Women in Canadian Independent School Leadership:

Perceptions, Career Patterns, and Possibilities

by

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Guided by the research question, *How do women faculty in independent schools enter and advance to school leadership positions*, this exploratory qualitative study sought to understand perceptions of women in independent school leadership in Canada. Giddens’ (1976) structuration theory, focusing on the interplay between organization and individual, informs the conceptual framework and illustrates inherent tensions between structure and agency in this context. Data collection included fifteen participants’ responses to semi-structured interviews and a survey of independent schools. This highlighted the strategies, barriers, and organizational facilitators that shape the trajectory of women’s leadership climb as it moves through critical stages in a climate of post second-generation gender bias. Moreover, this research examines how such forces impact women’s societal, organizational, familial, and individual identities. Findings reveal that women’s leadership in coeducational independent schools remains underrepresented at the highest levels. Women enter leadership later and become concentrated in the middle stages of the climb. This, despite the finding that women’s educational credentials often surpass those of their male counterparts. Women tend to lack the valuable executive and financial experience that hiring boards prioritize. Moreover, the historic culture of many schools has established a paradigm of leadership that has not been an easy fit for women leaders. Compounding these barriers, women’s careers seemed to coincide with child rearing years and domestic duties, leading to the “double shift”, and a reluctance to move for promotion. Strategies for leadership success include early entry into leadership, performance, mentorship and sponsorship, and a belief that self-improvement leads to school
improvement. This study addresses implications for practice, policy, and research, with a clarion call for prioritization of equity in executive leadership, the comprehensive development of programming and supports to encourage early interest and greater numbers of women in independent school leadership.

Finally, the study shows a need to reshape the paradigm of leadership to become more inclusive, while also challenging societal perceptions of women as leaders.

*keywords: women's leadership, independent schools, career patterns, leadership climb, head of school, Canada, CAIS, identity.*
Acknowledgements

“Our story is never written in isolation. We do not act in a one-man play. We can do nothing that does not affect other people, no matter how loudly we say, ”It's my own business.”

--Madeleine L’Engle

I consider myself honoured and privileged to be able to complete this degree, and to tell this story. Like any author, I hope my research inspires others: specifically, I hope it contributes to greater awareness of women’s leadership paths, and encourages our independent schools to grow stronger, more innovative, and more equitable. I hope too, that this helps to shape directions for change. I am indebted to my participants, the brave voices who have shared their experiences as teachers, leaders, recruiters, and affiliates of independent schools. I am simply the weaver of their fine words; they have lived these examples. Thank you for trusting me to find meaning in them and helping others learn from your experiences. You are the lifeblood of this project.

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Table of Contents

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 DESCRIBING LEADERSHIP................................................................................................................................. 4
   1.2 PURPOSE OF STUDY ............................................................................................................................................. 5
   1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS ........................................................................................................................................ 7
   1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY ................................................................................................................................. 9
   1.5 SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................................................... 10

2. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................................... 11
   2.1 ORGANIZATION OF LITERATURE ..................................................................................................................... 12
   2.2 A HISTORY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP ............................................................................................. 14
   2.3 STRUCTURAL BARRIERS.................................................................................................................................... 18
      2.3.1 Societal Barriers ........................................................................................................................................... 19
      2.3.2 Organizational Politics ................................................................................................................................. 20
         2.3.2.1 Leadership Paths ..................................................................................................................................... 20
      2.3.3 Familial barriers ........................................................................................................................................... 22
      2.3.4 Personal barriers .......................................................................................................................................... 24
      2.3.5 Leadership Identity ....................................................................................................................................... 25
         2.3.5.1 Leaning In and Opting-Out ..................................................................................................................... 27
   2.4 STRATEGIES ...................................................................................................................................................... 28
      2.4.1 Strategize Career ........................................................................................................................................ 29
      2.4.2 Develop Capacity ....................................................................................................................................... 29
      2.4.3 Perform Exemplarily .................................................................................................................................. 30
      2.4.4 Cultivate Professional Relationships ........................................................................................................ 31
      2.4.5 Protect Personal Life .................................................................................................................................. 31
   2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................................................................................ 32
   2.6 SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................................................... 36

3. CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................................ 37
   3.1 DATA COLLECTION .......................................................................................................................................... 37
      3.1.1 Stage One: Contextualizing The Issue ....................................................................................................... 38
      3.1.2 Stage Two: Finding a Baseline ................................................................................................................... 42
      3.1.3 Stage Three: Interviews with Women in Leadership .................................................................................. 44
   3.2 INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS—STAGES 1 & 3 .................................................................................................... 47
   3.3 DATA ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................................................. 51
   3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ............................................................................................................................ 52
4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
........................................................................................................................................ 55
4.1 QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS .................................................................................................................................................. 55
4.2 SECOND-GENERATION GENDER BIASES .................................................................................................................................. 60
  4.2.1 Governance, Hiring Committees, and Candidates ........................................................................................................ 62
  4.2.2 Governing Boards Value Financial Acumen and Proven Leaders ...................................................................................... 64
  4.2.3 Implicit Associations and Promotional Patterns ........................................................................................................ 67
  4.2.4 The Snowy Climb: Time is a Structural Barrier ........................................................................................................ 70
  4.2.5 Gendered Traditions and Women’s Leadership ........................................................................................................ 74
4.3 SUCCESSION PLANNING .................................................................................................................................................... 77
4.4 RELLOCATION FOR PROMOTION & OFF-RAMPING ........................................................................................................ 80
4.5 WOMEN LOSE TRACTION ON CLIMB TOWARDS TOP ROLES ........................................................................................ 81
4.6 IDENTITY QUESTIONS ....................................................................................................................................................... 86
4.7 PARENTAL LEAVE AND DOMESTIC ISSUES .................................................................................................................. 89
4.8 SUMMARY ........................................................................................................................................................................... 91
5. CHAPTER 5: ADVANCING IN LEADERSHIP: PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL STRATEGIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL
FACILITATORS ......................................................................................................................................................................... 93
5.1 PROFESSIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS ................................................................................................................ 93
  5.1.1 Growth, Innovation, and Improvement ............................................................................................................................. 93
  5.1.2 Working Diligently and Smartly ......................................................................................................................................... 95
  5.1.3 Promoting Excellence, Promoting Self ............................................................................................................................ 96
  5.1.4 Developing Relationships and Displaying People Skills ................................................................................................ 98
  5.1.5 Seek Professional Development and Valued Credentials ............................................................................................. 99
  5.1.6 Cultivating Support ....................................................................................................................................................... 102
  5.1.7 Relocation: A Strategy for Professional Advancement ................................................................................................ 103
  5.1.8 Redefining Leadership .................................................................................................................................................... 105
5.2 PERSONAL STRATEGIES: HOW WOMEN LEADERS DO IT ALL .................................................................................... 106
  5.2.1 Define Work-Life Balance ............................................................................................................................................... 106
  5.2.2 Source Support .............................................................................................................................................................. 107
  5.2.3 Defer Ambitions .......................................................................................................................................................... 108
5.3 ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS THAT FACILITATE THE PROMOTION PROCESS FOR WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ........ 111
  5.3.1 Foster Culture of Growth ............................................................................................................................................... 112
  5.3.2 Offer Flexible Scheduling and Targeted Programming ................................................................................................. 113
  5.3.3 Mentorship and Sponsorship ........................................................................................................................................ 115
6. CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH .................................. 121
   6.1 CONCLUSIONS .............................................................................................................................................. 122
   6.2 LIMITATIONS ............................................................................................................................................... 123
   6.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE ................................................................................................................ 124
       6.3.1 What Schools Can Do: ....................................................................................................................... 124
       6.3.2 What Boards Can Do: ......................................................................................................................... 127
       6.3.3 The Role of CAIS and CIS Ontario ..................................................................................................... 128
       6.3.4 What Women Can Do: ....................................................................................................................... 130
   6.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH .............................................................................................................. 133
   6.5 SUMMARY .................................................................................................................................................. 136

7. REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................................. 139

8. LIST OF APPENDICES .................................................................................................................................... 156
   8.1 STAGE 1: APPENDIX A .............................................................................................................................. 157
   8.2 STAGE 1: APPENDIX B .............................................................................................................................. 160
   8.3 STAGE 1: APPENDIX C .............................................................................................................................. 161
   8.4 STAGE 1: APPENDIX D .............................................................................................................................. 163
   8.5 STAGE 2: APPENDIX E .............................................................................................................................. 164
   8.6 STAGE 2: APPENDIX F .............................................................................................................................. 165
   8.7 STAGE 2: APPENDIX G .............................................................................................................................. 167
   8.8 STAGE 3: APPENDIX H .............................................................................................................................. 172
   8.9 STAGE 3: APPENDIX I .............................................................................................................................. 173
   8.10 STAGE 3: APPENDIX J ............................................................................................................................. 174
   8.11 STAGE 3: APPENDIX K ............................................................................................................................. 178
   8.12 STAGE 3: APPENDIX L ............................................................................................................................. 180
   8.13 LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................................... 181
1. Chapter One: Introduction

Research shows that advancement based solely on merit is a concept that rarely—if ever—occurs in actual workplaces, which are burdened by systemic inequities—Catalyst, 2016

Catalyst, a research-based NGO that promotes greater equity in organizations, identifies a foundational problem in career studies: promotions on merit alone are rare, and, how merit is recognized and developed is often biased. Historically, workplace merit has been subjective and women’s careers (and those of marginalized groups) have been subordinated to those of men. In Canada, less than a century ago, the teaching profession served as a mirror to society, with women consigned to the elementary level to rear young children and men dominating the secondary level, administration, and governance of the schools (Levin and Young, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989). The prevailing belief was that “women were not capable of teaching older children or managing schools” (Young, 1994, p. 355). Despite these gender biases, and because of concerted effort and coordinated legislative action, today women make up the majority of the teaching force at the secondary level in Ontario. More significantly, they occupy a higher percentage of school leadership roles than ever before (although this gain is not yet representational as women comprise almost 70% of the teaching profession at the secondary level (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2017). With the introduction of PPM 102 in 1993, known as the Affirmative Action/Employment Equity for Women Employees legislation, the numbers of women in elementary vice-principal and principal roles skyrocketed, from 39% in 1994-95 to 67.5% by 2016-17, and in secondary schools from 27.6% to almost 50% (Higginbottom, 2019; Ministry of Education, Ontario, 2017).

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<tr>
<td>Principals and vice-principals</td>
<td>2,094.37</td>
<td>2,096.05</td>
<td>2,101.61</td>
<td>2,105.97</td>
<td>2,075.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage male</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage female</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
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(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019)
Outside the public sector, the underrepresentation of women in leadership is of significant concern. Independent schools in Ontario, or more broadly, in Canada, lag far behind public institutions in promoting women to top role. As of January, 2019, of 44 independent middle and secondary schools in the association of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS) that are coeducational, only 9 are led by women principals (CAIS). Women are “the exception when they might be expected to be the rule” (Ozga, 1993, p. 3). In statistical terms, women comprise approximately 20% of these independent school secondary school headships, a number that resembles women’s representation at the public secondary school principal ranks a generation ago, before PPM 102 (Reynolds, 2008; Richter, 2007). This illustrates a significant equity gap between public and independent school administration, and prompts the question: what is it about independent schools that has prevented gender equity at the Head of School level?

This study was precipitated by a period of professional uncertainty after a rich ten-year career in independent schools. I had left an influential role at my school to start a family, and at home with an infant, in the insomniac haze of a parent’s first year, I questioned my professional path. Moreover, I questioned the intersection of gender, leadership and independent schools. What was it about the culture of independent schools, about the values, expectations, practices, and people that might make me worry about the compatibility of motherhood and school leadership in the 21st century? For starters, there were few female role models in coeducational schools. Those who were leading coed schools did not have small children. I wondered if women were being encouraged as leaders, and if so, when? Once children were grown? I wondered if boarding schools were particularly challenging places for women to lead because of the fusion of work-life balance. I wondered if age of school affected women’s leadership opportunities. I wondered why so many women were leading single-sex girls’ schools. Then, I looked to the public system for comparison, where women in principal roles were not uncommon. Learning that there are significant differences with the two approaches—public and independent—I hypothesized that culture and tradition affected career paths. I sought to discover the full extent of barriers to women’s career advancement in independent schools. Do barriers to women’s leadership increase in number or size as the career climb continues? Is there a typical time frame for this process? Might these barriers ease with the freedom that comes with greater professional responsibility?

Gender disparity is problematic from economic, social, and educational viewpoints. For example, Dychtwald and Larson (2010) noticed that companies employing women in senior leadership
roles are financially healthier than those with only men leading them (Rosin 2010, p. 4), and the OECD’s *Gender, Institutions and Development Database* shows that “[w]ith few exceptions, the greater the power of women, the greater the country’s economic success” (Rosin 2010, p. 4; MGI, 2017). McKinsey Global Institute’s (2017) study suggested that Canada could gain $150 billion more in GDP by 2026 by establishing gender parity in the workforce. This being said, only 7 of 249 companies traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) have a woman CEO (Catalyst, 2016). From a social perspective, organizations are microcosms of our larger world that can “point us towards consideration of the nature and direction of society” (Reiger, in Blackmore & Kenway, 1993, p. 17). Thus, wherever equal opportunity is enshrined by law, gender disparity in organizations must be questioned. From an educational perspective, it is problematic that in institutions shaping future generations, gender equity is not present in school leadership.

Gender parity in leadership is not only a hot topic, it is an important one. School leadership “is only second to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning” (Leithwood, et al., 2006, p. 3). *Leadership affects teachers, and teachers affect students.* Thus, role models are important. They act as powerful stimulants for change (Ozga, 1993, p.9). Antonakis’ (2011) “availability heuristic” shows that associations breed other associations. Associating leadership with men, for example, breeds the expectation that men will continue to fulfill these roles because “the easier it is to imagine a particular link, the more probable the link becomes in the observers’ minds’ eye” (p. 272). Schein (2001) terms this the “think leadership/think male” association. Today, it is possible for students in independent schools--many of whom will graduate into worlds of corporate and political leadership--to have never had a female principal, thereby making it less likely that they themselves would encourage women in these positions (Antonakis 2011; Schein, 2001). Thus, getting more women into leadership could have far-reaching consequences. This study was designed to better understand the process of achieving a top leadership role in the independent school context. The process seems a difficult one to negotiate, and learning more about the process may make it smoother and faster for aspiring women. It is hoped that this understanding will ultimately, help more women into Head of School roles.

Of the 1935 private schools in Canada, I have chosen to focus on a small portion of these: schools belonging to the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools association, a member organization whose 90+ schools are accredited according to established educational standards. More specifically, this study examines 44 coeducational middle and secondary schools. This chapter serves as an introduction
to the study of why women are underrepresented in corridors of power in independent schools and what can be done to address the process of entering and advancing in leadership. It will define key terms, address the statement of problem and rationale for the study, the purpose of the study, the study’s significance, and offer the plan of the thesis from start to finish.

1.1 Describing Leadership

The number, breadth, and meaning of job titles in independent schools can differ dramatically between schools making it difficult to compare pathways across schools. For the purpose of this study, I have classified the roles of the participants into several levels: junior leadership, middle leadership, senior leadership, and Head of School to show the degree of influence and position on the climb towards the top. Those in junior leadership could be termed “teacher leaders” and are best defined as teachers with formal positions of responsibility, who are compensated through time release or financial remuneration. Wenner & Campbell (2017) define them as "teachers who maintain K–12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (138). Some examples of junior leadership would include early leadership roles such as lead teachers and assistant leaders, and depending on the school, may also include department heads. Middle leadership includes more significant leadership roles such as program leaders, school directors, athletic directors, admission directors. These may still involve some classroom teaching but it is no longer the most important part of the role. Senior leadership is executive level leadership--assistant or deputy heads, and vice-principals. Depending on the school, these roles may have a small teaching responsibility but these individuals are compensated as executives and school operations are their priority. They are roles that are often training grounds and stepping stones to the top job. I define “leadership” in these schools as formalized roles that could involve significant motivational, programmatic, administrative and managerial responsibility. In the literature, it is often referred to as educational administration, or administration more generally. Additionally, I distinguish “leadership” in which junior, middle, and senior leaders can claim to work, from “headship” which is the top job, or the zenith of any school hierarchy, and awarded to only one person. And while the position is the same in each school, it is anything but that in name. This role, which in independent schools takes years of experience to achieve, is known as principal, Head of School, or headmaster/mistress. Finally, the terms “women leading schools”, “women principals,” or women heads” will help to differentiate between
women in the top job and women in educational administration, “leadership roles”, “positions of responsibility”, or junior, middle, and senior leadership positions.

1.2 Purpose of Study

“Women leaders are no longer anomalies” but “as a group have not been well studied” (Grogan, 2010, p. 783). This is especially true in independent schools in Canada where the body of literature on women’s careers is sparse. There are only the statistics on headships. While women have made inroads into leadership, documentation of their experiences remains on the academic margins. There are no baseline statistics documenting the gender breakdown of faculty, the number of women working as teachers or in positions of responsibility in these institutions (CAIS, 2013), and little understanding of what career paths of women in educational administration look like, prompting a need for a clearer picture of the pool of employees. Discovering what happens on the leadership climb between a woman’s initial role as teacher through positions of responsibility—entry/junior leadership, middle leadership, into senior leadership, and ultimately in the top job may help to explain the gender imbalance at the pinnacle role: Head of School.

Independent schools are different and they are growing more popular. A study by Van Pelt et al., for The Fraser Institute (2015) found that in the period between 2006/07-2011/12 public school enrollment decreased by 2.5% and independent school enrollment increased. Independent schools offer an alternative to public education and serve a variety of educational needs “contrary to the common caricature that they are enclaves for the urban elite” (Allison, Hasan, Van Pelt, 2015, Fraserinstitute.org). In Ontario, they receive no provincial funding, leaving parents to bear the (often) substantial costs of such educational choices. There are almost 2000 independent schools in Canada (Allison, Hasan, Van Pelt, 2015), which include for-profit, denominational, special needs, and other kinds of offerings. This study is focused on a small percentage (approximately 5% or 94 schools) of that total, the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS). CAIS defines itself as “A community of independent schools [that] explore and pursue exemplary leadership training, research and international standards of educational excellence” (CAIS, 2018). These schools are not-for-profit, tuition-funded schools that meet or exceed provincial curricula and national standards. These schools share common traits such as robust academic programs, compulsory arts, sports, and service programs, leadership training, and a network of parental support. Their goal is to graduate students with value-added or enriched achievements that complement their achievement of the provincial diploma (CAIS, 2018).
Some of these schools are also members of the Conference of Independent Schools, Ontario (CIS, Ontario) a network of 47 independent schools in Ontario. Focusing on coeducational middle and secondary member schools of CAIS and at times, CIS Ontario, ensures a more homogeneous grouping and thereby, similar cultural environments. This study dives deeply into the lives of teacher leaders and Heads of School through their own experiences in these schools. It is supplemented by the perspectives of two educational executive recruiters, and the insight of two executives from national and provincial independent school associations.

This study will explore the issue of women in independent school leadership in Canada. The lens is at times critical, and at other times liberal, a tension born from my dual identity as academic and teacher. The tension is introduced in the conceptual framework, and embedded throughout the study, continuing in the critique of structures in chapter 4, the agentic responses of women in chapter 5, and concluding with the implications for research and practice in chapter 6. My guiding research question was “How do women faculty in independent schools enter and advance in school leadership positions?” I sought to better understand what the leadership climb looks like, with an emphasis on the experience of those women in positions of responsibility and senior leadership, who (arguably) are poised for headship. A review of literature in educational administration, leadership, women’s careers, and independent school practices, describes women’s career paths as less linear and more circuitous than those of men with accelerations, decelerations, leaves and obstacles at certain intervals (Ozga, 1993; Cabrera, 2007; Sandberg, 2013). In public school administration, historically, a woman’s climb to the top has tended to be considerably slower than her male counterpart; if she arrived, it was often in late career (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ozga, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989). Moreover, she tended to be single, divorced, or widowed (Shakeshaft, 1989). Ely et al (2011) contend that while not intentional or explicit, biases exist that are “powerful, yet often invisible barriers to women’s advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men” (p. 2). This is widely referred to in the literature as “second generation gender bias” (Eagly & Carli, 2007), assumptions or codes of behaviour that impede women’s rise to key decision-making roles or executive positions, rather than direct discrimination. As Eagly and Carli (2007) show, cultural norms within most workplaces were established long before women in the workplace became common and have not always evolved to reflect new realities. Thus, a clearer understanding of these norms and women’s responses to them shapes this study.
Extrapolating these findings to independent school culture provides a starting point for research. Are women in independent schools struggling against second-generation gender bias? If so, how and why? What role does organizational culture play? What strategies do women employ to advance their careers? What barriers do they face? And for the few who have succeeded at the headship level, what was their experience? This study’s conceptual framework is comprised of an analysis of both the organizational context of independent school leadership and an exploration of the strategies and barriers women experience on the path to the top.

1.3 Research Questions

This study sought to investigate and ultimately answer the following research question: How do women faculty in independent schools enter and advance to school leadership positions? It was designed around four sub-questions:

What percentage of faculty employed in CAIS-sanctioned Canadian independent schools are women, and what percentage of these women are working in leadership roles?

Twenty-five years ago, Young (1994) bemoaned the lack of baseline data available about women in public school administration. Her words are just as applicable to the independent school context today. Young (1994) wrote that “the data available at this time leave many questions unanswered. We are starting to have the sort of foundational information needed for further policy research, but we have too little of it” (p.357). Prior to this, Shakeshaft (1989) wrote that: “over the past 80 years [in public schools] the only position in which women have been dominant has been elementary school principalship. Women have never been the majority of secondary principals or superintendents” (p. 20). Little academic research has been published on women in leadership in the independent context, and that which has refers to American schools. A Canadian chapter of the literature is overdue. The statistics tend to support contentions that “systemic discrimination, subtly reinforced and rationalized by traditional socialization,” continues to be a major factor in the under-representation of women in leadership (Young, 1994, p.357). Determining what percentage of women are employed in leadership in these schools will offer a sense of how many women are potential candidates for headships, or in the metaphorical pipeline. This study will examine the presence of this in the independent school context.
What strategies do women in independent schools employ to enter and advance in administration?

This question attempts to address the process from teacher to leadership to headship, illustrating what this climb entails, what each step looks like, and what strategies women use to facilitate their own promotion. Hearing their perceptions of their experiences on the leadership climb will enrich our understanding of what this process looks like, how long women might spend in this process, and what strategies might facilitate their promotion.

What are the structural barriers to the headship?

I define structural barriers as broad, systemic biases against a particular group that emerge from the founding of societies, cultures and institutions. There are specific barriers to women pursuing leadership in the independent school context for three distinct reasons: 1. self-governed institutions 2. traditional foundations, and 3. geographic location. Self-governed institutions can be barriers to women aspiring to leadership. Self-governed is defined by Allison, Hasan, and Van Pelt (2015) as “self-managed, relying on leadership and management internal to the school, rather than the echelons of specialists resident in public school board offices” (p. 2). Kane (1992) contends they share “six basic characteristics: self-governance, self-support, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size” (p. 7). These characteristics, in particular, the autonomy implied in their self-definition and self-direction, could make these schools less favourable to women’s leadership. Added to this, they are not subject to sweeping legislative changes, such as Bill PPM 102 that could affect broad social change. However, paradoxically, this autonomy could also offer great possibility for change. The independent nature of these schools is often their greatest strength in that they are free to pursue their foundational values (Bosetti, 2004; Bosetti and Gereluk, 2016; Davies & Quirke, 2005; Taylor, 2001; Van Pelt et al., 2007 in Allison, Hasan & Van Pelt (2015) and can be highly responsive to their stakeholders.

A second barrier to women pursuing leadership in independent schools is the traditional foundations of the independent school. Many Canadian independent schools were founded more than a century ago, and modeled on British exemplars such as Eton, Harrow, and Gordonstoun. Tradition is a source of identity and pride and is ever-present: architecture, uniform, programming, even jargon can reflect earlier times. This is not to imply that these schools are not progressive—many are, pushing educational boundaries and embracing educational initiatives. But, there is often a tension. In some schools there remains a strong historical (and by extension, patriarchal) tradition amongst alumni, and
sometimes, amongst staff, which contributes to resistance to change. Some boarding schools, specifically those established over a century ago, have had traditions of long-serving Heads of School (often termed Headmasters), men who became synonymous with the institutions. These respective tenures of 15-25 years, have led to little turnover at the highest level.

Women who wish to enter into leadership positions in independent schools encounter geographical barriers. Independent schools belonging to CAIS differ from public, or government funded schools in that there are only 94 of them, and they are located in urban, suburban, and rural communities across Canada (with three outside Canada’s borders). Their geography makes them key fixtures in communities, and makes a job transfer or promotion more complicated than simply moving neighbourhoods, often entailing a substantial geographical shift.

What organizational factors facilitate the promotion process for women in leadership?

Organizational factors are influenced by larger structural factors but differ in their specificity to the ecosystem, or environment of the school. For example, through an organizational lens, I question what role school culture plays in women’s career progression. Are women more likely to be promoted at a day school over a boarding school? At a newer school rather than one with longevity and tradition? From within their own school? What role do programmatic supports play? What influence does the Head of School wield on the promotional patterns of women? How might boards of governors play a role in shaping women’s careers? What personal and familial supports are available and how do these affect the process of career building and promotion?

1.4 Significance of Study

Leadership is identity work. This is particularly salient for women who are socialized not to identify with characteristics such as assertiveness and ambition (Ely et al, 2011; Ibarra, Ely et al, 2013). What Ibarra, Ely, et al. (2013) call the “fragile” development of this identity happens while women are entering and advancing in leadership, historically a male-defined and dominated context. The tension produced in this process forms the heart of this study. A deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women leaders in these schools could contribute to rectifying the serious gender disparity at the executive level of school leadership. To accelerate the movement towards equity, “there is a need to be strategic in growing new [school] leaders” (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017, p.554). Simply waiting
for these women to arrive at the top job could be a lengthy process. Researchers predict achieving gender equity in corporate leadership could take decades—a full century more if no measures are enacted (LeanIn.org & McKinsey, 2016; MGI, 2017; Weber Shandwick, 2015). Interestingly, almost 73% of “global executives” believed this is possible by 2030, revealing a significant disconnect from predictions (Weber Shandwick, 2015). Moreover, when asked what impetus would be the ‘tipping point’ to equality, women and men cited different triggers; women believed legislation was needed while men cited stakeholder pressure (ibid).

These corporate studies do have relevance to non-for-profit institutions and independent schools. They show that intentional steps are needed to make gender parity a reality as organizations are complex ecosystems and their cultures are shaped by history, people, practices, values, and behaviours. The numbers show that “absorbing women into educational management and [having them become] indistinguishable from men” (Ozga, 1993, p.3) does not work. Empowering women to lead independent schools through research that raises awareness and informs programming could catalyze gender progress in society, and normalize women’s leadership for generations of students. It is a noble goal and it is achievable.

1.5 Summary

This chapter introduces the study, offering context for the problem, purpose for the research, and explaining personal and professional motivation for this work. Chapter Two introduces the literature review and the conceptual framework. It provides historical context and draws from essential literature in the fields of feminist, organizational behavior, and school leadership. Chapter Three, the methodology, offers detailed description of the data collection and analysis processes. Chapter Four, entitled “Structural Barriers to Women in Independent School Leadership” is the first of two findings chapters; Chapter Five provides details of professional and personal strategies that women use to enter and advance in leadership, while highlighting organizational facilitators that support women’s promotion. Chapter Six summarizes the study, offering limitations, conclusions, and implications for practice and research.
2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

“I don’t see any institutional bias against women but I don’t see any programming for women either”

– Executive Recruiter

This literature review aims to provide insight into career patterns of women leaders in coeducational independent schools in Canada, and the gender specific challenges of them. It examines the historically patriarchal context from which these schools emerged, the lingering biases that continue to exist, and against such forces, the choices women have made to carve out their careers. Borrowing heavily from the literature review model established by Hallinger (2012), this review begins with a thematic focus, has a goal orientation in its explanatory review, outlines its purpose, draws on a variety of source types, is bounded, offers a critical theoretical perspective, and introduces a conceptual framework.

Literature Review Model (Hallinger, 2012)

This literature review uses a substantive and conceptual approach to synthesize essential research thematically into gender, career and organizational studies, corporate leadership, and independent schools while examining conceptual frameworks within these studies. Research on women in leadership is increasingly popular, yet, many of these studies are broadly contextualized as if designed to apply to a monolithic corporate world. Greater focus is needed to understand the uniqueness of the independent school context—a school environment without the centralized bureaucracy of the public system, drawing on corporate practices and culture—and women’s careers patterns in leadership here. Thus, this review has an explanatory goal: it draws on considerable depth and breadth of peer-reviewed academic
literature, is supplemented by business articles and popular books, includes historic government publications on the nature and structure of schooling, and adds empirical evidence from several doctoral disserations on independent school culture to further understand the tension between structure and agency that defines women’s career paths in independent school leadership. The review is bounded in the following ways:

1). It focuses on the experiences of white, middle-class women.

2). It is organized to reflect the historical origin of independent schooling in Canada from 19th century beginnings—an essential timeframe to understanding structural forces in the workplace;

3). It evaluates the theoretical research perspectives of academic scholars and populist writers using a spectrum from most structural to most agentic to explain their approach to women’s careers.

4). It explores answers to key research questions and foci: barriers to women’s advancement, strategies women use to advance in leadership, and organizational facilitators. It examines questions of organizational politics, and leadership identity.

These sections reflect the foundational goals of the study by echoing the research questions and setting the context for the conceptual framework that follows.

2.1 Organization of Literature

A review of the literature and a number of conceptual frameworks attempt to explain why certain groups have been disproportionately absent from positions of power in the workplace. They tend to reflect the socio-historical context in which they were conceived, and are somewhat applicable to the problem of women’s representation in independent school leadership today. From a feminist perspective, this literature--and my work--reflects a “post-second wave context” of gender studies, “one that is simultaneously split between newfound gains for women – especially for middle-class women with class, race, and sexuality privileges – and old family-life gender patterns and assumptions that discipline both men and women” (O’Brien Hallstein & O’Reilly, 2012, p.4). It also includes elements of third-wave and fourth wave feminism, recognizing movements that aim to empower more women in leadership, and to mobilize support and fight discrimination in the online social media sphere. My study
examines the careers of predominantly white, middle-class women, and aims to better understand the uniqueness and common threads of their leadership journeys as they interact with organizations.

An overview of relevant literature will offer insight into women’s leadership, and illustrate the gap between the existing field and this research. It will show why a new conceptual framework is needed to identify and describe women’s trajectories in independent school leadership. These conceptual frameworks, or metaphors as Buzzanell and Goldzwig (1991) term them, help in “discovering and describing patterns of career behavior, help stimulate new ideas, [but also] mask them” (p.469). Each offers a different visual model and as Mumby (1988) explains, brings “certain aspects of an organization into sharper focus making others experimentally and cognitively more peripheral” (p. 19). Moreover, they illuminate structural and organizational relationships that are critically significant in addressing issues of control, power, and the organization (Bourdieu, 1977, Clegg, 1979, Giddens, 1977, 1979; Lukes, 1974 in Buzzanell and Goldzwig, 1991, p. 468). While it is not possible to remove the patriarchal social model in which these authors write, each contribution to this literature review can be organized on a critical spectrum from most structural to most agentic. All writers acknowledge the existence of structural barriers, however the degree to which the structural barriers limit individual power varies as some ascribe power to the organization and others the individual and ascribe power to the woman herself. It is their approach to power that helps define how power might be negotiated and where change is possible. Many describe elements of a career trajectory, and fall within either the structural or agentic side spectrum (see Fig.1).
2.2 A History of Educational Leadership

From 1992 to 2008 in Canada, women’s rates of graduation from university programs rose, with women comprising more than 60% of bachelor’s programs, more than 50% of Masters’ programs, and slightly less than 50% of doctoral programs, the largest proportionate gain of all degrees (Statistics Canada, Post Secondary Student Information System, 1992-2008). More women than ever before are contributing to the Canadian workforce, with almost 82% between the ages of 25-54 earning a measurable income, an exponential change since a low of 21.6% in 1950 (Statistics Canada, 2017). Despite these numerical gains, women’s work lives exist within a larger social context whose practices have not evolved to support women’s fulsome integration at the highest levels of educational and corporate worlds. Gender bias today is a manifestation of the historical discrimination of women as undervalued participants in society, and by extension, the education workforce. To understand the status of women today in educational leadership requires a look back through the history of education in Canada.

Michael Apple (1990) argues that schools are byproducts of prevailing hegemonic ideologies that benefit the powerful and “reproduce” the norms they establish, ultimately dispursing a “common
sense” or accepted knowledge and ways of living that become difficult to question (Apple, 1990; Foshay, 1992; Reynolds, 1995). From the time Egerton Ryerson, Ontario Education Head, established the first teacher training institute in 1847, first hand accounts of women’s experiences in education during this time are limited, leading McIntosh (1983) to term it “womenless history.” From records we know that women were treated as subordinate members of the teaching profession, undervalued, underpaid and used as stopgaps or opportunities to save salary costs on men (Morison, 2016; Danylewycz & Prentice, 1984). In teaching and teaching assistant roles, they were paid almost 39-41% less than men in the same job (Rintoul & Bishop, 2018; Danylewycz & Prentice, 1984; Ross, 1896).

Paradoxically, many women did become teachers with percentages growing from less that 50% in 1861 to almost 80% by 1881, making the vocation an acceptable one for single and widowed women (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1984). Almost 80% of the women teaching in the TDSB at this time were listed as single whereas less than 10% of the men were single (ibid, p.84). Salary records show that the few women who became principals or “headmistresses” during this period were paid 44-55% less than headmasters (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1984, p.88). The patriarchal ‘culturalist perspective’ of Blackmore (1993) helps explain the entrenched bias against women in leadership roles. For example, Ryerson himself felt that women possesses “the qualities best suited for the care, instruction and government of infancy and childhood” (Annand, 1871, xiii) and this belief led to women being relegated to teach elementary grade children and paid less than men who were encouraged to teach secondary school (Morison, 2016). According to Morison (2016), male teachers received bonuses upon marriage while women teachers who married faced discrimination, and were often fired, thereby reinforcing hegemonic systems of male power by limiting women’s career and financial independence. In fact, in 1925, the Toronto District School Board barred married women from teaching (Reynolds, 1995).

