separating the highest levels of an organization and employees of a specific gender or minority status (United States Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Cotter et al. (2001) stated that the subtle ceiling represents a specific type of inequality that can only be explained by the glass ceiling. They contended that the ceiling had a greater impact at higher levels of an organization and increased with career progression. This research applies to the position of an independent head of school and is evident in the lack of female representation reported by NAIS (2019a). Some may say the proverbial glass ceiling is shattering; however, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) argued that the ceiling is present, is strengthening, and contributes to the underrepresentation of women in executive or senior leadership roles. Although the boomer generation is retiring, and leadership positions are

becoming available, women continually struggle to attain these highly sought after job titles (Fuller et al., 2018; Steele Flippin, 2017). This research begs the question that as many independent school heads retire in the next few years, will those positions be filled with capable women?

As the understanding of barriers evolved, the glass metaphor has been expanded to include glass cliffs, glass walls, and glass escalators, among other ceilings. These metaphors more accurately reflect the nature of organizationally based gender disadvantage (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Kumra, 2017). Occasionally, women break through the glass ceiling only to find themselves in untenable situations. Women are far more likely to be offered risky leadership positions where they will presumably fail (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) determined that women are more often chosen for precarious leadership positions, referenced as the glass cliff, in times of organizational crisis. Operating within such crises, organizations regularly attribute female orientation the most important factor in leader selection. Reportedly, women were found to be positioned in leadership not because they were solicited but because men had become unsuccessful, although female admittance into executive positions does not guarantee acceptance or support (Klenke, 2011; Porterfield, 2013). The glass cliff phenomenon promotes the idea that women are strategically set up to fail. By allowing a woman temporary access to leadership through the glass ceiling while assigning her impossible tasks and granting her limited organizational support, the woman is thrown over the glass cliff under the guise of professional incompetence rather than the truth of the organization's cycle of systemic sexism. Women in these situations are considered expendable, and this influences the aspiration and future advancement of women (Haslam & Ryan, 2008).

With clear documentation on the slow promotion of women in male-dominated careers, the glass escalator metaphor refers to the rapid ascent of men in predominantly female fields (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kumra, 2017). Sociologist Christine Williams (1992) coined the phrase, showing in her study that men attained authority positions faster than women in the four fields of social work, nursing, library science, and elementary education. Williams (1992) found that men have faster career mobility, assuming leadership roles in administration at a faster rate than women. She also found that men earned higher wages than women. In considering how this relates to independent school education, Williams (1992) noted that heterosexual white men most often experience the glass escalator while Cognard-Black (2012) found that there appeared to be an upward glass escalator for men who teach, as they are significantly more likely to advance upward into prominent school administrative positions.

The glass wall metaphor describes the lateral barrier keeping women in gender-specific occupations that are unlikely to position them for senior leadership roles. The glass wall takes away the opportunity for a minority group to be promoted. In independent schools, there is a greater likelihood of a woman serving as a secretary, admissions officer, administrative assistant, or librarian rather than an athletic director, technology professional, or head of school, as seen in Table 1 (NAIS, 2019a). The gender-specific positions do not frequently lead to the head of school.

Table 1*Independent School Administration and Staff by Gender 2019–2020*

Position	% Male	% Female
Admissions Officer	24	76
Athletic Director	72	28
Elementary Principal	18	82
Head of School	66	34
Head of School Assistant	17	83
Library Staff	12	88
Secretarial or Clerical	6	94
Technology Staff	85	15

Gender Roles

Among the factors that contribute to the challenges that women face in leadership are learned and perceived traditional gender roles. These expectations derive from stereotypical societal beliefs where men are assumed to be heads of the family and work to support and lead, while women nurture the family as wives and mothers, maintaining a subservient position (Hebl, 1995). These ideas often begin in the family unit, as Hiller and Baudin's (2016) research provided an insightful look into how traditional gender roles are perpetuated in the home, resulting in girls not envisioning themselves as holding leadership positions. They concluded that parents transfer culturally driven gender inequality to their children with prescribed inegalitarian women's roles inherited from one generation to the next.

In traditional homes, girls and boys are raised differently, and those differences contribute to learned gender-specific leadership behavior. Halls et al. (2018) shared relevant insights into how females have been raised over the last century according to gender-conservative views and how their experience speaks to the current societal perception of women. They found that despite more new possibilities and opportunities for women, girls in the contemporary era are seen as increasingly incompetent and vulnerable and less physically and emotionally stable. These disparities could cause conflict for the current generation of girls as they aspire to move into leadership positions within the workplace.

Additionally, Betz and Hackett (1997) discovered strong support for career self-efficacy as a predictor of educational and career preferences, classroom performance, and perseverance in pursuing a career. Some authors postulated that experiences associated with gender-role socialization lead to varying degrees of self-efficacy and confidence in typically male-dominated career fields. Additionally, they stated that women's acceptance of gender roles, possible long-range consequences of life goals, career or family expectations, and low expectations of self-efficacy within these fields significantly impact subsequent behavior in the position (Bryant, 2006).

Bias

A rather significant obstacle to be explored is bias. Stereotypical cognitive biases are often invisible and unintentional yet continue to shape some women's experiences in leadership, business, academia, and society. Bias can be implicit, explicit, and is sometimes referred to as second-generation bias, evolving from traditionally gendered career paths and cultural stereotypes. The bias is not explicit, and Ibarra (2017) described it as something in the water that could not be explicitly seen or understood but where women fall away and seen less. Bias has an

impact on networking, promotions, and grants, or diminishes access to key assignments and relationships, all factors leading to fewer women at the top of organizational leadership. This is evidenced by the number of women in support roles and the number of men chosen for high-profile projects. Despite women's qualifications and abilities, they are often overlooked and excused for top assignments as agentic traits and behaviors are required for success in occupations regardless of innate competence or skill (Carnes et al., 2015, Ibarra, 2017).

Bias is also present in the media where advertising contributes to learned behavior. Kennard et al. (2016) highlighted a remarkable increase in media portraying the sexualized imagery of women in recent decades. Other biases include the perceptions that women do not make effective managers, do not understand finances and budgets, and are emotional decision-makers (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Moreover, such biases lead to the devaluation and discrimination of women. Chin (2004) reported that women are devalued in society by appearance, an expectation of sacrifice, passivity, disempowerment, and the valuation of men.

In examining the literature regarding SRT, researchers observed that women are often socially rewarded for behaving within culturally expected norms, with the participants acknowledging that media images influence their current decision-making.

Steele Flippin's (2017) mixed-methods research on workplace bias and opportunity revealed ways in which women could become empowered to attain the leadership positions that were becoming available with the retirement of the boomer generation. However, the perpetuation of gender bias that disrupted the leadership learning cycle remains prevalent, and women raised in a setting with traditional gender roles ostensibly struggle in their identities as leaders (Hong & van der Wijst, 2013; Ibarra et al., 2013; Wallace & Wallin, 2015). Ibarra (2017) confirmed the challenge of transitioning into leadership was compounded by identity and seeing

oneself as a leader. Each obstacle hinders women from advancing in leadership, challenges women's contributions, discourages and prevents success, and limits organizational effectiveness, leading to interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Ibarra et al. (2013) stated that placing women in leadership positions was not enough and that a "fundamental identity shift" (p. 62) to overcome second-generation gender bias, organizational hierarchies, and cultural beliefs that have erected obstacles to leadership was crucial.

Within independent schools, gender bias is evident in the board selection of heads of school (Baker et al., 2016). Tallerico (2000) discovered similarity-attraction theory at play after noting a clear predisposition for white men over other candidates as boards are mostly made up of white men. Similarity attraction refers to the tendency of people to be attracted to others who are similar to them in specific respects, with the strongest effect in the areas of attitudes, values, and activity preferences (Reis, 2007). Gallagher (2017) found that boards typically comprise businessmen who want the school to be operated as a business and therefore choose a head of school who looks and thinks like them. This is derived from Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory of intergroup behavior. Under this theory, the board of trustees displays in-group bias by giving preferential treatment to those they perceive as similar. If the board is composed mainly of men, as most independent school boards are (NAIS, 2019a), they will choose a demographically similar head of school (Elsaid & Ursel, 2011).

Hierarchical Culture

Another challenge for women in leadership exists in the form of a hierarchical organizational culture in place at many organizations. Burkinshaw and White (2017) found that exclusionary structures remain active at many institutions of higher education. Their literature review revealed the presence of organizational masculinity and the perpetuation of a lack of

diversity. Women aspire to leadership positions or currently hold them but lack supportive networks, mentors, or the skills necessary to navigate leadership alone. Steele Flippin (2017) found that mentorship and executive coaching are the most effective ways to strengthen or enhance career advancement for women. Moreover, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) reported that women have fewer opportunities to engage in substantive work interactions and informal networking and to find and maintain same-gender mentors than their male counterparts. This perpetuation of the “good old boy” network keeps women at a disadvantage despite positive outcomes of executive coaching that include enhanced collaboration, increased productivity, effective conflict resolution, and improved executive presence (Boysen et al., 2018).

The culture of an independent school can also be seen as hierarchical; overwhelmingly, independent school heads are male, Caucasian, and over 50, although the majority of teachers at independent schools are female (Pernambuco-Wise, 2012). NAIS (2019b) research showed that 67% of teachers and administrators are women, yet only 22% are heads of school. The highest percentage of women filling a position within an independent school is currently that for the job of administrative assistant to the head, where 83% are female. Of the current heads of school, 25% lead K–12 schools, and of the 64 all-girls schools listed, 11 maintained male heads of school, while none of the 43 all-boys schools employed female heads (NAIS, 2019b).

Although women are acknowledged for their interpersonal skills, these traits do not reflect the strength by which traditional leadership, particularly independent school head leadership, is defined (Rivers & Barnett, 2013). In a study of independent schools in Connecticut, Gallagher (2017) found a gendered expectation of leadership in independent schools, with recycling of male heads, exclusive networking, and the precipitation of a stereotypical young male business-minded head of school.

Identity

Identity can be difficult to define and is regarded as an ongoing process within individuals. The concepts of personal (intra-individual) and contextual (extra-individual) identity both provide interferences to effective female leadership (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). Côté (1996) highlighted the identity–culture link framework and three ways in which experiences shape identity. Ascribed identity within the social identity structure refers to the identity others provide, while achieved identity refers to position or what has been accomplished. Personal identity refers to patterns of behavior shaped by life experiences, and ego identity is how experiences are handled, what is prioritized, and what grants meaning and purpose to life.

Wallace and Wallin (2015) studied the process of discovering academic identity, tracing the ways in which gender, institutional power, and other cultural and social influences shape women in the highly patriarchal domain of academia. Their findings included nontraditional paths to administration, the uncertainty of authority regardless of status or accomplishment, hesitancy to promote oneself, the lack of respect in professional practice, and the agentic nature of working to attain cohesion within the academic community.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) also studied work identity. Reviewing extensive literature on identity development and construction in organizations, focusing on antecedents to leadership, they theorized that the identities of both the leader and the follower are not only dynamically determined from self-concept but also socially constructed, affecting the gendered relationships of claiming and granting leadership roles. Kennard et al. (2016) discussed media exposure and its effects on women's future selves, which inversely impacts present decision-making.

Archard (2013) confirmed that women are missing from leadership positions and studied the need to develop women leaders through a female leadership framework. Her research

explored the perspective of adolescent girls on women as leaders in society. Acknowledging the current imbalance of women leaders in the workplace and the societal concern surrounding this phenomenon, she uncovered girls' concerns about the patriarchal nature of some working environments and leadership positions, the lack of aspiration to assume leadership roles, and the impact of ingrained societal expectations and stereotypes on personal identity. She also noted that these concerns could impact a girl's future leadership potential and perceived self-efficacy in overcoming gender barriers in the classroom and, ultimately, the workplace.

Ibarra (2017) found that men became chameleons and imitated other role models when becoming leaders. On the other hand, women lacked role models and were more true-to-self, seeking authenticity. This led to a slower learning process of becoming a leader, resulting in the authenticity paradox where identity is tied to skills and a scared version of self. Authenticity and true identity tend to increase in an environment of security, power, and acceptance.

Finding identity within mostly male educational leadership, specifically, a Christian independent school community, can be difficult for women. Females are often alone in male-dominated fields, and Sherman (2000) noted that many women reported feeling invisible in meetings. Role models observed within families and churches contribute heavily to how humans view ourselves and our identities. The socioeconomic, political, and ecclesial hierarchies within the Churches of Christ and other conservative churches have especially denied women's voices. As a result, women realize they are devalued and struggle to find their sense of self (Weber, 2020).

As women work to find their authentic identity as leaders, they look back and around for context clues, at times reverting to what religious leaders have taught them. The role of religion often impacts the abilities of women in leadership positions. This topic is addressed next.

Religion and Gender

Research suggests a pattern in which women hold pioneering leadership positions until a movement becomes respectable, and then men take over; this is most often characterized in the 20th century (Tucker et al., 1987). Religion is one field of history where women have been most influential yet denied authoritarian positions or even the existence of their leadership. Gender and religion are significant in this research as gender roles within conservative Christian communities are adhered to vehemently (Porterfield, 2013). Religion typically involves association with a formal organization, participation in rituals, and adherence to doctrines (Ellwood & McGraw, 2016). Religious identity is often formed through interactions with family and peers as well as participation in formal and informal religious groups and services (Pastorino et al., 1997). Dollahite et al. (2018) contributed to the research that discovered parents view parenting as having sacred significance and create the ability to impart religious values from their own faith traditions to their children, instilling a deep sense of religious identity within a family unit. At an early age, girls form a clear set of delimiting rules regarding participation in the community based on gender. These rules are formed by religious practices that function to hold traditions in place, with conservatism or fundamentalism being a stronger predictor of gender role ideologies than other religious variables (Bang et al., 2005). Mason et al. (2016) noted that Christian men aspire to leadership regardless of perceived self-efficacy. Women surveyed were found to have equal levels of self-esteem as men, but Christian men had leadership aspirations regardless of self-esteem because of the traditional patriarchal nature of leadership and religion. Gender traditions based on theology became deeply embedded, where even young girls within conservative Christian communities verbalized their desire to be boys so

they could lead, serve, and participate in the life of a congregational ministry (Johnson & Sharp Peña, 2011).

