

# *The Double Bind for Women: Exploring the Gendered Nature of Turnaround Leadership in a Principal Preparation Program*

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*In this study of nine participants in a turnaround principal preparation program, Jennie Miles Weiner and Laura J. Burton explore how gender role identity shaped participants' views of effective principal leadership and their place within it. The authors find that although female and male participants initially framed effective leadership similarly, their conceptualizations of themselves as leaders, the feedback they felt they received regarding their skills, and their access to employment were sharply divided based on gender and had real implications for how women viewed their leadership capabilities and potential success as school leaders.*

Since the 1980s, there have been increasing calls for school principals to be “instructional leaders” ensuring a coherent vision for, and effective implementation of, instruction (Hallinger, 2003). With this emphasis on instructional expertise as a requisite for effective school leadership, and with over 86 percent of teachers being women (Feistritz, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011; Grisson, Loeb, & Master, 2013), we might anticipate that female teachers would be a ready pool of potential candidates to serve as instructional leaders. However, women are underrepresented as school leaders—only 52 percent of K–12 principals and 30 percent of high school principals are women (NCES, 2013). Additionally, it is more difficult and frequently takes far longer for women to achieve such positions due to limited access to mentoring and other critical job resources (Muñoz, Pankake, Ramalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014; Peters, 2010).

Moreover, once serving as principals, women often report incidences of gender prejudice (Duncan, 2013) and tend to have shorter tenures overall (Eckman, 2004). Given the shortage of principals able to serve as effective instructional leaders (Kowal & Hassel, 2011; Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011) and recent research suggesting that women often embrace such roles (Loder & Spillane, 2005), the underutilization of women and their talents calls for inquiry into why these apparently gendered outcomes occur and how to alleviate them.

Yet, research on women's experiences becoming and being principals remains somewhat narrow in scope. First, many researchers have focused on how access to career resources such as mentorship and professional networks impact women's opportunities (e.g., Banks, 1995; Grady & O'Connell, 1993). Fewer have studied the influence of societal discourses regarding women leaders on female principals' experiences during training or in the role (e.g., Muñoz et al., 2014; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Such discourses reify gender stereotypes of women as nurturing and collaborative, often to a fault (Wood & Eagly, 2012), and thus position them as less capable or ineffective leaders (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). Alternatively, leadership types that are often considered effective, and particularly in educational leadership in the United States, tend to embrace what are deemed more "agentic" qualities (e.g., being heroic, autocratic, a risk taker) (Peck, Reitzug, & West, 2013), characteristics frequently associated with stereotypical male characteristics and behaviors (Eagly & Karau, 2002). As leadership preparation programs in education and elsewhere have long presented these heroic and, hence, more stereotypically male models of leadership, they have been perceived as potentially detrimental to female participants (Beekley, 1999; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1989), and this suggests a need for further research in this area and in principal preparation in particular.

Eagly and Karau (2002) offer a means to explore these issues directly through role congruity theory. They argue that effective leadership is often constructed in agentic terms (e.g., dominant, aggressive). When women attempt to take on leadership positions, they are placed in a double bind: punished for breaking gender stereotypes and taking on a more masculine leadership orientation or by failing to do so and thus enacting leadership in ways misaligned with expectations (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Using this framework to guide our inquiry, we examine how participants in a turnaround principal training program came to understand school leadership and their place within it. Thus, this work provides new insights into why women are underrepresented in school leadership and potential areas for intervention to increase their number, efficacy, and empowerment in such roles.

## Women in Educational Leadership

The current dearth of female leaders in US education is often traced back to the common schools movement of the mid-nineteenth century and the

feminization of the teaching profession (Apple, 1985; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Goldstein, 2014). This period of rapid school expansion created a great demand for a cheap, abundant, but well-educated teaching force. Women, who were well educated but excluded from many other professions, were a perfect solution. Teaching was also aligned with contemporary social mores, including the “cult of domesticity,” which saw women as natural nurturers of children (Grumet, 1988; Strober & Tyack, 1980). Teaching became an extension of these duties, placing female teachers as nurturers of children’s minds (Nelson, 1992; Weiler, 1989).