Rintoul and Bishop’s (2018) findings about the Ontario principalship support this inequity. They found that meritocracy and education had little to do with promotion in the nineteenth century and teachers who became “principals may have had much to do with their networking abilities, gender, class and race factors, and their use of power and authority” (Rintoul & Bishop, 2018, p.6; Hallinger, 2003; Reynolds, 1990). Women did become principals, however. In these cases, they were few, and they tended to be deployed to smaller, remote schools. Reynolds’ (1995) study of women principals in the Toronto District School Board revealed little change in the number of female school principals between 1940-1980, with 11% in 1940 and 13% in 1980 (p.3) despite this period being one of significant social and educational growth. She cites Larwood and Kaplan’s (1980) work to explain women’s low numbers.
She writes, “we might conclude that either most women in the Toronto Board over these years were not very hard working, skillful, or talented, or we might think them very unlucky indeed”; or, we might surmise that women’s exclusion from the principalship is a result of the majority of women lacking career advancing savvy and skill such as those Larwood and Kaplan (1980) term low “social role presentation” and “political tactics” (Reynolds, 1995, p.3). Or, might we conclude as Vibert (2019) asserts, that this was a consequence of the ubiquitous social assumption that women were simply not leadership material – in any sphere? This deficit impeded their ability to negotiate the complex organizational networks necessary for promotion. Even during the post-war baby boom when schools faced teacher and principal shortages, men benefitted “encouraged by their superintendents or principals to gain formal teaching credentials and quickly advance to become principals” (Rintoul & Bishop, 2018, p.5). Women entered the teaching profession in greater numbers as it was an acceptable “female” career for young women with more education and desiring an income (Reynolds, 1995), and equal pay legislation became law (ibid). Several government-sponsored initiatives in the 1970s such as the Green Paper brought attention to equity issues but according to Reynolds’ (1995) did not go far enough and lacked a comprehensive, and therefore, effective approach. The 1990s saw greater movement towards equity in Ontario. The provincial government introduced PPM 103, the Affirmative Action/Employment Equity for Women Employees legislation, which required school boards to seek parity in educational administration and appointed equity officers for each board to help guide the process (Bascia, personal communication, Aug. 28, 2014). This combined with the efforts of the Federation of Women Teachers of Ontario (FWTAO) helped to normalize the discourse around women in the principalship. In subsequent years, the Harris Conservative government repealed affirmative action legislation and the FWTAO merged with the men’s association to become the EFTO, increasing their membership numbers and shifting their identity. Despite these gains, it is arguable that they are not sufficient comprehensive; after all, men make up only 30% of the teacher roles at the secondary level in Ontario yet occupy more than 50% of the vice-principal and principal roles (Ministry of Education, 2017). Even in the public system, representational equality is still not present.

The history of the principalship in independent schools takes place in this context. Independent schools are defined as “schools which operate outside the public system” (Van Pelt, 2016, p. 30), that are run by a board of governors, and are tuition-funded and have a greater degree of bureaucratic autonomy than public schools. They subscribe to provincial education standards and are inspected regularly. With greater school choice available, more families are looking to independent schools to
fulfill their educational needs and enrollment in private schools has risen to almost 7% of the total student population (Van Pelt, 2016; Davies & Aurini, 2011). In much of Canada, independent schools receive some funding from provincial governments, with Alberta being among the most subsidized (Davies & Aurini, 2011). In Ontario, independent schools receive no government funding and are funded entirely through student tuition and school community fundraising efforts. Most schools are not-for-profit and tuitions per year vary widely depending on school offerings. Given their financial structure and omnipresent need for funding, the necessity of a vibrant business operation in each school becomes clear.

Many CAIS independent schools were established in the nineteenth century to teach boys. Their founders included clergy, military personnel, or community and business leaders whose traditions were informed by Anglican British school traditions and whose intention was to model young men to contribute to the growing political and military elite that an emerging colony required (OurKids.net, 2018; Mackay & Firmin, 2008). Males were hired to teach, and in the case of boarding schools—as many schools were—to supervise, and to live on campus, and to provide a quasi-familial environment for these childrens’ formative years. Teachers were “masters,” boarding house directors were “housemaster,” and head teacher, or principals were “headmaster,” terms which underline the patriarchal origins of these schools. Maxwell & Maxwell (1995) refer to this environment as one that made “the student a position of focal concern” where “more is done for the student than is measured in academic performance” (p. 315). In addition to housing and board, these schools encouraged a “social reproduction” of values, passing from generation to generation ways of knowing and acting that reaffirmed the dominant roles of certain groups. Women teachers were added to this context in later years, with a significant influx arriving in the latter twentieth century to correspond with the admission of girls to these schools. From 1962-1993, “23 single-sex CAIS schools became coeducational and of these, 14 were boys’ schools that added girls” (Maxwell & Maxwell, 1995, p. 318). It was 2000 before the first woman became head of a coeducational school. Now, several more women are leading CAIS coeducational schools. As of June 2017, 11 CAIS schools saw new heads, 8 of them women (CAIS, 2018), and while these seem “record” numbers and suggest significant improvement in the last two years, included in these statistics are those leading religious and single-gender girls’ schools, not the coeducational schools that are the focus of this study.
2.3 Structural Barriers

The reasons for women’s poor representation in the corridors of power are multifaceted and complex. The barriers are historical, societal, organizational, familial, and even personal. Recognizing the common barriers will enable women to employ facilitators, or what Shakeshaft (1989) calls “change strategies” that might mitigate or remove such barriers:

Change strategies are formulated based both on the barriers that exist and on the causes of these barriers. For instance, if a person believes that women’s own efforts are the cause of barriers and also, that lack of networks is a barrier, she or he would tell the woman to build a network…if lack of networks is believed to be a barrier, but the cause of this barrier is believed to be male hegemony, then strategies for building those networks would be quite different and more wide-ranging… (p.125).

Shakeshaft illustrates that barriers to women’s success may appear superficial in some cases, but are often part of a broader hegemonic patriarchal cultural foundation.

![Fig. 2: Barriers to Women’s Success](image-url)
2.3.1 Societal Barriers

The dominant values of a society permeate all constructs within that society from its organizations, through to family units, individuals, and genders. Institutional context plays a significant role in leadership development (Woodhouse and Pedder, 2017). Thus, “structural, societal obstacles” delay or prevent women’s advancement in educational leadership” (Ozga, 1993, p.3). The most structural of all metaphors, the “glass-ceiling” literally describes a structural barrier. Proverbial or not, it was coined by Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) to describe the experience of career-focused women stumbling up against invisible obstacles as they seemed poised to enter top corporate jobs. “It is glass, and so it is invisible, at least to some--more often than not, those who buy into the liberal ideal that everyone will be able to compete on an equal footing for what the world of work has to offer” (Ryan, Pollock, Antonelli 2009, p. 608). While the term continues to part of the discourse, it is not an accurate reflection of the current context as some women do achieve these roles, rendering this metaphorical barrier no longer impenetrable. Some scholars contend that the ceiling, while still there, has risen a few notches in height (Cabrera, 2007, p.220), thereby affording more room for women near the top, but still keeping them beneath it. Others believe that since women are now attaining the corner office, such “barrier” metaphors are defunct (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Bartol (1978) coined the phrase the “sex structuring of organisations” to explain that “the higher the level of the organization, the fewer women are found” (in Powell 2012, p. 121). And Wajcman (1998) blamed organizations inability to move beyond traditional sex-role patterns for the limited advancement of women in the workplace (in Broadbridge, 2008, p. 1228). This is echoed by Chamorro-Premuzic (2019) who contends that “it’s often the incompetent, overconfident candidates —most of them men—who get ahead” (https://hbr.org/ideacast/2019/03/why-are-we-still-promoting-incompetent-men) because our paradigm for leadership associates confidence and charisma with leadership. Powell (2012) and Byrne and Neuman (1992) explain women’s limited rise by referencing the similarity-attraction paradigm which concludes that people like others who resemble themselves and are more likely to promote those with similar appearance and traits (Powell, 2012, p. 122). This concept helps to explain why women often in leadership are poorly represented, why they are often excluded from “old boys” networks, and why they lack the connections to facilitate career advancement. Those women who do arrive in the executive suites tend to be central in mixed-gender networks, and have an inner circle of closely connected female contacts who might help them with the inside scoop, information that could help them through structural challenges, according to Uzzi (2019, https://hbr.org/2019/02/research-men-and-women-need-different-
kinds-of-networks-to-succeed). Moreover, “lower-level female managers have fewer role models” and have fewer available mentors because of the rarity of women in the corridors of power (Ozga, 1993 p.7).

2.3.2 Organizational Politics

In Women in Education Administration Shakeshaft (1989) contends that discrimination in educational administration is systemic and a result of both historical patterns of gender bias and male-centred discourses. Almost two decades later, April, Dreyer & Blass (2007) reach similar conclusions, suggesting that “the work environment determines [women workers] fate more than their own traits, skill or behavior”. Thomas Greenfield (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993) viewed the organization as a “social invention of its members”, a “moral order” of those with power imposing their values on those with less power (in Young, 1994, p. 353), while others believe it is a space where “underlying ideology, values, beliefs, assumptions, norms, and social practices are revealed in the structures, processes, and practices” (Tierney, 1988, 1991, 1993 in Safarik, 2002, p. 1721). Certainly, embedded within organizations are subtle innuendos, images, valuings and languages. Feminist scholars contend that these “subtleties” often exclude women by valuing dominant ‘masculinist’ images of leadership and administration. Singh and Terjesen (2008) found that many work environments are constructed “by men and for men” (p.56). Gendered by design, they naturally fail to take into account the needs of women, such as leaves for parenting, or the slow-pace of change in domestic matters. Orenstein (2000), refers to this reality for women as the “half-changed” world (p. 208); Gerson (2010) calls it the “unfinished revolution.” In fact, as Broadbridge (2008) asserts, “Where promotion systems work in a gender biased way, it is expected that career paths for corporate leaders are to be unbroken” (p.1228).

2.3.2.1 Leadership Paths

Eagly and Carli (2007) compare women’s quest for leadership to finding a pathway through a labyrinth; it is a path of twists and turns where the finish is often obscured, laboured, and distant. Ozga (1993) noticed this path two decades earlier, describing career progression for women in educational administration as “circuitous”, and, “a combination of accident and design” (p. 1). She continues, “[women’s career] accounts stress barriers, roundabout routes, horizontal ‘career’ routes, choices, pressures, problems. They also reveal strengths, and ways of doing things that are more likely to be characteristic of women than of men” (p.2). Ozga’s summary implies that such models of career
progression, borne out of lengthy struggles up the proverbial career ladder, may illustrate differences in women’s approaches to these roles.

Another relevant metaphor is the pipeline (Ryan, Pollock, Antonelli, 2009); visually, it is a long tube designed to channel fluids over distance, or a metaphor used to describe a linear process through which substances flow steadily. The often-used metaphor is intended to explain that personnel are in place and what begins in one place will eventually empty into another. In the independent school context, we are accustomed to hearing that more women are entering leadership positions. According to this metaphor then, they are in the pipeline and should eventually “spill out”, towards Headship jobs around the country. But as Ryan, Pollock, Antonelli (2009), contend, there are problems with this metaphor, the first being that “pipelines do not always work - they sometimes leak” (p. 601). If the process of women becoming leaders in the independent schools was simply a matter of being in the pipeline long enough to get to the destination and negotiating the occasional leak, then logically, many women leaders should be “tumbling” out soon. It could be that the pipeline is selectively leaky as Ryan et al., (2009) contend. More research is needed to determine why qualified women are not exiting the pipeline at the expected destination.

The bottleneck metaphor (Ryan, Pollock, Antonelli, 2009), first developed by Jimenez (2003), implies that there are plenty of candidates who are not filling positions because of a blockage near the top. To mix metaphors a little, this means that women leaders are in the pipeline, have negotiated the leaks, are poised to exit but are stuck in the glut and will simply have to wait their turn. While this may be an apt description for the independent school situation, leadership studies reveal that women fall behind from the start, and never catch up, suggesting that while the pipeline may be blocked at the top, women are slower to enter it and move slower through it. According to “Women in the Workplace,” a study by McKinsey (2017), in corporate spaces, from the outset, women are less likely to be hired than men, and “at every subsequent step, the representation of women further declines” amounting to “one in five C-suite leaders is a woman” https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2017. This report contends that “progress [towards executive leadership] may be stalling.” In the independent school context in Canada, there is a need to determine the experiences of qualified women entering, and in the pipeline.
Career paths may be enhanced through early success and timely challenges. Merton (1968) coined the term “the Matthew Effect” to describe the career benefits of early promotion (Gladwell, 2009); it references a Biblical parable to argue how success early in one’s career leads to more success, and often results in steep vertical career trajectories. Women are less likely to enter leadership, and less likely to apply for promotions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kay & Shipman, 2016; Sandberg, 2013) minimizing their likelihood of experiencing the Matthew Effect. Adding to this, recent findings from the Genome Project, a 10-year longitudinal study of 17,000 people in C-Suite roles by Botelho and Rosenkoetter Powell (2018) suggest that promotional risks can be “career catapults,” moves characterized by challenges just beyond their skill set that enable them to ascend to the pinnacle in faster than average time. Of these “sprinters” (Bothelo & Rosenkoetter Powell, 2018), 97% of them had at least one catapult, while over 50% had made two or more.

2.3.3 Familial barriers

Pursuing the top job in an independent school in Canada will almost always require relocation at some point, if not several times throughout this climb. This is a barrier for women, and sometimes for men too. For one, there are a limited number of positions available. Moreover, search committees value experience in a variety of schools, and these are geographically spread out. (Relocating for a leadership position does not guarantee any permanence in the role, or any other role for that matter). Mobility can facilitate career advancement, but women are less likely to move to pursue a promotion. Women tend to prioritize the impact of the job on the family and are more likely to move for their spouse’s role than to take on a role that requires her spouse to move for her own career ambitions (Cabrera, 2010, p. 222, CAIS, 2012; Powell and Mainiero, 1992). Additionally, as the top job is often isolating, moving can compound the isolation, as one is compelled to redefine relationships with colleagues, leave relationships that are “psychologically sustaining,” (Scott, 1997, p.12), and further meld into the role itself by being “on all the time,” (Hertneky, 2010, p.4).

Time is a barrier and can have a significant effect on women in leadership. The barrier is two-fold. It encompasses the time it takes a woman to reach her destination, but also, the perception of time, that is, the belief that with greater responsibility comes greater sacrifice of personal/family time. Advancing in school administration takes time; and it takes more time for women. While the research was performed 30 years ago, Shakeshaft (1989) found that on average men advanced to the principalship after 5 years of teaching. Women, on the other hand, took an average of 15 years to reach the same
position because of personal and professional barriers. She found that “For all women, the higher the position they hold, the older they are” (p.58). Women in leadership tend to be 40+, first born or only children, and more likely than men in similar roles to be divorced (Shakeshaft, 1989, p.58; Ozga, 1993). Shakeshaft continues, “Women at all levels of educational administration are older than men in similar positions…and more likely to have been a teacher for a longer period of time” (Shakeshaft, p.61-62). In independent schools context where forward-propulsion courses such as the Principal’s Qualification Program (PQP) that identify leaders as having the requisite qualifications to be Head have not existed until very recently, distinguishing oneself was done through on-the-job performance, and this could hasten, or hinder her promotion. The longer it takes women to reach the top, the more stamina may be required to persist in this upwards trajectory, and thus, the more likely attrition will set in and they will plateau or give up the fight.

Blair-Loy’s (2003) work on dual-roles of working mothers introduces the concept of “schemas of devotion” (p. 9). These are value-laden prioritizations such as work and family that involve “emotionally salient, moral definitions of what it means to be a good worker and a good parent” (p.177-178). In the post-second wave feminist context of the ‘supermom’, they often involve working mothers who value intensive parenting (Hays 1996; 1998), an ideology defined as “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour intensive, and financially expensive” (Hays, 1996, p.8). Juxtaposed with a working world that has become more demanding (Blair-Loy, 2003; Williams, 2001; Zeng et al, 2018), and increasingly less discrete in location and hours, and the bleed into the private world is complete. Among educated, white western women, there is tension and ‘contradictions’ (Hays, 1996) between these competing roles. For working mothers in leadership, growing as a leader in this context is physically and psychologically stressful.

Leading in an independent school requires greater school “devotion.” Generally, the number of evening and weekend commitments increases proportionally with position of responsibility. It follows then that those in leadership roles will be more present on campus, and will be investing more time in the school commensurate with their advanced position in the school hierarchy. The Head of School, the ultimate role, will be expected to be visible and accessible to students, faculty, and parents, and to show support for events ranging from sports fixtures to speaking contests, charity fundraisers, honour roll celebrations—many of which take place outside the school day. There is little time in most weeks for concerns of a personal or family nature. Thus, it will be important to determine if—as it seems here—the
barriers increase in number or weight with each promotion. In a 1997 study of leaders in American independent schools, women’s concerns about becoming a Head of School differed from men’s. For instance, women were five times as likely to respond with “I don’t know” to the question, “Do you want to be a head of school”, and they differed in their perceptions of the challenges of the job too (Scott, 1997, p.7). Women’s top five concerns were (in descending order): 1) Lack of personal time, 2) being a figurehead versus being myself, 3) lack of time with family, 4) overwhelming nature of job, 5) isolation/alienating faculty and students. Interestingly, men listed: 1) lack of time with family, 2) lack of personal time, 3) stress, 4) isolation/alienating faculty and students, 5) conflict between board and school goals (Scott, 1997). Time is a complex factor and the ways to mitigate this barrier are multifaceted but may include ways to buffer personal/family time and providing supports to enable women to ascend to the Headship faster.

While there may be an argument to be made that women’s quest for leadership in an independent school is, much like her public school counterparts of decades past (Blackmore, 1992, Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ozga, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Young, 1994), a structural battle against systemic biases, it is important to clarify that in most cases, these biases are no longer overt; rather, they are comprised of a number of informal barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007) that stem from “unexamined assumptions about women’s career interests and capabilities and policies and practices that pervade the corporate culture” (Catalyst in Scott, 1997, p. 3). They lead to the normalization of gendered notions of leadership, unconscious of expectations and values that assume maleness (Vibert, 2019). When combined, this environment does little to facilitate the promotion of women.

2.3.4 Personal barriers

The socialization of people into gender roles from an early age leads to internalized beliefs and values about what can and cannot do, and what should and should not do. A 2019 report by Weissbourd and Making Caring Common finds that gender bias against female leadership starts early, and is detectable in adolescence with teen boys and girls preferring male leaders, and “some mothers preferring teen boys over teen girls as leaders” (p.1). These perceptions affect our capacities as individuals by limiting our self-actualization and that of others. Leadership identity offers a specific example. Much has been written about the difference between men and women’s leadership styles, and often the conclusion is that women are disadvantaged for not possessing stronger male traits, especially characteristics of agency and assertiveness (Blackmore, 1992, Eagly & Carli, 2007, Sandberg, 2013;
Shakeshaft, 1989). Identity scholars such as Eagly and Carli (2007) and Ely et al (2011) argue that to be successful, a woman leader must fit into a narrowing and pre-existing defined schema of a leader.

2.3.5 Leadership Identity

Leadership is constructed as a masculine paradigm, this vision of leadership socializes both women and men “to accept these stereotypes” (McBride-Stetson, 2004; McLaughlin, 2003 in Johnson, 2011, p.40) despite the reality that women will look, behave, and experience leadership differently from their male counterparts (Carter et al., 2010; Chase, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely et al., 2011; Hall, 1999; Marshall, 1993, p.5). Eagly and Carli (2007) refer to this as “role incongruity” or the “double bind”. It is as if women are “damned if they do, damned if they don’t”: discriminated against for being women, but criticized for being overly masculine or agentic when they try to imitate a man (p. 65). Judge and Cable (2011) build on this perception of identity. In a five-year study of American and German working women, the authors found that a woman’s weight can determine her remuneration, with very thin women rewarded considerably more than obese women, and noticeably more than average-sized women. Conversely, men are discriminated against for thinness (ibid).

While leadership continues to be defined in relatively old-fashioned terms, some believe women will need to develop agentic qualities such as confidence, assertiveness, and self-advocacy because “there is still a preference for managers with masculine characteristics” (Cross and Linehan 2006; Powell et al., 2002; Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002, in Safarik, 2002, p. 220). (Eagly & Carli, 2007, contend this is the “double bind”.) In interviews with 64 female executives in 51 American organizations, Zheng, Kark, & Meister (2018) found four paradoxes in leadership identity: demanding yet caring; authoritative yet participative; self-advocating but serving others; keeping distance but being approachable, reinforcing the contradictions, or double-bind, of women leaders (https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership?autocomplete=true). Moreover, competitiveness, a quality that is not only associated with leadership but also associated with men, becomes more pronounced when women choose not to display it. This barrier is a significant one and it is cultural. Overcoming it will require a reconceptualization of what leadership looks like, and that is facilitated by seeing women in these positions.

Additionally, there is what Kay and Shipman (2014) call “The Confidence Gap.” They cite evidence to suggest that “women put themselves forward for promotion less often than men” because of
a perceived climate of discrimination in educational administration combined with self-scrutiny (Ozga, 1993, p.7). Kay and Shipman (2014) show that women—more so than men, and often unfairly to themselves—tend to credit luck for their success. Sandberg (2013), perhaps unfairly to herself, credits it as a component of her rise.

Other theories portray women’s career patterns less as trajectories determined by structural forces and more as paths shaped of their own making, driven by character and freedom of choice. Singh, Kumra and Vinnicombe (2002) contend that women hinder their own promotion in two ways: by not networking sufficiently or effectively, and by not advocating their career ambitions to influence makers (Broadbridge, 2008, p. 1228). Furthermore, Singh, Vinnicombe & James (2006) and Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe (2002) put forth that women are deficient in key agentic traits such as “ambition”, “influence” “assertiveness” and “confidence” and this deficit explains their lack of success in leadership (Broadbridge, 2008, p. 1239). Kay and Shipman (2014) support this. In “The Confidence Gap”, they explore the role of confidence in advancing women’s careers concluding that success is as much about confidence as about competence and women are lacking in it. They find that “compared with men, women don’t consider themselves as ready for promotions…and they generally underestimate their abilities”(p. 5). Moreover, women are less likely to take credit for their success, instead dismissing it as luck, or as a result of hard work (Sandberg, 2013, p. 30). This is likely a result of larger structural forces, that have conditioned women not to appear agentic, ambitious, or self-serving; nonetheless, Kay and Shipman’s insistence that women can identify and address this quality and remedy this skill gap in themselves, shifts their work towards the more agentic side of the spectrum. Among other factors, Sandberg (2013) explains the discrepancy in gender representation at the highest levels as partly due to “a leadership ambition gap” between men and women. She offers evidence that this exists at virtually every level of the career hierarchy—men are much more likely than women to consider themselves “ambitious” (p. 17). In fact, for women, the word “ambition” is itself emotionally laden (Fels, 2004) and “hated”, associated with “egotism, selfishness, self-aggrandizement, or the manipulative use of others for one’s own ends” (https://hbr.org/2004/04/do-women-lack-ambition). These contentions, which seem to offer women ways of resisting, are individual actions that negate the patriarchal hegemony organization and discourse in many societies, reinforcing that however agentic some solutions may be, they are limited by the larger social context. Men, on the other hand, claimed “ambition” to be a central part of their leadership identity (Fels, 2004). Perhaps not surprisingly then, men tend to experience success earlier (and for longer) than women.
2.3.5.1 Leaning In and Opting-Out

Sandberg (2013) acknowledges that structural barriers have long kept women out of the corner office, and blames mass media for reinforcing some of these, but believes women themselves have much to learn about succeeding in the workforce. In her bestselling manifesto, Lean In, Sandberg argues that change will come when women take it upon themselves to advance their careers. So long regulated to the periphery, they must “lean in” and claim a seat at the proverbial table, or “fake it until they make it” by asserting themselves, appearing confident in their roles, and illustrating their worth to their employers (Sandberg, 2013, 36-37). She extols the importance of mentorship in this process. Most agree mentorship is essential, and women tend to embrace mentorship at higher rates than men (Ibarra, Carter, et al., 2010). But mentorship is not enough (ibid). Sponsorship, that is, having the mentor—or another person—advocate and help place the candidate into key opportunities, makes all the difference (Ibarra, Ely, et al., 2013; Ibarra, Carter, et al, 2010; CAIS, 2018).

Cabrera (2007) and Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) suggest that women’s lack of advancement might have more to do with a value structure that prioritizes balance during child-rearing years and a tendency to “opt-out” of careers that lack flexibility. In other words, women are self-selecting (italics mine) out of leadership on their accord. Mainiero and Sullivan’s (2006) Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) puts forth that careers are like the fragments of coloured glass in kaleidoscopes; the shards are always present, but the patterns shift. There are only three pieces of glass representing three aspects of career: Balance, Challenge, and Authenticity. They suggest that the career patterns of men and women differ, with each gender prioritizing certain elements at certain stages in life. Men follow the Alpha Kaleidoscope model. This means in their early careers men seek challenge, in mid-career they seek authenticity, and in late career, they seek balance (Cabrera, 2007, p. 221). Women’s careers, not surprisingly, have a different shape with challenge being the priority in the early years, followed by balance, and later, authenticity (ibid, p. 222;). Sandberg (2013) found that “in comparison to their male counterparts, highly trained women are scaling back and dropping out of the workforce in high numbers” and these diverging percentages teach institutions and mentors to invest more in men who are statistically more likely to stay (p. 16). Belkin (2003) termed this the “opt-out revolution” (p.1). One must question whether this “revolution” is empowering to women. Are they leaving on their own accord, and not simply because they are frustrated with the system? Adding to the evidence that leadership is both constructed and socialized early, a study by Smith (2015) of student-teachers in the
United Kingdom discovered that men claimed to have principal ambitions, while “the majority of women did not consider headship to be a career option for them” (Woodhouse & Pedder, p.554). This confirms Smith’s earlier findings (2011) in which 28 of 30 female teachers would not pursue a headship on account of their perception of values “incongruent” to their own. Woodhouse and Pedder (2017) cite Smith’s work and consider solutions, asking “what schools and teacher educators might need to do to engage novice teachers in thinking about the full range of career options open to them, from the start of their careers” (p. 554).

To extrapolate on Mainiero and Sullivan’s KCM Theory and Belkin’s Opt-Out argument, women in independent school leadership may not be in a hurry to assume a Headship, and their career paths may be circuitous by choice. There will be a cost to this: postponing leadership postpones greater success, and in turn, greater financial reward, while doing little to increase the numbers of women leading these schools. Perhaps more needs to be done to support women during these pre-headship years so that choosing between family and promotion is a less of a Hobson’s Choice. Otherwise, we will wait years longer to see how women redefine leadership.

2.4 Strategies

Strategy, “a careful plan or method, a clever stratagem toward a goal” (Merriam-webster.com) enables women in leadership positions to advance. Strategies include both professional or work-related strategies and personal and family strategies. In Canada, few women have succeeded to the highest ranks of independent school leadership. Thus, not much is known about what strategies propel a woman’s climb to this position. Gaining access to women who are currently Heads of School in co-educational schools, will help discern how much power a woman herself has in designing her trajectory.

The strategies needed to ascend the corporate ladder are numerous. Strategies offer a roadmap of what to do to attain a goal; they do not offer support. Facilitating agents are often needed to make them effective. Facilitators are defined as items or factors designed “to make [experiences] easier or less difficult; [to] help forward, [and to] assist the progress of”. For example, one can be given the knowledge of how to advance in leadership, but without the means to do so—financial support, time-release, professional trust, as just a few examples--each step on this road could be uncomfortable, even treacherous, and little advancement might happen. Strategies might remain constant, but the facilitating agents will vary by woman, position of responsibility, and school context. Women are different and will
have different needs. For example, a single woman entering a leadership role for the first time will have
different needs than an experienced leader who is rearing children. And, the supports one needs in early
leadership may be different from those needed in senior leadership, and again, in the Headship. It will be
important to learn how they change during the ascent. Thus, strategies are essential, but not sufficient.
Facilitators are necessary to take advantage of these strategies.

2.4.1 Strategize Career

Research suggests that the following five strategies facilitate women’s career advancement. The
first is being purposefully strategic about one’s career, seizing opportunities, and courting visibility.
Studies suggest that consulting a career strategist is often a first step to making this happen. This may
overcome one of the biggest challenges to women’s career advancement which is the “lack of career
guidance” (Kekelis et al., 2005, p. 49; Woodhouse and Pedder; 2017, p.554). Women are less likely to
strategize than men. A facilitating agent, therefore, might be making managers and those in positions of
power (such as current heads of school or human resource managers) aware of their desire for promotion
(Sandberg, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 137). Another might be receiving an encouragement or
metaphorical tap on the shoulder to enter and/or advance in administration. How many of the women
currently in leadership have been explicitly encouraged to advance into administration? How does this
affect their career confidence henceforth? Perhaps another facilitator is changing schools to expedite
career advancement?

2.4.2 Develop Capacity

The second strategy is developing one’s capacity and skill through enriching one’s credentials.
Whether academic, professional, or athletic, a commitment to improve one’s skill base shows a
propensity to continuous learning and, in many cases, showcases one’s time-management skills. And, in
times of increasingly uncertain geopolitical, economic, and employment terrain, “The ability to learn is
the most important quality a leader can have” (Sandberg, 2013). While this implies enhancing learning
through professional development, it is not limited to that. In fact, Shakeshaft (1989), Ozga (1993),
Flemming and Nelson (2007), Allen (2007) and Sandberg (2013) tout the critical place of women-
centred or women-only organizational supports and programs for promotion. These include leadership
training geared to women, internships or interim roles and simulated leadership experiences. They
believe that the best women’s leadership training should “adequately address the organizational realities
women face” while also “foster in participants a sustained capacity for leadership” (Ely et al., 2011, p. 475). Ely et al. (2011) see leadership work as identity work, and thus, argue that supports be focused on developing the whole person and helping her define and redefine herself so she can thrive in her environment. After all, studies show that being promoted is one success; staying securely in the new role is another. Morahan et al. (2011) point out that “women in leadership roles may be more vulnerable and less likely to achieve sustained leadership success than men with comparable professional experience” (DeFranke-Cole et al. 2014, p. 52). Once women get into these roles, what facilitators help them remain there? How might schools facilitate women enriching their credentials? Facilitating agents might be financial subsidy or time-release.

2.4.3 Perform Exemplarily

The third strategy is performing one’s role with excellence, beyond the job’s expectations. In a survey of women in university and college administration, Matijevic (2005) found that one of the most important strategies to their promotion was consistently excelling in each previous role. Such habits combine to build a reputation for outstanding work. Building a reputation for excellence, however, does not necessary imbue women with the confidence to move up the ladder. Facilitators, such as the metaphorical “tap on the shoulder” are sometimes necessary to propel women forward (Singh, Kumra, Vinnicombe, 2002). This could be a critical difference for women as studies show women are less likely than lesser or equally qualified men to apply for promotions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kay & Shipman; Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018; Sandberg, 2013). While some could argue this is as much about chance as it is about being visible, the old adage that “you have to be good to be lucky” seems apt as one is unlikely to be encouraged to apply for a role if he/she does not stand out. However, Turban, Freeman, and Waber (2017) found that this is not enough. They tracked 100 employees over a four month period at a large multinational company, using sociometric badges, to monitor interpersonal interactions (to reduce the unreliability of self-assessment of behavior) and through measures of movement, proximity, and speech, in addition to data collected through emails and meetings, they measured gender differences in behavior against outcomes. They found that gender inequity at the leadership level could not be explained through performance differences or behavior, but rather through bias. That is, when performance reviews were the same, men were more likely to receive the promotion.
2.4.4 Cultivate Professional Relationships

The fourth strategy is cultivating professional relationships. These include emotionally supportive friendships in the organization and professional alliances with like-minded, or trustworthy colleagues. Such relationships offer opportunities for creativity, problem-solving, and small-group vetting of ideas in a safe and controlled setting before larger organizational awareness. The other important aspect of relationship is mentorships. Research shows that women in higher education administration benefit from mentorship (Patti, Holzer, Stern, & Brackett, 2012, p. 264). Women benefit from seeing other women in leadership as researchers point out “the appointment of women to senior posts acts as a powerful stimulus for more women to apply” (Edson, 1981; Pitner, 1981 in Ozga, 1993, p. 9; Sandberg, 2013). And, as DeFranke-Cole et al. (2014) summarize, “having a mentor gives a mentee more skills” (Chopin, Danish, Seers, & Cook, 2013; Madsen, 2008) and they “pay off not just in better performance but also in increased job satisfaction and decreased turnover” (Goleman, 2010, p. 143). Moreover, Slavenski (2007) shows that “Companies that provide mentoring to their high-achieving employees produced annual returns greater than 10% over a 10 year period in contrast to companies that did not provide such mentoring who produced 1% over the same period” (in Bradley, 2010, p. 35). The majority of independent schools in CAIS are not profit-driven enterprises, thus the financial statistics are somewhat irrelevant; however, such exponentials could provide a valuable comment on the efficacy and success of mentoring high-performing employees. Facilitating factors would be schools that support mentorship programs and provide time-release, financial sponsorship, professional support, and program oversight to ensure mentor-mentee relationships are optimized.

2.4.5 Protect Personal Life

In addition to workplace strategies, women in independent school leadership may need a fifth strategy—a way to ensure the continuation of a vital personal/family life. The separation of work strategies and non-work strategy seems artificial, as a personal life, albeit in different manifestations by life-stage, accompanies women (and men) through all aspects of their careers. This separation is even more challenging in a boarding school, especially for faculty who live on campus. These strategies likely begin with the woman herself recognizing that securing her personal life will enable her to focus on her work, in a Maslovian sort of way with self-care being an important foundation for leadership. Facilitators that enhance this balance may come from the organization itself, in the form of programming, scheduling, or philosophical support. They are necessary because the workday of an
independent school teacher and administrator can vary considerably from that of her public school counterpart. Unions regulating working hours, working conditions, meeting times, and prep times are virtually non-existent, and in schools with a boarding component, faculty workdays can stretch well into the evening. This presents a particular challenge for faculty with children; and, faculty in leadership roles often have more evening and weekend commitments. As “family responsibilities affect women in administration more than men” devising ways to balance work expectations and family needs is essential to finding balance and can also affect performance. Mok Kim Man et al (2009) found that “If organisational support to balance professional and domestic responsibilities is nonexistent; a woman's career advancement can be negatively impacted” (p. 24). Perhaps it is not surprising that research shows that female administrators are likely to be single, divorced, or have grown children. The few who have school-aged children tend to have a “full time nanny or family member who looks after children” (p. 112).