Conservative Christian Climate

Judging from the blessed results which have almost invariably followed the ministrations of women in the cause of Christ, we fear it will be found, in the great day of account, that a mistaken and unjustifiable application of the passage ‘Let your women keep silence in the Churches’ has [resulted] in more loss to the Church, evil to the world, and [dishonor] to God than any of the errors we have already referred to. — Catherine Booth, founder of the Salvation Army

The NCSA is an educational association of 98 elementary and secondary schools located in the United States and Canada. Most NCSA schools are independent, and as such, remain governed by self-perpetuating boards. Some schools are ministries of congregations, children’s homes, or universities. The majority of the schools have a historical relationship with the churches from the Restoration Movement, and most have ties to the Churches of Christ. The roots of the NCSA date back to annual conferences of Christian school administrators in 1975, though students of all faith backgrounds are welcome at NCSA member schools. The current NCSA began in 1980 as Partners in Christian Education, a fraternal organization for schools associated with the Churches of Christ. In 1988, the name was changed to the NCSA. A board of trustees made up of administrators from member schools and headed by an executive director forms the NCSA’s leadership.

An organization’s culture is difficult to capture, influence, and change when rooted in years of largely unchanging values and beliefs. Within the NCSA and Church of Christ educational community, barriers are not merely invisible but also quite visible. Faith is

foundational at NCSA institutions; thus, a notable barrier for women in leadership is the denomination and institutional culture (Langford, 2010; Porterfield, 2013). Most NCSA schools, as well as the NCSA itself, were founded by men associated with the Church of Christ. Many of these founding men were elders within their respective congregations. These founders and elders became the first leaders of each school, whether as board members or administrators. Thus, the ideologies and theology of the Church of Christ became the culture of each educational institution, respectively (NCSA, 2019). Through this practical theology of the church as a school, NCSA Christian educational leadership was formed. The long and firmly held belief systems have led to challenges among female leaders within NCSA communities that are steeped in the Church of Christ's conservative theology and practice.

When a religious community shapes meaning, they establish rules of participation within that community, which form individual identities. Traditional roles are created specifically in relation to visibility and voice, and girls learn quickly through the practical theology of example and ritual to have a less visible presence in their own religious communities (Johnson & Sharp Penya, 2011). Women serving in leadership positions are continually faced with traditional theological beliefs, both overtly and covertly, that support and promote conservative views in the area of gender equity (Pedersen & Jule, 2012). Long-established interpretations of scripture present formidable barriers when women attempt to lead, resulting in internal and external conflict (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2009; Pedersen & Jule, 2012). This traditionally embedded religious patriarchal culture leads to self-esteem issues and a lack of leadership aspiration and achievement by women.

Other faith communities have grappled with similar theological issues. Several could be considered conservative and have practiced or continue to practice a narrow view of women's

leadership roles. The Wesleyan Church has maintained a traditionally conservative stance on women in leadership but now state that they interpret scripture in light of the immediate context and support women pastors (The Wesleyan Church, 2020). Moreover, in the Christian Reformed Church, women have been serving as ordained ministers since 1996 (Meehan, 2020). Within the Seventh-day Adventist faith community, women may work for the denomination but cannot serve as supervisors of the organization. Some women in the organization consider this treatment as blatant injustice and discrimination (Pilgrim, 2019).

Church of Christ Theology

In not too many years, the vast majority of Americans will consider female subordination in any institutionalized form no more moral than we consider slavery today. Churches still institutionalizing female subordination will have no more future than a church today still advocating or defending slavery. — Dale Pauls (2015)

Historians of the Church of Christ note that adherents seek to abandon the divisions of denominations and unite around the clear teachings of scripture without philosophies or traditions (Foster, 2016). The body of believers, made up of local congregations, strives to be the restored New Testament church. In the past, Churches of Christ have emphasized unity and doctrinal conformity on every matter, from the order and time of worship to women's role, exerting a powerful influence on autonomous congregations (Foster, 1994). Despite their rejection of identification with fundamentalists, Foster (2020) noted that Churches of Christ are decidedly in the fundamentalist cluster, proudly declaring to speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent.

On the topic of women's role, most Churches of Christ believe in the Patriarchal Dispensation—God spoke and continues to speak to the head of the family, the heterosexual

man, who then speaks to the members of the family (Brownlow, 1945). Here, the man is the clear spiritual leader. Man was created first, woman was deceived and tempted man into evil, males were circumcised, worship was led by male priests, and Jesus does not change that in the New Testament (Smith, 1993).

Practical theology reveals how theology is embodied in the practices of a congregation and how these practices affect people. Evidence of practical theology displayed in the Church of Christ includes one of the most revered moments of worship each week: the Lord's Supper. Traditionally, only men are allowed to pray, speak, or serve. This weekly reminder of male dominance, in front and often by processional, carries formative power and emotes assumptions about the nature of God. Additionally, when women do speak in the Church of Christ, they are often found reading scripture; this is done specifically so that female beliefs, opinions, interpretations, and ideas remain unheard, lest they be deemed guilty of attempting to teach the men in the room (Hughes, 2008).

Other illustrations of overt teachings in the Church of Christ are evidenced by recent interviews with female adherents. When questioned about what to tell their daughters regarding the proper role of women, their answers included helping with food, encouraging men to be the leaders God designed, and teaching toddlers. Other women defended their role as not second-class but important in the way they use their talents to mentor other women, tutor children, and organize baby showers. One woman noted that growing up, she was very aware of what she could not do. She learned that her words were acceptable and valuable only when speaking to a child or another woman. In summary, the women agreed that the Church of Christ teaches that God chose men to be in leadership positions, never women (The Christian Chronicle, 2016).

Gaines (2018) researched the experience of a feminist in a patriarchal tradition and the history of women within the Stone–Campbell movement. The case study revealed that an environment of fear coupled with challenges and risks to enact change within a faith community required a slow strategic balance. Women have been assumed to push the feminist agenda within society and more specifically the church. Research shows this to be false and that women have been hesitant to challenge the leadership of men. When women do seek leadership positions, they do so to serve more effectively (Tucker et al., 1987). Clearly, in this environment, men hold the power and must choose or become convinced to share it with women. As DiAngelo (2018) noted in her book, *White Fragility*, men have denied women their rights just as white people have denied rights to people of color.

While women could be prejudiced and discriminate against men in individual interactions, women as a group could not deny men their civil rights. But men as a group could and did deny women their civil rights. Men could do so because they controlled all the institutions. Therefore, the only way women could gain suffrage was for men to grant it to them; women could not grant suffrage to themselves. (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 20)

Those in power must grant others power, and in the case of a patriarchal climate, only men can change the power structure. Even when men choose to grant women power, this allowance remains a form of benevolent sexism.

Learning to Lead

If women want to become leaders, they learn to do so in an environment of obstacles while navigating through a labyrinth (Ibarra, 2017). Women are constantly bombarded with images of who may become or who may be remembered as a leader. In the art world, this is referred to as the bronze ceiling. Less than 8% of public statues are female, and only nine of 411

national parks are dedicated to women's history in the United States. In the United Kingdom, only 2.7% of public statues are historical women who are not royalty, leading to the statement that to be regarded as statue-worthy, a woman must be either a mythical naked muse, royalty, or the Mother of God. In the physical landscape of the developed world, women are rendered invisible and irrelevant, and when girls walk past imposing figures on pedestals, they understand the representation of who exists as an icon of status and who maintains the graven title of authority (Criado-Perez, 2016). Whether subtle or not, girls learn, and women are reminded they do not fit the traditional mold of a leader (Ibarra, 2017).

Learning to lead can be challenging for women raised in conservative Christian environments. It is well documented that leader development is 70% on-the-job experience, 20% critical relationships, and 10% formal training (Ibarra, 2017). Girls are not given the opportunity to lead at a young age, do not see themselves as leaders, and therefore are not prepared when leadership positions become available.

Success in learning to lead has evolved incrementally. With leadership still viewed as a masculine trait, some women adjust and become more masculine in their leadership style. Research shows that when this adjustment occurs, women are punished, both overtly and covertly, for a perceived lack of femininity. Consequently, they are unfavorably labeled, resulting in a double bind that is discussed more thoroughly with social role theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoyt & Burnette, 2013; Northouse, 2016).

Strategies

Women adapt and employ strategies to lead successfully within a world that favors a gender not their own. Ibarra (2017) stated that redefining the job, networking with a larger range of stakeholders, and growing beyond familiar leadership styles are all strategic tactics women

utilize to develop leadership skills and counteract second-generation bias. Steele Flippin (2017) found that mentorship and executive coaching were the most effective ways to strengthen or enhance career advancement for women, although Ibarra (2017) found that sponsors played more of a critical role over mentors. Sponsors assist in catapulting a career, whereas mentors give advice.

In academia, Cavanaugh (2020) found that challenging conventional thinking and the intentional positioning of women in educational leadership roles resulted in women overcoming adversity and inequity with women skilled at networking, self-awareness, communication, and creativity (Astin & Leland, 1991). When asked about the secrets of their success, women mention being aware of opportunities, building relationships, networking, listening, and demonstrating confidence (Cavanaugh, 2020).

Covering. A strategy that women, minorities, differently-abled persons, and individuals with varying sexual orientations employ to manage identity is covering. Covering is an adaptive technique to keep one's difference from looming large, seeking to assimilate and reduce the visibility of differences to blend into the mainstream, often suppressing aspects of identity because of stigma (Braithwaite, 2008; Evans, 2017; Yoshino, 2007). Yoshino (2007) described covering as a social contract and "price of admission" for professional success (p. 140). For women, this technique may demonstrate traits such as strength and confidence while preserving femininity, walking the narrow ledge trying to accommodate both covering and reverse covering demands. Due to the pressure to conform, the strategy of covering is frequently a result of society-demands for a woman to fit into the leadership mold; however, the strategy commonly fails when women cannot walk the stereotypically gendered tightrope successfully (Braithwaite, 2008; Robinson, 2007).

Emotional Labor. There is enormous pressure on women to conform to an organization's culture of leadership. Dzubinski et al. (2019) discovered in their research that women in strongly male-normed leadership contexts are forced to exercise enormous self-constraint to break through the glass ceiling and often encounter a glass cliff. Additionally, women in these contexts operate using self-constraint due to internalized gender scripts, and only in more gender-diverse contexts were women able to operate from their authentic selves. The self-constraint required to conform to the culture and context is classified as emotional labor.

Emotional labor is defined as the process by which individuals display appropriate emotions to satisfy organizational requirements. This labor involves the exertion of energy to address the feelings of others, make them comfortable, or abide by social expectations. It is considered labor as it uses and often drains emotional resources requiring one to induce, suppress, modify, or conceal inner feelings to produce the proper state of mind in others (Gardner et al., 2009; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). The management and coordination of mind and feeling are foundational to the emotional labor process and is notably internal, taking place in private (Erickson & Ritter, 2001).

To counteract the bias of women operating as emotional managers, Opengart (2014) studied appropriate emotional expression of women in the workplace. Her research revealed that women learned the necessity of appearing emotionally neutral, continue to face a double bind from simultaneous expectations, and have a need for authenticity in emotional expression. Further stating that women learn from feedback, experience, and age. However, sustained appropriate emotional expression often requires the use of emotional labor.

Grandey (2000) proposed a model of emotional labor from an emotion regulation perspective comprised of two strategies: surface acting (SA), where individuals fake or hide

emotions; and deep acting (DA), where individuals display appropriate expressions through a cognitive reappraisal and change of perception of the situation. Both are considered emotional regulation techniques, although SA can be detrimental, decrease job satisfaction, and lead to resource depletion. This is caused when individuals inhibit expressing their inner feelings, generating a discrepancy between feelings and displayed emotions. In contrast, DA is an adaptive strategy that can be beneficial and has been associated with reduced emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2000; Wang et al., 2018).

Hochschild (1983) originally described jobs that require emotional labor as having three things in common: (a) they require face-to-face contact; (b) they require an individual to produce an emotional state in another; and (c) they allow the employer or supervisor to exercise control over the emotional life of the employee. A HOS is required to have face-to-face contact with all community constituents, create confidence in the school, and answers to a board who maintains control over the HOS (NAIS, 2019a). To manage the demands of emotional labor, individuals may adopt one of three stances. They may identify too closely with the work and find it difficult to separate themselves from the work, leading to burnout. Others distinguish themselves from their work and use surface or deep acting when appropriate but feel inauthentic. In the third stance, individuals distinguish themselves from their role and recognize that acting is part of the job but run the risk of becoming cynical (Gardner et al., 2009). Erickson and Ritter (2001) argued that agitation management is the form of emotional labor most likely associated with burnout and feelings of inauthenticity and the negative effects on well-being that are more common among women.

Women must employ a myriad of strategies to survive the evolution of identity necessary for becoming a leader. Confronting sexism and bias, taking an educative role, covering,

expending emotional labor, and raising awareness are just some of the many strategies employed by women in learning to lead (Bierema, 2017; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Madsen, 2017; Wang et al., 2018). The process of seeing oneself as a leader and being recognized as such is fundamental to being validated, endorsed, and strengthening authenticity and effectiveness (Ibarra, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative study will investigate the experiences of female heads of school through two theoretical frameworks. As women adopt and adapt to others' and their own expectations, they can view themselves through the lenses of MGT and SRT to help make sense of their experiences. This qualitative study will include these theories to explore and inform the dialogue. Initially, the conceptual frameworks of MGT and SRT will help guide the questions posed to each head of school to better interact with, understand, and interpret their experiences. In addition, the heads' responses and experiences will be evaluated through these lenses during analysis to discover common themes (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; West & Turner, 2018).

Social Role Theory

Alice Eagly explored the similarities and differences between gender roles and social behaviors in the early 1980s, which led her to develop SRT. Social role theory evolved from the ideas maintained about women and men and the gender differences in social behavior and personality (Eagly et al., 2000). Historically, societal norms and stereotypes have suggested that women fulfill a communal and domestic role, caring for the home and family, whereas men work and learn skills outside of the home. These gender stereotypes influence the perception of what men and women should do, affecting behavior through a general acceptance that men and women behave differently, and people thus behave in approved ways (Eagly et al., 2000).

A fundamental assumption in SRT is that both women and men are typically rewarded for conforming to gender roles, with research showing evidence of adverse reactions to any gender role deviation (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Eagly et al., 2000). When one encounters deviations from expected gender roles and behaviors, clarification is sought from those who share the perceiver's gender perspective, reinforcing role expectations and stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2000). Stereotypes define expectations and responses, thus creating cycles to further preserve them. This conflict is amplified by research on the adverse effects of SRT on women in positions of leadership as their actions frequently do not align with others' stereotypical expectations, thus creating interpersonal tension (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The Double Bind. The theoretical concept of the double bind has become a common term used to describe the challenges that women face to conform to their social roles. While studying schizophrenia, Gregory Bateson developed the double bind theory based on the dichotomy of expectations that result in inner turmoil from the inability to satisfy the double bind (Visser, 2003). Women are particularly vulnerable to the double bind as it involves the tension of navigating situations with conflicting messages, both internally and externally (Cummings & Terrion, 2020; Jamieson & Hall, 1995). Characterized as aggressive if they display traditionally masculine leadership traits, and characterized as weak if they display traditionally feminine traits, the double bind is a trap for women in the workplace (Holmes, 2006). The competing demands of gender role stereotypes toward women in leadership generate further conflict toward and in female leaders, often penalizing them for both conforming or nonconforming behavior (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The dilemma is in the conflicting requirements with feminine women being criticized for deficient leadership and masculine women criticized for a lack of femininity. The contradictory expectations associated with being a woman and effective leader complicates

everything from agency, communality, self-promotion, vision, and interaction (Ibarra, 2017; Madsen, 2017).