This labeling of teaching as a female profession had real and lasting impacts on women’s access to and willingness to take on school leadership. Framed as caretakers and denied access to leadership roles due to their purported weaker nature, over time many female teachers came to normalize and internalize these views, focusing their energies on building caring and close relationships with students and treating school leadership in the form of administration (principal, vice principal, department chair) as a male endeavor (Adams & Hambright, 2004). Such frames reflect the larger discourse, as there are implicit rules defining qualified or successful candidates for school leadership positions, rules that often include “the subtle devaluing of career paths more frequently traveled by females and people of color in education” (Feuerstein, 2006, p. 138). Such biases persist across multiple and intersecting elements of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality (Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008; Collins, 1998; Rusch, 2004), with gender bias against women remaining significant across these identities (Reed, 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012). As such, and given these historical trajectories, many female teachers continue to refrain from becoming administrators, or they experience role conflict if they do (Loder & Spillane, 2005).

As these biases persisted, the profession continued to evolve and grow, often in ways that served to reinforce these stereotypes rather than mitigate them. For example, like many male-dominated professions, school leadership continues to be described as an “old boys club,” with males receiving formal and informal mentoring and women having few positive, female mentors for similar supports (Muñoz et al., 2014; Peters, 2010). “Essentially, seasoned professionals (typically White males) have sought to assist protégés who are younger versions of themselves” (Peters, 2010, p. 112), thereby reproducing existing social inequalities (Kanter, 1977). Indeed, though a minority of teachers are white males, they are a majority in school leadership, often quickly being identified as “having leadership potential” (Cognard-Black, 2004; Myung et al., 2011) and moving up—riding the “glass escalator” (Williams, 1992)—leaving colleagues with minority identities behind. Research suggests that women of color who attempt or inhabit leadership often experience a “double jeopardy” of discrimination (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Moreover, when women are able to access leadership, they are more likely to be selected for precarious positions, such as leading an organization in crisis, thus generating further

obstacles to success—a situation dubbed the “glass cliff” in recent research (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Iacoviello, Faniko, & Ryan, 2015).

Women may also refrain from becoming principals due to their concern about work-family balance. Though men often find ways to incorporate their family into their professional life, women show greater reluctance to blur these lines (Adams & Hambright, 2004). Eckman (2004) found that male principals felt their ability to function effectively was largely due to their wives’ role as primary caretaker of their children. In contrast, women often highlighted the professional sacrifices they made for their family.

Clearly, women face numerous challenges in becoming school leaders. And yet, like so many other leadership training programs (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011), principal preparation programs provide little discussion about the impact gender bias and stereotyping may have in women’s understanding and enactment of leadership or how they or their effectiveness may be perceived as a result. Moreover, little research exists on how such programs impact women’s leadership identity—or, for that matter, men’s.

An exception, Sperandio and LaPier (2009) studied participants in an urban leadership program who were given opportunities to “reflect on their gendered and ethnic/cultural understandings and experiences to inform their future leadership experiences” (p. 68). They found that female participants were better able to articulate and understand the relationship between their identity and leadership and that they grew in their confidence regarding their leadership skills and their ability to lead for social justice and change. However, while this study focused on gender, race, and leadership to build participants’ efficacy and commitment to social justice, it did not seek to capture how these concepts exist within current constructions of principal leadership or preparation programs more broadly. Nor did the study consider how exposure to gendered constructions of leadership within such programs may shape participants’ views of leadership. Simultaneously acknowledging that gender is only one of an individual’s multiple identities, and that it has saliency even when intersecting with other identities relative to leadership accessibility and success (Banks, 1995; Reed, 2012), our study explores gender bias in leadership preparation and contributes to an understanding of why a gender gap in school leadership exists and how to rectify it.

### Theoretical Frame: Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory

To frame our work, we utilize social role theory (Wood & Eagly, 2012), which proposes that there are expectations regarding the roles men and women fill in society: there are qualities and behavioral tendencies demonstrated by each gender (descriptive roles) and also expectations regarding roles men and women should occupy (prescriptive roles). Communal characteristics such as being affectionate (emotive), helpful, and nurturing are often used

to describe women and are perceived as traits most appropriate for women to demonstrate (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Conversely, agentic characteristics include being aggressive, dominant, and self-confident and are typically used to describe men and are perceived as most appropriate for men to demonstrate (Wood & Eagly, 2012).