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Women are entering the leadership climb in independent schools in growing numbers and there are a proportion of women who have significant leadership experience but who are not Heads (CAIS, 2013; 2018). According to CAIS, there is an appetite for change at the top (CAIS, 2012). This is consistent with broader workforce trends where a greater percentage of women are entering and reaching middle management positions (what I term junior and middle leadership) but there has been little increase in the proportion reaching senior management (April et al., 2007; Kiaye and Singh, 2013; Maume, 2004; Powell and Graves, 2003), a phenomenon Slaughter (2013) terms “the great stall.” Why are women candidates not advancing further? My conceptual framework was designed to look at the processes of women’s careers as they enter and advance in school leadership. This process is a relationship that “evolve[s] as a dialectical interplay between person and organization over time” (Buzanell and Goldzwig, 1991, p.467; Derr & Laurent, 1989). In particular, what happens between the time women move from full-time teaching roles into formal positions of administrative or leadership responsibility, those that necessitate “at least a partial departure from the classroom and instruction”; roles that “ha[ve] changed [their] relationship with other teachers” and involve “increased visibility and schedule flexibility?” (Ortiz, 1982, p. 64; Shakeshaft, 1989, p.68). Examples often include (but may not be limited to) curriculum leaders, department heads, school/program directors, and assistant heads, or as I term these, junior, middle, and senior leadership roles.
My conceptual framework is based on a climb, and is designed to answer the following question: What is the process by which women faculty in independent schools enter and advance in school leadership? It is informed by Giddens’ (1976) structuration theory which attempts to explain the degree to which “structures are constituted through action, and reciprocally how action is constituted structurally” (Giddens, 1976a: p. 161). Acknowledging that there is a goal in sight and a most direct route, women’s career progressions in independent schools can be understood as an interplay between individual and organization with a number of salient confounding factors like larger gender discourses and practices within society. While originally conceived as a mountain, this metaphor failed to show the change within organizations as mountains are stable. Another Canadian metaphor, might be more apt: a snow pile. Like the organization itself, it is pyramidal, organic and malleable. Thus, as women climb the snowy hill, they leave impressions in the snow, gradually reshaping the structure. In turn, the malleability of the structure reshapes them too, altering their (organizationl) behavior. In Giddens’ social view, structures not only limit human agency but enable it (Bryant & Jary, 2014, p. 7) accounting for a reciprocity between structure and agency, or institutions and humans.

The climb is the process of promotion; barriers, strategies, and organizational facilitators exist. The upwards trajectory is a barrier; it becomes an increasingly challenging environment with every step, time becomes a concern, and there are fewer people ahead to assist. The climber employs professional or personal (often both) strategies to find the best route, preparing herself for the climb, choosing her steps thoughtfully, carving her identity in the snow. Facilitators such as crampons, flags, signposts, and water can smooth the ascent, contributing significantly to the climber’s success. Like most career metaphors, the hill of snow focuses on forwards or upward motion and uses a journey motif such as “tenure track,” or “ladder” (Buzzanell and Goldzwig, 1991). (Some argue even these are gendered as hierarchical models reflect a working world of individualism and patriarchy).

The climb is a process that is inherently upwards, but one in which fewer women than men actually arrive at the summit. There are forces helping them up, and others working against them. It can be linear but most often involves some circuitous routes, lateral motion, and occasionally, a regression, in order to continue. Some climbers may choose to stop half-way, or to take a time-out. Those wanting to summit must trust their experience, gauge their position, and consider their ambition and energy level
to give themselves the best chance. This is the parallel with the woman in independent school leadership; she must believe in her own capacity, consider the time it has taken her to advance to her current position—and the time she is willing to invest to continue—and understand the ascents and pitfalls of this environment to minimize its volatility (see Fig. 3)

Fig. 3: Women’s Paths to Independent School Leadership

This climber metaphor is also inspired by the work of Ozga (1993) and Sandberg (2013). Each studies the process of career advancement for women, and each illustrates her findings in similar language. For example, Ozga (1993) explains that for reasons ranging from child-bearing to second-generation gender bias, “women often do not have access to the unilinear career progression open to men” (p. 1; Terjesen & Singh, 2008). Their careers tend to be characterized by “barriers, roundabout routes, horizontal ‘career’ routes, choices, pressures, problems” (Ozga, 1993). Sandberg (2013) describes women’s career paths not as ladders but as jungle gyms “offer[ing] more creative exploration…with occasional dips, detours, and even dead ends” (p.52). Women’s career paths are
different than men’s. But, “they also reveal strengths, and ways of doing things uncharacteristically” (Ozga, 1993, p.2).

Examining these “uncharacteristic” elements and determining what these paths look like is essential to understanding the experience of women’s quest for headships. Moreover, these paths will illuminate the context in which they occur, illustrating any strategies employed and barriers faced, and ultimately, providing insight to help correct the gender imbalance at the top. Unlike the steep linear ascension of the “Matthew Effect”, the phenomenon that early success breeds greater success, women’s careers in independent school leadership may be more likely to be characterized as slow steady progressions with years of plateau, the occasional curve upwards or downwards, rest-stop, crevasses, and for those who succeed in achieving the top job, a final difficult, upward trajectory.

If climbing the mountain is one challenge; staying on top is another. There is evidence that many first time heads fail to survive their first five years (CAIS, 2008). It makes sense that the mountain is more conducive to male climbers than to women, simply because there have been more of them. The footfalls of men’s shoes are not going to fit most women because they are different in shape. Women will not stand solidly or resist turbulence. The setting of this position does not accommodate difference in those occupying this space. Therefore, if women are to summit and stay atop, they will need strong support systems that help buttress and strengthen this foothold. The “bootroute” as it’s imprinted now, is not an easy fit (See Fig. 4.)

![Fig. 4. The Routes of Men And Women in Leadership](image)
2.6 Summary

The history of educational administration in public and independent schools in Canada provides essential context for a study of women’s career paths in school leadership today. Hegemonic patterns that reinforced gender hierarchies from old world to new, and throughout institutions permeated public and independent schools too, a phenomenon that helps to explain how biased modes of thinking can reproduce social orders and exist within organizations. That many independent schools today began as boys’ only schools suggests that patriarchal traditions are deep, but also, that in welcoming girls, these schools may be addressing these issues concurrently. Structural barriers to women’s advancement in leadership in independent schools include societal barriers such as school history, tradition, expectations, and discourses. These invisible barriers help explain women’s leadership trajectories; familial barriers show women’s reluctance to move for promotional reasons, and the added responsibilities of mothers, many of whom shirk serious leadership goals until later age. Personal barriers include the early and reinforced gendered beliefs and values of women (and men) such as those that affect leadership identity, confidence, and career expectations and patterning. Strategies for advancing in leadership have been explored through corporate and educational literature. These include planning and strategizing career moves, developing and enriching capacity, performing with excellence, cultivating professional networks and protecting personal life and time. This chapter also introduces a conceptual framework based on Giddens’ theory of structuration and the interplay between individual and organization. It is designed to show the upwards trajectory of women in independent school administration, the challenges to her ascent, especially at certain stages, the strategies, and the impact of well-chosen and timely facilitators. It reinforces the influence of women and organization on each other, the organic and dynamic nature of this relationship, and the potential for change. Moreover, it illustrates that the routes of women and men often differ and that following in men’s boots is not, for many women, a perfect fit, suggesting that greater supports are needed to achieve equity in at the summit of independent school leadership.
3. Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter offers a detailed description of the methodological approach to this study of women in independent schools in Canada, and builds on the foundation literature and the gap identified in chapters 1 and 2. The chapter addresses the design of the research, sample selection and recruitment process, the approach to data collection and data analysis, and concludes with a close look at ethical considerations. I designed my research to take place in three stages. While these were conceived to be relatively independent phases of data collection, by design, they were intended to be developmental too; insights emerging from one stage helped to inform the next stage, ensuring that a comprehensive collection occurred. Data collection was primarily qualitative in nature with semi-structured interviews providing rich data about participants’ perceptions. A survey to 44 coeducational middle and secondary schools would complement this deep dive into participants’ perceptions by offering a statistical baseline of the current reality of women in leadership in independent schools.

3.1 Data Collection

The foundation for this exploratory sequential study were qualitative methods because by design, they offer an opportunity to explore experience and make meaning, two elements that are key to perception. They enable an exploration of the perceptions of each participant and validate her truth, enriching understanding of her career experience. As Kvale (1996) details, “the very virtue of qualitative interviews is their openness”, and as they intertwine “the conversational, the narrative, the linguistic, the contextual, and the inter-relational nature of knowledge” they offer a space for interviewer and interviewee to discuss a topic of mutual interest, while framing the understanding of such topic through word choice, intonation, personal experience and environment (p. 42). Glesne (2006) adds that qualitative interviews offer “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanation of what you do see” (p. 81), often gifting “serendipitous learnings that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse” evoked by questions (ibid). The semi-structured interview instrument, described by Merriam (2009) as “a conversation with a purpose,” created a comfortable environment between researcher and participant which was important to fostering trust, enhancing listening, and probing for understanding (Glesne, 2006; van Teijlingen, 2014). A series of questions were set in advance, and served as prompts to elicit specific, purposeful data from each participant.
These questions were administered in a flexible order (Merriam, 2009) depending on the participant and the organic flow of the conversation, giving me the flexibility to add follow-up questions and probe further. Much care was taken to develop a comfortable, conversational tone such as beginning with gentle inquiries about the school year so far, and pending holiday time, and softball questions such as those about current role, years at current school, and reasons for entering leadership. As each woman’s experience in independent school leadership was largely based on the context in which she worked, the semi-structured interview provided a framework for exploring the relationships between participant and school, and perception and discourse, for making what was hidden in histories, thoughts, beliefs, and experiences, visible (Booth; 2008; Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2006; Merriam, 2009). In most cases, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face, or via a face-to-face VOIP which offered another insight through observations of respondents non-verbal behavior.

I believed that the data needed to answer my questions required quantitative and qualitative approaches as these seemingly contrasting methods “lend themselves to different kinds of rhetoric and offer different information”, but “are not antithetical” (Gusfield, 1976; House, 1979, in Firestone, 1987, p.3). The survey design was intended to offer “a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p.296) and designed to elicit quantifiable responses. In this case, it was administered to be cross-sectional or, collected at “one place in time” (ibid, p.203) thereby acquiring a snapshot of the phenomena in 2016. I followed Dillman’s (2011) three phrase process with survey administration: introductory letter, survey, and follow-up

3.1.1 Stage One: Contextualizing The Issue

Stage One involved semi-structured interviews with executives at CAIS, and at CIS Ontario, the national, and provincial independent school associations, respectively and two educational recruiters. These were four participants whose understanding of women’s career paths in independent schools was informed by their administrative role, not necessarily their personal experience. Each had breadth of understanding, knew many schools, and could comment on commonalities and differences between them. As such, their viewpoints are different and likely more detached than those of the women leaders attached to one particular school (whose interviews comprise Stage Three.)
In Stage One, I sought the contributions of “Alexandra”, an executive at the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS) and chose to interview her before all other participants. I anticipated her insights into a wide array and number of independent schools would help me to establish a broader view of programming and human resource issues (Appendix B). Her responses helped to frame Stage Three interview questions by highlighting current issues and trends in CAIS schools. Alexandra’s perspective was complemented by Isabel, a later addition the study. Isabel was an executive at CIS Ontario, and a later, but most welcome, addition to my participant list, supplementing the administrative viewpoint, and offering a closer view of provincial independent schools. While she has worked in senior leadership in Ontario independent schools, I have categorized her interview under Stage One because she was speaking as a leader at CIS Ontario, a role similar to that of the CAIS executive. I knew “Alexandra” and “Isabel” professionally through collegial networks and both were highly accomplished, respected leaders. Both were women who had attained leadership roles in independent schools prior to leading these administrative organizations. I sought a panoramic view of independent schools and gender parity, and hoped Alexandra’s perspective might help me frame my interviews with teachers in positions of responsibility planned for Stage Three.

Next, I emailed three educational recruiters whose names I knew from publicized job searches (Appendix C). While one declined to participate due her perceived conflict of interest concerns, two, “Cecilia” and “George,” made themselves available. Each had led Head of School searches and had extensive experience with recruiting the “right” candidate for an organization. They differed in their experience with independent school recruiting, however. Cecilia was well known in independent school circles, having worked extensively with hiring committees and candidates for decades throughout Canada. George, a recipient of an independent school education, was also an experienced recruiter. But, in addition to being a different gender, he differed from Cecilia because he had developed his craft as a recruiter in business, specifically, pharmacology and sciences, and recently, had branched out to work with independent schools. George’s work was focused on Quebec and Ontario markets, and thus, his contributions, make up the eastern-most information. Cecilia and George’s roles were unique: their work made them liaisons between hiring committee and candidate, and I anticipated they would identify hard and soft qualifications needed to compete for Head of School positions, and, offer a different perspective from that of the leadership contenders.
Each participant was emailed a request to participate in my study from my University of Toronto email account (Appendix C) with essential information about the study including its purpose, projected timelines, the time commitment I sought for the interview, and an offer to speak in person, by phone, or by SKYPE to learn more before committing (Appendix I). My university affiliation allowed me to distance myself from my school and my professional association with any prospective participant, an important detail designed to provide greater assurance of confidentiality, and acknowledge my awareness of their need for comfort and discretion when speaking about personal and professional experiences. I then set up a mutually agreeable time for each interview, and which for reasons of geography, each was conducted on Skype.

To this email was attached a formal letter on OISE letterhead (Appendix J) outlining greater details of the study, including its phases, the supervisor with whom I was working, the promise of confidentiality and data security, and a declaration that the data was being collected for the purposes of a PhD study only, and while an executive summary would be made available to CAIS, no other attempts to publish this thesis in its entirety would be made.

I asked the association executives and the educational recruiters open-ended, broad questions designed to access the high-level view of promotional patterns in independent schools to which these participants may be privy. Questions included:

“What advice would you give a woman who wanted to be a head of school?”

“What role do stakeholders (parents, students, alumni, community) play in whether women become head of school?”

“Thinking of schools that have women heads, or several women in senior leadership positions, can you identify what these schools do to encourage this advancement?”

“In your opinion, what are the reasons for the low percentage of women leading independent schools?”

And,

“Thinking of schools that have women heads, or several women in senior leadership positions, can you identify what these schools do to encourage this advancement?” (Appendix B & D, J).
These questions were intended to illustrate the complexities of women in independent school leadership, in particular, the relationship between women and organization.

Interviews with Alexandra, Cecilia, and George all took place early in my data collection process, helped frame the study, and provided me with greater context when interviewing the teacher-leader participants (Stage Three) in later months. I had permission of the executives and the educational recruiters to record their interviews (Appendix A; Appendix J). I made this process clear to them by specifying it in the introductory letter (Appendix A; Appendix J) and reviewing this consent prior to beginning any interviews. For an overview of the study design, please see Fig. 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Stage</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Original Number</th>
<th>Revised Number</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1:</td>
<td>Qualitative, semi-structured interview</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CAIS Executive “Alexandra” &amp; CIS Ontario Executive “Isabel”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative, semi-structured interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Educational Recruiters “Cecilia” &amp; “George”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2:</td>
<td>Quantitative Survey</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>HR Departments/Head of School at CAIS schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3:</td>
<td>Qualitative, semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Women in positions of responsibility: (Entry, Middle, Senior leadership) Heads of School, former Heads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>survey + 15 interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5 Exploratory Sequential Qualitative Study

Legend
- CAIS and CIS interviews
- Educational Recruiters
- Women in leadership
3.1.2 Stage Two: Finding a Baseline

Stage Two was comprised of a short survey sent to Human Resource departments and/or Heads of School (or their designates) in CAIS schools (not all schools have HR departments or officers). My sample for Stage Two, drew on a different group. In this case, I sought the participation of 44 coeducational middle and high schools in CAIS, a smaller number than my initial estimate of 55 schools once my criteria for school-choice restricted elementary schools and religiously-affiliated schools. Through the CAIS website which lists and provides details of all member schools, I compiled an Excel spreadsheet of schools that fit my sample of coeducational, middle and secondary level CAIS member schools and the names of their respective Heads of School. There were 44 schools stretching across Canada that fit these criteria.

An introduction to me, the researcher, and the nature of the research, was offered with an email link to this survey. To uphold the highest ethical standards, I asked each school to consent to the study by actively opting-in, checking a box before beginning the survey. I sent the introduction to the survey and survey link in an email to CAIS administration to be sent to the Human Resources departments or (when applicable) Heads of School of the 44 schools from the CAIS office (See Appendix E) because I believed that having CAIS’ implied support would generate greater participation rates, especially amongst busy leaders. The survey link was sent twice to designated schools between May 20, and June 7, 2016. It was distributed again in early September, 2016 by a Head of School at a single-sex girls’ school, a professional who was not involved in the project but was aware of, and supported its goals. This survey was sent from CAIS’s administrative office with an introduction (written by me) about the researcher and the research, clearly distinguishing it as an academic study, and not a compulsory requirement from the national association (See Appendices E, F, G). Each school’s identity was protected by blindly (“bcc”) sending to all 44. Schools were informed that information they would offer will be used for academic study purposes and that an executive summary of this data would ultimately be shared with CAIS. Two weeks after the initial email, all school were sent a follow-up reminder with a survey link to encourage greater rate of participation. Moreover, to avoid identifying those who had or had not completed the survey and thereby, undermine confidentiality, the follow-up email was sent blindly to all schools.

The survey was designed through University of Toronto’s Survey Wizard and could be completed in 7-10 minutes to encourage response rates. It was comprised of 12 questions. Question 1
was a required consent opt-in to take the survey. In addition to offering details about my research in an introductory email (See Appendix E), I sought direct consent from each school by asking them to consent to participating study by checking a box before the survey commenced. This consent was embedded within the survey itself. For instance:

“I understand that all of the information that is collected will be kept in the strictest of confidences and that my name and the name of my school will not be used in any publication, and the information will be destroyed after five (5) years. I consent that the information gathered will be used to produce a dissertation of which the executive summary will be shared with CAIS for the purpose of raising awareness of this topic, improving representation of women in leadership, and positively contributing to healthier organizational cultures. I understand that once completed, a copy of the dissertation will be available in the University of Toronto’s TSpace research repository”

at https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944.

By checking this box, I consent to participate in this research

All schools were sent a follow-up email two weeks after the initial email with a survey link to remind those who had not completed it that they may still do so (Appendix H). For example, it read,

“Thank you to those schools who have completed this survey. If you have not had a chance to do so, would you kindly complete it by [X X 2015]. Your feedback is important and greatly appreciated. Click here for survey link”

By sending all schools the follow-up reminder, I was careful to again, protect the identity of those who had completed and not completed the survey and thereby, guarding confidentiality.

Respondents chose to opt-in. Questions 2-8 sought close-ended quantitative responses to personnel composition (Appendix G) such as the number of women on faculty at the respondent’s school, and the percentage of women in leadership roles at each school. Questions 9 and 10 offered an opportunity to comment more fully, and thereby clarify any responses, or add additional information. Ultimately, I had hoped this survey would establish baseline numbers about the proportion of women and men teaching in independent schools, the proportion of women leading independent
schools, patterns of promotion, challenges to promotion, and programming supports providing a quantitative understanding of how many women are in leadership, and where they are concentrated on this climb.

All information collected was valuable to my study because it offered insight into what is happening in each school. However, to gain meaningful insight about my research question, I had hoped to have enough schools so that I could see patterns in the data. My goal was to achieve a response rate of 70%, or 31 schools out of 44. At minimum, I felt a response rate of 50% would be needed to draw any conclusions from this data given the restricted sample size. After three requests for completion, however, only 12 schools responded.

3.1.3 Stage Three: Interviews with Women in Leadership

Stage Three was the study’s largest, and final stage. It was designed around semi-structured qualitative interviews with teachers-leaders, or teachers in positions of responsibility. It was intended to elicit rich, meaningful data, and to better understand the perception of opportunity and the process of promotion—the experiences of those in leadership roles, and those who had achieved the Head of School position. For my sample, I recruited women in coeducational middle and secondary CAIS schools from different regions across the country, targeting women in the same population of schools included in the survey sample. Attempts to attract participants in Atlantic Canada were not successful. Possible reasons for this include fewer independent schools in the Maritime provinces, a small sample of women in coeducational schools in positions of responsibility. Those asked did not respond to the invitation to participate. Thus, my sample included women from British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario with 9 of 11 participants from Ontario where a concentration of CAIS member schools are located. All eleven of my participants were women in leadership roles of varying levels of responsibility, ranging from entry-level leadership to Principal/Head of School. All but one of these women worked in a coeducational independent school. The 11th, Emily, worked in a single-sex girls’ school. Only one of the participants came from my own school to ensure a larger regional variation in sample composition and to minimize what Glesne & Peshkin (1992) term “backyard research,” to minimize concerns of researcher bias and interpretation, and to encourage a wider view of women’s leadership in a variety of (similarly defined) independent schools.
I selected all but two of my participants using a purposeful selection criteria: participants were women working as teachers in positions of responsibility in independent, coeducational middle and secondary school schools in Canada. I endeavoured to include a diversity of roles, regional representation, and personal circumstances. Participants were selected through independent school websites which often feature pictorial information, offering me a glimpse of a prospective participant’s presented gender and age. Cross referencing this information with Linked In and CAIS sites, allowed me to see candidates’ most recent roles, ensure a variety of participants at different career points, and to decipher the organizational place of each candidate because organizational hierarchy and job titles can differ between independent schools. This permitted selection based on not simply on gender, age, and job title, but also by location affording me the broadest possible perspective of what it means to be a leader in a Canadian independent school. Moreover, by eschewing the snowball approach, I could preserve the integrity of the study and offer greater degree of anonymity to the participants. The relatively tight network, and concentration of independent schools in Ontario meant that discretion was warranted. Eight of my eleven participants were found through school websites, or via the online career platform, Linked In. Two others I knew from collegial networks; one worked at my school.

I interviewed eleven women of diverse ages and diverse relationship status, in various levels of educational administration about their experiences in these early, middle and senior management roles, and their perceptions of the process of promotion. I had hoped to include in this group three (3) women who had “made it” to the ultimate job and were serving as Head of School. I reached out to female Heads of School in coeducational, middle and high schools; I found few women in the ultimate leadership role. I emailed these Heads of School and invited them to participate in my study but most did not respond. When only one agreed, I diversified to include recently retired or former Heads in this sample. Again, I returned to Linked In where I found a retired Head of School and approached her through this career site, anticipating she no longer had a school email address. She was excited to share her experiences and thus became my second Head of School participating. Thus, I interviewed two (2) Heads of School (one whom had recently retired) and nine (9) teacher-leaders, ranging from early to middle to senior leadership. Each woman’s experience in independent school leadership was informed by the context in which she worked. Thus, it was essential that at least one aspect of my research method accommodated perception and discourse. The semi-structured interview provided an instrument to access what Kvale (1996) calls the “social and linguistic construction of a perspectival reality where
knowledge is validated through practice” (p.42). This reality, informed as it is by personal values and experience, is meaningful and useful.

Through an email to each selected participant, I introduced myself as the researcher, and I attached an OISE-branded letter that detailed the study’s purpose, procedures, scope, assurances of confidentiality, and outlined my role and that of the participant (See Appendix I & J). I invited participants to contact me directly by replying to my query if they were interested in participating, thereby encouraging their interest and volunteerism, and minimizing any feeling of compulsion. Those who were interested in participating often replied quickly; some asked further questions before committing. With their questions answered, I suggested a mutually agreeable time and location for the interview. Each semi-structured interview took approximately 35-70 minutes. I met face-to-face with several participants who lived or worked in the Greater Toronto Area. Some participants, even some whose proximity would enable an in-person interview, chose to interview via Skype or Voice over Internet Protocol for reasons of efficiency. These face-to-face interviews took place away from their respective schools and in places of their choosing, often coffee shops, and other public spaces, such as libraries. Occasionally, a participant asked if I could conduct the interview in her home.

The semi-structured interview was used to gain greater insight through rich description and data. Sample questions included:

“How does/did someone in your position proceed to the next level of administration?

“Ultimately, would you like to be/did you aspire to be a head of school /principal?”

“Do you anticipate the hours will increase as you move towards this goal?”

“Do you think the barriers to women are different at different stages? For example, at specific times/specific roles, does the pressure increase? Is there a significant increase in time expected?”

I recorded the interviews using digital recording software with the participants' permission. Initially, this consisted of a personal digital recorder and Audacity digital recording software on my laptop. I found both methods were not needed and I defaulted to Audacity on my laptop, moving these digital files to an external hard drive for safe-keeping. Each participant was asked directly to “Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio-recorded: _____” (See Appendix J). Those who did not
wish to have their interview recorded had the choice to decline without penalty or judgment. No participant declined. For a graphic representation of the study’s design, including original numbers, and revisions, please see Fig. 6.

3.2 Interview Participants—Stages 1& 3

Data collection in Stage One and Stage Three provided the foundation for the research. Fifteen participants working in or with CAIS independent schools in Canada were interviewed during the time period of September 2015-September 2016. Fourteen of the participants were women. They can be further understood through the following data:

Participants: Fifteen (15)

Fourteen (14) women; one (1) man

Association Executives (2)

Two (2) executives of independent school associations

Executive Recruiters (2)

Two (2) Executive Recruiters (one woman; one man)

Heads of School (2)

One (1) current Head of School with more than 10 years experience.

One (1) former Head of School; currently semi-retired, consulting.

Women in school leadership (9)

Five (5) Senior Leadership

Three (3) middle leadership

One (1) entry level leadership
### Fig. 6 Interview Participants Matrix

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Day/Boarding School</th>
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<th>Middle Leadership</th>
<th>Senior Leadership</th>
<th>HoSchool</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Recruiter</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>LI/NS</th>
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<th>Young Children?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Taught</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N MBA</td>
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**Legend:**

- **CAIS and CIS interviews**
- **Heads of School**
- **Senior Leadership**
- **Middle Leadership**
- **Entry/Junior Leadership**
- **Executive Recruiters**
## Detail of Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexandra</td>
<td>Served as executive of CAIS,</td>
<td>where she founded several programs for women and new leaders. She is a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>new leaders. She is a first-</td>
<td>time Head of School at a established independent school. She possesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time Head of School</td>
<td>an M.Ed, and has adolescent children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel</td>
<td>Former Executive with CIS</td>
<td>Ontario, an organization that represents 45 independent schools within</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ontario, an organization</td>
<td>Ontario and promotes pedagogical excellence. Former senior leadership at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that represents 45</td>
<td>independent metropolitan school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Experienced secondary school</td>
<td>leader; former Head of an urban day school, grades 1-12. Graduate degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leader; former Head of an</td>
<td>Adult children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>urban day school, grades</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-12.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>K-12, Head; appointed from</td>
<td>internal role. Possesses graduate degree (MBA). Grown children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>internal role.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine</td>
<td>7-12, boarding, VP, suburban</td>
<td>school, Possesses graduate degree, children, appointed from within; never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>school, Possesses</td>
<td>moved schools. Completed Leadership Institute and Next Steps program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>graduate degree, children,</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>appointed from within; never</td>
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<td></td>
<td>moved schools.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Completed Leadership</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Institute and Next Steps</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>K-12, urban girls’ day school,</td>
<td>Senior leadership. Commutes, school-aged children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>K-12, urban day, Senior</td>
<td>leadership, commute, school-aged children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>4-12, boarding, Senior</td>
<td>leadership, moved, no children. Leadership Institute. Graduate degree,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leadership, moved, no</td>
<td>Principal’s Certificate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>children.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>K-12, VP Senior School,</td>
<td>urban centre, children, moved schools. Completed Leadership Institute and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>urban centre, children,</td>
<td>Next Steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moved schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theodora</td>
<td>K-12, day school, middle</td>
<td>leadership, suburban, moved, Leadership Institute, adolescent children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I interviewed 11 teacher-leaders, women of various ages, of various relationship statuses, in various levels of educational administration across Canada about their experiences in junior and senior leadership roles, and their perceptions of the process of promotion. Included in this group were two women who have “made it” to the ultimate job, the Head of School role.

The nine women in positions of responsibility were interviewed using a series of questions listed in Appendix K. As each woman’s role was positioned somewhere on the trajectory of leadership, that is, she was at junior, middle or senior leadership, her perceptions of her experiences would be important to the goal of the study. Each interview commenced with several closed informational questions such as “Approximately, how many faculty are employed at your school?” to “Have your positions of responsibility all been at the same school?” and proceeded to cover between 8-10 open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to reflect on their experiences and to speak at length. The two women Heads of School were interviewed using the less-detailed, high-level questions from Appendix B, D, & L). This was done for two reasons: the first was to tap into their understanding of the promotion trajectory from the point of view of the summit, as I expected they would have a deep understanding of the “system” as a whole. The second was to have a Head of school perspective on the same questions asked of executive associations, and executive recruiters.

I offered sample questions, and in some cases, all questions, prior to interviews beginning, to enhance participant comfort with the interview process. When interviewing, I would read all questions aloud initially for two reasons: to remind participants of the types of questions they would be asked, and
to help them begin to think about their responses. Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) or Skype, provided the platform for conversations and facilitated their recording. Each conversation was then transcribed into Microsoft Word files and password protected for security.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in two ways: by hand, using colour-coding techniques, and by computer-based coding software, NVivo. With fifteen interviews, my study yielded significant qualitative data; NVivo became a useful instrument when manual searching became too unwieldy. NVivo helped with pattern identification, and enabled me to observe unexpected or anomalous data, such as repetition of key words, and thematic overlap between categories. The qualitative interview data was analyzed according to the categories in my conceptual framework that contribute to career perceptions of women in leadership: strategies (work-related, personal), barriers (work-related, personal) and facilitators, which I differentiated from strategies by its focus on what organizations can do to support women. These categories provided a good framework to begin this analysis, but were not sufficient to categorize the many themes and complexities that began to emerge. So, using NVivo, I divided my data into “nodes” that enabled me to see clusters of word patterns, emergent themes, recurring ideas, and links, sometimes between diverse material. Twenty-four nodes emerged, most relating in some way to my three sub-research questions. A small portion of data did not correspond directly with a theme, but provided useful information nonetheless. For example, reports on previous roles, age of candidate, and age of school offered important data. Moreover, sundry information that emerged but did not necessary garner enough support to become its own node was filed in a folder entitled “other.” It came to be the place of all that I didn’t know I didn’t know. I would often return to this folder to for details that illuminated the study or helped me better understand the participant’s perception.

I had intended to run the quantitative data through SPSS. This was not necessary. Survey Wizard reports data in spreadsheet form, and as survey respondents were few, the data was easy to see. In fact, after three attempts to survey schools, only 12 of 44, or 27% of possible respondents completed the survey. The baseline information such as the percentage of women employed in educational administration at CAIS schools that could be used to numerically objectify the problem and provide a statistical framework for the experiences of the women interviewees was gleaned from these 12 schools, providing some insight into leadership numbers, but not likely enough from which to draw broad
conclusions. Possible reasons for this could be disinterest or lack of commitment to the cause, or a discomfort, or an unwillingness to share the information, or a lack of awareness of the data.

Additionally, I practiced memoing techniques and drawing my research. Memoing, or reflexive writing, journaling, notes-on-notes writing, or sampling, as its also known, is a data analysis technique, advocated by Luttrell (2010) who used it as a doctoral student with two young children and limited time to write, circumstances that parallel my own. From graduate program friends, I learned to draw my research, a technique advanced by Lynda Barry (2014). This was helpful in overcoming perfectionism and procrastination, writer’s block, and the daunting task of writing the dissertation. These techniques have been valuable in helping me achieve three things through the data analysis and writing phase: 1) Being aware of my thoughts, preconceptions, associations, and stretching my thinking; 2) holding me to a regular writing routine of twice and then more recently, three times per week; 3) helping me to organize my thoughts before, and after they are put to paper. Luttrell (2010) provides various exercises that can be used to identify what the researcher knows, what she needs to know, how she might find out, and next steps. Barry (2014) sparked my creative process and my inclination to visualize concepts—something that resides deeply in many teachers—and emboldened me to include greater graphical detail in this work so that it may be accessible to others.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Permission for this study was granted through the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board. The recruitment process was completed with discretion, and all requests for participation in my study were emailed from my University of Toronto email account directly, or, cases where email was not initially known, by way of LinkedIn, to prospective participants at an email, or social media account of their choosing. This diversity of communication completed with the intention of avoiding any conflation of my own employment and my Ph.D studies, and minimizing any discomfort for the prospective participants. Moreover, to ensure additional objectivity and emphasize trust, I chose not to work in a leadership capacity throughout the duration of this study to avoid any perceived power differential. Letters of Information and Consent (Appendix J) were issued to each participant, explaining the study and its academic purposes. Again, prior to any interview, I reviewed the study information, and sought additional verbal, informed consent and reminded participants that no judgment would be placed upon their responses, and they could pass on any question, or withdraw from the interview, or the study as a whole, at any time. Interviews were conducted between September 6, 2015 and September 5, 2016 and
then transcribed. Each interview was 35-70 minutes. Participants received their interview transcript and could comment or make changes.

The participants were engaged in this process and they appreciated the study’s research potential. The career women in leadership roles were living the subject daily, and thus, not only did they have an interest in collaborating, however anonymously, in an academic research project that may facilitate change, but many spoke about the benefit of reflection and critical thinking that participating encouraged. Most participants had much to say, and often wavered beyond the interview questions, offering honest perceptions and surprising truths. I promised to do my utmost to preserve confidentiality and anonymity but that in the closely-knit community of independent schools, a guarantee was not possible. Thus, great care was taken to protect participant identity. For example, each participant was granted a pseudonym, (named after a historically significant woman), which not simply concealed her identity but allowed her voice to be human (and not numerical). Each school was not named, or, in the rare case, was renamed; each city was described in broad geographic detail to obscure its identity without compromising its demographic features too much, Vancouver, for instance, might be a “major urban centre”).

Interviews were recorded on digital data recorder and laptop using Audacity and transcribed soon afterwards. Participants were given an opportunity to view transcript interview and comment or change. The interviews were password protected and backed up on personal external hard drive, as was all primary data, including names and schools, was kept secure through password protection. Only my supervisor and I had access to the raw data. Each of the participants were told they would be offered a hard copy of the final paper. Fifteen interviews were conducted, one with each participant. Email addresses were gathered from participants so that they could receive a copy of the findings once the study was complete. This information was kept separate from the data to help maintain confidentiality of findings.

This chapter explored the methodological focus of this research study. It established the reasons for employing qualitative and quantitative instruments, provided details about the data sample, including profiles of the participants, and addressed specific considerations about ethics. The small return on this survey offers a glimpse into a number of independent schools. It is not conclusive, however, and more information would be needed to assess the proportions of women in leadership in CAIS schools.
Nonetheless, an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the lived-experiences of women in independent schools was possible through the interviews with fifteen independent school leaders. Women from entry level or junior leaders through senior leadership, heads, executive administrators, and educational recruiters, provided rich, insightful data that illuminated lived-experiences and perceptions of independent school career promotion patterns. Participants’ perceptions of barriers to their promotion will be explored in Chapter 4, the first of two findings chapters.
4. Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis: Structural Barriers to Women in Independent School Leadership

“The strategies of getting them there are not working, or not working fast enough”

-Educational Recruiter

This study is not about why we need women in leadership; it’s about how to get them there faster. My research question, “What is the process by which women faculty in independent schools enter and advance in school leadership?” was designed to delve deeply into the experiences of female leaders in established coeducational independent schools in Canada. The findings are based on participants’ perceptions and divided into two chapters; one that analyzes the problem, and the other that analyzes responses to it. Chapter 4 looks closely at the structural barriers to women seeking to advance in independent school leadership; Chapter 5 delves deeply into women’s professional and personal strategies for advancing in leadership and the organizational facilitators that support this ascent.