Nowhere is the double bind more evident than in an independent school where the primary responsibility of the head of school is to instill the climate and values of the mission (NAIS, 2018). In a religious school, this encompasses being the spiritual leader of the school as well. In the context of a conservative Christian community, dominance is accepted in a man, but how does a woman lead in a competent, communal way that is acceptable, despite the doubts, resentment, and rules, both spoken and unspoken, placed around spiritual leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007)? Oakley (2000) advocated that the double bind has been used historically by those in power to suppress those without power, most often women. This study seeks to gain further insight around this topic.

Authentic Leadership Theory

Authentic leadership theory (ALT) is centered around the authenticity of the leader and the characteristics of the individual. Shaped and refined by critical life events that trigger growth and authenticity, this leadership theory represents one of the newest areas of leadership research, has yet to be fully substantiated, and does not have the support of research indicating effectiveness for an organization (Northouse, 2016). Authentic leadership can be described as transparent, value-driven, morally grounded, and responsive. Purpose, values, relationship, self-discipline, and mission are areas where an authentic leader must be transparent and excel as authentic leaders demonstrate compassion and heart toward their followers (Northouse, 2016). Moreover, authentic leadership maintains a focus on self-awareness, an emphasis on true self, and a grounding in moral leadership. This moral dimension asserts that leaders do what is right and good for their followers; yet, from the perspective of humanistic psychology, self-actualized

individuals see themselves clearly and are not hindered by others' expectations for them (Maslow, 1971).

Furthermore, Ibarra (2015) questioned the focus of being true to self in authentic leadership, advocating that authentic leadership should not be viewed as an unwavering sense of self but as an adaptive self. The self adapts as effective leaders continuously transform and pursue self-discovery. Identity changes and evolves throughout life and experience. Ibarra (2015) goes on to say that discovering oneself includes both introspective and social elements, thus occurring simultaneously in the dynamics of relationship; therefore, the true self is actually self in relation to others, or in the case of this study, the conservative Christian school context.

Leading a conservative Christian school, female heads may experience role incompatibility and difficulty in leadership authenticity as women could be considered a poor fit for the role of HOS due to societal, stereotypical, or faith-gendered expectations. These expectations and incompatibilities can lead to identity conflicts stemming from both intra-individual and extra-individual contradictions, further constraining individual agency (Fox-Kirk, et al., 2017).

Muted Group Theory

Muted group theory (MGT) is one of several critical social theories concerned with power and its distribution in society. Muted group theory, originating in the mid-1970s, was developed by Edwin and Shirley Ardener and later adapted by Cheris Kramarae. It asserts that wealthy men developed the language system for themselves to represent their own experiences, rendering women and minority groups without a voice in society (West & Turner, 2018). A central premise of the theory is that the members of the muted or marginalized group not only become silenced but also are rendered inarticulate. Groups that coexist with the powerful,

dominant group become subordinate and are forced to relinquish any hope of power, remaining mute (West & Turner, 2018).

Muted group theory proposes that the language spoken most dominantly in society is the language in which man alone is fluent (West & Turner, 2018). Women are therefore faced with the choice of either learning to speak this language or being left alone, silencing their feminist voice (Bem, 1993). When a woman fails to do the former, she is deprived of a sense of belonging and given an irreparable sense of self. Such silencing of women's voices is manipulative and easily disguised as a man helping a woman, a man providing shelter, protection, safety, and security for a woman who finds herself alone and confused (Bem, 1993). This action appears to take the form of benevolence when, in reality, it can be categorized as benevolent sexism (Oliver et al., 2018).

Muted groups have much to say but relatively little power and are often disrespected by those in dominant positions. Within a conservative Christian community, women are relegated to their gender-delimited social roles and taught to be silent or muted. Their experiences are interpreted for them by others, and their knowledge is not considered sufficient for the privileged inner circle (Johnson & Sharp Penya, 2011; Kramarae, 2005). Many women struggle with the internal voice of a woman's place, which is learned early in life within families and church communities. They feel excluded and muted not only personally and within their church but also professionally (Weber, 2020). Thus, as previously mentioned, viewing the experiences of female heads of school within conservative communities through the lenses of MGT and SRT provides context for possible interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict.

Chapter Summary

Despite considerable research outlining the advantages of women in leadership, barriers to women attaining leadership roles remain, specifically in religious independent educational communities. Obstacles derived from learned and perceived traditional gender roles, conscious and unconscious bias, hierarchical and patriarchal organizational culture, and liminal identity also remain (Ely et al., 2011). Image, identity, and reputation are significantly affected by the context in which they develop (Ibarra, 2017). If becoming a leader is a process of seeing oneself as a leader and being recognized as such, this study is valuable in discovering how women accomplish this goal within a context where they have historically been muted.

As evidenced by the review of pertinent literature, the meaning is yet to be found from female heads of school within the communities who face these obstacles. The majority of research has been performed outside of academia or at the university level. Knowledge of these experiences at the K–12 levels is lacking and has yet to be explored. This study aimed to amplify women who have navigated this labyrinth (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Moreover, because this is a relatively unexplored territory, as described in the literature review, an inductive qualitative study is an appropriate choice. In the next chapter, I explain the research methods and design to hear the voices of these female leaders effectively.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female heads of school within conservative Christian communities, specifically K–12 member schools of the NCSA. By performing qualitative research through inductive methods, I sought to achieve a systematic approach in analyzing data to derive themes and interpretations, the primary purpose of this approach being to determine relevant findings from the data and inform this study.

Using a phenomenological approach (Groenewald, 2004), this exploratory qualitative study examined the lived experiences of four heads of school within the NCSA, focusing on the obstacles and intrapersonal/interpersonal conflicts as well as their experiences in the position. This chapter presents the methodological foundation of the qualitative study to provide an overview of this method's implementation, including the processes and decisions informing the methodology. The sampling and interviewing processes and decisions and the coding techniques and conceptual processes for building the analysis are discussed. The analysis of data—including assumptions, limitations, and delimitations—is provided with the ethical assurances, including my role as researcher as well as my bias and positionality.

Research Methodology

To address the study's goals, I used an inductive, qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry that sought to understand lived experiences through the use of narrative, revealing the truth and understanding of human existence (Riessman, 2008). Inductive research relies on generating ideas and results emerging from data, causing the researcher to turn away from certainty and engage in openness and inquiry (Vagle, 2018). Qualitative methods result in a fuller comprehension of an experience and a clearer description of the complexity of an

experience to include perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, opinions, feelings, challenges, and victories (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research was appropriate for studying gender roles as the researcher learns about and understands the complex nature of experience, how it is interpreted, and how it impacts leadership and formation (Butina et al., 2015; Parry et al., 2014). Qualitative research focuses on experiences, utilizes the researcher as the key instrument for collecting and analyzing data, and is inductive and richly descriptive with a purposeful and small sample (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Research Questions

The qualitative study applied a purposeful and small sample to explore and document the experiences and journeys of four female heads of school, with personal interviews. The overarching question answered was as follows: What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian K–12 educational community? Additionally, the following research questions were used to explore this phenomenon.

Q1. How have female heads of school navigated their identity as Christians, women, and leaders within their community?

Q2. How have female heads of school learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

The research questions were designed broadly to guide my understanding of each head of school's lives with the purpose of understanding (rather than explaining) how complex factors in their lives shaped their role.

Research Design

Given that leadership is a complex phenomenon and that quantitative research alone cannot provide a thorough understanding of all its elements (Parry et al., 2014), I employed

primarily qualitative interview methods. My goal was to obtain in-depth data on the breadth of experiences of being a woman in leadership within a conservative Christian community. This inductive qualitative study was designed to understand how female heads of school within these communities engaged in and negotiated the totality of their situation.

Phenomenology, as an approach to qualitative research, relies on description, seeking to explore how participants perceive, recall, describe, and make sense of experiences. The purpose of this approach was not to seek to get inside the participants' minds but rather to contemplate the way a phenomenon had appeared and manifested in their world (Vagle, 2018). Overall, the objective was to understand the phenomenon through individuals' experiences and for the researcher to describe such a phenomenon accurately.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework required a discussion of reason and rigor, arguing why a topic matters and how the study will address the topic, thereby linking all elements of the research process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017; Rogers, 2016). A general inductive approach was used to analyze qualitative data to create meaning and identify emergent themes related to evaluation objectives. Inductive research provided a straightforward approach for deriving the findings linked to evaluation questions (Thomas, 2006). To more fully comprehend the experience and complexity of each female head, a qualitative inquiry provided interactive dialogue to cocreate narratives and make meaning of attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, challenges, and feelings (Patton, 2015). According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative inquiry is useful in studying the participants' inner experiences.

Participants

Interview participants included a purposive sampling of female heads of K–12 member schools of the NCSA. A narrow sampling strategy is common in phenomenological research, and many qualitative studies employ purposive sampling, deliberately selecting participants because of position or experience to provide insight into a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2008; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

The NCSA has 56 K-12 schools, and of these schools, eight heads of school (14%) are women. Four interviewees were selected from this scant population who have served in the role for a minimum of three years at schools with a minimum enrollment of 300 and who indicate a willingness to participate in an in-person interview. Focusing on four heads of school allowed me to gather and handle data properly and explore in-depth issues.

The participants' experiences directly informed the study and, according to Creswell (2008), were considered information-rich. The participants were contacted originally via email invitation (see Appendix A), followed by phone call confirmation. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and 30 minutes. The semistructured interview focused on their lived experiences as female heads of school, with each participant being asked the same series of questions, eliciting important moments in their lives and providing for dynamic, unrehearsed information where the participants are eager to tell their stories (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Ludema, 2002; Michael, 2005). The participants' identities were protected at all times before, during, and after the research.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study utilized exclusively qualitative research methods to obtain in-depth data on the breadth of experiences of being a woman in leadership within a conservative Christian

community, the impact of gender roles, and the experience of identity formation. Prior to each interview, the participants received a consent form to participate in the interview and for the interview to be audio-recorded.

The review of data included both collection and interaction to produce in-depth understanding (Cruz & Tantia, 2016). Utilizing McCracken's (1988) long-interview method allowed me to theoretically step into the mind of each interviewee and experience her world. Sasso (2010) stated that the long-interview method is designed to steer a participant toward the discovery of her own experiences and beliefs. This allowed the individual to articulate feelings or concepts that have been so ingrained that they have been taken for granted. This inquiry method of interviewing provided rich insight into each interviewee's experience. McCracken's four-step method begins with a thorough literature review that determines what the researcher should ask about and listen for and surveying the ground upon which the interview should be conducted. The second step included a cultural review as I begin to use myself as an instrument of inquiry. McCracken (1988) stated that the recognition of acquaintance with the object of study gives the investigator a delicacy of insight that is an exceptional analytical advantage. He encourages the interviewer to harness it fully for fuller understanding and explication rather than dismiss it merely as bias. This is the advantage of my emic perspective, focusing on the uniqueness of similar cultural experiences of being a female leader in a patriarchal system (Chapman & Kinloch, 2010). The rich experience I have accumulated helped me, as an insider, see and hear what an outsider may not, recognizing the nuances of a shared inner reality with the communication and understanding that comes through the values and assumptions shared by insiders yet hardly noticed by outsiders.

Data collection involved semistructured interviews, a primary source of qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Semistructured interviews allow researchers to engage in active listening, involving paraphrasing information to help support and develop harmony as well as encourage in-depth discussion (Rossetto, 2014). Half of the interview involved structured questions, and the other half incorporated questions that were not answered during the structured portion.

Each interview was conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed using the long-interview method, incorporating both floating and planned prompts to facilitate the sharing of experiences in a meaningful way (McCracken, 1988). The interview was audio-recorded using a handheld digital recording device for accurate interpretation and transcribed using a combination of voice recognition tools and researcher review. Copies of the interviews were shared with the participants, with each participant being asked to proofread and check for discrepancies. This process of sharing interviews with the participants is known as member checking and is used to validate qualitative results (Birt et al., 2016).

Analysis followed transcription, and as qualitative data consists of words and phrases, a thematic analysis was valuable in assessing the data (Clark & Vealé, 2018). Given the copious amount of data collected throughout a research process, coding provides a systematic way to both fragment and aggregate data across interviews. Coding in qualitative inquiry can be a word or phrase that summarizes or captures the essence or attributes for a portion of data (Saldaña, 2016). I used values coding as my coding strategy. Saldaña (2011) stated that this coding method helps discover a participant's value statements that point toward their values, attitudes, or beliefs, thus uncovering what is important, perceived, and felt. Saldaña (2016) further stated that values coding is particularly appropriate when exploring intrapersonal and interpersonal participant

experiences. Additionally, common themes were identified as unique experiences and ideas are significant to the study (Cruz & Tantia, 2016).

A spreadsheet was used to analyze the qualitative data and to maintain and organize all the participants' data, ensuring confidentiality and validity. McCracken's (1988) long-interview method calls for the careful analysis of interview data. The five stages include the analysis of words or utterances, observations, the relationship with the literature, patterns, and emergent themes, allowing the researcher to fully survey and analyze the responses. This method suited the goals of my study and followed a pattern that established purpose, congruence, trustworthiness, and rigor.

Assumptions

The first assumption in this study was that the participants were sincerely interested in participation. The second assumption was that the participants responded to the interview questions truthfully, recognizing that their confidentiality was assured.

Limitations

Limitations are inherent in any form of research (Creswell, 2008). Several limitations were present in this study, one of which was the vulnerability of the data to the researcher's and participants' bias. As the research instrument, I have positionality that may have been biased, as could the participants (Bansal & Corley, 2011). I am a woman and a current head of school in one specific NCSA member school with unique experiences that may have influenced my views, my theories of how things are or should be, and my sensitivities to certain aspects of being a female head of school. These sensitivities come from my particular experience, which informed my research in a positive way and motivated me to conduct this research. However, this positionality could have also limited my vision if I did not remain fully aware. In addressing this

limitation, journaling about my feelings, thoughts, and reactions to each interview and to the results throughout the research process helped me become increasingly aware of my own internal reality as I designed and carried out this research. I acknowledged the necessity of caution regarding expectations, interpretations, and conclusions. Learning all I could from those who have experienced the phenomenon, my role was not to agree or disagree, but in moments of positive or negative emotional response, I bridled myself, took notes, and did not allow these moments to take hold of me (Vagle, 2018).