Role congruity theory is grounded in social role theory and describes the double bind women face in leadership, how prejudice occurs when there is a perceived incongruity between group stereotypes (e.g., attributes and behaviors prescribed for a group of people, in this case leaders) and social role stereotypes (e.g., attributes and behaviors prescribed by social mores regarding gender) (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Further, work by Koenig and Eagly (2014) extends the understanding of how stereotypes are formed to recognize that observations about social roles through occupational roles produce stereotypes, such as woman as teacher and man as principal. For example, prescribed social roles for women defined as communal or emotive run counter to roles attributed to leaders as agentic. The social role stereotypes of “women take care and men take charge” (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013, p. 1307) affect how women are evaluated in leadership positions and are both pervasive and resilient. Women thus face a double bind; in order to fulfill the prescribed behaviors for leadership roles, they must act outside of their prescribed gender roles, including being less emotive (Smith, Brescoll, & Thomas, 2016) and then experience backlash for this violation (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Indeed, research shows that women are often penalized in work settings for this sort of incongruent behavior, such as for being neutral or unemotional, in an effort to be perceived as a more competent leader (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Utilizing social role theory and role congruity theory, we contend that this stereotyping of the principal shapes the construction of principal preparation programs and therefore the experiences of men and women enrolled in them. If the construction of the principal role within such programs is gendered based on stereotypes, and the evaluation of being an “effective” principal is also based on these prescribed social roles, then women participants may be perceived as lacking the necessary skills to be principals and may face greater challenges during hiring than their male peers.

## Methods

Our research emerged and evolved from a larger study exploring how a cohort of nine aspiring principals attending a turnaround principal preparation program came to understand both leadership and themselves as leaders.<sup>1</sup> Issues of gender and its intersection with leadership first came to our attention in the third interview as female participants described their difficult experiences obtaining turnaround principal positions. During their interviews, many explicitly questioned whether this difficulty might be related, at least in part, to their gender. However, it was not until we began to analyze the data

for the purposes of answering our original research questions that we felt the issue of gender and leadership preparation required additional focus. In particular, through our initial coding focused on participants' leadership identity more broadly, gender-based patterns emerged in participants' reports regarding the feedback they received in and out of the program, the considerations they made about their professional trajectories, and their hiring experiences. Given the saliency of these themes, we returned to the data with the following newly developed research questions to guide our inquiry:

- How did gender shape aspiring turnaround principals' experiences in their preparation program?
- How did these experiences impact their understanding of being a turnaround principal and their fit with the role?

We interpreted participants' recollections, reflections, and interpretations to examine how gender may have impacted their experiences and their construction of leadership (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Seidman, 2006).

### *Study Site*

This study is part of a larger three-year longitudinal study on the experiences of nine turnaround principals who attended a preparation program in a mid-size northeastern state. The preparation program was a partnership between a state education agency (SEA) and an external school leadership training institute that utilized best practices, including a cohort model, problem-based learning, field experiences, ongoing mentoring, and research-based content (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Additionally, cohort members went through a rigorous application process that included written essays, an in-depth individual interview in which each participant was asked to present data showing the impact of their work on student achievement, and a group interview that focused on school improvement planning.

As described by the SEA in recruitment documents, the preparation program's purpose was to recruit, prepare, and support highly effective turnaround leaders to close achievement gaps and improve student achievement overall. These leaders were meant to develop and support school leadership teams to quickly and permanently enhance the school's performance so it would no longer be deemed underperforming or in need of turnaround.<sup>2</sup> The program included a month-long summer intensive, a residency in a school, ongoing coaching in the placement, and monthly seminars. Curriculum included an emphasis on systems thinking, culture as a lever for organizational change, and capacity building at the school site.

Program completion was contingent on reaching proficiency on a leadership performance matrix that emphasized leadership integrity, adherence to core values, respect, reflexivity, and strategic decision making. It also emphasized the need to cultivate an "appropriate public persona" that, as interpreted from the performance standards, included the principal being able to "man-

age emotions” so that his or her feelings would not interfere with strategic thinking regarding the consequences of alternative responses to difficult situations. Program materials focused on developing these competencies and helping participants “become self-directed, self-reflective, and empowered.” Participants earned licensure on successful program completion and were supported in finding placement as a turnaround principal in the state, including reference letters and structured and informal networking opportunities (e.g., meet-and-greets, personal phone calls). Again, the site selection was not intentional to the current study, but salient themes in the participants’ interviews led to the research questions we explored during a secondary data analysis.

*Study Sample*

Table 1 provides some background data on the participants.<sup>3</sup> Six of the nine participants were women. Participants came to the program with various prior experiences, with some, like Bob, having served in supervisory positions prior to enrollment and others, like Anjale, as people who entered teaching from other careers and then spent their entire time in education within the classroom.