This chapter is organized in response to the sub-research questions that guided the study. They sought to understand systemic barriers to women’s advancement in independent school leadership, and organizational facilitators that help women enter and advance in leadership. These findings are based on responses to a survey of 44 CAIS schools, and semi-structured interview responses from 15 participants—fourteen women and one man. Participants included teachers in leadership roles, Heads of School (current and former), Executive Directors of National and Provincial bodies (CAIS and CIS respectively), and two Executive Recruiters. Rich data emerged as the participating teachers reflected on and responded to questions about their own path from teacher to leader in an independent school and illustrated the complexities of such organizations. To supplement these qualitative responses, a quantitative survey measured representation of women in these roles in middle and secondary CAIS schools and meaning teased from these responses is embedded in the paragraphs below. This instrument, sent to Heads of School and/or Human Resources Directors, sought to understand the statistical representation of women in leadership across Canada.

4.1 Quantitative Findings

Forty-four coeducational CAIS affiliated schools received the survey. They represented a broad geographical base, stretching from coast to coast. Unfortunately, after three requests for completion, the
response rate was low, with only 12 responses for a response rate of 27%. This data is therefore not representative of the group of 44 schools. However, some insight into these twelve schools is available, and compelling insights emerge which will be discussed more extensively in this chapter. To supplement this data, interview participants were asked “What are the structural barriers to the headship?” After checking for understanding of the concept of “structural barriers,” I found that participants cited numerous factors that, when combined, reveal second-generation gender bias in women’s career patterns in independent school leadership. These are: the role of governance and hiring committees, the age of school and its traditions such as language, resistance to change/honouring the past and the power of alumni; the approach to leadership development and succession planning, and the negotiations between place (relocation), time, and identity. Sub-questions included: “Have you ever experienced discrimination in your role?” “Do you think the barriers to women are different at different stages?” “Do you anticipate the hours will increase as you move towards this goal? And, “Have you ever considered moving schools to reach the next level?” This data revealed patterns in themes, experiences, and vocabulary. Participants carefully considered their responses, reflecting on formative moments, sharing professional experiences, and visualizing future steps on the leadership climb, helping to map the patterns of women’s careers in Canadian independent school leadership. In independent schools, gender does not explicitly prevent women from working in the top job, but historically, men have dominated the role and have been quicker to arrive. As a result, career patterns for women often follow a longer, more jagged, more gradual, trajectory up the mountain, punctuated by pauses, time-outs, and occasional short and steep ascensions corresponding with later stages of career (Mainiero and Gibson, 2017; Ozga, 1993, Sandberg, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989). In 2016, four of 12 schools had fewer than 25% women in leadership roles; three schools had between 25%-39% women in leadership roles, and these roles tended to be junior, middle, or senior tier leadership, not Head of School. Moreover, a closer look at the data confirms the research of Shakeshaft (1989), Ozga (1993), Eagly and Carli (2007), Kay and Shipman (2014), and others as it suggests that women’s paths are different than mens’; women’s promotion to the top role, if it happens at all, is likely to occur after age 40, as at 11 of 12 schools, women in leadership roles were between 41-50 years of age.
Respondents estimated that significantly more hours per week were expected of someone in a position of responsibility compared to a full-time faculty member. Respondents estimated the additional hours per week in a position of responsibility ranged from 6-10 (4 schools) or 11-15 (3 schools) with one school estimating 16-20 hours. Interestingly, two schools offered that no more hours were expected in leadership roles.

The trends they illuminate are consistent with themes emerging from interviews: there are fewer women than men in leadership—in the case of 3 schools, women made up less than 25% of leadership roles, and 9/12 schools reported that those on the school leadership team could expect to spend between 6 and 15 more hours working every week compared to a full-time teacher. Even in this small sample of data, a pattern emerges. Reporting that women make up less than 25% of positions of responsibility in a large school could mean that numerous women are in formal influential roles, while at a smaller school, this might be one woman amongst a group of men. The representation of women in leadership lacks parity. An interesting finding is that women’s promotional years seem to intersect with childrearing years (see Fig.8). Moreover, as the median age of motherhood rises in Canada, women’s promotional years may coincide with childrearing years longer and later (StatsCanada, 2011; GlobalNews, 2016).
This conflation adds new dimensions—teacher, leader, mother—to women’s identities and paradoxically, women’s career trajectories, which are initially delayed after child-bearing, ultimately ascending while they are caring for school-aged children. By how fast and how steeply depends on a variety of personal and professional factors and the dynamic negotiation between individual and organization.

Quantitative data derived from this study’s interview participants offers greater insights. This sample of eleven women teacher-leaders represented different points on the climb. Two had summited, becoming Head of School. The other nine women were in various positions of responsibility; these ranged from entry level leadership through middle and senior leadership (deputy head). Five were in senior leadership; three were in middle leadership; one was in entry level leadership. They share some commonalities.

Five (5) of the nine women worked in boarding schools. Seven (7) had moved schools to get their current leadership role (one within British Columbia, one across Ontario, and five within cities in the Greater Toronto area). Each of these roles was at least 50km from the previous school, with one spanning more than 400km. Of particular note, four of the five senior leaders had moved schools suggesting that for those with leadership intentions, staying in one school is rarely an option. Most mothers said they would choose to commute rather than to move their respective families, although this finding may be subject to distance as none was specified. This finding prompts questions about
leadership development and succession planning in schools showing that women are reluctant to move for promotion, and yet, examples of moving for a promotion are not uncommon, and perhaps necessary in later stages of the climb such as senior leadership and Head of School.

Thirteen women—including two association executives—were asked the question: “Do you [did you] want to be a Head of School?” More than 61% were currently acting as heads, had been a head, or wanted to be heads suggesting that a majority of those interviewed aspired to this pinnacle role. Almost a third (31%) expressed ambivalence: each of these women had decided to “take it year by year.” Eight percent (8%) responded “no,” and did not aspire to a headship.

These responses offer a small snapshot of the career perceptions of women in leadership roles. Greater exploration of the reasons for four of the thirteen (more than 31%), not wanting to pursue the top job after beginning the leadership climb, is needed. The responses of these women as a group form the foundation for this chapter. They have been analyzed and categorized to reflect key themes in the conceptual framework. Barriers, Strategies, and Facilitators to advancement in leadership.

![Graph](image)

Fig. 9: Women in academic leadership roles by school
Since this survey was completed in 2016, some independent schools have made some positive gains towards gender parity. For instance, according to CAIS, as of June 2018, 94 CAIS schools including elementary, secondary, single-sex, coeducational, and religious reveal some progression with female Heads listed at 41%, up from 31% the previous year. These were disproportionately concentrated in all-girls’ schools with 15 of the 16 girls’ schools having a female Head (CAIS, 2018). Coeducational schools were still male-dominated, as only 34% of Heads were female (ibid). As of June 2016, of 9 schools had new Heads, 2 were women, and as of June 2017, 11 schools saw new Heads, 8 of them women (ibid). It is important to remember that while there are signs of change, women’s leadership of schools is normalized in single-sex and elementary contexts where it is associated with feminine and maternal values and less common in coeducational environments. Moreover, several women were promoted internally, perhaps suggesting that women’s chances of becoming Head improve if internal candidates. Greater research into how this leadership is concentrated in promotional tiers of schools, and for how long, would be beneficial. Moreover, to truly measure the advancement of women in leadership in CAIS schools, a comprehensive survey of schools is required to establish a baseline, followed by a commitment to timely update.

4.2 Second-Generation Gender Biases

This section draws from the contextual interviews and questions answered by women in my interviews. Structural barriers to the Headship can be classified into two broad categories: second-generation gender biases, and self-selection (emphasis mine) by the women themselves. By structural barriers I mean the often invisible forces that frame social, organizational, familial, and personal lives of women, restricting or impeding their actions, thoughts, and identities. Second-generation gender bias, a term coined by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007) is a form of hegemony, unintentional discrimination against women as a result of systems and processes that were established by men, or for male leaders, such as cultural norms, practices, processes, and assumptions that favour one gender over others. As such, these systems and processes – a paradigm of sorts – take certain societal structures, behaviours, and practices for granted and favour those who fit this model (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Ibarra, Ely, et al., (2013) equate this form of discrimination to “something in the water,” a contextual condition that affects organizations (https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers), in ubiquitous, if often unappreciated, unrecognized ways. These can be rooted in the culture and organization of independent schools, often unwittingly, which borrow heavily from British traditions.
When women have led independent schools, they have tended to be day schools as the examples of Elizabeth and Mary show, single-sex girls’ schools (CAIS, 2018), and schools with smaller populations. This is consistent with findings from studies of women in corporate leadership where the context is male-dominated, often traditional, and challenges for women are similar. According to Catalyst (2016):

Research has shown that women face many challenges in their careers that men do not, making it harder for women to break through to critical positions. These challenges—which include gender stereotyping; lower initial job placement; lower pay; slower advancement even when using the same career strategies as men; less access to larger, more visible, mission-critical, and international projects; and less access to highly placed sponsors who can accelerate career growth that leads to opportunities—mean that women often have to work harder to get noticed and get access (p.7).

While my study did not attempt to track the time frame from teacher-leader to Head, the women Heads of School in this study were highly experienced leaders, having accrued significant learning and credentials before earning the headship. Studies show (Shakeshaft, 1989; Ozga, 1993) that women tend to be older than their male counterparts by the time they become heads, and therefore, once they arrive, spend less time in the headship, and thus, undermine her potential for influence, and her financial compensation. A well-known, well-respected Head of a metropolitan school offered in February, 2018 at a CIS women’s networking event, that she had applied for the Headship of this school four times before winning it (CAIS; CIS, 2018).

Her experience may not be unique, but women—and men—are not likely to display such vulnerability to colleagues and aspirational leaders. According to Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013), giving women the skills to be leaders is not enough when “the subtle gender bias that persists in organizations and in society disrupts the learning cycle at the heart of becoming a leader” which they insist is “an iterative process” (https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers). An analysis of the role of governance and hiring committees is the first step in explaining this profile.
4.2.1 Governance, Hiring Committees, and Candidates

Independent schools are not for profit (in contrast to private schools) and are responsible to a board of governors (CAIS, 2018; CIS, 2018). The board plays a significant role in the school’s direction. While they work at a visionary level and are not responsible for operations, they meet as often as bi-monthly, and are responsible for hiring and, if required, firing, the Head of School. A former director of CIS, Isabel, explained the power of the board in hiring decisions. “Who becomes head depends on the selection committee. It depends on the board. It depends on how forward thinking the board is. The board sets the principal selection committee so if they put forward thinkers on there…” In other words, the future direction of the school is significantly determined by the decisions of board of governors. The head they select will depend on their understanding of the school, and the criteria they establish for the hiring committee (many of which will be conducted in partnership with an external recruiting specialist) which in turn, comes from their perception of the school’s strengths and weaknesses. According to Executive Recruiter George, they are systematic, resourceful, and often careful. Their role is to focus on fiscal responsibility, and the long term survival of the school, so not surprisingly, they are inclined towards established success, and want a known entity. Moreover, boards are composed of people, and “there are usually two or three individuals who are the vocal people on the board, or who lead the [hiring] charge. If you want to be successful, you need to be tight with these two or three individuals.” This suggests that experience is important, but “soft” skills, such as connections, interpersonal
relationships, and likeability, are important too—and these are more available to men than to women when the majority of trustees are men.

Boards are often male-dominated, and composed of business leaders and lawyers who have, or have had, children enrolled in the school. Is it possible too, that boards have what Antonakis (2011) terms a “similarity bias”, tending to prefer candidates who share traits similar to theirs? Berdahl (2015) cites the challenges with what she calls “gender and diversity competence,” the ability to select and evaluate people and ideas on their potential and merits rather than on what they look like or where they come from” and claims it “is essential to effective leadership” (http://jberdahl.blogspot.ca/2015/08/beyond-diversity-as-body-count.html). Ibarra, Carter, et al (2010) evidenced that when women are promoted to lead companies they are selected for less risky roles than when men are promoted to the top job (hbr.org/p.82) suggesting boards are less likely to take chances on women. Moreover, boards may play a significant role in the glass cliff (Ryan and Haslam, 2005), phenomenon in which women’s leadership is sought to steer a precarious company. According to Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) women’s leadership is associated with board diversity, and board diversity is less likely to create the conditions for a “glass cliff” (p. 448). Furthermore, not only are women “more likely to be appointed CEO” by diverse boards, but women are more likely to “enjoy longer tenures as CEO” by diverse boards, but women are more likely to “enjoy longer tenures as CEO as the proportion of women on the board of directors increases” (Cook & Glass, 2014, p.97). Cook and Glass (2014) find that diversity on the board, in particular, women’s integration, is often mirrored in the organization and normalizes women’s leadership, reducing their perception as “outsiders” (101).

Research shows that boards have a critical role to play in tipping the balance for women in leadership (http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/initiatives/wldp/wb-ca/wob-fca-en.html, 2017). The gender balance on boards affects hiring decisions (Bruckmuller & Branscombe, 2010; Cook & Glass, 2014, 2016; Ely, 1995). Moreover, knowing the key drivers on the board is helpful. However, many participants, despite all being in leadership roles, admitted that they did not know much about their respective boards, had little contact with them, and off-hand, most overestimated the gender balance on their respective board. (Independent school governance is designed to be visionary not operational, explaining why only women in senior leadership or higher might have regular contact with a board.) These participants expressed surprise upon learning the lop-sided numbers. In one case, women held three of 18 seats; Joan shared that “our Chair is a woman. There might be two other women, I think. I
think the rest are male.” Eleanor offered: “I was going to say 50/50 but I was wrong. It is about twice the number of men to women but I suspect that’s partly because it was formally a boys’ school and especially a junior school for so long, that’s the reasoning for that.” Catherine, the deputy head, knew more about her school’s board than most others. She confessed, “We don't have anywhere near gender parity. … We added two [women] last year. So, we have 24 people on the board, I want to say we maybe have nine or 10 women.” Interestingly, Elizabeth, a sitting Head of School, shared this: “We have 14 people on our Board and in my term as head, I've had two Board Chairs that have been female. So, I'm on my very first male Board Chair.” When Elizabeth was hired, the board chair was a woman. Notwithstanding Elizabeth’s example, the participants’ responses reveal that women are not well-represented on coeducational independent school boards, and few women chair them. Part of the challenge to increasing gender balance on boards is that according to the director of CIS Ontario, “there are many more men interested than women.” This, in itself, is a statement that needs unpacking, but is likely rooted in social norms that make this role seemingly more available to men.

Studies show that organizations benefit from women governors, and even three women on a board can change financial results (Arguden, 2012; Dobbin, 2011; Zelechowski & Bilimoria, 2004). Integrating greater numbers of women on the board can improve long-term planning, manage risk better, and are responsive to constituents (Arguden, 2012). Moreover, increasing diversity—that is, having diverse individuals work side by side, is proven to be one of the most effective methods of reducing bias in a workplace, more effective even than prescribing mandatory diversity training (Dobbin & Kalev, 2014). Thus, it follows, that increasing gender diversity on boards could be a powerful strategy towards greater inclusion in an employee pool, and prompt a trickle-down effect on leadership succession.

4.2.2 Governing Boards Value Financial Acumen and Proven Leaders

Unlike the public school boards that have a centrally-managed infrastructure, independent schools are discrete, multi-million dollar businesses. Their respective operating budgets are entirely dependent on tuition revenue, and in Ontario, as in some other provinces, they receive no government subsidies or incentives. Perhaps not surprising then, independent school boards prioritize business acumen and proven leaders. There’s assurance to hiring a Head of School with financial savvy. Women in school leadership tend to come from the teaching side of the school and are less likely to have this business background. According to Alexandra:
It's not a principal shift like you would find in a school board. You're running a multi-
million business. [But], it's a school, and so the women don't just have to be great with
their faculty members, they have to now convince business people on the board that
they're the right person for this job.

George, an Executive Recruiter confirms this: “If someone wants access to those roles, [boards] don’t
care if someone has a Ph.D. They want someone who understands the numbers.” This is not the only
perspective, but it is a dominant narrative. More and more, Heads of School need “a different skillset,”
according to Alexandra, than in previous generations. This is supported by Kennedy (2009, 2014) who
says that “the route to the headmaster’s office has changed. Once upon a time [he had] teaching and
administrative experience. Better yet, he or she was an alumnus or an alumna - well connected and
respected within the community” (thoughtco.com/new-career-path-for-headmasters-2773977). George
felt that climates of economic uncertainty play a major role in hiring. In his recent involvement with the
hiring committee for a metropolitan school, he found that the board chose an experienced Head who
stood out because of her strong financial acumen. He said,

I’ve been privy to hire the Head of School at [Metropolitan Academy] and the outcome
there was a decision based on economics. In the market there are [several similar schools]
and one had closed down the year before…and they have dwindling numbers and the
remaining schools--all were feeling they needed to reinvent themselves.

Boards seek assurance. It is well established that they are less likely to opt for an untested Head of
School over an experienced one. And, in times and context of market pressure, where bankruptcy is a
real concern, schools want leaders who know the role, and possess sharp financial management. George
adds that experienced heads have great advantage when applying for headships because they have a
legacy of tangible, often well-known accomplishments. They can position themselves well in an
environment that stresses innovation and growth. Independent school education, according to him is “a
culture that’s flavor of the month and you’re only as good as your last move.” Being in a position to
make a last move, is an advantage most commonly enjoyed by men who tend to have this experience
and financial acumen (Eagly & Carli 2007; Wright, 2015) because as Lortie (1975) and more recently
Briskin (2000) show, men who choose teaching prioritize administration in far greater percentages than
women who tend to choose teaching for teaching. Educators then, are probably less likely to choose a
school role that prioritizes finance and organizational savvy. Coupling this with the fact that historically, the access to the headship has been limited for women, thereby reducing the number, gendering the candidates with this experience, and compounding the challenge of equal representation Head of School positions now. Based on my data, more women are waiting to be heads than are heads, and these women tend to come from academic leadership roles, rather than the business side of the school, thereby reducing their appeal to boards seeking financial reassurance, and advancement dollars. This implies too, that, in Canada, there may be a bottleneck of candidates waiting for the breakthrough.

Hiring committees show a preference towards hiring a sitting Head. This means a Head of School who has experience and is performing, or has performed the leading role in another school. There are valid reasons for this preference, the most foundational of which is concern for the school’s fiscal security. Hiring committees can be dominated by male perspectives and a tendency to select a leader who resembles themselves (Antonakis, 2011; Eagly, 2007), the majority of whom are male. Female candidates tend to enter leadership from academic rather than corporate paths thereby making them less appealing to boards concerned about fiscal sustainability. New or first-time heads struggle to survive the first five years (CAIS, 2008), and, in the United States, at least, “candidate pools for the headship have dropped sharply” (Evans, 2010, p. x), thereby creating a seeming cycle of experienced heads who rotate between schools, prioritizing stability and clogging the promotional process for inexperienced new heads. Most heads in North America will spend a considerable proportion of their headship—30% to 40%—according to CAIS estimates, managing the board—and the other time fundraising, with the expectation that he/she will bring in the multi-million dollar donors and underwrite the legacy of the school. It’s a job that requires strong interpersonal skills and expert time management but also an ability to cope with stress, unpredictability, and the myriad interactions actions and reactions that are necessary in leading a school. As private school consultant and writer, Robert Kennedy (2009) explains,

The head of a private school in the new millennium has to have the executive ability of a Fortune 1000 executive, the diplomatic skills of Ban Ki-moon and the vision of Bill Gates. S/he has to raise millions for this project and that. S/he has to sort through legal issues which would numb the mind of a Philadelphia lawyer. On top of all this, the head’s admissions department now has to compete for students
with several other schools which years ago could hardly be considered the competition if they existed at all

(Kennedy, thoughtco.com/new-career-path-for-headmasters-2773977).

How does a first-time head prepare for this? In addition to an emphasis on finance, the ideal candidate would have a diverse range of experience in different schools, and diverse portfolios in these schools (academic and corporate roles such as knowledge of curriculum, admissions, advancement, even headship), and good people skills. Accumulating all this experience takes time, and dedication towards the end goal, and, in many cases, especially with the admissions and advancement portfolios, considerable travel and after-hours work; not surprisingly, a Headship can be a long time coming. Combine this with the process of finding a Headship—interview rounds, and often little feedback—and the role can be aspirational only for many years. The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), the American counterpart to CAIS, tracked financial compensation in American Independent Schools by role and gender. Their findings portray contrasting realities: when women are appointed to a headship, they earn 83.6% of the male Head of School’s salary, down from a “high” of 90.8% in 2003-2004 (NAIS, 2014). These statistics reveal that women in Head of School roles are less valued than males in the same role.

4.2.3 Implicit Associations and Promotional Patterns

Gender is a determining factor in access to top roles. There was a perception among some participants that independent school boards are uncomfortable appointing a woman of childbearing years as Head of School. A similar bias has been shown in other industries such as politics (Eagly 2007; Schreiber 2016; Stalsberg 2010), and business (Baxter & Wright 2000; Budig & England 2001; Cornell et al. 2007; Eagly & Carli 2007; Ely et al., 2011; Ely 1995; Hymowitz & Schellart 1986; Sandberg 2013). Boards want a figurehead and a leader who is singularly focused on the school, is present, and whose tenure will be steady, uninterrupted, and ideally, long. Head searches are significant investments and disruptive to school culture with many conducted by external agencies at considerable expense and lasting 12-18 months. Combine this financial and focal disruption with the tendency of boards to be risk averse, and it is almost understandable that they would aim to hire the best possible bet—a talented, proven candidate. That this candidate is most likely to be male illustrates the challenge for women in
leadership who struggle to get the experience and support to compete. This anecdote from Isabel, former of CIS, illustrates the uncertainty of a woman in this office:

One of the candidates I know who is in the running for headship was young and female. The board asked me, ‘what should we expect?’ I said, ‘you should expect to support this person. She’s brand new. Maybe hire her a coach.’ They asked me that because she’s younger.

The implication is that she will have a family, and be raising children while running a school for the first time—pressures that could result in acute stress but also divided loyalties and greater absenteeism (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012; Baker et al, 2008). Additionally, another participant, Catherine, volunteered that she had “100 percent” experienced gender discrimination. She did not share specific details but recognized that as a younger female in the penultimate role, she was subject to the conflation of a few forces. For example, she said, “I think for me, it's been both a combination of youth and gender.” She was also quick to credit the previous head for her promotion:

I think the reason that I'm in the position I'm in now is because the person who was responsible for making those appointments had a very progressive viewpoint on women in leadership positions. He said to the board chair, “so before you even go down this rabbit hole of asking, yes she just got married, yes I anticipate that she is going to want a family. And yes, we will be able to manage that.

Catherine is a highly-skilled, successful, and forward-thinking leader and undermines her own ability here. She does, however, reveal the power of Heads, and in particular, male heads, as catalysts for leadership development and change (Ibarra, Carter, et al, 2010).

Given these anecdotes, perhaps it is not surprising that a majority of female heads are 50 years or older (Shakeshaft 1989; Ozga 1993; Sandberg 2013). There seems an unconscious bias against women with young children (Corell, Benard, et al, 2007) and few organizational supports to facilitate their leadership. Female leaders with children had concerns about how motherhood affected boards’ perception of them (despite clearly enshrined human rights legislation preventing discrimination on such grounds). Two participants reported that during interviews for headships, they had been asked about childcare and domestic management, should they become a head. One recognized that candidates with
children might be viewed with some skepticism by search committees who might question their commitment to the process, and ultimately, their fit with the role. Some women felt that boards did not equate motherhood and leadership, and thus held perceptions that immediately undermined their capacity to fulfil the role. For example, one participant, who had recently applied for a headship, chose not to mention her family in her candidate profile for fear it would be used as an excuse to overlook her. She feared others’ perceptions of her commitment and did not want to give an executive recruiter a “this just isn't the right opportunity at this time because [of] my family life” type of response. She recognized that having a family might stigmatize her; it implied that she would be reluctant to move: “If I'm a search consultant is it worth my time and effort to, you know, to go through that process if I know that, oh, they have four young kids, or they've got three young kids, or they just got married, right?” Her response reveals skepticism about her value as a candidate because of her family status, indicating she is perceiving a barrier before encountering it. Given the evidence above, this perception that working mothers need not apply for executive roles seems justified. Moreover, given this scrutiny and unwelcome context, it is not surprising that women leaders tend to score significantly lower than male leaders on measures of confidence, and higher on measures of perfectionism (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018; Optimum Talent, n.d). Advancing in these schools is a complex process. Women may be removing themselves from contention because of their own perceptions of professional value. These are dual ambition-dampening perceptions, before the candidate has even applied.

Mary offered that such perceptions can be limiting. She said, “I do think women with young families, I think there's a glass ceiling for those women and it all has to do with attitudes about what they’re going to be willing to do,” creating a false dichotomy between responsibility to children and commitment to the school. This is supported by other studies of women in leadership roles such as Brittany L. Stalsburg’s (2010) findings about women as political candidates in which she quotes voters fearing the female candidate’s commitment, “torn loyalties” (p.380; Barbara Lee Family Foundation, 2001, p.34), and Maureen Baker’s (2012) findings that mothers are viewed as “less committed and ambitious than fathers or child-free women” (p.19). Ironically, women who do more, who have “deviated from traditional gender roles—by occupying a ‘man’s’ job or having a ‘masculine’ personality” were disproportionately targeted for sexual harassment” (Berdahl 2016), reminded us that our attitudes often shape opportunities for others.
In line with this, several participants who had been before hiring committees wondered if male candidates were subject to the same scrutiny regarding their balance of work and family. One woman believed that male candidates would not be judged on the same criteria:

I think they're asked from an interview interest, but I think it's usually probably framed as, ‘tell me about yourself…how do you anticipate that this will impact your life?’ I don't think it's asked for the same … sort of [reason].

This data shows that women in leadership roles believe there is a motherhood penalty on school hiring committees, in particular (Budig, England, 2001; Correll, Benard, Paik, 2007), and a lack of organizational support and resources. As such, women seeking the top job, especially those who are mothers, are conscious of the intersection of the roles of mother and leader as a conflation that may not enhance their promotability. The male-dominated gender imbalance in the composition of boards of governors, and by extension, hiring committees, may play a significant role in preserving the paradigm of traditional male leadership.

4.2.4 The Snowy Climb: Time is a Structural Barrier

Time impacts women’s leadership opportunities. For, before any candidate, woman or man, meets a Head of School hiring committee, they have spent years climbing the mountain. This climb to the headship is not evenly challenging. That is, at some points, the ascent is smooth, and at others, it takes longer and the barriers grow. The move from teaching into positions of responsibility seems filled with excitement and challenge. Participants speak of their desire to stretch themselves and contribute to the school in other ways. They have often received encouragement from their Head or a report in the school. Staying in a leadership capacity requires continual dedication and development, and an awareness that one is between two masters—not far removed from the faculty, but still far removed from the Head of School, and this dance can cause stress. The number of positions decreases as one climbs, thus, there is competition among capable, driven people for a limited number of coveted roles. And yet, despite this, the move from senior positions into headships seems a steeper ascent. Statistics suggest that the climb up the mountain can take decades; after all, there are only 94 CAIS independent schools in Canada (by contrast, there are more than 580 schools in Toronto alone (TDSB, 2018)), and a Head of School can stay in that position as long as he and the board agree. These factors alone, could explain why women’s climbs are slower than their male counterparts (Eagly, 2007; Ozga, 1993;
Shakeshaft, 1989; Sandberg, 2013; Wright, 2015). If climbing into senior leadership is time-consuming, and finding a headship is time-consuming, then by the time one arrives, the investment has been considerable for men, but especially for women. Thus, staying in a Headship can be all-consuming, and therefore, stressful. This is supported by Eagly (2007) who finds that “In such environments, leaders often confront the challenges of masculine organizational culture that may make it difficult for women to feel comfortable and to gain authority” (e.g. Alvesson & Billing, 1992; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Silvestri, 2003; Wajcman, 1998; p.6). Reflecting on their interview processes, participants used terms such as “imposter,” “fraud,” “don’t belong,” to summarize their experiences.

In this study, only two women were Heads of School. Elizabeth had led her school for over 13 years and was promoted internally; before that, she had worked in various positions of responsibility at the school. Mary led for 7 years before retiring, and had a lengthy career in leadership at two or more schools. The other women in my study had at least 10 years teaching experience; most have between 15-20 years, making them somewhere between late thirties and late forties—and none of these are heads yet. While this is consistent with public system statistics of 30 years ago, it is no longer comparable today. In Ontario, for instance, a public system teacher can become a principal with 5 years of teaching experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012). It is not common to vault from early career teacher to principal, but, it is not uncommon to earn a vice-principalship as an early career teacher. In Pollock’s (2017) survey of vice-principals for the Ontario Principal’s Council, vice-principals aged 30–34 composed 2.4% of respondents, while vice-principals aged 35-39 made up 13.6% of respondents, indicating that almost 16% of vice-principals were 39 years or younger (p. 7). In contrast, as my study shows, in the independent schools, it is highly uncommon for a teacher with five years’ experience to move into a deputy headship, even with Principal’s Qualifications. Thus, the time to become head has a double-meaning; the time required to become Head of School is a structural barrier, and the time investment once one arrives there, could also be a barrier.

The structural barriers to women are composed of multiple, layered, and often nuanced expectations, practices, and language. For instance, the tension between growth and tradition is ever present in schools. Kennedy (2009) and Evans’ (2010) claims that the role of Head of School has become more complex—long hours, evening and weekend commitments, travel, 24/7 accessibility—is valid, and yet, in independent schools this role is still pinned to traditional, often gendered expectations. This is magnified in a boarding school environment where students, staff, and Head of
School live on a campus that never closes. Here, the Head’s home often doubles as a reception hall for staff and alumni, and his family, with the help of the catering and facilities resources in the school, host these events. It’s a paradigm of a traditional, nuclear family dynamic and a fishbowl; it supports campus life, connects past and present, and blurs the professional and personal. As Isabel says, “In the past it’s been packaged…You look at the heads announcements as they’re coming out. Mr. Smith has a lovely wife, Jean, and three children.” Independent schools, and boarding schools, in particular, have had a tendency to appeal to traditional family values; they offer a home away from home, portraying a welcoming family environment of benevolent care for students to assuage parental anxieties. Isabel cites changing generational perspectives, in particular, the entry of generation X and Y aged-faculty into the profession as harbingers for more significant change:

I’m sure things will change more as relationships change and younger people who have the 50/50 [balance of work and domestic duties] enter the profession. And men will go to interviews and say, I’m doing this and my wife is doing that and my kids...She works and she will expect to continue to work and doing what she is doing and you’re hiring me and not her.

As promising as this change may be, it may depend on the speed at which gender-role change occurs within the larger society. Statistics Canada reports that gender roles have evolved in Canadian society with a higher proportion of women in the workforce, and increasing public discourse on women’s social and financial empowerment (2017); yet, it is still difficult to find examples of non-traditional family structures in independent boarding schools. What is the role of the Head of School ’s partner if the Head of School is a woman? A gay woman? A gay man? Traditional views are persistent and may be slowing the pace of change. As Rosa put it, women are in a double bind situation. They face “pressure to be a good mother and put children first before career. Women are judged more if they aren’t present as a parent than dads are.” As one participant summarized, “80% of teachers are female, but 20%—only 20% of them are heads.” Moreover, prior to 2017, “not one of [over 90] schools (co-ed, single sex, religious) was run by a woman with children still living at home” (CAIS, 2016). This has changed. Specifically, 2017 may be viewed retrospectively as a watershed moment for women in independent school leadership. One woman was appointed head of Lakefield College School, a prestigious boarding school, and two more women were appointed heads at Holy Trinity School in Richmond Hill, and at Greenwood, respectively, well-respected Toronto-area schools.
Independent school headship is different from principalship in the public system. Thus, even those who qualify to perform the role may hesitate to seek it. This is particularly acute for women because of the public collision of societal, personal, and professional expectations. This “drift” of work into personal life for school leaders is summed up, first by Rob Evans (2010), in *The Seven Secrets of Saavy School Leaders*, and by Maureen Baker (2016) in her study of female academics in university contexts. Evans (2010) reports that “The quality of life of a head has been deteriorating…their jobs are, if not eating them up, at least eating into their lives…sacrificing even more of their personal and family time to their work” (x). Catherine, a vice-principal, and 15-year veteran of a boarding school environment offers an independent school perspective. She has learned that “balance isn’t possible in a boarding school environment. You have to integrate work and personal life, not balance them.” This could be a deterrent for men, but especially for women whose personal and familial lives are subsumed into the public domain; privacy becomes limited, and for mothers, especially, the dual roles of leader and mother become intertwined and very public. The family presence on campus, and the overlap of the personae of leader and mother breaks the model of independent school leadership (which has been male), and broader social mores (Schein, 2001). The Head of School role—especially that at a boarding school--was traditionally designed for men. There seems some validity to this. Isabel details the reality of boarding school life:

One of the issues is the time commitment. 24/7. Nights, weekends. That’s still the case. As an administrator, you’re serving the parents, and that means parents nights, and that means raising money, and that means nights and weekends and being at athletics…and so what ends up happening is the time commitment. If the husband [wants] the Headship, the domestic situation wouldn’t come into play…

For a wife, it does. In the past, male Heads were generally less involved in domestic duties. Perhaps the change in thinking required to get more women into Headships is still coming…women’s roles—even a generation ago—were so limited that the Head’s wife was expected to host the school related events in their school-provided house. Isabel recalls her dialogue with a new Head’s wife, who was a professional before her husband became Head of School:

“You’re going to end up pouring the tea,” Isabel said.

“I’m not pouring tea,” she said.
“She ended up pouring tea, and doing the flower arrangements. It was symbolic.” Isabel sums it up succinctly: “In my generation, women wouldn’t go for it [the Head of School role] because it wasn’t a 50/50 domestic situation at home.” At that time, women worked 78% more unpaid hours than their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, Canadian Social Trends, 1996). This comments on traditional family structures as much as broader societal expectations but it is an arrangement that was often necessary when one spouse had a significant or high-profile role—and in coeducational independent schools, this spouse would be the male.

That was then. Today, the model should be different. Yet, it is not unusual in independent schools led by male Heads that their qualified partner stays home. Isabel surmises,

Maybe it’s choice based on added pressure. If the Head’s travelling, raising money, this and that, who is there for the kids? I get it. Even if the spouse can work 9-5, that job has demands too. I think it’s evidenced as you look at stats across the country, we haven’t moved that far away from that traditional model [of husband and wife].