An additional limitation could have been the setting for the interview. Given the current global pandemic, in-person interviews were not always possible and could have hindered the depth of dialogue. The formality or informality of the setting, along with the dependability of technology, could have affected the participant's comfort level, resulting in shorter, possibly superficial answers rather than a rich, full discovery of experience and perception.

Additionally, this study may not be applicable in other contexts. Given the focus on female heads of NCSA schools, the resulting limitation is the male heads of school and those outside of the NCSA. Another limitation could include the sample size. The number of female heads of school studied was small but reflective of the small population sample.

Phenomenological researchers recommend at least three participants for a valid study to provide meaning for the given phenomenon (Englander, 2012). Phenomenological research is not dependent upon sampling but on the depth of meaning for the participants.

The narrow sample range in the type of institution studied was recognized as a limitation. The choice to study female heads of Christian K-12 NCSA member schools was deliberate. Transferability to other similar faith communities may be applicable; however, the experiences of these women may not represent the experiences of other female leaders.

Lastly, the inquiry was not a collection of facts. The rich stories and shared experiences were between the researcher and each participant at a given time and place. It is possible different stories would be shared at an alternative time with a different researcher.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a qualitative study are put in place to reduce the scope of research, creating boundaries or limits around a study to identify the core interest (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). In this study, the focus was on the experiences of the NCSA female heads of school. The research only involved members of the NCSA who satisfied the inclusion criteria of the study, ensuring that any information provided was from individuals with experience and knowledge who were qualified to provide valid information.

Ethical Assurances

Ethical assurances must be in place to safeguard the participants' rights. The Belmont Report states three basic principles for ethical practices of research with human subjects. These are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Institutional review boards (IRBs) protect researchers and institutions while ensuring that the research is conducted legally and ethically with no harm to human subjects (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). An important aspect of ethical assurance is informed consent, containing information on the participants' rights. Informed consent for each participant includes the purpose, description, and role of the participant in the study. Protocols to safeguard participant confidentiality, including any identifiable data, were maintained in a secure file and a password-protected folder. Assuring confidentiality encourages honesty in the participants' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The IRB at Abilene Christian University (ACU) approved the methodology of this study, including the participation of the three to six female heads of school at NCSA institutions (see

Appendix B). The initial interview questions were approved by the IRB and used as a guide to facilitate each interview. I preliminarily emailed three guiding interview questions to the participants prior to the interview, describing the focus of the interview and the interview questions. Lastly, an executive summary of my research was provided to all the participants, so they may personally have gained some benefit from participation.

Validity

The purpose and nature of this study was openly shared with each participant. All the information was maintained without deletions or additions to ensure valid and true conclusions. Prior to each interview, the participants were issued a consent form to participate in the interview and have the interview recorded (see Appendix C). The validity of evidence collected was verified, with the opportunity for participant review of the transcripts. Each participant was given the opportunity to review the key findings of her perspectives and experiences and provide any clarity or extended information. Finally, the participants were given the opportunity to engage in member checking (Glesne, 2006), review the full transcript, and provide feedback (see Appendix D). This checking provided me with direct feedback to ensure the validity of the initial findings, themes, and conclusions. Also, member checks helped eliminate bias by ensuring that the researcher is writing from the point of view of the participants and not their own.

Research quality is an additional assurance of validity that must be maintained. McCracken (1988) put forth the following conditions based on Bunge's (1961) symptoms of truth: the explanation of qualitative data must be exact without ambiguity, economical, mutually consistent with no contradictions, externally consistent with the current literature, unified, powerful, explanatory, and fertile to suggest new ideas and insight.

Consistent with the nature of qualitative studies, a pilot interview was conducted to field-test the interview procedures, data collection, and analysis. I identified a female leader within an NCSA K–12 member school who was a near match to the proposed study participants. Feedback from the pilot interview allowed for the flexible and emerging nature of phenomenological research (Glesne, 2006; Vagle, 2018).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female heads of schools within conservative Christian communities, specifically member schools of the NCSA. To address the goals of this study, I conducted an inductive, qualitative, phenomenological inquiry. Following IRB approval and a pilot interview, four female heads of school were recruited through purposive sampling (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Confidential data were gathered through semistructured interviews, with all interviews recorded and transcribed. Member checking ensured validity, and value coding was used to analyze data.

Chapter 4: Findings

Considerable research outlines the many beneficial outcomes associated with women in leadership. However, various obstacles continue to prevent women from assuming and thriving in leadership roles, and these obstacles extend into the academic world and further into the world of religious independent schools. These form a system that complicates the normal process of becoming a leader and internalizing a leadership identity (Ibarra, 2017). The addition of a conservative religious climate and expectations that accompany traditional gender roles further exacerbates the experience of serving as a female leader in a conservative Christian academic community (Bem, 1993; Heilman et al., 2004; Northouse, 2016).

This study's purpose was to explore the experiences of female heads of schools within conservative Christian communities, specifically member schools of the NCSA. This study used four such female heads of schools. The single method for data collection was semistructured interviews with open-ended questions. This allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and perspectives. Understanding their perspectives regarding identity, support, and barriers related to their experience will assist the National Christian School Association in fostering women in future head of school positions. This study adds to the body of knowledge related to gender and religious independent school leadership.

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the four semistructured interviews. It is organized by the research findings and the major themes that were identified by the participants. The female heads of schools gave voice to their experiences and perspectives through their own narratives. Their stories convey their experiences in their own words, as they described their schools' community and culture, reflected on their experiences, and shared their thoughts regarding challenges, identity, voice, and learning to lead. Though the individual story

was unique to each head of school, significant similarities surfaced, coalescing into seven central themes from the interviews. Links and applications between the literature, theory, and findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was, What has been the experience of a female head of school (HOS) within a conservative Christian educational community? Within this question were the following two subquestions.

Q1. How have female heads of school navigated their identity as Christians, women, and leaders within their community?

Q2. How have female heads of school learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

Participants

I used a purposive sample of four participants. The sample population included women who met the criteria of being a female head of school for at least three years at an NCSA K–12 school with a minimum enrollment of 300 as identified through the directory of the National Christian School Association. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via electronic mail to five potential participants (see Appendix A). Three current heads and one recently retired head responded and agreed to the request. The length of service as a head of school ranged from three to 38 years. They had collectively served at eight different NCSA schools, three of the four were the first female to serve as HOS in that school, and the road to HOS was varied. One participant began as an elementary teacher, another had no background in education, and two had worked in ministry prior to their HOS position. Three of the four had some administrative experience prior to becoming a HOS, and three out of the four grew up in a household where at least one parent

worked in education as a teacher or coach. All of the participants grew up in a similar faith community as the school where they serve or served as HOS, all were degreed at the master level, and half of the participants had attained a terminal degree.

Data Collection

Informed consent (see Appendix C) was obtained from each participant once her voluntary participation in the study had been confirmed via email. Each participant read and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix C) prior to her interview. Participants were also provided with a confirmation and informational email (see Appendix E). All recordings, coding, and related work were kept confidential in a fingerprint-protected device and password-protected cloud-based account for digital material. Each NCSA head participated in an approximately 90-minute semistructured interview using an interview protocol (see Appendix F). I was the sole instrument used for data collection. Questions were open-ended, allowing for responses to be conversational and relaxed. Follow-up questions were used to help understand each participant's perspective and for clarity. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Otter transcription application. Quotes from each interview were used to capture the participants' perspectives and provide major themes that surfaced during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The results and findings are presented in this chapter. Data were collected through semistructured interviews of four female NCSA heads of school (HOSs) to answer the overarching research question and subquestions. Transcripts were created from the digital audio recordings of each interview. Through the process of repeated listening to the recordings and rereading of the transcripts and field notes, I isolated units of meaning or clusters (Creswell, 2008; Groenewald, 2004). From the clusters of meanings and interpretation, themes were

developed from the data, and I created a codebook with the listed themes. The codebook provided the coding language or themes uploaded into the Dedoose software program (Dedoose, 2013). Using the Dedoose software to aid in the content analysis of the interview data, I explored emergent themes, searching the interview transcripts and excerpting patterns within the textural content. Dedoose created charts used in data review and interpretation. As qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language, I reviewed each transcript multiple times to reflect on emergent patterns and meanings to find what was and was not said. The provided data table (see Table 2) shows the incidence of codes in each participant's response by theme. I separated the codes into categories. Reoccurring words, phrases, and patterns were categorized into themes.

Table 2

Occurrence of Codes in Each Theme by Participant

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4
Faith and Calling	12	13	20	9
Influence of Mentors	10	16	7	10
Learning to Lead	13	15	8	9
Perseverance and Strength	8	6	9	14
Challenges	11	7	4	8
Conservative Climate	4	5	6	3
Leadership Redefined	10	8	4	6

Revisiting the transcript recordings and field notes during coding ensured validity (Groenewald, 2004). Because of the small number of female NCSA heads, findings are reported by theme rather than by the participants to avoid inadvertent identification of the participants and to maintain confidentiality.

Key Findings

Key findings are organized by themes as they correspond to the research questions. The major themes are delineated in order of the number reported by Dedoose (2013), with each major theme reported by all participants. A total of seven major themes emerged from the interview data, representing how NCSA heads of schools described their experience within conservative Christian communities. Coding of the transcripts included the following themes: (a) faith and calling, (b) influence of mentors, (c) learning to lead, (d) challenges, (e) conservative climate, (f) perseverance and strength, and (g) leadership redefined. The themes are revealed purposefully in this framework. Each HOS experienced a calling on her life, was encouraged and advanced by others, learned to lead within this context, faced challenges along the way, and displayed perseverance and strength despite those challenges. Due to the obstacles posed by a conservative climate, each woman discovered or redefined leadership for herself in an authentic way. Examining the authentic leadership of these women was not one of the original purposes of this study but an unexpected theme derived during analysis. Table 2 demonstrates the number of responses coded under each theme and reported from participant responses. The table lists the number of times the individuals mentioned a code related to each theme.

Faith and Calling

Through the exploration of identity and as each HOS described her experience, there was an undeniable recognition of a calling by God and a personal commitment to following the

guidance of the Holy Spirit. This commitment and sense of calling were woven throughout each interview, and no other theme emerged as clearly. Participants repeatedly spoke of reading scripture, personal and group devotional time, journaling, and reflection. What each HOS said she most relied on was prayer. Whether talking about challenges or successes, social networks or the lack thereof, every participant pointed to prayer as what kept her strong and able to keep going, with one stating, “God opened doors for me although I was not raised in a church that ever talked about God opening doors. . . . I always believed in God’s leadership and a lot of prayer.” They recognized their unique gifts and abilities, with one HOS stating that she sought God through a prayer journal, asking Him why He had created her with gifts that were not welcome in the church. Many years after becoming a HOS, she realized God had made her for this. When asked how she had come to the position of HOS, one participant said, “God made it really clear. . . . He put things in my way. . . . God had a plan for me and was opening the doors.” Another said, “God has led me through, opening doors.” Additionally, a participant, who often felt ill-equipped, described her calling like this:

I would very much say I felt called. . . . I’ve often identified with Gideon, the youngest and the least. . . . If God opens the door, if He has given you gifts, He will open the door to the way He wants you to use them if you’re trusting. I feel blessed that God is willing to use me in His work.

Likewise, taking and keeping the role of head of school went back to faith and calling. One HOS stated, “I love this school; I don’t want anyone to come in and mess with what we have. As a child in a conservative church, I was taught coincidence; I’ve now learned God is a part of everything.” Each woman also articulated how her faith had grown stronger through her hardships. One stated,

I've grown more spiritually having to figure out how to lead as a woman. . . . I was spiritually immature, and God brought me to my knees in this role, on the floor in prayer. . . . I couldn't do it without God. . . . the spiritual journey for me is to realize this is bigger than me and I'm not going to make it without God. I'm thankful I was in over my head.

They saw their lives as a sacrifice to the mission they served, which was ultimately to teach children and adults about Jesus. One woman said, "My job is to get kids to fall in love with Jesus and to understand his loving, nurturing side." Another stated that she felt her ultimate goal was "teaching kids to know and love Jesus and about the hope of Heaven," with one participant sharing, "I want our kids to have lifelong faith." One HOS put it this way:

I pray every day that I have an impact on a kid . . . that's why I do it . . . even if a child is only at the school one year, they will know we care for them and who Jesus Christ is. . . . Sharing my walk with the adults as well . . . not for myself . . . no way would I do this in a public school setting.

It is important to note this abundant theme manifested itself throughout each interview. Every participant articulated that God had called her, orchestrated her path, and was using her. They all communicated they felt both honored and equipped by God to do the work.

It makes it all worthwhile to be a part of something God is doing. . . . Anything done in the name of Christ had to be done as well as we are capable of doing it. . . . I think a true woman, a Biblical woman, can be a leader.

One participant precisely expressed her experience by saying,

I know every day that my worth is from the Lord and not from any man or woman who judges me, and it's a daily, daily reminder to take a deep breath and fill myself with the Spirit. And I'm not intimidated.

Influence of Mentors

Studies (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Steele Flippin, 2017) have shown the benefit of mentors in enhancing career advancement for women, with Ibarra (2017) stating that sponsors play more of a key role than mentors in assisting in catapulting a career. There was strong evidence to support this in each interview around the discussion of identity as a female and leader. Some participants spoke directly about mentors, while others told stories of turning points in their careers and the people who played a part in them. One HOS recounted a time when the NCSA president asked her to stand before the group and make an introduction. This was the first time a woman had ever spoken publicly at the national conference, and thus, it impacted her and began to change the trajectory of the organization.

A specific question for each participant that also led to the discussion of mentors was, “When did you begin to see yourself as a potential head of school?” The answer was when someone else believed in her and told her something like, “For such a time as this . . . God has gifted you,” or “this is something you can do,” or “you can run this school; I know you can do it.” Participants stated they felt a lot of encouragement, and God had “put the right people in my path.” They spoke of mentors who they could call and ask anything and how they lived for the professional conversations they could have with them. Some lessons they had learned from their mentors included the value of hard work, the benefit of professional development, how to be a better public speaker, to think bigger and broader, and always to consider what is next. Their mentors’ belief in their capacity to succeed made an enormous difference in each of their lives. Some mentors led by example and the HOSs learned from watching “Women who were professional yet vulnerable, willing to learn, try new things, and be an advocate for all kinds of kids.” Other mentors provided life lessons, such as “He taught me to be a worker. I now value a

strong work ethic.” Another mentor personally advocated for a participant. She said of him, “He kind of championed me and opened doors for me, that belief in me was important.”