*Data Collection*

All the data for this study was a secondary analysis of the data collected in the course of a study focused on better understanding the experiences of participants in turnaround principal preparation programs. This study employed two

TABLE 1 *Participant information*

	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Past experience</i>
Juan	Nonwhite	Male	Early 30s	Teacher, TFA corps member
Sandra	Nonwhite	Female	Early 50s	External profession, teacher
Tom	White	Male	Late 30s	Teacher leader
Wendy	White	Female	Early 40s	Teacher leader (charter school)
Thali	Nonwhite	Female	Late 30s	Teacher leader
Kelly	White	Female	Late 30s	Teacher leader, school leadership consultant
Frances	White	Female	Mid-40s	Teacher, district and state employee
Bob	White	Male	Mid-40s	Principal, teacher
Anjale	Nonwhite	Female	Mid-30s	Teacher, external profession

forms of data collection. The first was focused on better understanding the nature and substance of the program itself. To do so, we reviewed the SEA's marketing materials, the program curriculum and objectives, and responses from a postanalysis conversation with program officials. Our analysis of these materials was more informal, since our main goal was to use these materials to gain a sense of the context in which participants were learning about and coming to understand turnaround policy and behaviors.

Second, we interviewed participants four times over the year, each session lasting approximately one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Initial interviews were structured and focused on participants' professional backgrounds, motivations for program enrollment, and views on leadership. Later interviews were semistructured and asked participants to reflect on their learning and how their views had evolved over time (e.g., "In what ways have your views of *leadership* changed as a result of your program experiences? In what ways have your views of *yourself as a leader* changed as a result of these experiences?")

Beyond the first interview, which was structured, all three later interviews were semistructured, with time for researchers to engage with participants on emerging themes from earlier interviews and in real time. The open nature of the interviews provided opportunities for the participants to discuss what they perceived as issues of gender bias, issues the researchers had not initially intended to focus on but which the interviewees brought to the foreground of the conversation. For example, when, in her third interview, one of the participants was asked whether there was anything she felt would be a potential challenge when serving as a turnaround principal, her response was gendered in nature. Specifically, she thought that her role as a mother would impact others' perceptions of her leadership capabilities and work habits in negative ways as she had seen this happen to her mentor principal at her site.

One of the first things I noticed when I went to [name of residency site] and I was early and the secretary was there and I was supposed to meet the principal at 7:30. She laughed and said, "Oh, she's never here early, she's usually here at 8:15, she has small kids." Back to the old boy sexist levels for a high school principal, what it should be, and not a younger woman with young kids.

In response, and alerted to the themes of gender the participant was pulling from her lived experience, the interviewer probed, "It's interesting, because this idea of gender, it's so implicit—Are people talking about it at the high school, as you move up?" Such moments provided ample data from which to guide the present study while allowing participants' emerging views to come through in powerful ways.

### *Analysis*

We analyzed the data thematically using inductive and deductive coding (Boyatzis, 1998). We derived deductive codes from research on the challenges



women experience when wanting to become principals (e.g., lack of family support) and once in the position (e.g., negative feedback) (see Eckman, 2004). Informed by Eagly and Karau's (2002) conceptualization of role congruity, we coded participants' descriptions of leadership as agentic or communal as described by Eagly (1987). Codes also captured each participant's self-identification as a leader, such as whether they used agentic signifiers in these descriptions (e.g., "I hold people accountable," "I am a risk-taker").

We also allowed inductive codes to emerge. Doing so, we followed Hruschka et al.'s (2004) process of building intercoder reliability: segmentation of text, codebook creation, coding, assessment of reliability, codebook modification, and final coding. First, for each time point we randomly selected four interviews to independently code (segmentation). We then, as suggested by Charmaz (2014) for a grounded coding process, conducted line-by-line analysis. Next, we made meaning of these phrases through memoing and reflecting, the end result being initial inductive codes to add to our deductive ones (codebook creation). We discussed our codes and emerging understandings until we agreed on the code meanings and application. Next, we independently coded a portion of the interviews, frequently discussing and reviewing our codes and inevitably producing additional codes (codebook modification). For example, we found that participants tended to tell an origin story about their reasons for pursuing leadership and how these experiences impacted their current leadership orientation (e.g., as a fighter, change agent, advocate). Repeating this deductive/inductive process for each time segment, we refined our codes, returning to the data to ensure coherency and a grounding in participants' experiences (final coding).