This data reveals structural barriers undermining women’s advancement to independent school leadership. This is supported by Eagly’s (2007) research. In a study of leadership positions, women “were judged to be less effective than men in leadership positions occupied by more men or associated with a higher proportion of male subordinates,” (6) thus reinforcing Schein’s (2001) “Think Leadership, Think Male” association and by extension, raising some concern about how women will be perceived once they arrive.

4.2.5 Gendered Traditions and Women’s Leadership

There is a perception that age of school plays a role in women’s advancement to headships. Tradition is celebrated, and longevity lends prestige and market value. Coeducational schools are often older institutions with significant tradition and engaged alumni, who attended the school under the leadership of a Headmaster. They were often boys’ schools first, then fused with girls’ schools for financial, or social reasons. For many male alum, the “great man” paradigm defined school leadership. Years later, this association can affect hiring decisions, according to CIS Ontario: “The selection committees often have alumni on them…and they are often traditionalists…they’ve always had a male head, even in the coed schools. Always a male head. The alum are used to a male. All the Ontario Coeds
have gone coed have always had a male. It’s still there. Alum want this.” This may be implicit bias, “attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner” (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity) playing out. Elizabeth adds hiring a female head could ruffle alumni: “I think the old boys would see that as a big comedown.” There is tension here. Honouring these wishes is essential to the schools’ longevity and continued success because not-for-profit schools count on their alumni to continue to educationally and financially support the school. George reminds us that a key component of a sustainable school is keeping “the school full [and] encouraging the alumni to send their kids back.” Cecilia offers that there may be a connection between age and prestige of school and gender of Head:

I think there is…there’s a connection between tradition and history and its always worked so there’s a comfort there…I think if - if the prestigious schools are going to choose a female, they'd like to go out of the country, which is what many of them do.”

Interestingly, the schools where women are the Head of School are often younger schools, or single-sex girls schools. On one hand, this creates meaningful, empowered opportunities for leadership, and inspiring young women, but on the other, it suggests many female heads are limited in their leverage, restricted to smaller schools. Might these leadership roles be a gateway to the bigger leadership pipeline?

Mary, who became a highly successful head of a coeducation school, described an experience she had on this climb towards Head of School position. She was a senior leader in a prestigious boys’ school, and was considered by some to be a promising candidate for the school’s headship:

So I went to the meeting [where the search consultant, an American man, was presenting to the board]. I was one of two women in the room. The other was the Chief Financial Officer [a non-academic role]. And he made such a point of saying, "And of course I am not aware of a single prestigious boys' school that has ever considered a woman for a position of leadership like that. Have you, [M]?

Participants had few examples of such explicit discrimination. Many of their stories exposed second-generation gender bias, or implicit practices that hindered their careers in time and/or scope. Some explained that the representation of women in senior leadership has been so minimal in these
established, coeducational schools that the culture remains in one participant’s words, a “boys’ club.”
Another doesn’t use this term but describes the peculiarities of being a different gender. Since accepting a position in senior leadership at a new school, she had questioned their acceptance of her. She offers an anecdote to illustrate:

I’ve been included in a “gents” email which was strange the first time. Now that I’m in as admin in a new school and the only female in senior leadership it’s hard to be part of the social piece of leadership. It’s not intentional, but men socialize differently than women and my office is out of the main corridor.

This club, organic as it may be, is exclusionary because it is based on a previous culture, one founded on similarities and masculinity. Rosa’s slow inclusion into it, speaks to the power of relationships that shape corporate culture, and serves as a reminder that success in leadership requires “hard” skills such as academic and corporate credentials, and “soft” skills such as relationship-building, confidence, and team-cooperation. It echoes Ibarra, Ely, et al., (2013) claim that second-generation gender bias is so common in organizations that it is often not recognized but can affect women’s acceptance as leaders, and in turn, their career aspirations (hbr.org). They use the example of a woman who claimed “It’s nothing overt. I just feel less of a connection, either positive or negative, with the guys I work with. So sometimes I seem to have difficulty getting traction for my ideas” (ibid). Rosa has been highly successful in her new role, and has worked tirelessly to build bridges and solidify her team. But, hearing her story, one may think how much easier her integration may have been if she shared the gender of her circle of influence. Naturally, she is not the first woman to experience this lack of fit; women struggle to fit into a male mold of leadership, noting its discomfort (Baker, 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra, Ely, et al., 2013; Sandberg, 2013; Schein, 2001) and often questioning their own leadership, and their own identity. Blackmore and Sachs (2007), studying the experiences of women in male-dominated academic environments, found women were excluded through explicit means such as “bullying and fear tactics,” implicit divisions such as “the ‘gentleman’s club’ with its protective paternalism and patriarchal dividend,” and “by men prioritizing task-focused workaholism” (Airini et al, 2011, p. 46).

So, how does one lead with confidence, authenticity, and be a team player when seemingly anomalous? (Berdahl, 2015; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Schein, 2001). Men tend to be attracted to, and benefit from social and organizational hierarchies (Broadbridge, 2008, p.1228; Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 37).
Managing conflicting identities in terms of the socially expected and accepted behavior for females, and the socially expected and accepted behavior of leaders remains a struggle for women because leadership is still largely regarded as a male activity (Ely et al., 2011; Heilman, 2001; Johanson, 2008; Suh, Moskowitz, Fournier & Zuroff, 2004). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2012), in their study of women faculty in the university professoriate contend that leadership identity is further complicated by motherhood as “having a baby makes gender salient” (p.8) and “clashes both with her singularity of purpose and with external expectations of what it means to be a professor” (ibid). Eagly and Carli (2007) contend that the perceived need to display these male leadership characteristics could prevent women from pursuing and accepting leadership positions as women may feel they have to subvert their own traits to seem in control, and therefore may feel awkward or insincere when carrying out leadership behaviour.

Elizabeth’s anecdote reveals that her definition of leadership was irreconcilable with the historical title:

So when I become the Head of School, somebody called me the ‘headmistress.’ I said no. I'm nobody's mistress, and I'm not going to be a headmistress. I'd like to be the Head of School.

Ely et al (2011) suggest that “if a central developmental task for an aspiring leader is to integrate the leader identity into the core self, then this task is fraught at the outset for a woman, who must establish credibility in a culture that is deeply conflicted about her authority” (p. 477). Rosa offered that her new school had had a successful woman Head of School but qualified that she was frequently described as “a woman leading like a man.” Adding to this, Catherine found that when the term “ambition” is used to describe women leaders, it is often in a pejorative sense, making it difficult to make one’s intentions clear. She described her leadership persona as “dancing line between ambition and being self-directed,” a conscious decision to frame her own leadership identity.

### 4.3 Succession planning

One of the challenges to increasing the balance of women in leadership, and in particular, as Heads of School, is an inconsistency in the lack of succession planning amongst schools. Susan Wright’s (2015) study found that only 57% of independent schools were currently using formal succession planning; 51% had formal mentoring programs and/or partnerships (p.28). Part of the reason for not doing more is that some heads fear that developing people may precipitate their departure. As Alexandra says,
It's not every head who believes that they should send their young and up-and-coming leaders to get training in governance or finance or admissions. There would be a group of about 20 to 30 schools who will always support people through the [CAIS] Leadership Institute. And I would say there are some heads who believe in leadership development, not just professional development. So you have to almost convince heads of the value of leadership development.

Cecilia, who knows a number of schools well, found herself surprised at the number and types of schools who were not developing leadership capacity internally. She said, even at “a big sophisticated school in a big sophisticated market, there ought to be people in there who are developed and trained to take on the top job…and that is not happening very often.” Catherine summed it up: “…on the question of succession, people [are] not doing enough.” Interestingly, Wright’s (2015) study found that 82% of schools surveyed provided financial support for externally provided leadership programming, 74% supported internal professional development, 72% claimed to project leadership roles for candidates, and 14% supported job rotations, exchanges, and/or secondments, revealing an encouraging commitment to developing capacity, but some areas that could be further leveraged too. At just 14%, job rotations were surprisingly low. Leadership is developed through opportunities to lead, so this prompts other questions about succession planning in schools.

Internal leadership development not only benefits the long term prospects of the school, but also can enrich the capacity, and focus, of faculty in short term. Cecilia believes this is of critical importance to the immediate and future health of the school, so much so, that she suggests making it more meaningful, and demonstrable: “One of the metrics by which [boards] ought to be assessing [the head’s] success is whether they have a strong successor in place.” It should be intentional, coordinated, and measurable.

Without intentional development of leaders, schools are disadvantaged, and women faculty, in particular, are disadvantaged. Systemic barriers are preventing women from advancing effectively, and the problem is two-fold: low numbers of women seeking the position, and factors along the climb itself. Cecilia, an executive recruiter, emphasized the challenge of ascending to leadership in more established schools. She confessed that “older co-ed schools don’t have applicant pool,” suggesting that successors are chosen from well-known names. In her interview, Isabel admitted that “[she] get calls [from
executive recruiters and schools] all the time asking, “Who’ve you got?” What names can you give me?” Elizabeth supported this point: “Up until quite recently you would have found all-girl schools with male heads. So, I don’t think that co-ed schools or single sex [boys’] schools necessarily encourage women in senior leadership positions. Because if they did, we wouldn’t have the situations we have.” Certain candidates are encouraged to apply, and many of the same names make these lists. These responses suggest that networking and word of mouth may facilitate consideration for roles, and such processes benefit those who are established and well-known, making it especially difficult for women, most of whom are not sitting heads, to gain access to this pool. According to Rotman scholar, Beatrix Dart (2008), women do not tend to leverage networking as effectively as their male counterparts: "More women need to recognize that networking strengthens their effectiveness and capability to drive results. The ability to reach out and ask someone with a similar set of circumstances for their opinion or to get feedback is important” (p.14). Cecilia extends this point further, explaining that the leadership pool is limited, and while it is gendered, its shallowness is problematic. She says, “I don’t think the pipeline is full. But I would also say it’s not full with men either.” Some would suggest that more needs to be done to develop home-grown leaders; others contend that we have capable leaders that are not being encouraged. Moreover, this pipeline of candidates is not being well-tapped by all schools. In the last 10 years, a handful of traditional schools have chosen heads from outside Canada, preferring a candidate from a global pool. These include a prestigious urban boys’ school, two established coeducational schools and a prestigious girls’ school. These schools are rooted in, or adjacent to a large metropolitan area. These leaders, while experienced and proven, do not necessarily have roots to the communities they serve, nor CAIS Leadership Institute training, leaving one to question how important is growing our own.

Attempting to establish an average age for women in leadership in independent schools, I asked several participants and survey respondents about their own schools. Rosa explained that there was “No real average age [of women in leadership]. I’m the only one on [the executive team] and there’s one other on [the leadership team] who is 60+.” The survey results reinforce these numbers: Of 12 responding schools, women in leadership tend to be few and in later stages of their careers. For example, in 11 schools, women leaders were between 41-50 years old. In one school, the female leader was 51-60 years. On average, women wait to establish themselves as teachers before entering leadership roles. This is not uncommon across genders as school administration values teaching experience. From my survey of schools, I gleaned that women in positions of responsibility tended to have between 5-10 years of
teaching experience (7 schools) or 11-15 years (4 schools) of teaching experience, before seeking a position of responsibility or being tapped for leadership. Based on these numbers, most women do not enter leadership before age 30, delaying these responsibilities until well into their careers, and usually entering between ages 35-40. Advancing women in leadership, and increasing their representation at the level of headship, might mean getting more women into leadership roles earlier. Rosa’s description of herself as “an awkward fit,” and at times an overlooked member of a boys’ club, is perhaps not surprising, and likely a common scenario.

4.4 Relocation for Promotion & Off-Ramping

No two schools are alike. Thus, independent school hiring committees want a head who has experienced different roles in schools, but also one who has experienced different schools. Couple this ideal with the narrowing pyramid, the dwindling number of leadership roles as one climbs closer to the top, and, at some point in middle to senior management, leadership candidates have to move. Moving schools in CAIS, as I have suggested earlier, often necessitates a considerable commute, or more significantly, a move. Studies show that women with school-aged children are less likely to move (Scott, 1997; Lyness & Schrader, 2006). Among my school-based participants, eight women had moved schools for a promotional leadership role. Three of the eight did not have children, or had children who were no longer dependent and thus not living with them. Four of the eight had children still living at home. Of these 4, only one had moved her family; the three other women commuted on average 80 km a day to avoid moving theirs. One woman had her family after moving to a leadership role. These examples show that mobility advances careers. Thus, candidates who have flexibility and are willing to follow the job tend to advance faster. George compares it to other industries. He says,

It’s easier for men to move. In [a different corporate industry], we have a few gay men who are unattached, no kids, maybe I’m generalizing, but it’s probably easier. If you’re a young mother and you’ve got kids, and a network, and a nanny…

Rosa moved for opportunity when her family circumstances permitted: “I tried at my first school to advance within and there wasn’t the opportunity where I wanted it. That’s why I moved.” When the time was right, she moved cities for the promotion. Sometimes leadership candidates are compelled to move laterally—take a similar position at another school—with an eye on greater promotion to come; some do so, because support systems in another area are better for a family. Because there are only so many roles
for assistant/deputy heads, and/or heads, getting outside one’s school is often the only way to advance further. As Isabel explains, those in senior leadership—be it headship or deputy heads, might be “settling in and going, “Okay, well you know, I’m going to retire in 15 years, so I’m happy in my spot.” When there is little movement at the top, this affects everyone’s career opportunities, and women, in particular, given their general later start in leadership, and longer ascension patterns, are most affected. This is supported by Maureen Baker’s (2009) research: "Regardless of educational qualifications or occupational prestige, the work-related concessions that women often make for motherhood and marriage generally limit their academic promotion” (Baker 2010c; Zhang 2009, p.893). What is omitted from these anecdotes are the stories of women whose careers do not advance because they choose not to move.

There are structural forces keeping women out of higher administration, and while these are not necessarily explicit, they intersect and when combined, become more powerful. For example, we know there are fewer women in leadership than men. The disproportion of women to men becomes more pronounced the closer one gets to the top jobs, and again, more pronounced again in boarding schools. Also, leadership experience begets more leadership opportunity. Women’s responses to these forces are worth studying. According to Baker (2014) “these choices are actually shaped by patterns of support and structural differences” suggesting too, spaces for critical dialogue and organizational improvement. What does it mean then, when evidence points to women leaving the climb towards the top role? Are they truly self-selecting? Can their reasons for bowing out, or not pursuing the peak be separated from greater structural biases limiting their mobility?

Women themselves may lose interest in pursuing senior administration—for varied reasons, including different priorities, drift between work life and home life, and the time required (Mainiero, 2006; Mainiero and Gibson, 2017). Moreover, the role, especially in a boarding school, is not an easy fit with many women’s professional and personal lives, and some may find it uncomfortable. Women leave the pursuit of leadership for various reasons, many of which will overlap. These include few role models, lack of support, mid-level attrition.

4.5 Women Lose Traction on Climb Towards Top Roles

Women aspiring to leadership need time to get there. To stay the course, which is often longer and more gradual than men’s, they need support, greater capacity building, and mentoring. The majority
of women interviewed in this study were in roles between entry level and senior, or executive leadership. As Isabel says, “There are lots of quality females. I could go to any school and get 10 quickly [who aspire to greater leadership].” This does not mean that they are poised to jump into a headship however. Many are in the mid-level roles. According to Catherine, “if the numbers of women on a coeducational teaching staff--what might be considered a “feeder group” for leadership--are close to 50%, and if men and women enter leadership at equal rates, there should be similar numbers in the leadership pipeline.” But we know, that women do not enter as fast as men, and thus, are often behind from the start, and they do not progress as quickly (Hargens & Long, 2002), a trajectory Ward & Wolf-Wendel (2012) call “demographic inertia” (p.8) Couple this with personal life-experiences, such as starting a family, and the time required to complete “double duty”, and the climb can slow, even plateau. If there are 50% of women on a teaching staff, and they gradually spread out as they ascend the mountain at different rates, only a few will persist, or re-present after a period of plateau. This pattern results in experiences such as Rosa’s example above, a senior leader, in the penultimate phase of her career isolated in a male-dominated environment. Thus, greater support at work is essential for upwardly mobile women: “In a comparison of factors identified by men and women as contributing to their success, Broadbridge (2007) identified that “women put more emphasis on support mechanisms at work whereas men emphasized support from home” (p.47). A McKinsey and Co. (2017) study adds greater insight revealing that “Women identified key enablers they want their workplace to offer: Logistical Flexibility, 49%; Career flexibility, 48%; Policy to schedule meetings only during business hours, 34%; In-house or external childcare facilities, 33%” (p.52)

There are two key junctures: the path from entry level/junior leader to senior leader, and the path from senior leader to head. In these two junctures, the numbers of women competing for the Head of School role drop precipitously. To move from junior to senior leadership requires considerable support, what might be called “career capital” in the school, and a confluence of the right skills, soft and hard skills, and the right timing. Moreover, often, these senior roles—assistant head, deputy head, vice-principal—are not open to applications but are appointed. They are limited in number, and thus, do not arise often. Perhaps it is not surprising then, that it is at this juncture that significant career decisions are made. Some women move. Some stay in their roles, or move laterally to gain greater experience, and to find challenge. Ultimately, if one is not moving, they are waiting.
The next juncture, the final push to the summit, the head’s role, requires career capital and a considerable determination to earn the title. Carter et al. (2010) found that mentoring is essential but is not enough. They argue that “high potential women are over-mentored and under-sponsored relative to their male peers” and that “without sponsorship, women not only are less likely than men to be appointed to top roles but may also be more reluctant to go for them (p.82). This may help to explain that 50% of my leader participants expressed ambivalence towards this role. This is not uncommon as the role has evolved to include greater and more diverse responsibilities (Kennedy, 2009; Evans, 2010; CAIS, 2018). Rob Evans (2010) school leadership expert writes, “It seems no one wants the job. An entire generation of leaders is retiring, many of them early, and the number of candidates applying to replace them is plummeting. So too, is the tenure of their successors” (2010). Evans’ research is American based, suggesting the need for a Canadian study. Senior leadership is spoken of as a more desired role than the headship by several participants. Both Joan and Theodora, envisioning the benefits of senior leadership, emphasize the connection with students that is still part of the second-in-command role; the Head, conversely (andironically), can be the most removed of all staff from the daily interactions of the student body. Theodora explained her reluctance:

As far as absolute principal/Head of School, I don’t think I’d ever really — there’s less contact with kids. I like my job because I have a lot of contact with kids…a lot of positive contact with kids in the hallways and all that — When I was doing a similar job [to principal], the grade nine and ten [director], I really enjoyed that aspect too…it was very rewarding, you felt like you could make a difference…And I don’t know if that is the case as you get higher on the ladder…Certainly our principal has much less contact with the students. It seems to be a fundraising heavy kind of job really…

Disinterest, perhaps even disillusionment, with the expansion of the head role is not the only factor slowing the numbers of women entering headships. Another could be burnout. The women poised to enter headships have often been committed to their careers for decades. Sustaining the momentum and energy for the final push into a role that promises no letup, and likely more demands, is challenging. Rosa intimated that the time and work ethic needed throughout the latter stages of the climb could result in potential heads deciding not to make the final push to the top. A senior leader, she was “Unsure at this point,” surprisingly ambivalent about the headship. “I know I could do it, but don’t know what my interest will be when I feel like my current position isn’t challenging enough.” When I asked if she
anticipated the hours would increase as she moved towards this goal, her response summed up the investment thus far: “Not possible.”

Isabel says Rosa’s hesitation is not unusual. “A lot of women got to the level of assistant head and said, no, that’s not for me. “You didn’t have to be at the board meetings, you didn’t have to be the last one on the totem pole and the stress was enough…you didn’t have to go any higher.” Adding to this, the selection process is daunting. Isabel, the former director of CIS, questions the reasons why so many stop at the penultimate role. She says, “I don’t know if they’re not pursuing because it’s not worth the risk, or if they’re not pursuing because they think it’s a waste of energy.” She offers greater detail: “I know two females who’ve pursued various headships across the country…been disappointed and second every time. I don’t know if that is a pervasive feeling but I think it’s pertinent that there are a lot of qualified females who look at this and say it’s not worth it.” Isabel’s understanding of this process illustrates the tension between the structural challenges of climbing into top leadership, and the professional and personal toll this process can require. Are women not getting there because it is difficult? Are they weighing the intensity of the process against the chances of success? Or are they choosing not to go further because they simply do not like what they see?

The responses of my participants are not unusual. Of the ten who are in leadership roles/principal track, not all candidates wanted to aspire to Head of School roles as they are currently defined. Only three participants were certain about wanting to be Head of School. Five were uncertain; two did not want the role. Based on this small sample, the number of women who might be in the leadership pipeline varies from a low of three, to a high of eight, making encouraging those who are ambivalent critically important to the future of women in leadership. Shaping the path for them (Heath and Heath, 2010) through support and removing obstacles could transform the proportion of women in leadership at the highest levels.

In essence, the headship is an insecure job that often requires candidates with extensive fundraising, financial and curricular experience, strong people skills, an understanding of the complex recruitment process, a willingness to relocate, and to accept a reduction in holidays. And, for women, leadership identity confusion; for women with children, greater need for family support. Is it surprising that some women are wondering if it is worth the gamble? The responses above suggest that highly capable women, poised for headships, could be “self”-selecting out of these opportunities (my
emphasis intended). Often called “off-ramping,” or in response to Sheryl Sandberg’s 2013 *Lean In*, a conscious decision to “lean-out.” But self-selecting implies choice; what is the relationship between structural barriers and free will in female independent school leadership?

While teaching is often seen as a traditionally female career choice, female faculty in independent schools follow somewhat different timetable and expectations than those associated with a public sector school placement. For one, most independent schools do not have employee unions; the employee-manager relationship is akin to a private company. It is not without its perks such as a higher number of vacation days, but on average, the days are longer, especially in schools with a boarding population, and encourage community buy-in amongst their faculty, normalizing weekend work through scheduling of duty days, sports fixtures, service trips, alumni reunions, and, in several schools only a decade ago, Saturday classes. Taking on leadership responsibilities in this environment may lead, in some cases, to a more flexible class schedule, but comes with greater time investment and demands for presence. McKinsey and Co (2017) cite this 'anytime, anywhere' performance model” as being the biggest obstacle to women’s advancement (p.36), because working women continue to be the primary caregiver in most households, and therefore work the “double shift”. This is a significant factor in why women lag behind men in terms of proportional representation in leadership roles. Historically, in coeducational schools, leadership roles were not designed for women—in fact, one could argue they were not designed for anyone who did not conform to the most traditional of family structures, and was thus, capable of devoting all his time to the school’s growth. Life stage plays a role too. Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) and Mainiero and Gibson (2017) explored the prominence of three values, challenge, balance, and authenticity, in men and women throughout their careers and found that men in mid-career did not claim to need the same balance that women sought (p.362). There are myriad possible reasons for this, and several likely originate from the domestic design—the distribution of household duties—in most families. This contention would be worth greater investigation at another time.

Leading an independent school in the head role is an intensive, and often ceaseless vocation. The job requires a full-family commitment, the separation of tasks, and the full focus of the partners on the school itself. Thus, is not uncommon for “first families” with children to resort to gendered roles in which one parent leads the school, and the other stays home. Until very recently, the parent at home has been the female partner; now, there are signs of change with the spouse working outside the home. How these examples will shape the expectations of this role remain to be seen:
[The traditional expectations are] very much there. Whether the job demands that, or the job is just so stupid crazy busy for the head that someone has to pick up the rest of it, that it has to be this way, I don’t know. But I would suggest that it’s an interesting dynamic in that you don’t see many that are flipped around.

Isabel refers to the rarity of non-conventional gender roles in the independent school principal role. This is likely a microcosm of the larger cultural division of labour; in Canada, domestic responsibilities continue to be unequally divided, with women tipping the balance of unpaid household work and childcare hours (Statistics Canada, 2015), with 3.6 hours daily to men’s 2.4 hours, from 2015, the latest date available. Plainly put, running a school and simultaneously running a household, is a difficult commitment for many. Cecilia, an executive recruiter, admitted that “I’ve never really thought about this before but most of the women candidates for head are either single, or have no children, or their children are grown up.” So, the question is, are women camping out because they are satisfied with their role, or because the climb ahead seems difficult and uncomfortable? After all, there are few role models showing women the way. While self-selecting out of the headship might seem an exercise of a woman’s will, a closer look at the context and complexities of these decisions reveals myriad factors that might impact her will, and thus undermine her agency.

4.6 Identity Questions

Insecurities could be one reason women are pausing. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman (2014) suggested that women are not putting themselves forward for these roles with the same frequency as men. “The Confidence Gap” explores the complexities of this reluctance which Kay and Shipman argue are the result of patterns of socialization in females that encourage non-assertive, rule-abiding behavior in the workplace, and a general likelihood to underestimate their value, to ask for less salary, and to be selective about their paths. These are conditioned responses to persistent structural barriers and manifest in the Imposter theory (Clance & Imes, 1978) where women question their readiness. Female executives, for instance, report significant higher rates of stress, anxiety, somatic concerns, and, interestingly, perfectionism than their male counterparts (Optimum Talent, n.d; Parkman, 2016). Moreover, they report considerably lower scores on measures of self-respect, self-confidence, confidence in overcoming failure, and fear of success (ibid, p. 25) This lack of confidence could come from a range of factors, from “upbringing to biology” (Kay & Shipman, 2014 atlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/05/the-confidence-gap/359815/), and may be further complicated
by motherhood (ibid). But, based on the historical structural hegemonic practices depicted here, women do not fit. Perhaps confidence is not an inherent lack in women but rather, an appropriate response to very real, exclusive social conditions.

Isabel surmises that women in leadership “are self-selecting out a little more probably [than are men], and going back to the home-life thing.” George offers an anecdote that suggests that women are selective about promotions:

Guys are like, what’s the role, what does it lead to, how much will it pay? Women are like, “What will be my relationship with this person in Europe? What will it lead to afterwards? If it doesn’t work out, what will I do next?” It’s easier to deal with a guy. It’s always more complicated to place a woman, but the clients are happier with the results. Women are smarter.

Isabel adds,

They are likely self-selecting out more than males. Males will say, I want a headship. I will go to where there is a headship. Females will say, Well, no… I don’t want to have to move from Ontario, I don’t want to go here, I don’t want a boarding school. They’re pre-selecting in some cases.

Adding to the confidence gap are the challenges to identity that often come with leadership. Women, in particular, can struggle with the tension between leadership identity and personal identity, bringing into conflict their values. One participant showed that some fall back on established models: “The last Head of School here was female but I’m told she was a female leading as a male. I don’t know what that fully looks like but a lot of control in her hands only.” This sounds familiar to Ely’s (2011) contention that women often feel that “to become authoritative they [have to] become cold,” as if there’s no place for maternal characteristics in a leadership role. Moreover, this goes beyond administrative demeanor and can influence priorities. According to Blackmore and Sachs (2007) who studied educational leadership in a university context, in an environment of performance measures, initiatives such as “research outputs and grant acquisition have arguably come to count more than substantive social action such as addressing social justice issues” (Airini et al., 2011, p.45; Morley & Hosking, 2003) thereby reinforcing
old managerial hierarchies with new ones that seem more equitable to women, yet in reality, stress performance and time during periods when women’s focus and time is precious.

In the voices of this study’s participants, there is a tension between the projecting confidence and seeming authentic, a non-uncommon struggle for many professionals. To complicate matters, while the “gentlemen’s club” may restrict women’s access to powerful environments, some participants believed that the sisterhood did not benefit women either, offering that simply sharing gender with another was not enough to ensure support or understanding. One participant, Theodora, an experienced teacher and junior leader who was also a mother, felt “the sisterhood” might actually unwittingly undermine her.

[My superior has]…children. But she works long hours and she’s got a husband who takes on most of the child [care]…He feeds them dinner, he gets the kids all ready and he does the whole evening thing. And I wonder whether she would be – how sympathetic she’d be to [other women juggling home/life responsibilities].

Another offers, “Just because I managed to be superwoman for a while it doesn’t mean that everyone – that that’s the way.” Is it possible that instead of support, there’s competition? A rite of passage, or “we each pay our dues” mentality of women who have been successful want others to go through same pain? Mary suggested so. She has seen women who have hindered the leadership progress of other women:

That's an awful thing, but it's just true. I think that -- I think that young women [in particular ] beginning to move up the ladder are invisible and in fact collaborate in that invisibility by giving their ideas freely and willingly to others who use those ideas.

There are many examples of women helping women in leadership, and some agreement about what strategies are most effective. On a formal or macrolevel, several initiatives through national associations have catalyzed the sisterhood. In various stages of development, initiatives range from a women’s only module in the annual summer Leadership Institute to a one-off networking event after hours. These additions have raised awareness of the potential of numbers and the commonalities geographically disparate women share (CIS, 2018; CAIS, 2018). But, like any group, there is great plurality amongst members, and a homogenized solution is not the answer.
4.7 Parental leave and Domestic Issues

“Women could achieve economic equality in one generation if they stopped having children and replicated the work patterns of men. But the equality would last only one generation and then it’s over!”

-Sheila Regahar: Economic Gender Equality Indicators, 1998

As ridiculous as this idea may seem, Regahar may be onto something. On the climb to the top, one critical juncture is parental leave. Participants with children spoke about the challenges of teaching and leading in an independent school while rearing their own children. This has been studied in university settings (Airini, 2011). Participant Theodora is a mother of adolescents, and was keenly aware of the expectation of her dual roles—mothering and school leadership. And yet, the age of her children affords her greater autonomy to pursue leadership, compared to a mother of elementary school-aged children, or babies. The career interruption that can come from maternity leave is real. This is not simply because Canadian mothers are entitled to 12 months (now 18 months) away from the workplace, but because the successive pre-school years require great parental investment, emotional and physical stamina, and significant flexibility. This model of leadership is not an easy fit.

George says, “Women on mat leave ‘fall behind’. I think it’s the same as a business. It’s definitely a disadvantage if a woman goes on mat leave…it puts that person behind and that’s a disadvantage.” The independent school is not a public board; it does not have same human or financial resources to deal with maternity or parental leaves, and thus leaves of any kind can be more disruptive. Under Canadian law, women are guaranteed a similar role upon return from leave. What seemed like grand expectations in these roles before pregnancy, might become less manageable with a baby. Taking shorter leave is common in high-performance professions such as law and medicine (McMahon 2014; Marron, 2008). In teaching, where child development is paramount, few teachers opt for less time with their babies, and many stretch their leaves into traditional holiday periods to maximize bonding. But, in leadership roles, the tug of war between work and child can be real, as roles can be more precarious. Mothers often want to maximize time with baby—and this can come at the cost of leadership. There are pervasive structural challenges to motherhood and leadership in this context. Rosa, explains that even amidst evolving gender roles, “Women are judged more [than men] if they aren’t present for the children…” leaving women in another bind. Policy in many schools reinforces this conundrum— inadvertently. For example, few schools offer modified or flexible scheduling post-leave such as is
available in the public boards. Theodora explains the predicament post-partum teachers face in her school:

[Our school provides] nothing at all. And we’ve been talking about that a little bit because it’s quite important. But we definitely have people who’ve come back and their babies are just a year, and they’re back into coaching something, teaching a class…

The teaching role includes the full curriculum: academics, arts, sports, and other duties such as pastoral care, supervision, and meetings and correspondence with parents. It is a busy, highly rewarding, but at times, stressful job, partly because of the number of interactions (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). The irony which is not lost on teachers, too, is that a mother leaves her own child in the paid care of others so she can care for the children of others. For a teacher with only a few years experience earning a starting salary, this might seem absurd. Thus, it should come as no surprise that the pressure to do everything might not be appealing for a new mother. Theodora adds,

When I went [to her current school] I was only going to be there for 10 months, it was a mat leave replacement and she never came back. And in fact there were two science teachers who were on mat leave at the same time and neither of them came back. We lose – yeah, we lose probably – I’m not sure what the exact ratio would be.

Women may choose to stay home after bearing children. Those who desire a career, however, are underserved by the current policies and practices in most independent schools, which are challenged themselves by revenue and costs. Creative solutions are needed to ensure that the needs of both women and school are met so that valued employees with leadership potential are not lost because of career interruptions. Doing more here could positively disrupt the demographic distribution of women leaders, allowing more to enter and advance in leadership at younger ages.

Data from Statistics Canada shows that while there has been progress, domestic responsibilities are not equal, lending greater support to Orenstein’s (2000) “half-changed” world and Gerson’s (2010) “unfinished revolution.” In a national survey of dual earner couples, with both parents working full-time, women spent almost 50 hours/week on childcare to men’s 28 hours, and 13.8 hours/week on domestic unpaid work to men’s 8.3 hours (Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010; 2017). Unpaid work is more evenly distributed by gender than it was a generation ago, but domestic cares still
consume more of women’s lives, despite their commitments to work outside of the home, often resulting in difficult choices and/or detrimental effects on a women’s career and overall wellness (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Correll, Benard & Paik, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Plainly put, running a school and simultaneously running a household, is a difficult commitment for many. Cecilia’s realization that women applying for headship tend to be single, divorced, or mothers to grown children is telling. So, the question is, are women camping out because they are satisfied with their role, or because the climb ahead seems difficult and uncomfortable? After all, there are few role models showing women the way.

4.8 Summary

As the saying goes, “you can’t be what you can’t see.” In the Canadian independent schools pipeline, there are highly-skilled women who seek headships. In fact, studies show that because “women must overcome barriers to attain leadership roles and therefore are more stringently selected than men, women leaders may manifest a more effective set of leader behaviors mainly because they are more qualified,” meaning that many women in senior leadership are well-rounded candidates (Eagly, 2007, p.5; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2019). But, qualifications notwithstanding, their numbers are small in comparison to the number of men seeking these roles. Moreover, the female candidates are few in comparison to the number of Heads retiring (CAIS). Thus, the proportion of women in the Head role is not likely to change dramatically unless there are intentional, coordinated measures to accelerate the pace of women into the headship (Fabrizi, 2018; Gloor et al., 2018; Krivkovich et al, 2017; Wright, 2015).

This chapter details the structural barriers influencing women entering and advancing in leadership in independent schools. Findings provide sight into the statistical realities of the representations of women in these schools, demonstrating—granted in a limited sample—that power is concentrated with men, and that women in leadership are minority members of the leadership team. They tend to be 41-50 years of age, have considerable experience, be mothers, and work significant more hours than women in faculty roles.

It reveals the complexity of these barriers many of which are rooted in the history, uniqueness, and autonomous nature of the independent school itself, from its foundational need to be financially
healthy and ensure long-term survival and the need to appeal to new generations of children, and in the ways in which women are socialized to see themselves. In schools, these barriers and include the composition of boards and hiring committees, the desire for proven leaders with financial acumen, expectations about commitment to the school and representation of the school, and the impact on family dynamics and divisions of labour.