One woman said her mentor had trusted and promoted her in a way that communicated respect and affirmation. She stated,

He saw something in me. I was taught to think about what’s next and how can we make it better in a way that brings glory to God. He gave me a lot of responsibility; I then began to think that I could become something.

Whether by example, through verbal affirmation, or by being a personal champion, each mentor helped pave the way to success in the eyes of the participants. Unsurprisingly, the majority of the mentors were male, likely due to the fact that most every female head was the first to assume the position of HOS in her community. These mentors looked beyond the established social roles, and believed in, trusted, and affirmed the abilities of the women, most without knowledge of their influence. The actions of these pivotal mentors supported the women from a traditionally muted group to help advance the careers of the heads.

Challenges

In recounting their experience as a female HOS within a conservative Christian community, each participant shared many challenges they faced relating to their position, identity, learning to lead, and perceived social roles. This is discussed further in relationship to the literature in Chapter 5.

Challenges relating to social roles included the traditional expectations of a female. One participant shared that she is often left out of operational discussions about things, and “a woman wouldn’t understand, like drainage issues.” When business lunches are necessary, often the table is full of men, and the female HOS is the lone female. A participant shared that at donor

meetings, the conversation is rarely directed toward her. Her perception was, “Oh right, I don’t know how to talk to the girl.” Another shared that she “did all of the grunt work because that’s what the girls did, and the boys said the prayers and made the speeches.”

Moreover, internally feeling the need to attend to every detail was a challenge shared by one participant. She said, “I thought it was important for people to see me doing all of the jobs, knowing I had worked just as hard as anyone else. I got stuck in the weeds.”

One participant challenged by the expectations of social role shared that she doesn’t naturally give praise . . . and I’m not a gift giver . . . I feel like I have to say thank you all the time . . . other women get their feelings hurt . . . I feel like I’m supposed to send notes . . . I feel obligated to spend time with the other women socially.

All participants agreed that the boardroom can be a challenge. They shared that the majority of their board members were male, and some did not “work well with women.” Most expressed difficulty as a female to work with the board and that was the place that it is “hardest to find my voice.” One recounted an example of how board members avoided her as a strong woman.

Instead of him coming and asking me questions, he will go around me to the board chair. . . not to follow a protocol, but because they are afraid to approach me. . . The boardroom is where I feel the most not heard and I can’t use my voice because, literally, I’m not being asked to explain. I am most challenged when male board members try and work around me because they don’t know how to talk to a strong woman.

Another participant faced challenges with her board regarding equitable compensation sharing. “I just now make what the man made before me . . . who ran the school into the ground and left it with enormous debt . . . that was over ten years ago.” The “struggle of overcoming financial

instability, challenge of providing quality facilities, and the competitive nature of private schools” remains a challenge for every HOS.

One experience that was particularly revealing and connected to the double bind theory was a story about preparing for a board meeting. The participant related the story in this way:

You’re just going to die when I tell you this, okay, so every other month we have board meetings, and a light dinner is always provided. Okay, so I’m running around like a chicken with my head cut off to make sure dinner is ready, that it looks nice, and it’s presented well. And, oh yes, getting the minutes from the last meeting, and the budget report ready, and the academic review report ready and there were days I was like, oh great, how did I get both of these jobs?

She likened this to the Mary and Martha story from the book of Luke, as she was so busy she rarely had time to vision cast for the school.

One final challenge that two of the participants shared was a glass ceiling experience. They had each risen to senior leadership roles in their schools when, for no clear reason, they were passed over for the headship. Both took the opportunity to go elsewhere and lead, but one described her challenge as “not moving on once I saw the glass ceiling.”

Conservative Climate

A challenge specific to this study and these women is that of leading within a conservative Christian climate. This presents additional difficulties for the women to manage and overcome. Each woman recognized her leadership gifts, firmly believing that God created her, but in some ways, each was conflicted in how to use her gifts and not cause division. Several quotes expressed evidence of the conservative climate.

I inhibit myself because of how I was raised . . . I'm not allowed to pray . . . I get challenged when I've allowed girls to overstep their roles. They don't mind girls serving because that is the Martha job . . . I loved working to lead kids to the Lord, but I had to do it through my husband.

One participant described the process of trying to lead in this climate like “pushing a wet noodle, it is a real struggle.” One school was affiliated with a church and the participant shared that when wanting to start a program, she “couldn't approach the elders . . . we had to get a man to go.” A participant revealed that some men in her school were disrespectful. She stated, “Some men struggle with respecting a woman, regardless of being in a conservative Christian community.”

When one participant would encourage excellence, she was faced with opposition from men. She shared, “It is a battle because most of the men want a good old boy organization and I want it done well . . . the good old boy situation is really hard to get out of . . . so many times if I were a man, things would not be questioned.” The “good ole boy network still exists,” and this participant was determined not to be a part of it. Yet another HOS expressed, “Every school I went to . . . the women worked really hard but only the men were leaders.” And another shared this statement, “The biggest challenge is being seen as a spiritual leader. They expect the academic [leader]. They do not expect the athletic [leader], and do not want the spiritual [leader].”

Although these challenges continue to exist, it was fascinating to hear how the women responded. Their stance coalesced around unity and without hearing each other's words, they said the same thing over and over. They expressed themselves with phrases such as,

I do not want to in some way dishonor the heritage that I overlapped with them . . . I will still be careful . . . the focus is not my rights . . . I did not want to cause disunity . . . I

didn't lead chapel or prayers out of respect . . . but I never try to rebel against those things . . . I'm prayerful that I don't cause friction.

To preserve unity, all of these women maintain their place, but "don't feel oppressed."

They recognize the traditional roles, respect them, and have found alternative yet authentic ways to lead. This was a consistent and definitive theme.

Perseverance and Strength

A relationship emerged between the question of identity and learning to lead that resulted in a theme of perseverance and strength. As each participant shared their story, it became clear there was a pattern of resilience, doggedness, determination, and overall grit. These women are tough. One of the women was raised in a bus ministry. After her parents divorced, she lived with her single mom who worked three jobs to support her and her siblings. She cleaned houses for her college professors, made her own clothes, and ran a day care as a high school senior. She remembers knowing at an early age that she had leadership skills and had no choice but to step up because, financially, "we had nothing . . . we did it all . . . and we had to start young."

Another participant shared the story of her husband losing his job after 25 years just after being named head of school. She stated that she wanted to quit so many times, but she had to stay, and she learned. "Through the challenges, I've gained independence and confidence. I learned to walk into a room when no one wanted me in that room. I have gained an inner strength that I don't think I had."

Two of the women faced significant bias and experienced a glass ceiling phenomenon at one workplace before becoming a HOS elsewhere. One recalled, "I've learned who I am and what battles to fight. I know when to pick up and leave." In each interview, the participants recounted a story of someone who acted disingenuously, which challenged them, but in the end,

made them stronger. Two of the four mentioned that if this had not happened, they might not be in the position they are today. But each credited the difficulty to God's plan for their lives. What seemed like a mountain at the moment became a catapult to where they are now. Their reactions were to say, "Thank you . . . you pushed me out, and I needed to be pushed out . . . you opened a door for me."

The challenges made them stronger than they thought they were. One participant noted that in the beginning as HOS she felt "terrified a lot of the time and have no clue what will happen next." But who they are would emerge in a strong way with statements such as:

I've always had confidence . . . I am not quiet when something needs to be said . . . I'm a learner, an explorer, and trying to find a better way to do anything . . . I just would be frustrated with the way things were going and I would end up taking over . . . I was a go getter . . . I figured out how to get things done . . . and I was willing to work hard and sacrifice . . . I'm idea-oriented and goal-oriented.

One woman shared a very personal story from the beginning of her tenure as HOS, saying, "I don't think I slept for the first two months, and the only comfort I could get in the middle of the night was to reach over and touch my husband, and we prayed a lot together."

Overall, each displayed a quiet strength about them, which can be summarized with one quote:

"I've kind of always known that I had to stand up for what was right, even if I stood alone." Each woman found her identity and, with it, persevered through many obstacles to achieve and remain in the HOS position.

Learning to Lead

The theme of learning to lead clearly emerged from the research questions and interviews. None of the women interviewed stated they felt fully equipped on day one to lead as

a head of school. Each expressed some preparedness and a calling to the mission and position. However, they learned to lead in their environment through humility, personal growth, seeking out learning opportunities, and surrounding themselves with key individuals. For some, learning to lead meant continuing education, for others, an executive coach, and others strategically surrounding themselves with individuals having the skill sets they needed. All willingly admitted to things they did not know and continued to learn and grow in the role. One participant said, “I pay attention and watch others.” Another stated, “I surround myself with a good team. I know being a HOS is more about having a good team around you.” One expressed the same idea saying, it is about “finding the right people who can teach you the things you don’t know.” One HOS stated that she watched people she admired, studying best practices and observing high-performing teams. Crediting her family background with helping her learn how to lead, a HOS stated, “I worked hard. I may not know how to do something, but my parents taught me how to be a figure-outer. Being raised in a family where hard work was the expectation has helped me.”

The majority of participants were given opportunities to develop their leadership skills throughout their career. Positions previously held were key in preparing the women for the role of HOS. As they were promoted, they gained greater responsibility, learning new facets of the school that equipped them for the future. One participant recalls having no experience in human resources, another recounted not being a good fundraiser, and another spoke of not fully understanding all of the aspects of financial sustainability in the beginning. But each “worked hard and figured it out . . . because I had to.”

Some of their learning how to lead was from education or from experience. Half of the participants had obtained a terminal degree and said this had been helpful. One learned from previous positions, saying, “I feel like all of my positions have made my job easier . . . if I hadn’t

had that, I think it would be very detrimental to the school.” Others learned the hard way, and one stated, “I have learned what battles to fight and what is important to me . . . I’m willing to be unpopular.”

All credited their teams or others with helping them lead. One participant specified, “I love being a part of a team. I learned from a very humble father who taught me it is not about myself, but about the team.” Another expressed it by saying, “I know that being a good head of school is more about having a good team around you than it is about being the boss.” Lastly, one said, “I didn’t have a spreadsheet, a balance sheet, or an operating statement, but I learned how to do it . . . there were always people along the way when it was time to learn something.”

Collectively, the participants displayed a humble yet determined attitude towards learning to lead. When asked, none of the participants could readily recount a blueprint of how they learned to lead but took the necessary steps to “read and learn and try to find a better way to do anything.” Their narratives demonstrated initiative and a persistent growth mindset that helped them acquire the skills to lead effectively.

Leadership Redefined

Throughout the interview process, the theme of redefined leadership emerged, and I consider it a significant finding. Redefining their leadership, these women sought to be authentic. Authentic leadership theory focuses on genuineness or realness and can be viewed from an intrapersonal, interpersonal, or developmental perspective. The intrapersonal perspective focuses on what goes on within the leader; leaders and followers create the interpersonal perspective together, and the developmental perspective views authentic leadership as something that can be learned or nurtured in a leader rather than innate or fixed (Northouse, 2016).

In this study, the female heads of school redefined what it means to lead at a Christian school in a conservative setting where women do not traditionally lead. They spoke of not needing to sing or pray or preach, which has been traditionally considered leadership in a conservative Christian community. They found leadership elsewhere, in new and authentic ways, just by being who they are. Some phrases shared with me that led me to this finding were, “I have had to learn how to be me in this role . . . I have found ways to lead . . . to be real and not pretend.” One participant shared,

I’m not going to stand up ever and be this incredibly articulate person, but I’m going to be real. It’s painful to project something that you’re not. I had to figure out how to be comfortable in my skin and it took two years. Figuring out how to be myself was a process.

Each HOS was creative in finding ways to lead their community spiritually. One stated that “every time I speak, I talk about Christ and the value of Christian education.” Another led small group Bible studies and said, “Leading others in devotionals helps them see I’m human.” Another facilitated “a weekly two-hour prayer session that took priority and the whole school knew about it.” Another shared that she had “spent a lot of time on spiritual formation, which gave me the opportunity to lead in a different way spiritually from what I experienced growing up in a conservative world.” And another gave her leadership team a study Bible focused on strong women of the Bible and led the study during her first year.

All of the women spoke about finding ways to lead and serve their communities in their own way. One participant revealed that often just by listening to others, she feels she is leading humbly. “I listen to people and try to find the grain of truth and learn what I need to hear from the conversation. There are great lessons I can teach and learn for myself.”

Almost all of the women acknowledged being raised in a community where they were not afforded leadership opportunities. This caused some anxiety because they did not know what female spiritual leadership was supposed to look like. One HOS stated, “I was not raised doing this, it’s not natural, but there is so much good to be shared, it became natural.” Having experienced this disconnect has led the female heads of school to reexamine what true spiritual leadership is. One questioned it in this way:

When you teach a child to serve, that’s very Biblical. Anytime you give something, it is better to give than to receive. That is how you build confident children . . . to serve and I’m not talking traditional mission trips or service days. That is my philosophy . . . since I was a principal to now. Service is how I lead and teach how to lead. Training a boy to be a song leader does not fully explore what a leader should be.

Another HOS said,

We have defined spiritual leadership as leading prayers, leading songs and preaching.

And if you do those things as a girl, you are wrong. But where do we teach men to be the spiritual head of the home? To honor and respect women?

The women leaders communicated a respect for the tradition and heritage that built their school communities but are approaching spiritual leadership in the way that feels right for them. Pushing themselves out of their comfort zone into a world they had neither experienced nor observed, they navigated and defined what leadership looked like for them. They recognized serving their communities as leading and providing an example of service to others. One stated, “I’m big into serving my community . . . it’s my opportunity to be a spiritual leader and so much more. People come to me for spiritual advice . . . I want to serve.”

Ultimately, each HOS found her voice through authentic spiritual leadership characterized by the statement, “I think the spiritual leadership came from trying to walk authentically.”

Chapter Summary

The seven themes that emerged from the data provided insight into how female NCSA heads of school understand and describe their experience within their communities, helping to answer the question of what has been the experience of a female HOS within a conservative Christian educational community. Coding of the transcripts led to the seven themes: (a) faith and calling, (b) mentors, (c) learning to lead, (d) challenges, (e) conservative climate, (f) perseverance and strength, and (g) leadership redefined.