### *Limitations*

Since our initial intention was not to study gender bias in principal preparation, the study was not necessarily designed for this purpose. Therefore, it is likely that a more explicit focus on issues of gender bias in leadership preparation at the onset of the study may have yielded alternative site selection, interview protocols, etc. Yet, the fact that these issues emerged as highly salient without an explicit research focus suggests their import to the participants and the power of engaging in what Edwards (2004) calls "unmotivated looking" as a means of a more organic, inductive approach. The small sample size and single site are other clear limitations to the study and bring up questions regarding the degree to which these findings can be generalized to women and men generally or to principal preparation programs in particular.

That said, our findings do align with recent research in both arenas and provide important insights into the understudied context of principal preparation and its role in reinforcing gender and possibly other forms of bias within school leadership. The research also focused on participants' perceptions regarding program experiences. Our findings neither give insights into the intentions of those interacting with participants nor include observations of these moments.

As a result, the lack of triangulation might serve to bias the findings in favor of participants' perceptions. And yet, given the connection between perceptions and behaviors (Argyris, 1997), our approach is particularly well suited to understanding how gender bias may have impacted participants' views of themselves as leaders and, inevitably, their enactment of leadership.

Additionally, we did not collect demographic information on program leaders or the principal mentors and therefore cannot draw conclusions regarding how their multiple identities might have also influenced the type and substance of the feedback they provided to participants. We also note that gender is only one of multiple identities held by our participants—for example, race, ethnicity, sexuality—and that those identities intersect to influence each person's experiences (Rusch, 2004) and, hence, are worthy of further exploration in subsequent research.

Finally, as women in another male-dominated field, that of higher education, and given our perceptions regarding the role of gender bias in the reception of our work and our ability to effectively enact leadership within our profession, we had an interest in these issues and how they might be mitigated. This positionality may have made us more likely to see such themes emerge in the data and for us to probe, even emergently, for deeper reflection and thought among participants on these issues. To help mitigate the impact of this positionality and potential subjectivity, we utilized member checks from participants and feedback on our analysis from them and program officials.

## Findings

Organized chronologically, our findings explore the cumulative nature of participants' experiences through the program. This helps illustrate the way role conflict may create a "million small cuts" rather than a singular and definitive blow to women as they attempt to become principals.

### *Initial Conceptions*

#### — Leadership and Self as Leader

Before beginning the principal preparation program, we asked participants to describe the qualities, attributes, and behaviors required to be effective turnaround leaders. All participants described effective turnaround leaders as deploying more communal than agentic behaviors. For example, Bob noted that most effective turnaround principals take the following approach to leadership:

To support the community, to support the teachers and the students and the parents, to create structures working with community members that will help students. Help students feel emotionally secure, socially secure, academically secure. I don't think it's to put everything on my back that I'm going to drive all those things forward.

Participants described effective turnaround leadership as supportive and nurturing, with recognition that leadership should be collaborative. To do so, Anjale explained,

[The leader] can make his presence known in the school, stop by teachers' classrooms and say, "Hey, how are things going today? Oh, I heard about that difficulty that you had with a student. Let's talk about it." Just so it's more, "You know what? I'm not in this alone. I actually do have a team that cares."

Despite her description favoring a more communal orientation toward leadership, Anjale still uses the pronoun *he* when discussing the principal. This suggests that she sees a communal approach as appropriate for leaders of either gender but that her default expectation is for leaders to be male.

— Story of Self/Self as Leader

At the beginning of the program, all participants presented themselves as having strong leadership qualities and capabilities. For example, reflecting on her and other participants' readiness for leadership, Wendy said, "I tend to be a person who takes on a lot of stuff, more than I can handle sometimes, and I love it. I am just driven." Frances also noted, "One of my strengths is really working with people and helping them see new ways to do things, and, actually, I'm decent at building a consensus." Even with some feelings of trepidation, confidence was evident. Tom queried, "Who has done this? Who will guide me? And to a certain extent, sometimes I think the answer is me, which is terrifying. But I think . . . I feel like I am up for it."