This chapter suggests that independent schools, diverse as they are, have some key commonalities: history, tradition, alumni, geographical context, financial security, and culture, and the intersection of these factors has impacted the power of women in leadership roles. Moreover, as this chapter shows, potential Heads of School make considerable investments of time to climb towards the headship and ultimately more time, sacrificing personal life and privacy, once one arrives in the role. Other barriers include gendered expectations such as the uncomfortable fit between women’s leadership identity and that of traditional school leadership—a fit that is compounded by childbearing and childrearing—the need to relocate to build her career, and the lack of female role models and sisterhood support, and the clash of traditional independent school scheduling with women’s need for balance. Another finding is that boards, which in every case were significantly male-heavy, have a preference for proven Head of School candidates. These are often men, as men have dominated leadership ranks in these schools since their inception. Financial acumen, one of the most important skills to hiring committees, is often less developed in women candidates. These participants’ stories highlight that there is a tendency for women to come to Head of School roles through faculty ranks where job-based excellence is fostered from position to position, with running the school being the final ascent of the instructional leader. This helps to explain some of the difficult women have in breaking into headship pool. Chapter five offers an in-depth analysis of women’s strategies in resisting hegemonic forces and overcoming these barriers, and itemizes the organizational facilitators that encourage women to thrive.
5. Chapter Five: Advancing in Leadership: Professional and Personal Strategies and Organizational Facilitators

"As long as female executives face the double bind, they will need to find ways to manage it"—Zheng, Kark, Meister, 2018 https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership

Female teachers in independent schools employ a number of strategies to enter and advance in administration. Their perceptions of their experiences on the leadership climb are detailed in this chapter; they illuminate different stages in this process, from how it appears (such as their perceptions of the promotion process), to the duration of the climb (the length and time required), to strategies that facilitate promotion. There is significant complexity in their descriptions, and some idiosyncrasy, given that each participant is an individual, and age, stage, and school are variables. However, even when these are considered, there are key patterns that appear. For the purposes of illustrating these, I have grouped the information into two broad categories: professional strategies and personal strategies.

5.1 Professional Strategies for Success

Participants were chosen according to a set of criteria, including their school’s geographical location in Canada. Each respondent worked, or had worked in a leadership role in a CAIS independent school, had made a conscious decision to seek a new role and thereby, trade classroom teaching time for greater administrative responsibility. Thus, similar professional motivations emerged amongst candidates. All displayed a strong sense of self-belief, which White et al. (1997) find is associated with “other personality characteristics, such as a personal motivation to achieve and persistence towards that goal” (2011, p.46). Their strategies for advancing in leadership can be divided into seven key areas: 1. Embracing a growth mindset and being willing to learn and adapt 2. Working diligently and smartly; 3. Promoting self in myriad ways 4. Developing and displaying people skills 5. Seeking professional development and valued credentials 6. Cultivating Support; and, if necessary, 7. Relocating.

5.1.1 Growth, Innovation, and Improvement

Overwhelmingly, respondents identified a growth mindset – defined by Carol Dweck (2006) as the belief that abilities and intelligence are not fixed but can be grown or developed as a critical trait amongst leaders in independent school. Essentially, this looks like a life-long learner, someone open to innovation, adaptable to shifting circumstances, and continuously challenging oneself to be a better professional, and to making the school better. Participants used similar language to describe the need for
stretching oneself beyond the responsibilities and expectations of the current role: You have to “show impact and ability to influence, a growth mindset…” Another offered, “I think you have to be able to look for opportunities where you can stick your head out and say, I think we should try this or I think this might work better for us.” Elizabeth said prospective leaders can distinguish themselves “by starting an initiative, or by not correcting, but improving what the school already does.” They should “look for ways to shine outside of the classroom.” A former head added:

if you don't have something that pushes you out of the context in which you have previously and historically been successful, you do not appear to other people to have the same cachet that you have if you've had multiple experiences. I could never have gotten the [X] job from [W] if I had been there for the previous 35 years.

In other words, prospective leaders need to continuously expand their skill base, not simply their years of experience. Simply gaining experience in similar roles is not likely to distinguish a leader. Another participant summed up how she viewed the Head of School role, emphasizing the importance of these habits of mind:

[The Headship] is such a complex job, you have to be really great at what you do in all the steps along the way…look for opportunities to improve the school outside of your regular day-to-day responsibility - you have to be great at that.

These comments come from women with growth mindsets, certainly, but they also emphasize the importance of displaying their strengths in different contexts and raising their profile. The participants highlight connection between their professional growth, innovative thinking, and school improvement. The subtext shows the importance of confidence, and risk taking, and getting noticed, underlining the critical importance of displaying one’s skillset. The interplay amongst these factors is what develops leaders and will be further explored in this chapter (Fig.11).
Developing a growth mindset, continuing to be innovative, and displaying one’s strengths are essential to prospects for promotion. However, as independent schools are independently governed, employees are hired by each school. There is no official human resources network or pool of employees as is found in the public boards. Thus, schools and their teachers, respectively, can be quite siloed, limiting one’s reach and consequently, one's promotional prospects. Finding opportunities for connecting with other schools, or pursuing new initiatives in the provincial or national associations is important for developing perspective and sourcing opportunity.

5.1.2 Working Diligently and Smartly

Women tend to wait to enter leadership, and therefore, are older and often more experienced teachers when they advance (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1998;) Moreover, more so than men, still tend to enter administrative roles through the academic path (Eagly & Carli, 2007), a natural progression from teaching, lining them up for roles such as department head, program director (Athletics, Service), grade or school director, residential faculty (boarding schools only), and putting them on track to senior leadership, eventual assistant or deputy headship, and, ultimately Head of School. My participants emphasized the need for prospective leaders to work hard and invest considerable time in the organization. They stressed the need to display a strong work ethic, and to find opportunities—not simply all that arise—but those “high octane moments”, ones with value and visibility to demonstrate mastery of her role. Several stressed that these moments had to be just that—opportunities—and that as the job becomes more complex, one has to find them but must be selective to preserve the demands on her time. That is, work hard, but work smartly.
Women tend to follow a particular path into leadership. They are often motivated by a desire for greater challenge, professional growth, and new perspectives of independent school careers. They seek experiences that offer challenge, require a greater test of their skillset, and significant new learning. Former Head of School, Mary, offered this metaphor: “Just like the kids, they need challenges that are just beyond their skill and experience level but not so far beyond that, you know, they're basically out there on the limb and you have to save them.” Once a teacher has made the decision to seek leadership, she will seek to broaden her experience and build her capacity. The more strategic will identify her next role through a gap-like analysis of her experiences and the end-goal, and seek the complementary professional development. Eleanor, for instance, shared her strategic approach:

My recommendation would be to do like myself, which might be a very female approach—take the courses, and read about leadership, and get your foot in the door at one level and get the experience, and then start deciding if that’s something you’re looking for.

Research suggests that women tend to be selective about when they apply for promotion and to which role (Clance & Imes, 1978; Kay & Shipman, 2014). My data bore this out. Participants spoke about timing and fit. Rosa, for instance shared “When an opportunity was presented, I thought about whether it was the right fit for me or and then chose to apply or not.” She is not swayed by any single factor such as the promise of remuneration, or even the appeal of the role; rather, she is suggesting that there are various considerations women bring to promotional opportunities.

5.1.3 Promoting Excellence, Promoting Self

Participants agreed that distinguishing oneself as an outstanding employee who excels in her current role was essential to advancing into higher leadership. This required some strategy too. Women candidates for leadership recognized the need to portray themselves effectively and to cultivate a public image that reflects their strengths and their benefit to the school. Elizabeth explained, [the prospective leader should] “be the best she can be at what she's doing now, establish that credibility early on in being somebody who's committed to excellence, regardless of the task.” Another participant added that those aspiring to leadership must “demonstrate that you're a good teacher and you can communicate well” for these skills build credibility and trust with multiple stakeholders. Joan believed that potential leaders needed more than good teaching and communication skills. She felt that to preserve the self, one must strategize a little, investing in your own promotion. “You want to keep letting them [school
decision makers] know that you're interested...you want to show that you...it’s a little bit surface level.” Commitment to developing one’s professional capacity is a win-win result: it encourages self-improvement and can enrich confidence, while also demanding attention from administration. But, engaging in this requires leaving the classroom—still proportionally women-dominated—for mostly unsustained bursts of connection with others, and this may not seem a good tradeoff. In such an environment, a few participants spoke about the need to deliberately raise one’s professional profile, especially as they ascend into leadership.

Like a professional athlete, the teacher-leader creates a calling card, in this case, a social media profile, to showcase her professional persona. This entails making connections with colleagues in other schools, finding opportunities to share ideas, and connections. The day-to-day responsibilities of classes, curriculum, colleagues, and, in many cases, a woman’s children, can be demanding, leaving little time for networking, inside or outside the school. Beatrix Dart (2008) claims that when women do network their networks are not as efficient, or effective as those of men: “Women typically separate personal and professional networks. Personal networks tend to be dominated by other women, whereas professional networks include mostly men. For this reason they wind up having to cultivate many more relationships than men” (p.14). Catherine, a vice-principal, explained that some of the well-known leaders cultivated their profiles, investing heavily in “external networking and promotion.” She felt this simply “has to happen” to foster the best opportunities. Eleanor, echoed this sentiment. As a teacher she had cultivated a reputation for excellence in the classroom and her capability has made her a strong leader. But, to enter leadership, she claims, “I had to put myself out there.”

Elizabeth, had a similar perspective but, as head of a coeducational school, she had noticed a trend: She had come to believe that “men are much more likely to try something” and this willingness to take risks is necessary in this environment. She added, “To move to the next level, I think you want to make yourself as known as possible in the community as someone who is passionate and experienced.” This self-promotion strategy becomes more important as one approaches senior leadership, the stage in the climb that seems to be a tipping point; instead of candidates simply putting their professional profile online, now, executive recruiters start calling them, recruiting candidates directly for senior leadership roles and headships.
5.1.4 Developing Relationships and Displaying People Skills

Good school leadership requires attention to continuous organizational improvement. Thus, a Head of School encourages the school’s teachers to perennially improve their practice, a task best accomplished by an individual who can motivate others. Heath & Heath (2010) refer to leadership as a process of change, one which requires great and persistent effort. They use the metaphorical concept of “directing the rider (supporting critical points), moving the elephant (motivating), and shaping the path” (outlining how it is possible) (p.7-8). Respondents emphasized that to lead a school, prospective leaders needed well-honed people skills, should display a good rapport with peers and “get along with people” while another added she should be willing to have “difficult conversations with adults to improve their performance.” Developing strong skills in managing people will enable a positive organizational culture. Several commented on the challenges of adding hierarchical roles to a culture of professional equality. They believed “peer to peer management is harder at a school” in a culture where at its best, one is managing friendly colleagues but at its worst could resemble the crab bucket where colleagues prevent one of their own from getting ahead. Rosa, addressed this, adding that good leaders look for “opportunities to better the environment for everybody.” She felt that “you have to show you’re dedicated and willing to do what it takes to improve the whole organization, even if this is sometimes uncomfortable. You need to model good people skills, how that you’re all in and willing to pick up garbage.” This might be viewed as benevolent ambition, a team approach where one’s ability to persuade others towards a goal is best for them, and her. There is an interesting tension here. Soft skills such as likeability are cited as important in the teaching profession (Gruber, 2012; Quigley, 2016), and can enhance the perceived value of a prospective leader. But, if managing people offers opportunities for likeability, it also offers challenges to likeability, and women, more so than men, can struggle with the changing relationships as they ascend into more authoritative roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ely, Ibera, Kolb, 2011).

Almost all participants cited decision-making and judgment as being critical components of good leadership. To these, they added “problem solving”, “creativity” and “resourcefulness” suggesting leadership is dynamic but also unpredictable; good people skills, strong thinking skills, and a willingness to find solutions are valuable tools. Again, these skills underline the nature of the job itself which is one that needs to be responsive—if not anticipative educational trends, government initiatives, market forces, and constituents such as boards, parents, and, ultimately, students. Harvard’s Principals’ Center
offers professional training in such skills framing them as “adaptive leadership” (www.gse.harvard.edu), and CAIS itself has stressed the need for this dynamic skillset. In its 2051 Project, it has assembled academic and business thinkers from across Canada to consider how CAIS schools might “initiate innovation and change” to ensure “their strength and permanence through academic and business innovation,” provide outstanding educational opportunities to students and prepare them for a rapidly-changing world. Rosa summed it up: “[The Head of School] needs to make good decisions and be a good problem solver” while simultaneously “getting along with people. “[She needs to be] a big picture thinker. They're all clinical skills on the path towards leadership and not everybody sees that.”

5.1.5 Seek Professional Development and Valued Credentials

Prospective women leaders design academic and professional learning strategically. Generally, professional development for these leadership candidates comes in two forms: academic or teacher-training credentials, such as Additional Basic Qualifications, and/or graduate degrees, or targeted leadership training such as CAIS sponsored Leadership Institute, a significant player in the Canadian independent school world, training, conferences, or in a few rare cases, professional coaching. Other options may include professional institutes. These training opportunities are expensive and if sponsored by the school, the costs may be fully or partially covered. Not everyone will be sponsored though; streaming or careful selection of individuals will take place so that the limited funds go directly to the ideal candidate, creating a priority system for the best candidates. Generally, larger, more established schools have more money for professional development, thereby advantaging those who can shine in these schools. Thus, demonstrating that one is committed to professional growth and the school improvement is vital for securing professional development investment. Once in leadership ranks, leadership development becomes more frequent and more focused, developing the skill base for greater organizational or executive profiles.

Advanced academic credentials are important. Of the 13 teacher participants interviewed in this study (including two executive directors), 11 had Master’s degrees; all of these degrees were in Arts/Science or Education. Interestingly, only one of the participants, Elizabeth, possessed an MBA. She was serving as a Head of School at the time of the interview, and had earned her MBA after her promotion to this role. She felt that:
anyone who would become a Head of School should have an MBA. You need to understand the business; you [don't have] to be able to do a spreadsheet and you don't have to be able to do the balance sheet or any of that, but you have to know the questions to ask.

Elizabeth’s credentials enhance her credibility as a woman managing a large faculty and a multi-million dollar budget in a metropolitan school. Moreover, she has survived professionally, growing the school, and, at 10 years and counting, surpassing the usual tenure of 5 years for most first time Heads of School (CAIS, 2008; Wright, 2015).

All participants agreed that enrolling in leadership-related professional development was essential to advancement but there was a lack of consensus on the most rewarding career-focused programming. Eight of the 11 prospective leaders had graduated with the CAIS Leadership Institute diploma in Canadian independent school leadership. Moreover, the numbers graduating with this leadership diploma over the last five years suggest there are a high proportion of women in the leadership pipeline:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Graduates of CAIS Leadership Institutes</th>
<th># of women</th>
<th>% of women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017:</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016:</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015:</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014:</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013:</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>61.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 12: Graduates of CAIS Leadership Institutes

These numbers indicate that a majority of graduates of this program are women (CAIS, 2017). Moreover, “Next Steps,” a newer, more personalized CAIS program for aspiring Heads of School who
have completed the Leadership Institute, a de facto independent school leadership graduate program, boasts women as 16/32 grads, or 50% in its first three cohorts suggesting that women are interested in leading, and that this professional development is available and accessible to women:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduates of Next Steps Program</th>
<th># of Women</th>
<th>% of Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2016-2017</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: Graduates of Next Steps Program

Two leadership candidates also possessed Principal I and II credentials.

CAIS Executive Alexandra explains that Next Steps was introduced to foster closer connections between leadership candidates, leaders and former leaders, and CAIS administration, to address the leadership gap and encourage greater leadership sustainability: “what we're trying to do with the Next Steps Program is get the candidates and some of the boards into other areas of other schools.” The connection between current leaders and prospective leaders is key. Candidates gain insider leadership knowledge through skill-based learning, while mentoring with established leaders networking with those in hiring circles, and building a cohort of colleagues across Canada. For leaders, it affords an up-close look at the talent, and a chance to mentor the next generation.

Leadership sustainability through improved preparation is also being addressed by CIS Ontario, which has begun a partnership with York University to offer an independent school principal’s qualification program. In a broad survey of CAIS heads conducted in 2015, Susan Wright tracked their professional backgrounds. Many CAIS heads have been academic leaders, with more than 50% having been department heads at some point (Wright, 2015, p.12); notable numbers (18%) have come from admissions (Wright, 2015, p.13), a portfolio aligned with the business side of the school, suggesting
knowing how to promote, recruit, populate the school, and foster relationships with families are critical leadership skills valued in leadership contexts.

5.1.6 Cultivating Support

Leadership literature extolls the value of mentorship and reminds us of the inspirational effect good leaders can have on employee performance (Hoigaard & Mathisen, 2009; Moore Brown, 2005; Searby et al., 2015). Strong, sustained leadership necessitates succession planning (Peters-Hawkins et al, 2017), therefore, it is to the Head of School’s benefit as a leader to know who is interested in leading. In my study, respondents agreed that making one’s career intentions clear to their respective Heads of School was important to their growth, and credited this openness with greater opportunities to enrich their capacity. Mary, a retired Head of School offered the view from the top:

Pester your head to give you experience outside of your purview. If you’re a great academic leader and you know your curriculum inside out, tell your head you’d like to get some advancement experience, or you’d like to sit in on the budget committee, or you’d like to get your HR certificate—just something that gets you out of your silo-ed focus and spread your wings a little bit.

Joan knew she wanted to be a leader, and was willing to assume a position of responsibility early in her career. She remembered: “I really wanted the head to know my intention --directions and then opportunities at [my school] happened very early. After three years of being there I became Department Head, so I was lucky, I had a lot of good guidance there and---So between [the head] and the Department Head, the two of them sort of guided me that way.” A perceptive head can help shape the careers of future school leaders but leadership development and succession planning are not job requirements, nor are they necessarily beneficial to the head him/herself. Leaders take years to develop, and often, after significant investment, they leave for another school—for opportunity. So, a head with limited funds might hesitate to invest in greater leadership development. However, without investing in talent, a school, like a business, will limit their potential (Peters-Hawkins, 2017; Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Elizabeth, a sitting head, felt that heads should be encouraging their faculty to enter leadership. For instance, she suggests heads should ask prospective leaders “[have you] Ever thought of going to the Leadership Institute?” Not only did she consider leadership development a philosophical part of her role, but she believed that this nudge was necessary to cultivate talent, and help others see their potential. She
continues, “you know, you always get surprised when you mention stuff like that - it's like they haven't thought of themselves in that way.” Emily’s leadership development trajectory confirms the need for heads to encourage potential leaders. She confesses that

If I hadn't had the sort of tap on the shoulder, you know literally someone pointing out and putting on my desk, like the [X school] posting --I just - you know I had little kids and I was just - sometimes you're keeping your head just above water, so it really wouldn't have happened in any of the moments, you know that we're deciding, if someone hadn't thought of me and given me a bit of a nudge.

Forward-thinking heads invest in leadership development. Moreover, Elizabeth sums up a theme that is persistent in studies of women’s leadership. Namely, that for myriad reasons, many capable women do not self-identify as leaders…and a sponsor, or champion can help them envision themselves in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; CAIS, 2018). A voice of impact, such as a Head of School can transform perceptions of career development opportunities. The power of this conversation, short as it may be, underlines the importance of interacting with, or being known to the head. Unlike the public boards that still offer plenty of opportunities to serve as vice-principal or principal (partly because the role has become less palatable in recent years), in independent schools, roles are limited. Simply gaining principal credentials may not lead to greater advancement in one’s school, far less a principalship. There are many other skills required; there may be other more obvious, or more skilled, candidates. However, the head is in a unique position, like CEO of a company, to promote and recommend, and this attention can be catalytic to a leadership career.

5.1.7 Relocation: A Strategy for Professional Advancement

To climb through snow, one requires skills, support, and the freedom to move as needed. If one gets stuck on the ascent, she may stay there and in effect plateau while waiting for conditions to change, descend, or move to another hill. In independent schools, the pyramid-shaped promotional structure necessitates that as faculty move from full-time teaching to full-time leadership, the number of positions of responsibility decline, until there is only one: Head of School. Women on leadership tracks are faced with two choices as they progress upwards: work hard, bide time, and wait for space to open above, or consider another mountain. Of the 9 women in low, middle, and senior level leadership in this study (not Head of School), 7 women moved schools to get their current job (1 BC, 1 Ottawa; 5 GTA); for some, it
has meant a long commute (50k+) twice a day. For others, it might mean moving the family.

Respondents cited promotional reasons in their decisions to move: “I was looking for challenge and felt that my full skills weren’t being used at my former school,” Rosa said. The new role at a new school was “a natural next step from being Assistant Director of Academics.” These anecdotes suggest that leadership for women is a linear, step-by-step climb. But they gloss over the challenges of moving between stages, and don’t differentiate among stages, suggesting that the ascent to the senior leadership or Head of School can be more time consuming and frustrating than at lower levels. After reaching senior leadership, there is only one more step, but it’s the biggest of all. So, perhaps it is not surprising that the final stage of the climb is often punctuated by standing still, assessing one’s best route, or making lateral movements, that prolong—even negate—the ascent. Anne-Marie Slaughter (2015) calls it “The Great Stall” as women get stuck in senior positions but fall short of the top job (p. 81). This is supported by the experiences of several participants in this study, including Emily and Catherine, and more recently, by a CAIS Head of School who said she applied four times from her senior leadership role for her current Head of School job before receiving it (CIS, Women’s Networking Event, 2018).

Knowing how often such experiences occur, and how prolonged this final promotional step can be would offer greater insight into the supports needed. Moving schools—for those who are willing--can accelerate the leadership climb. Instead of waiting for a senior opportunity to arise at one’s school, candidates can seek out their desired position from a pool of schools, and literally, seek the job. Of the participants in this study, 10 women (77%) moved schools to take their current role, and six of the 13 women had moved to take their leadership role. Often, they will find their desired role at a smaller school, where they can gain experience and credibility, before returning to the more established, or larger school context. Catherine, herself a successful vice principal, reflected on the route ahead: “I think people who successfully move from either vice principal or assistant head roles…[for] a lot of those opportunities you have to jump ship, so to speak.” The decision to relocate is highly gendered. Not only are women less likely to move their family for a promotion (Eagly & Carley, 2007; Ezrati, 1983; Watkins et al, 1998; Zhong, et al, 2018), but as Carter et al (2010) contend, because women are “still perceived as “risky” appointments by often male-dominated committees” they are more likely to have to move organizations for the top role. In their research on “top-performing CEOs,” those who were women “were nearly twice as likely as the men to have been hired from outside the company” (p.83).

Women tend to stay in leadership roles at the same school until a certain point: this is often well into junior or middle leadership. Women who do not wish to move right away, or at all, may seek
lateral promotions, learn a new role, and remain at virtually the same level of promotion and pay, limiting themselves to many years in virtually the same place. Women are rarely appointed to headships from within, and yet two examples from 2017-2018 suggests that this may be becoming more common. Elizabeth, the one head who had been appointed from within, admitted that her route to the headship was unusual. Would promoting from within and thereby making this “unusual” route commonplace, increase the number of women leading as Heads of School?

5.1.8 Redefining Leadership

Every participant questioned the current expectations of the Head of School role. Many vowed to make changes once achieving that role; some had started to redefine their own respective roles on the ascent. There is a tension here as candidates seek a role that they desire to reinvent, perhaps explaining the ambivalence that characterizes several responses. The change they seek echoes the recurring motif of “fit” for women, repeating the earlier theme that candidates advance into leadership by focusing on how to better themselves and the school. These women felt that the head role, as currently exists, was not compatible with their own leadership priorities. Clear concerns about expectations, school-related pressures, personal and professional balance, and a desire to find greater efficiency in tasks emerged as recurrent themes for those on the upward trajectory, reaffirming the “scramble” (Sandberg, 2013) and “circuitous” route (Ozga, 1993) concepts. Victoria, for instance, in her senior leadership role, was redefining what leadership looked like, partly because as she says, “there are only 24 hours in the day.” She had a family, a partner who worked long hours, and a significant public transit commute. Her work had to be measured and disciplined to manage it all. She explained:

I would set boundaries very clearly of when I will arrive and when I leave. I have left meetings where I'm the only woman, and I have left. I am making sure my time at work is well-spent – I don’t waste my time at work…

She ate lunch at her desk every day “so that I can actually then be with people…I’m actually more targeted than people would probably think.”

Victoria confessed that she was finding senior leadership incongruous with her own values, and was not willing to live this way for much longer. When I spoke to her the first time, she was considering resigning within the next couple of years. She had been promoted from a junior leadership role at one
school to senior leadership at another, then moved again to a third school for a deputy head role. Now, she has stopped the ascent. By choice, she has left leadership, the independent school, and the commute, and is teaching full-time in a fourth school, a public high school close to home.

5.2 Personal Strategies: How Women Leaders Do it All

Teaching in an independent school tends to demand greater time investment than teaching in the public boards. The majority of independent schools are not unionized, nor do they have collective agreements on work hours. The role of full-time teachers includes a full academic course load and one or two terms of cocurricular coaching or supervision. Workdays are longer, and this is amplified in boarding schools which often require evening commitments such as residence, or even, weekend duty. To be successful in this environment often means working “around the clock”, taking work home evenings and weekends, being highly self-disciplined and prioritizing the job. Not surprisingly, balance between professional world and the personal realm can be elusive. In this study, most participants discussed the work/life “balance” with several suggesting such a notion was an inadequate way to describe their lives. One recent US study revealed that teacher retention rates in independent schools in the United States are significantly lower than in public schools (teacherpensions.org); a 2013 Canadian study on teacher retention in Alberta found that “urban and private schools had higher rates of attrition than other schools” (Guarino et al., 2006).

5.2.1 Define Work-Life Balance

All of the thirteen educational participants (not including executive recruiters) spoke at length about the challenges of building careers in the high-performance, non-stop independent school environment. Coping strategies of respondents without children were no dissimilar to their peers with children. They wanted to show their commitment to their work and to the organization, emphasizing the need to seem “job first”, but to turning off when possible to avoid physical and mental burnout. Eleanor recognized this tension, and strived for a healthy devotion to her personal life, trying to avoid subsuming it to work demands. After finishing her first couple of years in senior leadership, she summed up her state of mind: “It’s been a phenomenal year and I have felt a lot of support from my partner but I can’t keep working the way that I am all the time. So you struggle.” She prioritized time with her partner, and reached out to other female leaders for support. Eleanor summarized a recent conversation with Michelle, a female head at single-sex girls’ school: “Her response was that she worked very long hours,
and for her, that is balance. She reshaped what [balance] means for her” reclaiming the term, personalizing it, and making it meaningful. Michelle’s example reveals a recalibrating of her own expectations and by extension, work hours. To be healthy, and have meaningful personal time, she needed to abandon a traditional work schedule and accept that working evenings, weekends, and occasionally during holiday time is the price of being good at her job—and that helps her feel good. Eleanor’s reflection also illustrated a dichotomy between the social values of generations. The following contrasts the interpretation of balance of an established head and the viewpoints of new hires:

I guess for myself, it’s been interesting—a lot of our staff is a good 10 years younger and a lot of that research about millennials is true. I think they really do get that balance. Some of our staff say, “I don’t work on weekends,” which to me is unfathomable! I can’t believe they’ve even said it! Initially, it really rattled me, and then I stepped away and said, you know, maybe I could take my lead a little bit from them. But I think it’s challenging because there is so much to be done and there are issues that come one’s way and you can’t just say, “I’m going to take the weekend off!

Eleanor’s example illustrates a generational divide, certainly. Moreover, it reveals something about the experience of those who do not have children. Women leaders without school-aged children may face other forms of discrimination. There is a perception of their time as boundless. Unlike mothers whose children provide reasons to leave work early, or to stop working after hours, female leaders without children can be subject to additional expectations (Weikle, 2018).

5.2.2 Source Support

Of the seven participants with school-aged children (defined as children aged 0-18 years), all emphasized a disciplined approach to work, a need to be seen as professionals—as if motherhood and professionalism are not compatible, and the need for a supportive work and family network. From a broader organizational perspective, they believed too, that there is much the school culture could do to make their days more manageable—for all employees. Rosa admitted: “When I had kids at home, I didn’t do anything specific but try to survive/manage.” And Emily added, that to make the role possible, “You need really good people in your school and you need a really good support system at home…” All participants mentioned a significant lack of personal time as the job requires evening and weekend planning, email, and in challenging moments, troubleshooting or crisis management.
It’s one of those sort of odd jobs where some days I’ll be – it’ll be my day where I only teach one class and I’ll have [no crisis]. And then there’ll be a day where I can’t – I can barely get into the class I’ve got to teach because there’s so many things going on. So there is a fair bit of take home work. A lot of the balancing of schedule stuff, I do that at home, a lot of that at home.

5.2.3 Defer Ambitions

Theodora, whose spouse worked in the business world and who was home late most evenings, offered a glimpse into her world: “I was always the person who did all the [children’s] school things in the evening and all their practices and driving them around all these places, and all that stuff really fell on me if it was during the week.” Although she harboured leadership ambitions, she remained a teacher for many years, and only once her children were adolescents could she envision taking on a position of responsibility:

I took on this role pretty much as [my children] were getting older and out of that, in a way. Like [my eldest] was sort of moving off. So there were fewer of [his sports commitments] in the evening anyway, and that helped to kind of balance [the leadership role demands]. I think…I may have wanted to [take it on earlier]. I’m not sure I would have been able to without more help.” When you get home at 10:30 p.m. and your spouse is not home yet, he’s not much use. I don’t really know how I do it actually. I think the kids are really good at being very independent…

Theodora’s route parallels that of many women who deferred their own career ambitions to preserve time for others, in particular, their children. When I asked Theodora “What strategies do you use to be able to balance a very busy job, a commute, and do your job as well as you want to do it, and a family with their needs and all the other things that happen? What are some of your strategies?” She responded:

I laughed when I read that question. Like, does your partner pick up [the childcare]? Absolutely no way. Our family relies on a cleaning lady once a week. Because while I love my husband, he’s never at home. I got home at 10:30 p.m. on Thursday night from a school celebration thing and he wasn’t home yet.
Theodora’s schedule is not uncommon for women in leadership in independent schools. Relying on others to complete important domestic duties was not simply commonplace, but essential to keeping a functioning household, contracting out services that a generation ago may have rested squarely with the woman. With career-focused women, there is less time for domestic care, so duties such as cooking and cleaning, which still are more likely to be completed by the female member of the household, are not completed, or are completed by someone else. All but one of the women with children relied on an outside caregiver, at least part-time, but in some cases more, depending on the age of the children. Often these leaders had a supportive spouse who helped run the household; in one woman’s case, she relied on her parents to help. As Theodora’s example reveals, transitioning from full-time independent school teacher to teacher-leadership can free up time during the day, but often at the expense of a heavier workload and longer, later hours, time that is traditionally reserved for family care. A key tension in these women’s lives was being supportive and present for others while completing one’s own job responsibilities. In independent schools, most notably those with a boarding component, women in leadership roles are often stretched to be available at work and after hours for faculty, and in early morning and evenings for family.

Given the weeknights of work, several participants, like Theodora, above, delayed entering leadership until their children were more independent; others who had entered leadership with young children reported a feeling of self-division, lack of control, using words such as “survival” and “managing,” hoping their colleagues are “good.” Emily, who commuted more than 80km round trip each day empathized with her husband’s responsibilities:

People always have this horrified look on their face when they find out [that he manages the household] but I couldn’t do it if he didn't do what he does. He brings our kids to school in the mornings and I leave really early, and it's actually - you - you - I think it takes kind of a - it builds up, the toll that it takes. I mean it adds two hours to your day and, you know for me, I think my family feels it more than I do; it's kind of a quiet hour for me on either end of the day.

Emily’s account has two important takeaways: that gendered expectations affect her spouse, and that establishing a routine that satisfied family needs was essential for a female leader with children. Each mother in this study echoed similar experiences, stressing essential need of a dedicated, consistent adult
who could help with domestic care and childminding duties so that she could be present at work. Catherine noted that this tug of war between the demands of a school, in particular, a boarding school with a continuous curriculum and around the clock responsibility, and a family, was something that all parents experienced: “I think this is actually something that - not just - not just women, but people with young families struggle with--I can't be out four nights a week because I have little kids who need stories to be read to them.” This is consistent with Moorehead’s (2008) contention that "the woman executive, by nature, is constantly trying to find balance. The needs of their careers, their children if they have them, and their personal interests or community efforts often come into conflict," from Dart, 2008, p.14).

Moreover, there was a perception that the stressors would increase and the personal time diminish as leadership role inched closer to the head of school role. Perhaps ironically, Emily summed up the challenge, comparing it to another child:

I had to have a lot of talks with my husband about what this would actually look like…So I think - I think, yes of course I think you're on call 24/7, I meant the school is your baby and everything that goes well and goes badly is all out on you, so I don't think you ever really sleep with both eyes closed.

Emily highlights the importance of her spousal partnership in making her career path and family life compatible. She credits her husband’s domestic work and child care for freeing her to focus on her professional goals. And, she is preparing him for the pending pressures of her future Head of School responsibilities where personal life and professional life blend, and privacy and free time are minimal. Emily’s perception of the increased work load associated with Head of School roles reinforces a common theme amongst participants: their heavy workload will only increase as approach the summit of their climb, the top job.

The eleven women in this study detailed their strategies for entering and advancing in leadership in independent schools. These can be seen as resistance or agentic efforts against the structural challenges inherent in this model of leadership. These fell into two categories: professional, and personal, which may be an artificial separation, at times. (In the case of moving, for example, one could move for a promotion, but unless the candidate is single, there are other people—spouse, children--who will be affected.) The professional strategies outlined above included, being open, adaptable and growth
oriented; working diligently but smartly; demonstrating breadth and excellence; developing skills; attaining credentials; cultivating support, and, moving. Personal strategies included seeking balance, relying on others, whether partner or peer for support, finding domestic help and/or childcare, commuting to avoid moving family, and delaying entry into leadership until later career, when children are not as dependent. No woman spoke about children as a challenge to leadership career in an independent school, but several participants had chosen not to be mothers. Certainly in university settings, delaying or choosing not to have children is a strategy amongst higher education academics whose tenure-track quest often coincides with child-bearing years (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012). More research is needed to determine the extent to which this is prevalent among independent school faculty entering or advancing in leadership.

5.3 Organizational Factors that Facilitate the Promotion Process for Women in Leadership

Organizational factors influence women’s careers on a macro level as a group, and on a micro level, affecting women individually. Supports and challenges can be age/stage related, both professionally, and personally. For example, professionally, there are critical points to navigate on the leadership climb; the first is the move from teaching into leadership, the second is from junior leadership to senior leadership, and the last is from senior leadership to head. Home, or personal life challenges, are more difficult to measure, but the arrival of children seems to shift focus and energy and increase identity crises. Children’s needs, especially in the first year, supercede most others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many teachers time their pregnancy to correspond with summer holidays, to maximize time with child, and minimize class disruption. Many will also take the 12 month (18 months as of July 2018) maternity leave, effectively keeping them out of the workforce for at least one school year, possibly two. The return to work can be daunting; few schools offer any on-ramping, and these female teachers often find themselves between two masters: the demands of a high-performance career, and the demands of a toddler. But, the return to work can be liberating too. As their children grow and gain greater independence, some teachers may consider a position of responsibility; the more demanding workload comes with a confidence boost, and often some flexibility, when juxtaposed to the rigours of the timetabled classroom and the need to be present for minors. The fit between woman and school context is important, and often determines the success of this dance. Independent schools, like other workforces, lose women to maternity leaves. One school estimated one in eight leaves would not return;
no data was available to compare this estimate to public boards or other professions. Determining the rate of attrition is difficult in this context; however, there are often compounding factors such as commute, paternal role, and financial circumstances, and few exit reports list “independent school workload” as the reason for the departure, even if it is the primary reason.