As each woman expressed her perspective of navigating identity and how she learned to lead, it became evident that these are extremely strong women. Family experiences, life challenges, career job experiences, and faith form their backbone of strength. One was raised in a broken home and made all of her own clothes from a young age; one successfully pursued a male-dominated career before entering the field of education and starting a school from nothing. One was being groomed for leadership and was a victim of sexism and bias, and all experienced gender discrimination. All feel called to their work and easily named mentors who encouraged them, the majority of whom were male. All faced conservative gender bias yet found authentic ways to lead their communities spiritually. None fits neatly into her social role, and none would consider herself muted.

Relationships existed among all themes; however, the most significant was the relationship between faith, calling, and leadership redefined. The external conflict presented by being a woman in a conservative Christian man’s world was far less of a challenge than the

internal conflict of causing disunity. One head stated, “It was a real struggle for me . . . I was asking God why did you make me this way . . . what am I for?” The heads were conflicted, trusting that God had called them but looking for a way to lead that would not offend the religious, academic communities they respected. This internal conflict steered them to discover ways to lead in authentic ways spiritually.

Men traditionally understand spiritual leadership as leading prayers, songs, reading scripture, and preaching. The women heads of school often could not or rather would not lead in those ways yet found their authentic leadership in other ways. Through small group Bible studies, counseling others, praying with families and staff, walking alongside others in hard times, and serving their communities, these women led and “not just the traditional mission trip or service days. . . I mean physically get out there and go do something for someone else. . . it’s about hard work.”

These alternative actions and practices allowed the women to “explore a better way” and afforded the female heads an opportunity to lead, in their opinion, that felt real to them and quite possibly provided a more authentic and relevant version of leadership than the traditional male-gendered interpretation of spiritual leadership.

The experiences of the female heads were revealed through the seven themes presented, providing insight into their experiences. These seven themes and how each participant recounted examples provided insight into themselves. As a female HOS, these women’s stories resonated with me as I was hired and reported to a board of 13 men for the first five years of my term. The challenges faced in this context have only been matched by the recent pandemic. There was an ever-present sense that I did not belong, punctuated by men who held strong conservative Christian opinions. A further examination of my relationship to this study and my experience are

discussed in Chapter 5 along with a summary of the findings as they relate to the research questions, a comparison of the findings to the literature, and a discussion of implications for future policy and practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Research related to gender and leadership supports the fact that women still outnumber men as classroom educators, yet few attain the top leadership position of superintendent or independent HOS (Bitterman et al., 2013; Chubb, 2015). There is a significant lack of research related to the female independent HOS experience and a scarce amount specific to a religious school setting. This research adds to the body of knowledge not only related to women in educational leadership, but more specifically, within the context of a religious independent school.

This study examined the lived experiences of four female heads of K–12 member institutions of the National Christian School Association (NCSA). The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of female heads of independent schools within a conservative K–12 Christian school context, providing insight from their distinct perspectives. Their stories, though unique, produced a similar narrative arc, illuminating the coexistence of individuality and sameness within the Christian educational environment for a female head of school.

Chapter 5 provides a review of the overarching research question and subquestions, a summary of the study, the investigative method, and interpretation of the findings presented in chapter four. Additionally, findings related to the literature, emergent themes in the data, implications for practice, and recommendations for further research are discussed. The chapter includes a segment on my relationship to the study, personal reflections, and a conclusion.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this study was, What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community?

The subquestions were:

Q1. How have female heads of school navigated their identity as Christians, women, and leaders within their community?

Q2. How have female heads of school learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

Quotes from each interview were used to capture the perspective of the participants and provide major themes that surfaced during the interviews.

Summary of the Study

The interviews with the four female NCSA heads of school took place in the spring and summer of 2020. Each interview was engaging and informative, producing data that have implications for future female NCSA leaders, boards of trustees, religious K–12 independent schools, and the leadership of the NCSA. The study allowed female NCSA heads to share their perspective and experience of serving in a leadership position within a conservative Christian community.

From my experiences with the female heads of school, I encountered strong, confident, and effective leaders who discerned and accepted a call on their lives to serve in their positions. They were encouraged and mentored, mostly by men, and faced a variety of challenges on their way to and in their leadership position. Through their experiences, they uncovered a surprisingly independent sense of self along with an expanded identity, and navigated an amended style of leadership within a traditional, patriarchal community. These findings revealed themselves through seven themes as each leader shared her experiences in the position of HOS. The seven themes emerging from the data addressed the overarching research question. The themes included (a) faith and calling, (b) mentors, (c) learning to lead, (d) challenges, (e) conservative climate, (f) perseverance and strength, and (g) leadership redefined. All seven themes were

represented by each participant and provided insight into the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community.

Methodology

This inductive qualitative study examined the lived experiences of four female heads of school, focusing on their perceptions and experiences in the role as leader. Data were gathered from semistructured interviews with the four women leaders who held the position of head of school at a K–12 NCSA school with a minimum enrollment of 300 and serving a minimum of three years in the position. Interviews were recorded, and transcripts created from the digital audio recordings of each interview. From the clusters of meanings and interpretation, themes were developed from the data with quotes from each interview used to capture the participants' perspectives that surfaced during the interviews. Key findings were organized by themes as they corresponded to the research questions. Data provided implications for future female heads of NCSA independent schools, the NCSA organization, independent school boards, and other scholars.

Limitations

Limitations are inherent with any form of research, and several limitations were present in this study, one being the vulnerability of the data to the researcher's positionality (Creswell, 2008). I, as the sole researcher, am an insider with a perspective from my own experience serving as a HOS in a specific conservative Christian community. This perspective served as a strength in the study as I conducted interviews with a knowledge and understanding of the position of the participants and is discussed further in the following section. To safeguard the integrity of research, I employed bracketing throughout the study and disclosed to the

participants my role in an NCSA school. Future research conducted by someone outside the NCSA may be valuable.

Relationship to the Study

This research necessitates that I reveal who I am in relation to my study. I am not a distant observer but rather a central part of this inquiry. I am a co-collaborator with the participants, as together we probed into our experiences. In this chapter, I reveal my personal analysis of what initially propelled me toward this study. Similarly, I discuss personal insights I discovered through the survey of my experience.

Being the first female head of school within my conservative religious community, I have observed a lack of women in leadership positions, specifically the role of HOS. Faith is foundational at NCSA institutions; thus, a notable barrier for women in leadership is the denomination and institutional culture (Langford, 2010; Porterfield, 2013). Long-established interpretations of scripture present formidable barriers when women attempt to lead, resulting in internal and external conflict (Joeckel & Chesnes, 2009; Pedersen & Jule, 2012).

Through the practical theology of long and firmly held belief systems, communities steeped in the Church of Christ's conservative theology and practice have established rules of participation within that community that have shaped my experience and formed my identity. Being raised in a conservative Christian setting where gender roles were well-defined, I learned quickly through the practical theology of example and ritual to have a less visible presence in my religious community, which, as I grew older became my professional community (Johnson & Sharp Penya, 2011). As a young girl, I was neither encouraged to be aspirational nor afforded opportunities to lead. I both witnessed and experienced social role theory (SRT) and muted group theory (MGT) in the church, where women were taught overtly and covertly to be silent.

Each week, as the most important ritual of our gathering took place, I would observe 12 men from the congregation slowly and reverently parade down the long center aisle of our large cathedral-like building to take their places on the stage. The two most honored men were in the middle of the arrangement and were allowed to speak and pray. They would then formally pass the plates to the other men in ceremonious fashion and proceed into the audience to uniformly serve those in the assembly. In my 24 years of worshiping with this congregation three times each week, I never once witnessed a woman speak or even approach the steps of the stage where all of the men were permitted to stand and speak. I remember watching my brother and the other young men around me being asked and taught to lead. I recall going to church early on Sunday evenings, so my brother could be a part of the “Timothy Class,” where young men were educated on how to be leaders in the congregation. Girls were to follow, listen, be quiet, and be pretty. I recall being noticed and commended for my appearance or my apparel, sometimes for my mind, but never for my opinion and certainly not for my voice. This traditionally embedded religious patriarchal culture led to issues of self-esteem, identity, uncertainty, and a hesitancy of leadership aspiration.

I attended a Christian liberal arts university and studied to become a teacher. I knew I could be a teacher; I never imagined being a HOS. Girls did not do that, especially within communities like mine, affiliated with the NCSA. For years, I never questioned my place, what I had been taught, and how girls were treated. Once I became a member of the board of trustees of an NCSA school, my eyes were opened to how some men in one particular faith community truly viewed women. This awareness coincided with my daughter becoming a teenager and beginning to question being denied the opportunity to pray and lead in her youth group.

Consequently, as an educator immersed in this community and called to lead, I became burdened with the patriarchal environment where I worked and lived. Most boardrooms or meetings I attended in my position as HOS were filled with all white men over 50, and I was frequently the lone female. As Sherman (2000) noted, I often felt invisible in that context. I was hired by 13 men who anticipated a compliant, rule-follower with a conservative mindset. I could speak to our student body of a thousand on school matters but was “discouraged” from praying or visibly leading them spiritually. Acceptable and appropriate spiritual leadership was behind the scenes with a small group of freshman girls once a month or as the cook on our annual mission trip.

An elderly member of the board referred to me as sweetie, honey, and doll at board meetings, and although I may not consider myself attractive, I was told more than once that looking at me was the best part of the meeting. This supports the research that stereotypical gender bias is exacerbated in contexts dominated by men, when men evaluate women, and when women leaders are considered attractive (Eagly et al., 1992; Heilman & Stopeck, 1985; Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Pazy & Oron, 2001). The “meeting outside of the meeting” would often occur in the men’s room when I was not present. The discussion, tone, and vote count would change due to the exclusive men’s room meeting. Furthermore, only in the last two years was my compensation made equal to the salary of the man prior to my male predecessor, over 14 years ago. In my early years in the position, I felt like the girl they asked to run the school, although when I would refer to “running the school,” I was frequently met with eye rolls and audible sighs. It was as if they allowed me to be here while they discussed more important things such as athletics, coaches, concessions, money, while ensuring a conservative doctrine was taught and patriarchy was perpetuated.

These and other experiences growing up and working within this faith community profoundly influenced me, and this realization prompted further contemplation resulting in my interest in this research puzzle. With an increasing awareness of the unique nature of my path, I recognized my own challenges that led to the coalescence of my study: I wanted to hear the voices of other women working in communities like mine. Moreover, through the review of related literature, I discovered that the experience of the female HOS within a religious community was largely unexplored. Therefore, as a woman serving in a leadership position, I faced traditional theological beliefs, both overtly and covertly, that supported and promoted conservative views in the area of gender equity and felt compelled to investigate the experiences of women who attained leadership positions in similar communities (Pedersen & Jule, 2012).

Implications

This research supports the literature related to gender and leadership as several obstacles were noted in the labyrinth of females attaining leadership positions and interviews revealed challenges the participants faced. Specifically, two encountered a glass ceiling and were forced to move on to another school if they wanted to advance in leadership (Cotter et al., 2001; Klenke, 2011; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Williams, 1992). All were faced with the conservative culture and gender bias (Baker et al., 2016; Boysen et al., 2018; Côté, 1996; Gallagher, 2017; Ibarra, 2017; Sherman, 2000; Weber, 2020). Current findings also revealed major themes in correlation to the literature around the benefit of mentors and the theoretical frameworks of social role theory, gendered expectations, the double bind, and emotional labor (Cummings & Terrion, 2020; Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Jamieson & Hall, 1995; Visser, 2003). These are explored in addition to the emergent themes and strategies observed as participants learned to lead in their environments.

Conservative Culture

The overarching question guiding this study was, What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community? Even if the word “conservative” had not been a part of the overarching question, the topic would have been broached within the first five minutes of each interview with how they were raised or their first experience on the road to becoming a HOS. Each participant easily and frequently referenced the conservative climate around them but readily accepted it and sought to serve regardless of it. As Tucker et al. (1987) noted, when women seek leadership positions, they do so to serve more effectively, and this was true in each instance. All of the HOS participants were fully aware of the conservative faith traditions of their NCSA school, as all were raised in the same or a similar faith community. They understood that many in their circles still openly believed God chose men and not women to be in positions of leadership (The Christian Chronicle, 2016). However, out of respect, the participants sought unity over positional power and authority, slowly working to create change while honoring traditional beliefs. Their actions in the conservative environment supported the research by Gaines (2018) of a feminist in a patriarchal environment. This case study revealed that an environment coupled with challenges and risks to enact change within a faith community required a slow strategic balance. There was strong evidence of the participants leading in a respectful way and if working to create change, doing so slowly. Gaines (2018) went on to say that it has been assumed that women push the feminist agenda within society and the church. Gaines (2018) showed this to be false and that women have been hesitant to challenge the leadership of men. Current findings support this outcome evidenced by the statements:

I don't want to dishonor the heritage that I overlapped with them . . . I'm careful . . . the focus is not my rights . . . I did not want to cause disunity . . . I don't lead chapel or

prayers out of respect . . . but I never try to rebel against those things . . . I'm prayerful that I don't cause friction.

Although the participants chose unity and respect for the good of their communities, they still experienced internal conflict because of the embedded religious patriarchal culture. Unsure of her role, both internally and externally, each HOS recognized her leadership gifts, firmly believing that God created her but remained conflicted in how to use her gifts and expended immense emotional labor (Gardner et al., 2009; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983) to avoid causing division.

The hierarchies within conservative Christian communities denied women's voices, and participants would agree they struggled to find their sense of self in spiritual leadership (Weber, 2020). Faced with traditional theological beliefs, both overtly and covertly that supported and promoted conservative views in the area of gender equity, they struggled with issues of self-esteem and liminality (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017; Gaines, 2018; Joeckel & Chesnes, 2009; Pedersen & Jule, 2012). The participants noted that finding identity within mostly male educational leadership, specifically a Christian independent school community, was difficult. Citing role models observed within families, churches, and their school communities as those contributing heavily to how each HOS created identity, Ibarra (2017) confirmed the challenge of transitioning into leadership is compounded by identity and seeing oneself as a leader. As one HOS stated, "The biggest challenge is being seen as a spiritual leader."

Glass Ceiling

Navigating their labyrinth, two of the participants experienced a glass ceiling at an organization before moving on to another and becoming a HOS. Consistent with the reporting of NAIS (2019a) and the lack of female representation at the HOS position, these women were

promoted to certain levels but not beyond due to an invisible barrier separating the highest ranks of an organization and employees of a specific gender or minority status (United States Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Participants were given multiple opportunities and mentored up through the levels of their communities only to be denied the top job with little explanation. It was noted that the glass ceiling had a greater impact at higher levels of an organization and increased with career progression (Cotter et al., 2001). This holds true in the case of these participants who moved on to other schools to later become a HOS.

Bias, Gender Roles, and the Double Bind

A fundamental assumption in social role theory (SRT) is that women are typically rewarded for conforming to gender roles, with research showing evidence of adverse reactions to any gender role deviation (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Eagly et al., 2000). The current findings were congruent with the literature on gender bias, hindering and challenging women's contributions, thus limiting organizational effectiveness. From the interviews, it was noted that gender bias was experienced by the women from board members, donors, fellow administrators, employees, church leadership, and members of the greater school community. Not conforming to the role expectations of others led to interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict in the participants and emotional labor on the part of the HOS to display appropriate emotions, satisfy organizational requirements, and make others comfortable (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Gardner et al., 2009; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Research showed this conflict is amplified when the stereotypical expectations of others do not align with the actions of women in positions of leadership. This can lead to adverse effects and interpersonal tension (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Ibarra et al. (2013) stated that placing women in leadership positions is not enough and that a

“fundamental identity shift” (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 62) to overcome gender bias, organizational hierarchies, and cultural beliefs that have erected obstacles to leadership is crucial.

In addition to the gendered expectations and bias the participants faced, their challenges were complicated by the presence of the double bind. The theoretical concept of the double bind describes the challenges that women face to conform to their social roles, resulting in inner turmoil from the inability to satisfy the double bind (Visser, 2003). Women are particularly vulnerable to the double bind as it involves the tension of navigating situations with conflicting messages, both internally and externally (Cummings & Terrion, 2020; Jamieson & Hall, 1995). Not only did these women experience discrimination based on descriptive gender stereotypes that influenced how they were perceived, but the prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes placed them in a leadership double bind (Hoyt & Simon, 2017). The double bind manifested itself through contradictory expectations associated with being a traditional Christian woman and an effective leader. This bias of role-incongruity and the double bind is greater in contexts dominated by men, where men make the evaluations, and where gender role beliefs are reinforced by other belief systems, such as a conservative Christian independent school (Eagly, et al., 1992; Hoyt & Simon, 2017; Kanter, 1977; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Pazy & Oron, 2001). A prime example of the double bind and contradictory expectations was the board meeting dinner and presentation. Not only was the HOS required to plan, prepare, display, and serve the dinner but also was expected to organize and present every report for the meeting and then clean up after the meeting. Board meetings are the one and only opportunity for a HOS to speak to the entire board about key issues, strategic initiatives, and full committee reports. Held monthly, quarterly, or sometimes yearly, these meetings are crucial to the HOS and board relationship and require days, hours, and sometimes weeks of planning. The gendered expectation of the dinner

along with the professional expectation of leading the meeting placed the HOS in a leadership double bind.

The double bind was also evident as another participant spoke of being expected to be a visionary by her board but unable to get out of the weeds with all of the jobs that landed on her plate. Multitasking and saying yes to others is considered office housework and is a result of gendered expectations of female leaders (Jang et al., 2020). Moreover, one HOS shared about being responsible for every aspect of the school yet being expected to give gifts and socialize with the other women in the office. Another shared that she felt it requisite to call others to a higher standard yet was encouraged and often expected to be kinder, gentler, and more forgiving as a Christian woman. It disturbed others when she expected excellence or compliance with rules and regulations. As a woman, it was presumed she would exhibit softer rules, guidelines, and grace concerning procedures. High expectations are assertive and agentic in nature and are attributes generally associated with male leadership. When this leader displayed these qualities, she was criticized for not being communal, a behavior associated with women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These are all examples of a double bind dilemma where the requirements of the leader role and the female gender role were inconsistent, and the HOS was unable to fill both role expectations at the same time.

In the context of a conservative Christian community, the double bind is exceedingly apparent. Heads of religious schools are seen as the spiritual leader; however, in conservative communities, women are not welcome to outwardly lead in a spiritual way. The rules, both spoken and unspoken, placed around spiritual leadership lead to doubts, resentment, and fear both within the school community and within the HOS (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Furthermore, the definitive double bind is the expectation that a woman remains subservient to a man as outlined

in scripture by Paul and practiced in conservative Christian communities, yet execute the requirements of the position of HOS and leader of a multi-million dollar enterprise with her decisions impacting the lives of hundreds, sometimes thousands.

Given the emphasis on the true self in authentic leadership, these women in a conservative climate sought to enact their true selves when faced with the double bind that accompanies this context. The female leaders navigated around the norms to lead, but struggled to lead in the way they were created, as they believed, and remain measured in the way that is expected and inoffensive to traditional patriarchal beliefs, traditions, and practices.

Authentic Leadership

In seeking to discover if the participants were truly able to lead authentically, three predominant themes emerged from a review of the authentic leadership literature: a focus on self-awareness, the emphasis on true self, and a grounding in moral leadership. From the perspective of humanistic psychology, self-actualized individuals see themselves clearly and are not hindered by others' expectations for them (Maslow, 1971). However, Ibarra (2015) questioned the focus of being true to self in authentic leadership, advocating that authentic leadership should not be viewed as an unwavering sense of self but as an adaptive self. The self adapts as effective leaders are constantly transforming and seeking to learn about themselves. Identity changes and evolves throughout life and experience. She goes on to say that discovering oneself was both introspective and social, occurring simultaneously in the dynamics of relationship; therefore, the true self is actually self in relation to others, or in this case, the conservative Christian school and climate. Through this relational viewpoint, there is a constant construction of identity and leadership; thus, the expression of authenticity could be considered inconsistent.

When faced with the double bind of traditionally conservative Christian woman and independent HOS, I questioned if the participants were truly able to construct identity and lead authentically. Maslow (1971) discussed the authentic or true self as one who is not hindered by others' expectations of them; and Kernis (2003) proposed that the true self is not developed through conforming to societal norms. However, these women were expected to stay within a "narrow band of acceptable behavior—to combine seemingly contradictory behaviors" (Morrison et al., 1992, p. 54). Each female leader adapted her leadership to fit into the male-dominated, gendered entity that is a conservative Christian independent school (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015). Were they truly unhindered or did they find a suitable way around the system that felt right to them? I would argue that the women participating in this study embraced a deep sense of self with her identity firmly rooted in Christ, regardless of the surrounding patriarchal, conservative school community. They led in a way that was true to self and authentic because of this knowledge, calling, and relationship.

Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is defined as the process by which individuals display appropriate emotions to satisfy organizational requirements. This involves the exertion of energy to address the feelings of others, to make them comfortable, or to abide by social expectations. It is considered labor as it uses and often drains emotional resources requiring one to induce, suppress, modify, or conceal inner feelings to produce the proper state of mind in others (Gardner et al., 2009; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). The management and coordination of mind and feeling is foundational to the emotional labor process and is notably internal, taking place in private (Erickson & Ritter, 2001).

The participants did not speak directly about emotional labor, just as they did not about the double bind, yet both were evident as they shared about their experiences. The expectations placed on the women by themselves, their boards, and their conservative communities required each HOS to modify, conceal, and suppress inner feelings to make others comfortable and address the feelings of others (Hochschild, 1983). Just as the service industry requires a great amount of emotional labor, these women considered themselves servants and freely offered up themselves in the service of others (Erickson & Ritter, 2001). Likely unaware of the emotional exhaustion resulting from consistent emotional labor to satisfy organizational requirements, the participants often spoke of making peace with tradition and expectations. Emotional resource depletion may have been experienced and noted, but it was accepted. They were servants, on a mission, and the costs were worth the reward, which was eternal. They adapted and learned to lead grounded in their calling, with the help and encouragement of mentors, and through a redefined version of leadership.

Learning to Lead

Women adjust and employ strategies to lead successfully within a world that favors men, and the female heads of school in this study were no different. Participants displayed courage, resilience, grit, stamina, endurance, strength, and taking “the necessary steps to read and learn and try to find a better way to do anything . . . working hard and to figure it out . . . because I had to.” Participants learned to lead in a variety of ways. They readily attributed success to their teams, and always to the Lord. What was evident was their internal resolve because of their faith, calling, and support from mentors. Built upon that foundation, they became unstoppable, capable of crafting their unique leadership style, authentic, and redefined to formulate success in their organizations.

I found no evidence of covering, as these women leaders were being women in their context. Covering and trying to be more like a man could easily be a tendency, but in this study with these participants, was not. Foregoing the behavior of a classical male leader, each HOS navigated her own labyrinth in an authentic way that seemed right for her. Moreover, they were aware of the double bind placed upon them by the organization and their dual roles of Christian woman and HOS but found a sense of peace with the bind and their position through their deep faith and calling.

Calling

A critical theme to this study was the recognition of calling in each participant. As each question was posed, the thread woven throughout every answer and story was a spiritual calling and dependence on the Lord. This call and dependence were foundational to every decision made and the strength by which these women do their jobs. Moreover, the interviews revealed a deep commitment to Christian education and institutional mission. This is not surprising since the faith of each participant was grounded in the beliefs and values and of the institution she leads. This commitment and sense of calling were woven throughout the data as evidenced by the following phrases:

God opened doors for me. . . . I always believed in God's leadership and a lot of prayer. . . . God made it really clear. . . . He put things in my way. . . . God had a plan for me and was opening the doors. . . . I would very much say I felt called. . . . I've now learned God is a part of everything. . . . He will open the door, if you're trusting. . . . I've grown more spiritually having to figure out how to lead as a woman. . . . I was spiritually immature, and God brought me to my knees in this role, on the floor in prayer, God has led me through, opening doors.

As this theme manifested itself throughout each interview, each participant articulated that she absolutely believed God had called her, orchestrated her path, and was using her. They communicated they felt both honored and equipped by Him to do the work and that the realization and acceptance of their calling sustained them through the difficulties they faced. One participant said it this way, “I couldn’t do it without God. . . . the spiritual journey for me is to realize this is bigger than me and I’m not going to make it without God.” Another stated that she takes “a deep breath and fill myself with the Spirit. And I’m not intimidated.”

Likewise, this calling was evident in my life and remains to this day. I never aspired to my position and do not feel I have acted alone in my capacity to lead our school. When God called me to the position, I questioned my ability and my friends laughed at the idea. God placed several strong influencers in my path who encouraged me and supported me, reminding me both then and now of my calling when I allow myself to forget.

Mentors

Evident in the findings of this study was the value of the mentor relationship. Steele Flippin (2017) found that mentorship and executive coaching were the most effective ways to strengthen or enhance career advancement for women, and each participant was instantly able to share stories of significant individuals who mentored them. Even the mentors who were no longer physically present made a difference in the lives of each HOS. They smiled and recounted words or phrases their mentors spoke and that they mentally repeat to themselves when in a tough spot. Words such as

believed in me . . . you are gifted. . . you can do this. . . I know you can do it. . .
encouragement. . . think bigger. . . teacher . . . affirmation . . . trust. . . respect. . .
responsibility. . . champion. . .what’s next. . .work hard. . .figure it out.

These words and phrases reminded each HOS of the ways their mentors spoke life into them and encouraged them to find their own identity as HOS.

Moving beyond mentorship, some of the heads pointed to ways they were sponsored. Ibarra (2017) stated that sponsors play more of a critical role over mentors to assist in catapulting a career whereas mentors give advice. Three participants shared stories of how a well-connected man sponsored their careers and saw something in them, giving them opportunities they would have never had. These actions on their behalf propelled their careers forward in ways they could not have accomplished alone.

Although the vast majority of mentors mentioned were male, none of the participants spoke of their mentors in terms that would be considered manipulative or that would be defined as benevolent sexism (Oliver et al., 2018). The support and mentor affirmation shared in each interview was regarded as sincere and authentic, forging confidence and encouragement, the opposite of confusion and isolation, which are products of benevolent sexism (Bem, 1993).

Sharing in this experience with the participants, I have not had a sponsor but have benefitted from the backing of a strong mentor for over 30 years. One especially meaningful long-time mentor continues to provide direction and support to me. She speaks powerful words of affirmation over me and reminds me I was made for this. She prays over me, buoys me when I want to quit, and has consistently been in my corner. I go to her when no one else understands and when I am very low. She speaks words of calling and purpose back into my head and heart, and I walk away encouraged and stronger. I would not and could not survive in this role without trusting fully in my calling with reminders from those who also believe in me. I relied upon this as I faced uncertainty, identity perplexity, criticism, a battle against conservative culture, and gendered expectations.

Redefining Leadership

Eagly and Carli (2007) stated that often the twists and turns of the labyrinth are put there by the organizations. Women must learn to lead in their cultural context, reconfiguring leadership in the way it works best for them. The leadership reconfiguration for these women was precipitated externally by the organization, but also internally because of their conflict over not challenging long-held gender roles within their conservative Christian community. Participants were constrained by gender roles, as expected, so what they did was redefine for themselves, with biblical insight, what leadership was (and was not). Redefining leadership was a theme, but, paradoxically, by assuming the women's role of being a peacemaker, they performed the emotional labor necessary to avoid conflict by not challenging certain gender roles.

Each HOS spoke of serving authentically in her role and the fulfillment that service provided. Research indicates that women stereotypically fit the servant style of leadership, are more communal than men, and transformational rather than transactional (Eagly et al., 2003). While the participants spoke of finding an authentic form of leadership, critics of authentic leadership theory point to gendered organizational norms faced by female leaders pose challenges for asserting true authentic leadership (Hopkins & O'Neil, 2015). These female leaders worked cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually to prioritize and constantly sort out what gender-leader related roles were worth fighting, expending considerable emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983) in the process. Ultimately, they redefined the job, networking with a larger range of stakeholders, and growing beyond familiar leadership styles to "feel comfortable in my own skin." These strategic tactics developed leadership skills to counteract second-generation

bias and challenge conventional thinking, boosting networking, self-awareness, communication, and creativity (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cavanaugh, 2020; Ibarra, 2017).

Reflecting on my personal labyrinth through the lens of redefined leadership, authenticity, emotional labor, and the double bind provokes an assortment of discomfiting experiences. I also prepared the board dinners, served coffee, was dismissed so the men could meet, cleaned my office, organized office parties, cleaned up community spaces, made copies, dressed up as a rabbit for an alumni Easter egg hunt, along with anything and everything else that needed doing (Jang et al., 2020). I was told I did not understand governance, or the strategic plan, or construction, or the finances, and the list goes on. At the time, I did not realize the adverse affect and emotional labor this had taken. Emotional labor theory suggests that negative affective events elicit higher levels of surface and deep acting, and this was true in my case (Gardner et al., 2009). The emotional labor required to address the feelings of the board, and specifically one patriarchal chair, to make them comfortable, and abide by their expectations drained my emotional resources as I suppressed, modified, and concealed my feelings to produce the proper state of mind in them and for the good of the school. Displaying the appropriate emotions to maintain my position under the direct authority of this patriarchal chair led to emotional exhaustion confirmed by research, which stated that lack of trust in colleagues has an exacerbating effect on the positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (Wang et al., 2018).