On a microlevel, or case by case basis, there are actions individual schools can take to promote women in leadership. These include fostering a growth culture, offering programming support and timely and flexible scheduling, valuing products and people rather than facetime, intentional nurturing, making leadership visible, and demystifying leadership.

5.3.1 Foster Culture of Growth

Individual schools can become incubators for leadership through establishing a culture that encourages challenge, supports failure, and normalizes blue sky thinking (Dweck, 2006; Pink, 2009; Wojcicki, 2011; Davies & Ellison, 2003; Walker & Dimmock, 2006). Developing a philosophy of growth and investment in people through setting term limits and rotating positions of responsibility builds positive momentum and hope that all can contribute in some way, some time. It encourages greater stakeholding and can distribute responsibility (Harris, 2003; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Moreover, it can normalize change. “Change is good,” Emily, a senior leader, offered. Scholars might argue, the right change, that is, change that energizes employees, is essential in traditional institutions such as schools as new people offer fresh and innovative experiences, energizing culture, and bringing relevance to children’s worlds (Hoy & Sweetland, 2001). Several participants commented on the delicate balance between newness and experience, and that leaving a department head in the same role for 25 years is a career-numbing experience for him/her and the school itself. Another mentioned that teachers who were alum can resist institutional attempts to change. She concluded that keeping these former students on staff can undermine attempts by the institutional to change: “I’m not convinced that [alumni as teachers are] a good thing.” “They like it the way it was and they’re very resistant to change.” Alexandra adds that the alumni have a voice in leadership succession and “there has to be an openness from [them]. I use the expression “I don't know if that school's ready for [that]”. Additionally, “there’s keeping the alumni happy” who think they own the school.” Fond memories of their own schooling encourage alumni to return to campus, as teachers, board members, even parents. This comes from a place of pride; they are often the schools best promoters. Many will want to share their educational
experience with their children, known as legacy students, and may expect that years later the same tenets that made theirs special will still be evident.

5.3.2 Offer Flexible Scheduling and Targeted Programming

In CAIS, more women lead independent day schools than boarding schools, and more women lead single-sex schools over coed schools. While there are multiple reasons for this, and it is not the focus of this study, it could suggest that leadership expectations are different for single-sex (girls’) schools than others. It would be a valuable extension to pursue how different the work culture and leadership expectations are in these schools.

Maternity leave, child-rearing, and household management influence women’s careers. In “Motherhood, Employment and the ‘Child Penalty’”, Maureen Baker (Baker, 2010c, Zhang, 2009) sums up the impact of starting a family on women’s careers: "Regardless of educational qualifications or occupational prestige, the work-related concessions that women often make for motherhood and marriage generally limit their academic promotion” (p.893). Motherhood can be a disruption, but organizational support may affect how long women’s career trajectory is affected. In post-maternity years, research shows organizations that provide time release and flexible scheduling are more likely to retain women (Forbes, 2017). No two participants worked at the same school, meaning that 13 different schools were represented. Adding to this, the two executive recruiters had a broad sense of schools across Canada. Participants knew of only one school that offered targeted programming for post-maternity women. This, a coeducational middle and secondary day and boarding school, offered an on-ramping program for female faculty. “Return to Work” was designed to facilitate the transition from maternity leave to faculty member in a dynamic environment of high expectations rigorous academics, coaching, and evening/weekend duties that constituted a full-time teaching position. Under this program, full-time female faculty could be timetabled only 3 days/week, and could be exempt from coaching and evening duty, providing them with a 9-3 schedule and two days/week at home. According to the school’s Human Resources office, the program has provided greater balance for these women, with a number choosing it for second and third pregnancies. It may encourage employee retention. However, as mentioned earlier, this is difficult to track. Choosing not to return may be prompted by professional factors, but is ultimately, a personal decision. Executive recruiter Cecilia believed that such women-focused programming is rare in corporations, and especially in independent schools: “Maybe I’m naïve about this [but] I don’t see any programming for women. Maybe it’s out there and I don’t know.”
Programming that targets women explicitly seems elusive but some schools, according to participants, offered part-time teaching. No school offered part-time leadership.

Study participants listed organizational beliefs that facilitate women’s careers. A culture that value products over presence (when possible), is a better fit for mothers of young children. The expectation that every employee, and in particular, every leader, is at every event, is particularly problematic at boarding schools where campus life is always open. Such expectation lower morale, and at worst, create burnout. Catherine found that having a strong team where after hours events can be shared was essential, and helped her establish her leadership while raising a family, showcasing the benefits of a rotational leadership model that encourages growth.

There are two obvious paradoxes within these points. The first, is that several women participants emphasized the importance of visible leadership to promotions. This implies presence, which can mean lots of events, and can undermine work/life balance. The second contradiction is that the education system, and schools in particular, value experience, and leadership happens after experience. Teachers and leaders are compensated based on a hierarchical grid, according to years of experience. Early career teachers are the lowest paid professionals on staff, often have limited access to professional development funding, can be relegated in the least-desirable courses, and have little political influence, resulting in limited self-advocacy. These teachers are deemed less valuable as their more experienced counterparts, regulating their organizational power, and muffling their leadership ambitions. Gaining leadership experience, however minor, in early-career could change a female teacher’s career pattern (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017; Gladwell, 2008). Not only might it produce more women in leadership, but also, it would ensure they are leading schools at earlier times in their careers, potentially affording them longer legacies, greater impact, and more control over their trajectories.

Several participants spoke of the need for the independent school culture to change. As noted above, this is not a monolithic culture, although there are some characteristics shared from school to school, including an emphasis on exceeding expectations, a commitment to long hours, significant professional investment, and the blurring of professional and personal worlds. Many participants spoke of their hope of a new independent school culture, one that supports new ways of leading—because the round-the-clock leadership model is not developing women leaders. Moreover, it is not realistic nor
healthy. As one summed up: “I would say the same things help men, it's just that men have other supports.”

5.3.3 Mentorship and Sponsorship

Participants stressed the role of the Head of School in developing leaders. Whether top down or bottom up, the role is unique and catalytic in shaping culture for growth and change. Good heads recognize and nurture talent, providing stretch experiences and support. They invest in these leaders through professional development opportunities, promotions, and sometimes, by developing them out the door to another school. Many new teachers—women in particular—do not consider leadership as a career; thus, the input of a Head of School can be transformative. In a recent study of female ECTs in the UK, Smith (2011) found that 28 of 30 interviewed “would not consider” leadership as a career option, partly because they viewed leaders as promoting values “counterpoised” to their own. A subsequent study (2015) revealed that ECT males were much more likely to enter leadership than women. Mary adds teachers with leadership potential need encouragement and “honest feedback.” She felt that heads of school were often “too nice, evasive.” Participants suggested the support needed to be “proactive” and “in the minute, timely,” but also to consider long-term “career path mentoring.” Emily supported this and echoed the need to “help them see where they could be in a couple of years; I think that's one - one thing that schools could do a better job of.” Because as Elizabeth suggested “people don't always recognize in themselves what they're good at”, mentoring is critical to faculty development and succession planning. Catherine, a vice-principal, added that such intentional development benefits everyone by improving individual professional capacity: “if we're serious about it as a group of schools, we[should] do goal-setting with our staff [annually].” One former principal went so far as to insist that mentoring people is a foundational part of the jobs of Heads of School, and should be embedded in CAIS standards for accreditation. After all, quality leadership shapes school success and impacts teachers and students (Leithwood, et al., 2006, p. 3).

Interestingly, a few participants believed that “single-sex (girls) schools do a better job of encouraging women staff” to pursue leadership, but no statistics were available to confirm. Most agreed that in an independent school context, women have not had the same opportunities as men to lead, claiming “it’s not an even playing field.” Isabel believed that co-ed and single-sex male schools did not necessarily encourage women in senior leadership positions because “if they did, we wouldn't have the
situations we have.” She added that until quite recently you would have found all-girl schools with male heads.” (No CAIS boys’ schools have ever been led by women.) Mary summarized:

I do think that there is a world in which people who look just like me get ahead. And since the majority of people [currently] making those "just like me" decisions happen to be men, I think there is an advantage for men in that context.

Encouraging women faculty to enter leadership is a simple step that can make considerable difference. There is evidence that purposeful encouragement of faculty into leadership is necessary and effective (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017; Smith, 2011; Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013). In a study of mentorship on incumbent leaders in a school setting, Rhodes & Fletcher (2013) found that it is possible to develop self-efficacy, and encouraging “active development of individual’s self-efficacy through mentoring and coaching relationships may serve to ensure that the loss of human potential of those who could lead but never completed the journey is reduced” (Boyer, Edmondson, Artis, & Fleming (2014); Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013). Participants speak of the importance of the “tap on the shoulder,” the nudge towards a certain course of action. Elizabeth believed that “it comes down again to mentorship…you've got to look for those golden moments, and some of them - I would say most people need a push.” Dahlvig and Longman (2010) refer to this push, nudge as a “defining moment” (p.240). Isabel said, “Most enlightened heads, if they recognize someone strong and ready, they would want to help them…” Participants recognized the importance of this push/nudge/defining moment, consistently referring to the on-the-job leadership experience as some of the most valuable and emphasizing that learning to lead is best accomplished by being in a position to “just liv[e] it” and making the leap into leadership. Eleanor confessed that she “went into this job thinking there would be a steep learning curve but then I thought, you know, I’m ready for this, and I didn’t realize I was so ready. It was a real surprise to me.”

Mentorship has been hailed as a powerful, even transformative tool, for leaders, and in particularly, women leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra, Carter et al.,2010; Sandberg, 2013; Botelho & Powell, 2018). Beverborg, Sleegers, Endedijk & van Veen (2015) found that support and interactions from a teacher’s peers led to improvements in and greater sustainment of self-efficacy (p. 206). Isaac, Kaatz, Lee & Carnes (2012) found self-efficacy improvements in women working in STEM fields both immediately and years afterwards after enrolling in a course designed to prepare them for leadership. Rhodes & Fletcher’s (2013) leadership development model focuses on identity, specifically, the
acculturation, assimilation and actualization of leaders in their spaces. While conceptual, their work highlights the role targeted mentoring, coaching, and self-study through action research can play in boosting self-efficacy, and ultimately, leadership capacity. They articulate a long-term planning process with intermittent phases of action and reflection. Mentorship promises a bridge, or a “scaffold” (Rhodes & Fletcher, 2013) between leadership and headship through boosting confidence, encouraging persistence, broadening networks, and making one aware of different process. It is not likely that one mentor can address every growth area, nor, does it seem likely that the same mentor will be sufficient throughout all phrases of leadership development, as junior to senior leadership require different skillset, and procedural awareness, than senior to headship. In the example below from Emily, a senior leader, she demonstrates the role of her mentor as an experienced coach, a concerned advocate, and a cheerleader, reminding one that landing a Head of School role comes requires scrutiny, negotiation, and fit between the parties:

I have a great mentor who's sort of said, you know Emily, I went to four or five Head of School interviews before I got a Head of School job…you're interviewing them as much as they're interviewing you.

Emily’s mentoring needs differ from less experienced leaders, highlighting the need for stage-based mentorship. Mary reflects on these different needs: “If I were a mentoring young woman, I would be talking about that and what is an appropriate way to work with your own ideas and how you position those ideas. Not in an offensive way, but so it’s clear who gets the credit for that work.” Early career teachers require what Rhodes and Fletcher (2013) call “acculturalization,” an awareness of how one works within the organization whereas junior and senior leaders would require actualization, the opportunity to lead in a meaningful, visible way to prepare them for the headship. Wright’s (2015) survey of Heads of School in Canada, revealed that “Over half of them have only been a head at their school for 5 years or less” while “very few (4%) have stayed in their role for more than 20 years” (p.10). The mentorship needs of this population are also different; new heads need support. As Wright (2015) says, “It takes a long time to hire and get a new head up to speed.” They have had limited capacity to promote their goals, or to leave an impact. In contrast, the small number of well-established heads offer a wealth of experience—and could serve as valuable mentors to less experienced heads, but may benefit from late-career mentoring to leave their legacy. Mentoring could be a change-making step; it could get women into leadership faster, and better support them when they arrive. This is not to say that it is an
panacea, however. Studies show that “high-performing females need more than just well-meaning mentors” (Ibarra, Carter et al, 2010, p.80).

Another trend was that participants wanted more mentorship, and often more formalized, school-supported opportunities for this assistance. Joan, for instance, had two external mentors, both administrators who knew her well, and both men. She felt that “at times I wish I had a little bit more,” especially in-house where there wasn’t any formalized mentorship program. Elizabeth was asked if there’s a good mentoring program in our schools: “No, I don't think so. We could have a much more accessible, some kind of career path mentoring programme within schools” but also externally. I think it takes them both.” And while the mentorship may change between phases, there are some common needs of mentees such as another’s perspective, recognition, and encouragement to see and then to take the next step. There was little consensus among participants on the best mentoring arrangements—male or female, internal or external, one or more—almost all participants believed, however, that mentoring had been, or would be, a necessary and valuable part of their advancement.

A more cautious view of mentoring comes from Mary. From her role as Head of School, she believes mentoring can be effective, but too often it is not focusing on the right material.

I think when you're really trying to mentor someone in terms of -- just in terms of encouraging them to be resilient and to broaden their thinking past the merely compassionate or the merely emotional, I think sometimes women, just because of how they have been socialized in organizations, really need to have that frank conversation. Are you advocating this direction because you're worried about staff morale or are you advocating this direction because you really see that organizationally it's a powerful thing for the school to do? I don't think enough of those conversations take place woman to woman.

Mary advocates for women mentoring other women but doing so in a different way, one that is not necessarily about self-improvement or soft-skill building but focusing on strategic needs or the organization and school improvements. She encourages greater research into mentorship practices: “I'm not aware of male-female mentorship roles in education that work, although I'm very aware of them in law and medicine, where they work brilliantly.”
Participants made suggestions for leadership development. These include: “Provide opportunities for prospective leaders, and women in particular, to put forth own ideas.” Giving them a voice can reinforce confidence and build capacity. Elizabeth stressed that “[women] need challenges that are just beyond their skill and experience level.” She added that making leadership roles for women and men obvious at a co-ed school is “very important” because it shows inclusive, diverse leadership. Showcasing inclusive leadership might prompt other associations. One participant saw a correlation between this style and women’s promotional status: “I’m thinking across the country where I know women leaders… I’m thinking X school. [Mr. Smith] is a very inclusive head.” Eleanor’s experience as a leader in a gender-positive culture has encouraged her to do more: “I have never felt any kind of bias because I’m a woman. On the contrary it has been how do we get more women into leadership.” But displaying women in leadership is not enough. The experiences need to be meaningful and growth oriented to benefit the individual, school, the cause, and ultimately, the students. Scholars caution that ‘Body count diversity’ which emphasizes optics over process may be an intentional step, but not meaningful or likely to produce lasting change: Berdahl writes, “It is usually possible to find people of the right color, sex, or other identities to make the numbers look good. But body count diversity stops there and treats those individuals as window dressing, mouthpieces, or good soldiers willing to go along in exchange for synthetic inclusion” (Berdahl 2015, http://jberdahl.blogspot.ca/2015/08/beyond-diversity-as-body-count.html)

5.4 Summary

The research findings in this chapter are grouped to highlight career women’s professional and personal strategies and the role of organizational facilitators on leadership advancement. The data for this chapter is teased from semi-structured interviews with thirteen women in leadership roles in independent schools, two executive directors of independent school organizations, and two executive recruiters. Strategies that enable women’s advancement in leadership are numerous and can be grouped in two categories: professional and personal. Professionally, these include embracing a growth mindset and being willing to learn and adapt; working diligently and smartly; promoting excellence and self-promotion; building relationships and displaying people skills; deepening professional development credentials, especially through leadership training programs for the independent school context; cultivate support; and, if necessary, moving. Personal strategies shared by many leaders to advance their leadership careers suggest a long-term approach designed to preserve self, and manage the stress of the
climb. Candidates spoke of a trying to manage a heavy workload by having a disciplined approach to work, which would maximize efficiency and preserve personal time. Several spoke about the importance of supportive networks and allies at work who would offer professional and emotional support. Most had domestic help, either part-time, or full-time to manage household, driving, or children’s needs. Most considered moving a personal strategy for advancement, and more than half of all participants had moved for a role.

The examination of organizational facilitators to women’s leadership juxtaposed women’s needs with the often monolithic culture and program offerings of most schools, practices rooted in the philosophy of egalitarianism that so characterizes public sector employees, especially teachers—and which ironically, affects independent school faculties, just the same. The women echoed a desire for schools to change, and for the model of leadership to evolve to be more representative and inclusive, less patriarchal and isolating. Findings included the desire for flexible scheduling and targeted programming for female leaders, especially mothers of young children, the importance of challenging traditional role models, and normalizing the presence women in leadership, providing opportunities to be visible and demonstrate success to the school community, the critical role a Head of School plays in developing and encouraging leaders, and lastly, the role of mentoring and sponsorship.
6. Chapter Six: Limitations, Conclusions, and Implications for Practice and Research

"In the long run, organizations and society must produce systematic change to alleviate conflicting expectations for women and additional hurdles for their leadership"—Zheng, Kark, Meister, 2018. (https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership)

The intention of this study has always been to better understand perceptions of career patterns amongst women leaders in independent schools. This is not a research study about undermining men or their significant contributions to independent school leadership. Rather, it is a study about the possibilities of inclusion. It was designed to assess how to include a greater diversity of inspired leaders in leadership ranks, by identifying and mitigating barriers, highlighting successful women’s strategies, and reconsidering organizational policy and programs. It is predicated on the belief that people with passion, creativity, and intentionality can build greater equity and balance in our institutions, and thereby, unleash possibilities and ameliorate the climate for all. My research question was “How do women faculty in independent schools enter and advance to school leadership positions?” Four sub-questions guided my analysis and formed the organizational framework for the data. Once again, these were:

What percentage of faculty employed in CAIS-sanctioned Canadian independent schools are women, and what percentage of these women are working in leadership roles?

What are the structural barriers to the headship?

What strategies do women in independent schools employ to enter and advance in administration?

What organizational factors facilitate the promotion process for women in leadership?

The study sought to better understand the paths of female leaders in independent schools in Canada. The findings highlight the tension between structural biases and agentic supports that characterize many women’s careers in leadership today. While time, awareness, and intentional resistance may weaken these biases, they are strong and persistent. Waiting is not a guarantee, nor an option; it is accepting the status quo. This is not about diversifying headships in a “body count” way, but about making leadership culture, paths, and ultimately top leadership, more inclusive (Berdahl, 2015; Ngobia, 2018) by highlighting areas for change. Our schools need strong women leading them, and our
students, perceptive as they are, need to see balance in leadership to carry this into their wider society so that the equal opportunity that Canada’s Charter enshrines is visible.

6.1 Conclusions

The following conclusions emerge from this research. They will be further explored in the implications for stakeholders sections below.

- Tradition runs deep and men’s hold on Head of School roles have been lengthy, often generational. This tenure reflects patriarchal social constructs in professional and personal worlds.

- Tradition is a source of great pride and meaning to schools; it can also affect change. It is reflected in many of the organizational structures, policies, and hiring practices of independent schools.

- Boards tend to prefer proven, experienced Heads of School over new candidates. As these are almost always male, this creates a bottleneck at the top levels of leadership that prevents women from ascending. It may also prioritize stability over innovation. A closer look at board composition and hiring practices is needed.

- Women’s leadership in independent schools remains underrepresented at the highest levels. This seems to be compounded in boarding schools where participants questioned the school’s “readiness” for this change in culture. Women Heads of School tend to lead single-sex day schools.

- Women leaders are concentrated in middle and senior leadership. This is both concerning and promising as it suggests a pool of experienced, qualified candidates.

- Based on educational attainments, and time spent on the climb, women are not only qualified, but according to Leadership Institute and Next Steps graduation rates, often more qualified than men.

- There is a shift towards leaders from the business world. Women’s credentials tend to be educational. Women need greater financial credentialing.

- Women want to be Heads of School. The length of the climb towards this goal, and the uncertainty of reaching it, precipitate attrition.

- Women enter leadership later, and have more interruptions on the climb than their male counterparts; this results in women being older than men and having shorter tenures when they reach the top.
• Women’s leadership years often coincide with reproductive and childrearing years. Moreover, women still perform the bulk of domestic duties, including childcare. The time dedicated to childcare is compounded by the rise in popularity of intensive parenting.

• Significant action is needed to recognize, advocate, and explicitly support women’s leadership in independent schools. There is much to consider in national and provincial policy, systematic school succession planning and leadership development, and mentorship, sponsorship, and parental leave policies.

• The changes encouraged by the findings of this study range from micro to macro, from individual, to institutional, to societal, and thus, some are easier to facilitate--and see manifest--in the short term than others.

6.2 Limitations

As with any research study, limitations exist. The data that formed the basis of the primary research was collected from 15 participants: 11 teachers-leaders, two executives of national independent school organizations, and two executive recruiters. Over the course of 10 months, they were selected from independent schools, support organizations, and recruitment firms in Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, with a concentration in metropolitan areas. Their perceptions of their own career paths, the experiences, culture, and people who contributed to these trajectories, and their ability to articulate, contextualize, and self-report these anecdotes provides great insight into the world of independent schools and rich evidence to understand the experiences of women in leadership. However, these are humans, and as a researcher, I acknowledge that data collected using human instruments is often detailed and pithy, but that it can be subject to (unintentional) bias as they construct themselves and narrate their experiences. One participant waived all anonymity, trusting me to identify her, and use her distinct viewpoint and expertise to better understand the key issues. I preserved her anonymity nonetheless. Because of her willingness to be identified upfront, her interview may lack the nuance and revelations of some others. Moreover, these interviews reflect a snapshot in time; they are limited in that they cannot predict what follows. The responses of a survey to 44 coeducational independent schools contributed quantitative statistics, providing a glimpse into women’s representation in independent schools but not enough data to establish a reliable baseline. More baseline research is needed including a compulsory tracking system with CAIS member school buy-in, especially at levels other than Head of School.
My role as a teacher in an independent school is both a benefit and a limitation. It is a benefit because I understand the culture of Canadian independent schools, and can empathize with the experiences of many participants. It is a limitation because I am their colleague—in the broad sense of the word—and I am asking for private details about their careers. Furthermore, in the future, we could be competitors seeking the same leadership roles. I have tried to mitigate these concerns by removing myself from any leadership role while in the data collection/dissertation writing phase of the doctoral program, which has enabled me to detach myself from their context, and thus, create supportive, trusting dialogue.

6.3 Implications for Practice

6.3.1 What Schools Can Do:

The implications for practice emerge from 15 interviews with independent school leaders. These are based on their own experiences, and while one must be cautious not to extrapolate their truths to a wider system, they do offer a view into common themes in leadership in this context. There is some overlap in the strategies women use to enter leadership and the factors that schools can employ to promote greater numbers of women in leadership. They are to engage them in leadership early, to mentor and sponsor them, to consider women’s needs, in particular mothers’ needs in programming and policy development, such as considering off-ramping and on-ramping support to minimize disruption, to welcome diverse forms of leadership and alternative models that reflect evolving familial and social needs, and to ensure that the Head of School, who has considerable decision-making and promotional power, is aware and involved in women’s leadership development and school succession planning. Schools can be leadership incubators, developing faculty towards greater accountability and capacity. Schools are in a unique position to help demystify the Head of School role, which could be an important factor in attracting potential candidates.

Schools could encourage more women to enter the leadership pipeline—and to enter early. They are well positioned to do this by helping the candidate understand the opportunity, have a clearer career vision, be more aware of the climb and perhaps even, cultivate her capacity to navigate challenging levels. Moreover, early entry offers leadership candidates a longer career of influence, the potential to earn higher salaries for longer, and the chance to create a greater legacy. Most Principal’s Qualification Programs (PQP) require a minimum of 5 years teaching experience before applying (OPC, 2018).
Independent schools, while heterogenous in their requirements, generally do not require a minimum number of years teaching before applying for internal positions of responsibility, thereby, in theory, at least, offering greater access to leadership opportunities for Early Career Teachers. This does not imply that with less than 5 years of experience one will be leading the school, but there are entry level roles available to good candidates. This is especially evident in non-teaching leadership roles such as the administrative side of the school from whence a Head of School occasionally emerges. Thus, encouraging these ECTs in leadership early in their careers through conversations with the head, or with senior leadership, could be formative experiences for the women, and strategic leadership development and succession planning exercises for the head.

Schools can support women to enter, transition, and thrive in leadership through thoughtful programming, intentional mentoring, and strategic professional development. For example, by creating opportunities to give teachers experience and visibility, to make promotions intentional and obvious, to know their staff, to consider succession planning, and to encourage leadership in formal and informal ways. Mentoring is critically important throughout a women’s career in independent schools. There are key points along the trajectory where her climb towards headship poses greater challenge such as in the latter stages of the climb, and in particular, in the crucial final ascent from senior leadership to deputy or headship. Significant professional support, personal support, and targeted sponsorship were important. Comprehensive leadership development policies and programs which included such ideals could encourage more women in senior leadership to stay the course.

There are specific points on women’s personal trajectory where more support is needed. To advance women in leadership, policy should account for women’s “double duty”, particularly women with school-aged children. Greater support for childcare and a recognition that flexibility and balance are important to career performance could encourage more women into leadership. Pregnancy and maternity leaves hinder climb, break momentum, can change priorities. Most studies of professional women’s career patterns emphasize a need for greater support during child-bearing years. Maternity leave, and the physiological, psychological, and social changes often require a renegotiation of one’s time, space, and commitments. Canada’s parental leave policy provides up to 18 months of leave—12 paid—after the birth or adoption of a baby (Government of Canada, 2018) to “protect,” care for, foster bonds, and transition to the new family structure. In many independent schools, within 12 months most mothers are back at work, juggling a full-time role and the demands of a young family. Perhaps not
surprisingly, there is attrition among women faculty during this stage. These statistics are difficult to come by because according to one HR Director, few professional women offer workload demand as the key reason for their resignation. In a busy boarding, or metropolitan school, the reasons for post-partum resignations amongst female faculty are likely layered: they cite the strain of the commute, but rarely the long hours, the demands of students and parents, the after-hour commitments. At one school, the attrition rate for post-partum women was 20%. Encouraging women to report “school expectations” as a reason for leave would identify the issue, and could rally supports, offering schools or their national associations (CAIS, CIS) baseline data. Currently, there is no information on industry standard. Adding to the inquiry could be the number of women who opt-out not of career but of independent school career in the post-maternity years. Certainly, some of the women referenced in my study had found work in public schools in the years that followed maternity leaves.

One school had developed programming to address the attrition of post-partum women. It was the only school in this study which offered any on-ramping assistance. This is not to say that no other school offered support—some claimed to offer “flexible hours,” others part-time options, and others specific mentorship for women in leadership roles. This “return to work” program was popular and well praised within the school because it offered women faculty some flexibility in their first year returning after parental leave by compressing one’s schedule into 3 days and exempting teachers from co-curricular responsibilities, including evening duty. These on-ramping programs were available to teachers in positions of responsibility, but were not always compatible with the requirements of those roles, reinforcing the challenges of combining flex-time scheduling with leadership expectations. No school in this study offered daycare programs for children, although several participants believed having these supports in their school building would be a game-changer for their careers. They cited such reasons as minimizing drop-off and pick-up timing, confidence in caregivers, greater accessibility, and a sense of holistic support where employer and employee participate in health and wellness.

Schools do not want to lose great teachers. And, those who become leaders may leave—but they may stay. To ensure greater gender representation in leadership, schools could help to demystify the Head of School role. It is complex, and challenging, and often overwhelms the working day, bleeding into private lives, blurring any distinction between a head’s life and his work. The danger of enabling a Head of School’s role to continue like this is to model frenetic pace, and attract a minority of potential leaders. Advocating a healthier balance of hours and commitment could be beneficial modelling for
employees and students. Moreover, this could prevent isolation and burnout. Encouraging leadership rotations, co-leading models so that child bearing/rearing is not a career-impediment.

Moreover, by including greater supports for women to enter and advance in leadership, there is the potential of a healthier, more inclusive organization where a diversity of familial, social, and organizational models exist. Many of the women in this study are highly accomplished, diversely skilled professionals who manage busy careers and hundreds of interactions every week. Their gender should not prevent them from earning this role. After all, the Head of School role is leading a school of children. This seems ironic that being a woman and having—or not having—children could work against potential school leaders.

6.3.2 What Boards Can Do

In independent schools, governing boards are powerful entities. Like most boards, they operate at arm’s length from the daily operations and paradoxically, this allows them to have considerable influence on school leadership. Some participants knew little about their boards. Several confessed that they specifically inquired about numbers and parity for this study. If the responses of my participants are used, all boards are operating at less than gender parity, and many with a third or less of the board composed of women. Some had had women chairs, however, and overall, there seemed an intention to appoint more women to the board. There is movement towards greater gender diversity on boards in Ontario, and under the former provincial government, public boards have been tasked with meeting specific targets of gender representation (Ontario, 2017). Even if independent school boards are not included in this mandate, the cultural shift may help to accelerate more equal representation. Members of Boards, after all, are appointed by the Head of School, and thus, are intended to reflect and safeguard the school’s priorities. Studies show a positive correlation between the diversity of a board’s composition and the likelihood of a woman leader or CEO, and a positive correlation between board diversity and women leaders’ tenure (Cook & Glass, 2014). But some caution is required. There is a danger of encouraging “body count” diversity (Berdahl, 2015), or tokenism, which can add intense pressure to those group representatives, and, increase their likelihood of failure (Cook & Glass, 2014; Kanter, 1977). Several years ago Alison Bechdel (1985) created a simple test to assess gender roles in films. It was predicated on three simple criteria: 1. Does the woman lead speak? Does she speak to another woman? Do they speak about a topic other than a man? If so, the film would receive a positive feminist rating. The point is thus: including women in governance could be essential to gaining greater
gender representation in schools. But, they must be involved in these boards in meaningful ways, and their involvement much be integrated, and not tokenistic to harness their capacity as professionals. For reasons that seems to echo some of my study’s participants’ concerns; women were not stepping up to boards, and were less likely than men to heed the call of the principal to join. More research is needed here to determine why women are reluctant, and how changes in board practices, or meeting times, or composition, might increase representation.

Boards of governance help to ensure the long-term survival of the school. Thus, it follows that the board hires the person they perceive to be the best possible Head of School, he/she who can lead the school through a decade or more. Is there more that could be done to support boards in getting the right people in place? In the last decade, several well-known independent schools have hired experienced heads from outside Canada. In fact, “66% of current heads were not selected from within their school – they were at another school within Canada (50%) or came from a school outside Canada (16%)” (Wright, 2015, p.8).

6.3.3 The Role of CAIS and CIS Ontario

The national association of Canadian Accredited Independent Schools promotes the mission, vision and value of independent schools, serves as an umbrella association for 94 schools, and ensures consistent and measurable standards amongst its members. Most relative to this study, CAIS has done much to build leadership capacity within Canada. Because of their success, schools, and their employees, will continue to look to them for big-picture programming. CAIS has taken big steps already. In addition to the Leadership Institute Diploma and Next Steps programs, CAIS has introduced a Head’s Institute to enrich learning and share effective practices amongst Heads of School. Moreover, CAIS has been offering an optional module in the Leadership Institute for several years on Women in Leadership, and this module has provided a space for women to discuss their needs as teachers and leaders. And while different women and different groups will have different needs, mothers’ needs differ from women without children—and various levels of leadership need support tailored to individual and role, there are key challenges women face as a group, and key gaps in support, that if bridged, might promote comprehensive change. Several solutions include:

- Offer professional development opportunities that simulate Head of School roles. One suggestion would be to offer a national placement program to position prospective heads with established heads for a short duration. This would be serve several important purposes such as
providing authentic on-the-job training and capacity building, exchange of ideas, and not incidentally, demystify the top job, and thereby, minimize attrition from the senior ranks.

- Add to CAIS Accreditation Standards on School Leadership and Succession Planning the development of women’s leadership within each member school.

- Encourage women to pursue opportunities for leadership at an earlier age. Understanding in early career that leadership is an option could foster greater intentionality and in turn, greater propulsion forward. Moreover, seeing younger women in leadership roles could do much for changing the perception of independent school leadership amongst stakeholders, the most important of whom are students.

- Continue to offer opportunities to build women’s leadership capacity. These can be internal to schools, but also external, in CAIS, or CIS Ontario, or interschool associations and networks. Gaining recognition outside one’s school could offer some flexible options for her could help build their capacity and expand her exposure, improving her confidence in her own role, but also, showcasing her skills to potential markets.

- Develop Specific Opportunities for Financial Education. Given the importance of a financial background in the Head of School role, boards have a special interest in candidate’s financial acumen. The role requires a good understanding of finances, such as understanding its not-for-profit status. appreciation of market and socioeconomic trends, understanding of endowments, loans, and interest, and ability to read a balance sheet. But, this should not necessarily require a traditional MBA. In fact, an expensive, and often long professional degree such as this could be superfluous to the head’s role, especially when most schools employ a controller or CFO as well as business office. If anything, it might be more important in a smaller school where expert support staff are not present. Moreover, through the gender lens, expecting female leaders to take on an MBA while juggling their already significant responsibilities could be one challenge too many and further reduce the fit of leadership, and lead to more attrition. Since financial acumen is important, even essential, perhaps a more targeted training program, taught by industry experts, specific to the independent school head’s role could be a better option. Moreover, this program, call it an MBA for independent school leaders, could be enriched and updated based on market trends or educational issues to offer timely infusions of expertise to reflect the evolving
demands of independent schools. And, from a financial perspective, this approach might be somewhat less costly.

- Explicitly encourage women to apply for promotion through job advertisements or blind application processes.

- Generate network supports for women in these roles. Online networks, such as the National Women’s Forum run by CAIS (2014), or the face-to-face CIS Ontario Women’s Network event (2018, 2019) are two examples of effective and economical ways to connect women in positions of responsibility, especially when few other supports are available.

6.3.4 What Women Can Do:

There are things women themselves can do to advance in independent school leadership. They are: enter early, build capacity and confidence (academic, leadership, financial), get noticed, take promotional risks, seek mentorship, or sponsorship, move laterally, move schools, support other women, safeguard personal time. Women should be encouraged to enter leadership earlier. Both the Matthew effect (Gladwell, 2008) and the Harvard study illustrate the benefits of early entry in terms of accelerating upward career mobility (Botelho, Rosenkoetter Powell, 2018). Starting this climb earlier is dependent on women’s awareness of career options in the teaching profession, many of which are unbeknownst to Bachelor of Education students and early career teachers. Teacher training institutes, partially funded by provincial governments, virtually ignore all but public school teaching roles in their placements and promotions, leaving B.Ed graduates unaware of other teaching options, such as the diversity of roles available in independent schools (necessitated by the fact that they are independent); these are department heads, curriculum directors, division heads, program directors, vice-principals, principal, just to name a few. Additionally, there exist corporate roles such as admissions, marketing and advancement, all of which invest in the long-term financial viability of the school. Those who arrive at independent schools are often not aware of the myriad opportunities outside of the standard department head promotion, and just like other new teachers, spend their early years figuring out the responsibilities of their immediate role, enriching their capacity, and managing expectations. Independent schools can do more to encourage ECTs to join their ranks, and once there, to highlight the wealth of career options available.
Most participants admitted that their leadership ambitions were cultivated on the job, and often after they became comfortable with their faculty roles, or after a more senior member of faculty encouraged them to apply for a position of responsibility, suggesting not only that there is a delay in which ECTs enter leadership, but the women who do, often do so because they were noticed by someone in the organization with influence, reinforcing the importance of showcasing one’s skills and raising one’s profile. This self-promotion is important throughout one’s career, and, can be critical in helping to transition between junior to senior leadership, and senior leadership to headship, as it enhances a candidate’s knowability, and hiring committees tend to prefer “known” candidates.

Increasing capacity through targeted professional development, in particular, advanced degrees and leadership training, such as that offered by CAIS Leadership Institute, were consistent accomplishments amongst my participants. Financial acumen is essential, and reassures boards. Executive recruiters and some participants cited it as a difference maker. Only one participant had an MBA—which she earned concurrently with starting her headship—and most participants did not have formalized financial credentials. This does not mean they could not read a balance sheet, nor participate in financial discussions, and several noted that they did not feel having an MBA was necessary, especially if a capable CFO was in place. This is an area for greater investigation as there is a difference of opinion between hiring committees and women candidates.

Confidence and mentorship play significant roles in women’s career advancement. This confidence is critical to future success, and women in general, have less self-confidence than men, and are less likely to apply for a role where they do not meet every criterion (Kay & Shipman, 2014; Optimum Talent, n.d.), and stretching for a role can have exponential payoffs, getting into roles faster, and reduce the time spent pursuing the top job. Adding to this, most executives struggle with fear of failure, but female executives are significantly lower than men in their self-reported ability to overcome this fear (Optimum Talent, 2007). Assessing such traits in the context of independent school leadership is a topic that requires greater investigation. Targeted programming to support female leaders, while simultaneously resisting the forces that beget this lack of confidence, could be influential in changing these patterns.

Mentorship and sponsorship can be powerful accelerants to women’s careers. The two women in my study who had been heads of CAIS coeducational schools had reached the role in later career, a characteristic of women in leadership. Conversely, Catherine, the deputy head, had earned a significant
promotion, “a career catapult,” early in her career, becoming an assistant head before 30, and by 40, after spending years in the second-in-command role, was ready for a headship. She, unlike all other participants, had entered her first teaching role with the intention of leading an independent school. Her 10+ years in senior leadership in a CAIS school before the age of 40 is anomalous. Yet, despite her obvious ability and well-rounded skill-base, she highlights the power of a visionary head to kickstart her career by giving her opportunity. At this school, women had served as assistant heads in senior leadership, but Catherine was the first female deputy head. She does not take full credit for this accomplishment but highlights the importance of her Head of School, as a sponsor. The head had anticipated the board’s concern about her being young and female. What could have been a stumbling block, and, as she claimed, a “deal breaker”, was nullified by her Head of School who convinced them she could do it. This case shows the role of the sponsor as a critical player in leadership promotion. He was able to look past gender to see the best candidate; however, his actions acknowledge the gendered concerns of other players. His relationship with the board helped shape the path, supporting her climb from senior leadership to deputy head. Her long tenure in the role is evidence of her skill but, the role of sponsorship as career catalyst—particularly into senior leadership, or headship, cannot be overlooked; it is an area for further research.

Other actions women take to advance in leadership are moving laterally within their school to build their portfolio and increase their capacity, or, moving to another school. The latter, which is almost always made for a promotional incentive, was common among participants with the majority of them (eight of thirteen) moving schools at least once for a promotion; promotions that required significant relocation (to another geographical area) were undertaken by three women, each of whom was either single, or whose children were no longer living at home, consistent with Scott’s (1997) contention that women with school-aged children are less likely to uproot family for a promotion. This offers insight into the stall that could occur if a woman seeking to ascend in leadership cannot find opportunity at her own school. Alternatively, three women in leadership, each of whom worked at day schools, commuted significant distances to avoid moving their respective families, highlighting a concern about burnout in such arrangements.

Additionally, one action that could facilitate the advancement of women in leadership in independent schools is to encourage the sisterhood. In this study, some participants questioned the support of other women, especially women in leadership roles who could act as allies or sponsors for
their own leadership ambitions. There was a perception that women judged other women and could be competitive. Greater cooperation between women through organized initiatives could enhance opportunities. For example, leveraging powerful women to sponsor other women could help encourage women in leadership and demystify leadership for many. Encouraging coordinated programming opportunities, and local networks of women in leadership, akin to the LeanIn Circles, could provide support and influence, and allies.

Finally, all participants in this study commented on maintaining a work-life balance, many questioning the accuracy and the desirability of the term “balance,” itself. What was common is that each participant emphasized the importance of safeguarding personal time to prevent the flow of work into private or family life. This was especially challenging in the boarding school environment where personal life is displayed for all stakeholders (students, parents, board, alumni, faculty, staff) and is marketed by schools as part of their culture. Participants who had children had employed domestic help, whether it was a full-time caregiver, or extended family assistance to clean, collect children from school, to cook, or to run errands, effectively showing the challenges of working in leadership roles, managing a household, and guarding personal time. Most women in leadership recognized this “double duty” and felt it was slow to change. They believed that greater supports was needed and changing social expectations and gender roles was the first step. There is no one size-fits-all solution to advancing women in leadership. Recognizing that a comprehensive approach will require discursive inclusion of stakeholders and a collective will to see change.

6.4 Implications for Research

The data that emerged from my study offers a number of possibilities for further research to improve gender representation at the highest levels of independent school leadership. Returning to the structural/agency tension, there are several options for greater investigation.

- How might changing women’s perceptions of leadership and diversifying models of leadership to include younger women encourage greater representation? If part of the challenge is to help women see women like them leading independent schools, then revisioning what the Head of School looks like is a starting point. Moreover, intentional measures that encouraged Bachelor of Education students and Early Career Teachers to consider leadership paths as viable career choices in independent schools could help shape the path and define career years earlier.
this earlier entry to leadership could have incremental consequences for influence, remuneration, and legacy of female leaders.

- The Leaning Out research by Weissbourd and Making Caring Common (2019) suggests that bias to women’s leadership begins well before women enter the full-time workforce. Studying reactions of students in middle and high schools to women leaders, especially those in schools, could provide worthwhile insights about the power of representation on students’ attitudes towards women in power. Moreover, long-term tracking of these students’ career choices and their self-perception of leadership could yield insights about the influence of role-modelling on career choice.

- Research possibilities for greater diversity in leadership in independent schools. While this study focuses on gender diversity, considerable research finds that Black, Indigenous and Asian American women face many more barriers in their career climbs (Tso, 2018; LeanIn.com, 2017; McKinsey, 2017; McDonald, 2015;). Moreover, there is little published on LGBTQ2 leaders in independent schools. Compensating leaders more effectively whether financially, or through time release, could boost this movement towards greater diversity. Also, encouraging teachers to better themselves, and ultimately, the organization, should be the most important goal of any professional development plan.

- Research cites men as being more likely to take career risks than women. These career risks are often rewarded and can be “catapults” to promotion. Understanding why women are reluctant to take such risks might help to illuminate more about the complexities of women’s career decision-making.

- The independent nature and autonomy of these CAIS schools offers great promise. Power can be negotiated and change is possible, opening possibilities for new models, and new ways of doing things. Established structures can be challenged through awareness of leadership gaps; effective action could lead to robust and comprehensive (rather than replacement) succession planning, investments in broad leadership development, and targeted gender quotes in board composition.

- Ontario bill PPM 102 (1993) changed the landscape for women in public school leadership at the vice principal and principal level. Might similar intentionality revamp leadership in independent
schools? Bottlenecks of highly qualified women at penultimate leadership level would be the first to benefit, and it could inspire a generation of female leaders to aspire to the top job.

- Track women in leadership at all levels from entry level positions through to Heads of School. To design the future, we must be able to assess the potential in the pipeline, or at different stages on the mountain. A better understanding of who is there and at what stage would enable targeted programming, customized support, and well-matched mentoring.

- Track women and men applying for Head of School roles. Having a sense of how often they apply would offer important data points:
  
  o it would encourage greater scrutiny of the final steep step from senior leadership or deputy head to Head of School. In particular, it is important to understand the time required to move from senior leadership to headship, and the attrition rate of this step.
  
  o It would offer insight into the demographic circumstances of who is applying, whether they are single women, divorced women, or women with young families;
  
  o it would reveal the average number of times women are chosen and not chosen
  
  o it would reframe the notion of “failure” for all leaders.

- Track post-partum attrition over a four-year period. This timeframe would correspond with children entering primary school and would signal a change in responsibility for teaching mothers.

- Compare promotional trajectories of mothers and women without children. This study illustrates the challenges of building a leadership career while raising children; it does not delve as deeply into the experiences of single women and/or women without children. There is much to learn through their approach.

More research is needed on independent school governing boards. Data could help to determine why women are reluctant to join a board, and how changes in board practices, or meeting times, or composition, might increase representation. Moreover, studying boards who have a greater proportion of women governors, and these might be found in single-sex girls schools, could provide insights for other coeducational schools. This study did not address single-sex girls or single-sex boys schools. Research
examining their respective approaches to gender-inclusive leadership could illuminate effective practices in other contexts.

6.5 Summary

A bolder feminist discourse has gained greater popular traction in North American in the last three years with the surprising defeat of Hillary Clinton in the American presidential race, the inauguration of her often-misogynistic opponent, and the #metoo and #timesup movements precipitated by the revelations of the Weinstein scandal. Workplace discrimination—at least the explicit type—is now openly discussed. The Canadian government proudly unveiled the first-ever gender parity cabinet in 2015. It is hoped that by empowering women in this highly visible way, it will precipitate long-term equity by encouraging future generations of women to seek leadership roles in all divisions and fields. Parity is possible. In the Ontario public school system, women principals are more common than men in elementary divisions, and virtually tied at the secondary level because of government-sponsored initiatives to encourage women’s leadership. In independent schools, which are structurally different from public schools and lack the same centralized, unifying direction, increasing the proportion of women leading schools becomes more difficult. This study has shown through an examination of the structural impediments and the voices of women teacher-leaders themselves that significant potential exists to reshape the entry, progression, and the face of leadership in independent schools.

Explicit gender bias is no longer permitted by Canadian law. However, what is more challenging to detect are the implicit biases that permeate social life, that are often unconscious in human thought and behavior, and by extension, infuse our policies, practices, and institutions and organizations, restricting certain groups, in this case, women, from reaching the highest levels of leadership. While women are achieving some impressive gains such as higher university graduation rates than men, women in Canada continue to be concentrated in lower-paying jobs (Catalyst, 2016) and earn less than men for equal work, with mothers earning even less again (Catalyst, 2017). Waiting for equity is unfair and, unconstitutional, as the right to equal opportunity is enshrined in law. Women’s equity in leadership may be closely tied to equity in perceptions—a challenge to measure, certainly, and a seismic change in the perception of how power should be shared from boardrooms to domestic responsibilities. The stories of women in leadership that have informed this study have helped identify the significant social, organizational, and professional, and personal barriers affecting their climbs. By defining and better understanding these experiences, positive steps can be taken towards mitigating the often historic,
unconscious biases within independent schools, and the intrinsic biases of leadership quests. Participants stories offer an opportunity to reshape the paradigm of leadership to include new, more inclusive models, and greater reflection in process and programming. A closer look at perceptions of leadership emerged from this study. The time has come to alter the perception of the women/mother/leader association into one that acknowledges this combination of roles not as a deficit but as a deep skill base. It would highlight their greater capacity because of their complex identities. It is an optimistic vision of an empathetic culture, one that continues to challenge women, but one that encourages women to self-fulfill by acknowledging and their dual roles as women and leaders and triple roles as women, leaders, and mothers.

By examining the strategies women use to enter and advance in leadership, we celebrate their successes and offer a path forward for others. Participants carefully detailed the interplay between themselves and their roles, exposing their capacity, dedication to their jobs, determination to seek excellence and innovation, and their ongoing negotiation between their public and private worlds. They seek support and appreciate that their career advancement will require different needs at different stages, including raising their profile and continuous support from their Head of School. Almost all women in this study relied on another person to help with domestic responsibilities highlighting the intersection of gender roles, professional work, and domestic choices, and suggesting the need for continued conversations about how this is managed.

Encouraging more women in leadership will require organization support, and there are steps schools can take to facilitate women’s climb and summit. Examining the school’s programs, practices, and perceptions will help identify organizational biases or “blind spots” (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Making leadership careers obvious and accessible to new teachers encourages early leadership development and could “catalyze” leadership careers and help to shift perceptions of leadership from the one-dimensional view to a more inclusive, diverse example. Shifting the view of maternity leave and supporting it with off-ramping and on-ramping programs could enable women, especially those of childbearing and childrearing age, to continue in leadership; in this way, maternity leave becomes a pause on a career trajectory, not a descent. Schools could also do more to foster mentoring and sponsorship programs for potential candidates, and to track the time, process, and candidates on the leadership climb from entry through to senior leadership, and then again, from senior leadership to Head
of School. Only then will a clearer picture of the climb, and the success of the any new leadership
development initiative, be evident.
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8. List of Appendices

Stage 1: Appendix A: Letter Seeking Administrative Consent

Stage 1: Appendix B: Interview Questions for CAIS Executive Director

Stage 1: Appendix C: Email to Educational Recruiters

Stage 1: Appendix D: Interview Questions for Educational Recruiters

Stage 2: Appendix E: Email to CAIS for Schools Survey

Stage 2: Appendix F: Introductory Letter to Heads of School for Schools Survey

Stage 2: Appendix G: Quantitative Survey for CAIS Schools

Stage 2: Appendix H: Follow-up Email re Survey to CAIS Schools

Stage 3: Appendix I: Email to Women in Leadership Roles (including Heads of School)

Stage 3: Appendix J: Letter re Study Information & Consent

Stage 3: Appendix K: Interview Questions for Women in Positions of Responsibility

Stage 3: Appendix L: Interview Questions for Heads of School
8.1 Stage 1: Appendix A

Letter Requesting Administrative Consent

Ms. Anne-Marie Kee  
Executive Director  
Canadian Accredited Independent Schools  
264 Welland Avenue, 2nd Floor, Suite P  
St. Catharines, ON  
L2R 2P8  

Dear Ms. Kee,  

My name is Claire Kelly and I am an English teacher at Appleby College and a candidate in the PhD program at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The purpose of my study is to better understand the career paths of women in leadership in independent schools in Canada. This study will involve several phases and is designed to be completed over Winter-Spring 2016. It will be carried out in Canada with a focus on Ontario, under the supervision of Professor James Ryan, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at OISE/UT.

My research is intended to help:  

i). Compile a baseline of statistical information on women in independent school administration in Canada
ii). Study the career patterns of women in positions of responsibility in independent schools

iii.). Identify strategies that help women advance in independent school leadership

iv). Identify barriers that hinder women from advancing in independent school administration

v). Identify facilitators to women’s advancement in independent school leadership

The data is being collected for the purposes of a PhD thesis. An executive summary will be shared with CAIS for the purpose of raising awareness of this topic, improving representation of women in leadership, and positively contributing to healthier organizational cultures. Any publications will be restricted to academic journals.

My research is both quantitative and qualitative and divided into three phases:

In phase one I hope to interview you, [Executive Director of CAIS], and also, to interview several educational recruiters to gauge an overall impression of the current state of women in leadership in Canadian independent schools.

Phase Two will be a survey of approximately 55 CAIS schools. This is designed to collect baseline data. I have identified 55 schools because I am not including religious or single-sex schools, nor elementary schools). As a component of the ethical consideration, I would like participants (in this case, schools) to participate voluntarily.

Phase Three will involve interviews with twelve to fifteen (12-15) women faculty in leadership roles and heads of school (including former heads) at CAIS schools across Canada.

I am hoping that you might agree, [Executive Director of CAIS], to be the platform from which I send the email of invitation to the survey. You, nor CAIS itself, would have any other responsibility, other than distributing this email. I will draft the email, the questions, and correspond with participating schools, should they have questions about the survey. Moreover, I will ensure confidentiality for them. I have attached my survey so you know the questions I will be asking. Once I have schools on board, your involvement would be finished.
The information gathered from both the survey and the interviews will be kept in strict confidence and stored securely and with password protection on my home computer. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, and communities cannot be identified. All data collected will be used for the purposes of my thesis and perhaps for subsequent research articles. All raw data (i.e. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

If you agree, please sign the letter below and return it to me via email. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 871-5587 or at Claire.kelly@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. James Ryan at jim.ryan@utoronto.ca. Finally, you may also contact the UofT Office of Research Ethics for questions about your rights as a research participant at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.

With Appreciation,

Claire Kelly

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above.

Name: ______________________________ School/Organization:________________

Signed: _____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the study findings upon completion: ___

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio-recorded: _____

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
8.2 Stage 1: Appendix B

Interview Questions for CAIS Executive

1. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the low percentage of women leading independent schools?

2. Do you believe there are many women ready and waiting to be heads (pipeline & bottleneck)?

3. What role do stakeholders (parents, students, alumni, community) play in whether women become head of school? (By head of school I mean “top job”).

4. Thinking of schools that have women heads, or several women in senior leadership positions, can you identify what these schools do to encourage this advancement? (Is it the system that encourages advancement, or is it that schools are accepting without encouraging?)

5. What correlation—if any—exists between age of school and women in leadership?

6. What correlation exists between the prestige of school and women in leadership?

7. How does childbearing factor into women’s career trajectories towards Head of School?

8. If a woman wanted to be a head of school, what advice would you give her?
8.3 Stage 1: Appendix C

Email to Educational Recruiters

[TO:--]

[FROM: Claire Kelly, Ph.D Candidate]

SUBJECT: Request for Participation in Study]

Dear Educational Recruiter,

My name is Claire Kelly and I am an English teacher at Appleby College and a candidate in the Ph.D programme in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at OISE/UT. My research focuses on what career patterns of women in Canadian independent schools look like, and how schools might best support women’s leadership ambitions. In particular, I am looking at strategies, barriers, and facilitators on this career climb. I hope my study will be beneficial to faculty at these schools, and to the Canadian Association of Independent Schools as a whole.

This study will be carried out in Canada with a focus on Ontario, under the supervision of Professor James Ryan, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. The data is being collected for the purposes of a Ph.D thesis.

My research has a quantitative and a qualitative phase. The quantitative phase is designed on a survey to 55 CAIS member schools (55 because I am not including religious, single-sex, or primary/junior schools). The qualitative phase involves interviews with women in leadership roles and women heads/former of school. As a component of the ethical consideration, I would like participants to participate voluntarily.

I am writing to ask for your support. I would like to interview you, as an educational recruiter for independent schools, about the subject of women in leadership in CAIS schools. My timeline for interviewing my 15 participants will be Summer-Fall, 2015. I would hope to interview you in advance of these interviews so that you might help frame the issue.
The benefits of participation include an opportunity to address an issue of importance to oneself, one’s organization at large, and society as a whole. Moreover, participants’ suggestions may help to reshape organizational conditions in these schools. I would be pleased to discuss my study further, by phone or email, should you wish. Please let me know if you would be willing to be interviewed for my study.

With Appreciation,

Claire Kelly
8.4 Stage 1: Appendix D

Interview Questions for Educational Recruiters

1. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the low percentage of women leading independent schools?

2. Do you believe there are many women ready and waiting to be heads (pipeline & bottleneck)?

3. What role do stakeholders (parents, students, alumni, community) play in whether women become head of school? (By head of school I mean “top job”).

4. Thinking of schools that have women heads, or several women in senior leadership positions, can you identify what these schools do to encourage this advancement? (Is it the system that encourages advancement, or is it that schools are accepting without encouraging?)

5. What correlation – if any – exists between age of school and women in leadership?

6. What correlation exists between the prestige of school and women in leadership?

7. How does childbearing factor into women’s career trajectories towards Head of School?

8. If a woman wanted to be a Head of School, what advice would you give her?
8.5 Stage 2: Appendix E

Email to CAIS for Schools Survey

On May 19, 2016, at 12:45 PM, Claire Kelly <claire.kelly@utoronto.ca> wrote:

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your continued support of my studies in leadership. I appreciate you taking the time to speak to me again, and to help me frame the issue of Career Patterns of Women in Independent Schools.

Here is the link to my survey:

http://surveys.oise.utoronto.ca/surveyviewer2/index.php?surveyID=YG76Y

My intention is that the survey be offered to all CAIS schools which meet the following criteria:

- co-educational
- intermediate/senior schools
- not overtly religious

I will provide a list of these if you’d like, or I will trust CAIS to do this.

Attached is an email draft that might be sent out with the survey link to these schools. Also, I have included an introductory letter CAIS might send attach to this email for further information. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you again for your help.

Sincerely,

Claire Kelly

Ph.D candidate

Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto
Dear Heads of School and Human Resource Administrators,

I hope that this letter finds you well and enjoying a good third term. My name is Claire Kelly and I am an English teacher at Appleby College and a PhD candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto.

I am beginning the thesis portion of my program. I am searching for data on the baseline composition of faculty and faculty in leadership in CAIS schools. I hope to have participation from approximately 55 coeducational CAIS schools. This study will be carried out in Canada with a focus on Ontario, under the supervision of Professor James Ryan, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

The topic of my research is “Women in Leadership in Independent Schools in Canada.” Participation is completely voluntary and will involve the completion of a short survey of approximately 7-10 minutes. Sample questions include:

“What percentage of women in your employ could be considered in positions of responsibility or educational leadership?”

and
“On average, how many more hours per week might be expected of a faculty member in a position of responsibility compared to the hours required by a full-time teacher at your school?”

My research is intended to help:

i). Compile a baseline of statistical information on women in independent school administration in Canada

ii). Study the career patterns of women in positions of responsibility in independent schools

iii). Identify strategies that help women advance in independent school leadership

iv). Identify barriers that hinder women from advancing in independent school administration

v). Identify facilitators to women’s advancement in independent school leadership

All information collected will be kept in the strictest of confidences as your name and the name of the school will not be used in any publication, and the information will be destroyed after five (5) years. An executive summary will be shared with CAIS for the purpose of raising awareness of this topic, improving representation of women in leadership, and positively contributing to healthier organizational cultures. This data will not be used in populist media such as newspapers.

It is my hope that you will be interested in this research study. If you would like more information about being a participant in this study, I would ask that you contact me through my email address:

Thank you for your consideration,

Sincerely,

Claire Kelly
8.7 Stage 2: Appendix G

Quantitative Survey to CAIS Schools
1. I understand that by checking this box below, I hereby give my consent to participate in this survey. I understand too, that the information gathered will be used to produce a PhD dissertation, which will be housed at the University of Toronto’s TSpace research repository.

Please select one of the following:

please click here

2. 1. How many employees work at your institution?

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. 1b. How many teachers work at your institution?

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. 1c. How many people are on your leadership team? Please enter a number in the space provided


5. 2. How many men and women are employed as faculty in your school:

Men:

Women:

6. 3. What percentage of women in your school are in *academic leadership roles*?

*academic leadership roles involve additional time or compensation to support the role, often including a reduction in teaching, i.e. curriculum leaders, department heads, school/program directors, and assistant heads.

Please select one of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Below 25%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25-39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. 4. What is the average age of women in *positions of responsibility* in your school?

Please select one of the following:
- Under 30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

8. 5. On average, how many years of teaching experience prior to moving to a position of responsibility is noticed in your school?

Please select one of the following:
- 5-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21 years+

9. 6. Approximately, what percentage of these women in *positions of responsibility* have school-aged children? _______%

Please select one of the following:
- 0% (none)
- 26-50%
- 51-74%
- 75-100%

10. 7. What is the most common way for teachers to enter leadership/positions of responsibility at your school?

- Candidate applied through a job posting
- Succession Plan/Appointment
  - Candidate is entirely self-directed—applies for promotion without encouragement
  - Candidate has transferred from another workplace to improve success
  - Candidate receives the "tap on the shoulder" from his/her superior
  - Candidate is encouraged by peer or family
  - Candidate has sought mentorship while in job
  - Candidate has completed other roles with excellence
  - Candidate has 'put in her time' through staff or line jobs
  - Candidate is in right place at right time
- Other (please explain your response in section 11)
11. 8. On average, how many more hours per week might be expected of a faculty member in a position of responsibility compared to the hours required by a full-time teacher at your school?

Please select one of the following:
- None
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21+

12. 9. Does your school offer any programming that facilitates and/or engages women in leadership roles? For example, release time, flex hours, modified responsibilities, mentorship, or programming?

13. 10. Is there any other information you would like to add to clarify any of your responses?

Thank you for participating in this survey. Data are collected internally at our site and we will maintain the anonymity of the survey results. Your responses will not be traced and will be destroyed once the survey results are compiled.
Follow-up Email re Survey to CAIS Schools

[To:] bcc 44 schools

[From:] CAIS

[Date: ] June, 17, 2016

Dear Head of School/HR Director,

Thank you to those schools who have completed this survey. If you have not had a chance to do so, would you kindly complete it by June 30, 2016?

Click here for survey link

Thank you,

Claire

Claire Kelly

Ph.D Candidate

Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education

Ontario Institute for the Study of Education/University of Toronto
8.9 Stage 3: Appendix I

Email to Women in Leadership Roles (including Heads of School)

[To]:
[From]: Claire.kelly@utoronto.ca
[Date]: January-September, 2016

Dear Ms.—

I am a teacher in the English Department at Appleby College, a CAIS school. I am also a Ph.D candidate in the Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at OISE/UT.

I am writing to ask you if you would consider participating in an interview with me of approximately 45 minutes about your role as a woman in a position of responsibility in an independent school. I recognize that for many heads summertime offers holiday time and more flexibility. If you have time, I would very much like to interview you. I will do my best to schedule this at your convenience.

The purpose of my study is to better understand the career paths of women in leadership in independent schools in Canada.

Kindly see the attached letter that offers more detail about the nature of the study and the role of the participant. Included you will find details about confidentiality, anonymity, and participant consent.

Please contact me if you have any questions. We could conduct the interview over Skype at your convenience.

Thank you. I appreciate your consideration,

Sincerely,

Claire Kelly
Ph.D candidate
Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto
To the participants in this study,

The purpose of the present study is to better understand the career paths of women in leadership in independent schools in Canada. This study will involve several phases and is designed to be completed over Winter, 2016. This national study will be carried out in Canada with a focus on Ontario, under the supervision of Professor James Ryan, Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education at The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Phase One will include interviews with [REDACTED] CAIS and several educational recruiters to gauge an overall impression of the current state of the issue.

Phase Two will be a survey of 55 CAIS schools. This is designed to collect baseline data.

Phase Three will involve interviews with twelve to fifteen (12-15) women faculty in leadership roles at CAIS schools across Canada.

My research is intended to help:

i). Compile a baseline of statistical information on women in independent school administration in Canada

ii). Study the career patterns of women in positions of responsibility in independent schools
iii.). Identify strategies that help women advance in independent school leadership
iv). Identify barriers that hinder women from advancing in independent school administration
v). Identify facilitators to women’s advancement in independent school leadership

The participants in this study will be selected based on their gender, their position of responsibility, the number of years they have held the position, their geographical location, and their personal/familial circumstances. While they will each meet the selection criteria, a diverse group of women participants is sought, each of whom may represent a range of professional circumstances from junior leadership roles to senior administration, and personal circumstances including single marital status, to married with or without children.

The data is being collected for the purposes of a Ph.D thesis only. An executive summary of the findings will be shared with CAIS and its schools for the purpose of raising awareness of this topic, improving representation of women in leadership, and positively contributing to healthier organizational cultures. Any publications will be restricted to academic journals. Once completed, a copy of my thesis will be available in University of Toronto’s TSpace if you wish to access it:

https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/9944

Data will be collected using qualitative research techniques. In particular, participants will be asked to consent to a face-to-face semi-structured interview (via Skype, where distance necessitates) of approximately 45 minutes. During the interview, each participant will be asked questions about her decision to enter leadership, her expectations and responsibilities as a woman in an administrative position of responsibility, her satisfaction and concerns, her ambitions, her perception of career strategies and barriers, and personal/familial support. As the interview proceeds, I may ask questions for clarification or further understanding, but my part will be mainly to listen to each participant speak about her views, experiences, and the reasons she believes the things she does. After the interview, I will transcribe her words.

With the permission of each participant, each interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed to Word document. Please consent by initialing in the space provided at the bottom of this letter.
Each participant will be assigned a number that will correspond to her interviews and transcriptions. Your transcript will be sent to you (via email) to read so that you may add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations. The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored at a secure location. All information will be reported with the upmost care and with the intention of protecting the identity of each participant and each school. As such, participant names and school names, will be assigned pseudonyms; school locations will be concealed. All raw data (i.e. transcripts) will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. Only my supervisor and I will see the data.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Participants may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process. Participants may request that any information, whether in written form or audio recording, be eliminated from the project. At no time will value judgments will be placed on a participant’s response nor will any evaluation be made of her effectiveness as a teacher, leader, or person. Finally, each participant is free to ask any questions about the research and her involvement with it. I have asked for your email address so that a summary of the findings of the study will be sent to each participant.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (416) 871-5587 or at claire.kelly@utoronto.ca. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. James Ryan at (416) 978-1152 ext. Finally, if you have any questions related to your rights as a participant in this study or if you have any complaints or concerns about how you have been treated as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273

Claire Kelly, candidate, Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education, OISE/University of Toronto.
Telephone: 416 871 5587 claire.kelly@utoronto.ca

Dr. James Ryan, Professor, Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education OISE/University of Toronto, Toronto, ON, M5S 1V6 Telephone: (416) 978-1152 email: jim.ryan@utoronto.ca

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, you have received a copy of this letter, and you are fully aware of the conditions above. Name:
________________________________________ School: ___________________________________ Signed:
________________________________________ Date: ______________________________

Please initial if you would like a summary of the study findings upon completion: _____

Please initial if you agree to have your interview audio-recorded: _____

Please include your email address:_____

Please keep a copy of this form for your records.
Interview Questions for Women in Positions of Responsibility

Personal details:
Name: [Code]
School: [Code]  Day or Boarding?  Est. 1- - -?
Title:
Years teaching:

1. What is the approximate number of faculty in your school?
2. Of this faculty, can you estimate the gender balance between male and female employees?
3. Have you held previous positions of responsibility? Please name:
   b. What prompted you to apply for a position of responsibility? (Has this motivation been the same for each new application?)
4. Have your positions of responsibility all been at the same school?
   Yes
   No—PROMPT: How have the conditions that led you to apply for each of these roles differed between schools?

What strategies do women in independent schools employ to enter administration?

5. What factors prompted you to think about taking on a position of responsibility? For example,
   • Career goal?
   • “Tap on the shoulder”
   • Support from admin/peer or family to apply for admin roles?
   • Mentorship?
   • New capacity or skills training?
   • Natural next step from a specialist position?
• No prior experience--entirely self-directed?
• Boredom in current role?
• Challenge of new role?
• Financial remuneration?
• Greater autonomy?
• Other? ___________________

6. How does someone in your position proceed to the next level of administration?
   (goal-setting & being visible, capacity building, excellent job performance, relationship building, luck)

7. What strategies do you employ to be able to do your job effectively, raise a family/maintain personal life, and find personal time? PROMPT: Do you limit email to various periods? Does your partner contribute to household management? Do you have a nanny or a relative who helps daily?
   
   b. Have any of these changed since you moved from teaching full-time?

What are the structural barriers to the headship?

8. Ultimately, would you like to be a Head of school/principal?
9. Do you anticipate the hours will increase as you move towards this goal?
10. Do you think the barriers to women are different at different stages? For example, at specific times/specific roles, does the pressure increase? Is there a significant increase in time expected?
12. The KCM theory puts forth that women value different things in their careers at different times in their lives. Initially they value challenge, then balance, then authenticity. Do you see your career this way?
13. Have you ever considered moving schools to reach the next level?

What organizational factors facilitate the promotion process for women in leadership roles?

14. Do you have a mentor?
15. Do you have work-place allies?
   Yes: PROMPT: How do they facilitate your ability to perform your role?
16. Do you think your school would appoint a woman as Head?
   b. Would she be more likely to be appointed from within the school or externally?
17. How many women are on your board of governors?
18. What is the average age of women in positions of responsibility in your school?
   Under 30  31-40  41-50  51-60  61 +

[voluntary]: How old are you?
8.12 Stage 3: Appendix L

Interview Questions for Heads of School

1. In your opinion, what are the reasons for the low percentage of women leading independent schools?

2. Do you believe there are many women ready and waiting to be heads (pipeline & bottleneck)?

3. What role do stakeholders (parents, students, alumni, community) play in whether women become head of school? (By head of school I mean “top job”).

4. Thinking of schools that have women heads, or several women in senior leadership positions, can you identify what these schools do to encourage this advancement? (Is it the system that encourages advancement, or is it that schools are accepting without encouraging?)

5. What correlation—if any—exists between age of school and women in leadership?

6. What correlation exists between the prestige of school and women in leadership?

7. How does childbearing factor into women’s career trajectories towards Head of School?

8. If a woman wanted to be a Head of School, what advice would you give her?
8.13 List of Figures

Fig. 1: Theoretical Spectrum of Career Theory

Fig. 2: Barriers to Women’s Success

Fig. 3: Women’s Paths to Independent School Leadership

Fig. 4: The Routes of Women and Men in Leadership

Fig. 5: Exploratory Sequential Qualitative Study

Fig. 6 Interview Participants Matrix

Fig. 7: Average age of Women in Leadership Positions by School

Fig. 8: Women in Positions of Responsibility with Children

Fig. 9: Women in Academic Leadership Roles by School

Fig. 10: Interview Participants

Fig. 11: Professional Strategy: Improve one’s own professional practice to improve school

Fig. 12: Graduates of Leadership Institute Program

Fig. 13: Graduates of Next Step Program