During this time, a wise mentor told me I was trying to push a wet string across the floor. I could keep trying to push it, but it was not going anywhere, and I was going to continue to be frustrated. I remained frustrated and likely pushed only mildly less. I wanted to serve my school and not fight against tradition; however, I was patient and began to make strategic, slight

changes where I could. Praying, serving, working, and consistently learning how to do my job better while still playing by the rules afforded me credibility because the school was enjoying significant success on almost every level. The patriarchal leadership of a few small-minded men almost broke me. But instead, they made me stronger. I relied on the Lord and trusted in the call I knew had been placed on my life.

Now our community looks different, is led differently, is open to others from outside one close-minded doctrine, and seeks unity rather than uniformity. This is not my doing, but I believe the will of God who called me and used me and my cognitive and spiritual dissonance to redefine leadership created the necessary change. I still do not fully lead true to self and authentically because of the slow and measured steps that must be taken to change 68 years of tradition and the gendered expectations of my organizational community (Eagly & Carli, 2007). I adapt my leadership, accept the emotional labor, and like my peers, trust in my calling.

Recommendations

This section contains a discussion of recommendations for NCSA schools and the organization. As a result of this study, several recommendations are suggested including mentorship and sponsorship, leadership development programs, climate surveys, and board training. The NCSA should offer training and support to their member schools in these areas in preparation for a changing climate for women in leadership.

A Call to the NCSA

All participants said they would assume the HOS position if they were to go back in time and do it all again. They recommended young women aspire to the position of HOS and called for support from the NCSA to foster growth in the female HOS population. Several themes emerged from the data pointing to actionable steps.

Mentors and Sponsors. This study's findings revealed the importance of a strong mentor for women. A critical component in their journey, there is a call for mentoring for women. The NCSA should establish mentoring programs if they want to promote more leadership roles for women, creating future leaders to strengthen the member schools and the organization. Purposefully designed to meet the needs of women, mentor programs should seek to develop leadership skills in a safe and supportive way, helping bolster and further their careers and aspirations. For example, current, successful female heads or retired female heads of school could serve as mentors and sponsors. Several participants noted that female leaders should have the opportunity to watch and observe other women leading. Whether this is an emerging leaders program or mentorship opportunities within the NCSA, there is a recognized lack of pipeline programs for females. Of the four female heads interviewed, one has retired, one is considering retirement, and the other two have been heads for nearly 10 years. There will be forthcoming opportunities for other females to hold these positions, and aspiring heads should be observing strong leaders in action now.

With findings clearly identifying the importance of mentors and sponsors, a focus should be on networking and relationship-building opportunities for female leaders across the NCSA. Steele Flippin (2017) found that mentorship and executive coaching were the most effective ways to strengthen or enhance career advancement for women, although Ibarra (2017) found that sponsors played more of a critical role than mentors. Sponsors assist in catapulting a career, whereas mentors give advice. Connecting sponsors to aspiring heads and training mentoring programs should be made available both on the local, regional, and national level with NCSA schools. Additionally, current heads should encourage faculty and staff to attend association networking gatherings, serve on accreditation teams, seek professional training, and apply to

mentorship programs. Each of these opportunities should be accessible in terms of location but also according to the school calendar. Growth in this area will not only serve to benefit women, but also the NCSA organization.

Leadership Development. If the NCSA is supportive of more female K–12 HOS, it will be necessary for the organization to understand its role in educating trustees, search firms, and presidents. This education may include identifying approaches and avenues of accessibility for future female leaders, such as an Aspiring Heads Program. This education could incorporate and address leadership challenges both specific to women and to general topics of leadership preparation. A strong leadership development program should include a variety of perspectives. Additionally, NCSA should consider an active recruitment process for this program, along with a strong representation of female HOS speaking and leading the program.

Board Training. Trustees play a meaningful role in independent schools and oversee the hiring, management, and evaluation of the HOS. Each HOS interviewed shared challenging experiences with her board of trustees. A better understanding of the perspectives from both board members and heads could equip a school for greater relationships, leading to stability and success (Littleford, 2020).

The NCSA has an opportunity to provide board training on gender bias, emotional labor, social role theory, the double bind, and the trust relationship. Additionally, boards should examine their composition to ensure the presence of diversity. The literature is clear that both gender bias and similarity-attraction theory are evident in the board selection of heads of school by independent school boards (Baker et al., 2016; Elsaid & Ursel, 2011; Reis, 2007; Tallerico, 2000). An effective means for boards to assist female heads in professional growth, improvement, and overall well-being would be to foster a supportive work environment and

establish a stable trust relationship. Irwin et al. (2015) noted that trust mattered more to women than men, and boards that exhibit trust, openness, and self-disclosure during interpersonal interactions contribute to the cultivation of a trust climate with both the HOS and the organization (Brower et al., 2000). Board training on these topics could better prepare the landscape for future female leaders.

Climate Surveys. Likewise, NCSA schools should consider climate surveys evaluating the perceptions their boards and communities have toward a gendered expectation of leadership. A climate survey could provide valuable insight into identifying discriminatory practices. Policies to address these should be established and reviewed with a sustainable action plan. The NCSA should require such policies as a part of each school's ongoing accreditation review with education offered by the NCSA for sensitivity training as a proactive measure. Each of these measures additionally supports member schools and leaders, both male and female. Promoting an environment of openness and transparency that fosters communication around issues of possible discrimination would be beneficial in the context of gender, but also with race and other muted groups. Applying muted group theory, social role theory, the double bind, and emotional labor will allow for a closer look at the perceived and real barriers women face, further informing the NCSA on how to address the gender imbalance within the HOS position.

Future Research

There is much to learn from female leaders of K–12 independent schools. Future research should continue to seek the rich stories of women in this environment. The current study was limited to the experience of four women within conservative Christian academic communities, specifically the NCSA. Future research should seek to broaden the understanding of this

experience by hearing stories from women who have risen to leadership in other environments outside of the NCSA and how they learned to lead.

Also noted was the determination and resilience the female participants displayed. Further exploration into the factors that may have contributed to these personal qualities could be examined.

Another area of inquiry may be around the topic of how few women lead in K–12 schools. Public school superintendents are approximately 20% female, independent school heads are around 30% female, and NCSA K–12 heads are also 20% female (NAIS, 2019a, NCSA, 2019). The percentages decrease dramatically in schools that have grades nine through 12. There is a research opportunity here.

Additionally, by leading in these contexts, the female heads are change agents. Reflecting on their interviews, I do not believe this was their primary goal, but they are influencing those around them as well as younger generations. An area for supplementary study could include consideration of that influence and how that influence could change the landscape of NCSA communities, individuals, and the women themselves.

Finally, further research is needed on authentic leadership and the difference it makes on an academic organization. Were the female heads able to uncover true authenticity or just another version of themselves in this environment that may be different from the one uncovered in a different context? Further study on how a community views a female versus a male HOS in a conservative Christian school environment could be interesting research and shed light on authenticity and leadership values.

Further exploration of these concepts would provide meaningful insight into how to support female leaders in their advancement and may lead to the discovery of a model for the process of fostering more women in independent school leadership.

Conclusion

In reviewing the research questions and literature of this study, I was reminded of the strength and fortitude of these women. Each had a different pathway to becoming head of school, but they shared a common perseverance and grit when life handed them difficulty. When there was hurt, they overcame it, when faced with adversity, they found a way around it. They had supporters and mentors, but it was through individual determination and faith that they have made their way, all pointing to a sense of mission and purpose for choosing a difficult path.

As a woman who has spent my life in Christian education as a student, parent, teacher, coach, board member, and administrator, I was encouraged and motivated by this study's findings. As each participant described her experience in the role of head of school, I was deeply impacted by her continual reliance on God and commitment to following God's call to further the school's mission. I have the utmost respect for these women. Participating in their stories in even a small way motivates me to rely more on the leading of the Holy Spirit, as they have. Hearing each story of faith was a gift to me, spiritually, personally, and professionally. Every decision was made through trust in the Lord and the following of the Spirit. So much so that I'm not sure how one would lead without this. Displaying utter reliance on God and the leading of the Divine, their stories provoked me to confront my own leadership. Each woman stepped into uncharted waters for them, and for their school communities, and through the uncertainty, exhibited a deep dependence on God, God's will, and leading others to do the same.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Date
Name
Address
City, State
Zip Code

Dear Participant,

You are a part of a select group of women who currently serve as K–12 female heads of schools within a conservative evangelical community, specifically member schools of the National Christian School Association (NCSA). This small population is the topic of my dissertation, and I hope you will choose to participate in this important study.

I am a doctoral candidate at Abilene Christian University, studying organizational leadership and conflict resolution in the EdD program. I am currently completing my dissertation, using qualitative research to understand how female heads of K–12 schools make sense of their experiences within their communities. Dr. Peter Williams is my dissertation chair. This inductive study will focus on the perceptions of current female heads of school. This topic is of personal and professional interest to me as I have spent several years as a female head of a K–12 school within a conservative evangelical community. Extensive research has been done on the experiences of and barriers to female executives in education, but very little research exists on faith-based K–12 educational institutions. I wish to focus on the experiences of female heads in independent schools given the small number of women who hold such positions.

I plan to conduct interviews beginning in June 2020. I hope to be able to speak with you and engage your participation in my study. My study design includes an interview with you, and I anticipate that the interview would take approximately two hours. I understand that you have a demanding schedule and would be both honored and grateful if you could make time for an interview. I will gladly arrange a time that is most convenient for you.

Thank you for your consideration of this study. You will receive a follow-up call after this email communication. I look forward to hearing from you. Your participation in this study would make a significant contribution to the body of research in this area.

Kind regards,

Jill C. Hartness
Doctoral Candidate
Abilene Christian University

Appendix B: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



June 5, 2020

Jill Hartness
Department of Organizational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Jill,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Navigating the Role of Head of School as Perceived By Female Heads of NCSA Schools",

was approved by expedited review (Category 7) on 6/5/2020 (IRB # 20-077). Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form within 30 days of study completion.

If you wish to make any changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events/Noncompliance Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C: Informed Consent for Participation

My name is Jill Hartness, and I am a graduate student at Abilene Christian University in Texas. I am conducting a study on the experiences of female heads of independent schools within conservative Christian communities, specifically member schools of the National Christian School Association (NCSA). I am inviting you to participate because of your role as a head of school. Other female heads of NCSA schools are also being interviewed about their experiences. These women being interviewed lead or have led K–12 schools with enrollments of at least 300 for at least three years.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of female heads of independent schools within conservative Christian communities, specifically member schools of the National Christian School Association (NCSA). You are being asked to consent to participating in an interview that will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. As the principal investigator, I will ask your permission to tape-record the interview. There will be questions concerning your experiences as a female head of school within your community. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and your candid responses are appreciated. You may decline to answer any question, and you may choose to stop the interview and recording at any time.

All the information collected in this study is confidential. Responses will be kept anonymous and confidential through the use of pseudonyms for participants and anyone mentioned by a participant. All audiotape recordings and transcripts will be entered into a computer file that is password protected. The research team will be the only individuals with access to all files. If you agree to participate and later change your mind, all data associated with you will be immediately deleted. If, for any reason, the researcher needs to withdraw you from the study without your consent, you will be notified.

While every effort is made to reduce risk, there exists a possibility that confidentiality may be compromised, and discomfort may be experienced given the nature of the questions. Although there is no direct benefit or compensation paid to you for participating in this study, your participation will likely enhance the research informing faith-based independent schools. Participation in this study is not mandatory. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you choose not to participate.

If you have additional questions, you may contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx. If you prefer, you may contact my chair, Dr. Peter Williams, at xxxxx@acu.edu. If you feel a need to report research-related problems, you may contact Dr. Megan Roth, chair of the ACU Institutional Review Board, at xxxxx@acu.edu.

I have explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have additional questions or need to report research-related problems, you may contact my chair, Dr. Peter Williams, at xxxxx@acu.edu.

CONSENT SECTION:

I agree to participate in this study.

I give the researcher my consent to audiotape my interview. Yes No

Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Investigator's Name

Date

Investigator's Signature

Appendix D: Thank You and Member Check Letter

Dear Participant,

Hello again!

Thank you again for the gracious gift of your time and insights that enabled me to conduct my research. Without your thoughtful participation, I would not have been able to complete my study, “Navigating the Role of Head of School as Perceived by Female Heads of National Christian School Association (NCSA) Schools.”

As I make the final edits on my dissertation, and as promised during our interview, I want to provide you an opportunity to review the Findings chapter (attached). The purpose of this review is to give you a chance to discuss any of the findings with me.

As this material will be copyrighted, please do not share the information in any form. The final dissertation will be available electronically on ACU Digital Commons and ProQuest.

You may contact me at any time at xxxxxx@bbschool.org or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you again,

Jill

Appendix E: Participant Confirmation and Information Email

Dear Name,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. I am very excited about the opportunity to have an in-depth conversation with you about your experiences as a female NCSA head of school. I am most interested in how you understand and describe your experiences as a woman in a leadership position. To give you context for the interview, the overarching question guiding this study is, What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community?

Q1. How have female heads of school navigated their identity as Christians, women, and leaders within their community?

Q2. How have female heads of school learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

Each of these will be explored through the interview questions.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this study and allow me to interview you. I count my ability to speak with you a true gift to myself, and others likely to benefit from your experiences!

Kind Regards,

Jill Hartness
Doctoral Candidate
Abilene Christian University

Appendix F: Draft Interview Protocol

May I have permission to record our interview session?

Research Question: What has been the experience of a female head of school within a conservative Christian educational community?

Question 1: How have you, as a female head of school, navigated your identity as a Christian, a woman, and a leader within your community?

Were you raised in a similar faith community to the one in which your school is affiliated?

What kind of leadership opportunities did you have growing up?

How did you get started in education?

Tell me about how you started thinking about yourself as a head of school.

What prepared you the most for this position?

Tell me about any mentors you have had.

Where do you find validation?

Where has it been most difficult to find your voice?

Have you experienced school and church overlap in your community? Where specifically has that occurred the most?

What are your biggest challenges?

Question 2: How have you learned to lead within a traditional, patriarchal religious community?

How did you learn how to be a head of school?

Do you feel free to spiritually lead your community? In what ways do you do this?

How do you feel your leadership is similar or different from that of other independent schools?

What strategies have worked well for you?

What have been your biggest challenges?

Who are the people you turn to most often for advice?

Who is your work network?

Who is your social network?

What is your vision for yourself as a leader?

Do you have any secrets of success?

Closing

If you had to do it all over again, would you still choose to be in this position within your current community?

What will you do after this position?

Is there anything you wish I had asked you about?