Despite the confidence conveyed by all the participants except for Sandra, the other five female participants noted that they met resistance as they chose a leadership path. As Wendy described, "I had told people I was going to go into leadership. I got a lot of negative reactions from friends, from other people around the state that are teachers. And it's really been disheartening." Anjale also described negative responses from her fellow teachers when she shared her interest in pursuing leadership, "and even talking to some of the teachers and how when I first came in they'd go, 'Oh, you're just excited now but that will change in three months. You're just motivated now but that will change.'" Thali, too, faced negative responses: "As a matter of fact, every single principal has told me that I am crazy for going into this program, every single one." Thali noted that her husband also discouraged her leadership aspirations: "I said to my husband, 'I think I am gonna go into leadership,' which he is like, 'Don't do it.'"

Conversely, male participants reported a more natural progression toward leadership, with their statements indicating they felt they were provided opportunities to lead and that they received positive feedback for enacting leadership behaviors. Bob captured this natural progression to leadership, describing how he "fell into" school leadership and "got a call saying, 'We need you to start running the school on Monday,' and I stepped in as the assist—as the

substitute principal to a very challenging climate.” Tom also noted a lack of resistance to his leadership path, “So leadership in other ways had always been a part of my life, and I knew that was something that I wanted to do. So—so when this came—it was just like this was just—it really made sense.”

### *Program Experiences*

Though all but one of the women marked their entrance into the program as including external resistance, it did not appear to affect their willingness or desire to engage. In this way, it seems such feedback from loved ones and other trusted advisers had a relatively small externally measurable impact on how these female participants viewed school leadership or themselves as school leaders. However, participants’ perceptions of instructor feedback and relationships with principal mentors at the internship sites seemed to reinforce the early resistance these women faced or, for Sandra, brought new challenges that negatively impacted their confidence about and access to becoming effective principals.

#### — Programmatic Feedback

Throughout the program, participants received formal and informal feedback from the course instructors. Informal feedback was generally oral and primarily provided to participants publicly during class time. Formal feedback was less frequent and usually occurred in response to written assignments asking participants to apply class learning. Our analysis focuses, as the participants did, on the informal feedback; participants barely discussed the written feedback and never provided concrete examples of what it included or how they understood it relative to their leadership capabilities.

According to participants’ recollections, the substance of the informal program feedback was twofold. First was a focus on content knowledge, such as proficiency with budgeting, special education regulations, or human resource policies. As they reported, feedback was directed toward their understanding with few differences in tone or overall content expectations across participants. The second type of feedback pertained to “softer” leadership skills, such as communication, vision, and strategy. This feedback was understood quite differently based on the participant’s gender.

Male participants often described the programmatic critique as helping them build on existing strengths. Reported feedback included suggestions on how to better clarify and communicate each man’s vision for school improvement. When asked about the feedback he received from program instructors, Juan said:

I got a lot of reinforcement that those—that feelings and those beliefs, those core values resonate with other people, so I don’t have to be afraid to share it or I don’t have to be afraid to you know—and change it, because I’m afraid that someone can’t receive it. You know? I mean if anything, it’s just the challenge

of being even more clear and more explicit when you are explaining things . . . People will either get on board or they'll see the value and at least engage in the conversation.

Here Juan experienced the feedback as helping him convince others to believe in his vision. His comments also suggest that he felt encouraged to hold firm to his vision for improvement, even when criticized. Juan appears to have experienced this feedback as affirming, if not empowering.

Bob, too, presented the feedback as reinforcing. When asked whether his program experiences changed his view of himself as a leader, he responded,

What came out—We had weekly check-ins on what we considered to be our strengths and what areas would we want to work on based on our own self-reflection, based on our groups' observations and the facilitators'. And they were all pretty much in line, strong with relationships, strong with creating a sense of belonging. How do I push things a little bit, because I'm—I don't like to create unhealthy stress, but in perhaps to a [fault], I don't create stress?

Bob clarified that he experienced positive alignment between this feedback and his sense of himself as a leader. When it was perhaps less aligned, when he named what was being asked of him as “creating unhealthy stress,” he diminished the critique's negativity by presenting this flaw as a potential positive, that he does not impart unhealthy stress on colleagues. This also suggests that, as did Juan, Bob perceived that he was being called to be more forceful in his approach.

Tom also felt that his beliefs and vision for reform were reinforced by program instructors and, if anything, that he was being pushed to more forcefully advocate for his views. When asked whether he found the program coaches supportive, he said that they were, and they were helping him through targeted coaching to develop more of an “edge” to ensure his success in a turnaround environment. Working to incorporate this feedback, Tom said he began to be more forceful in class simulations, in one instance telling a recalcitrant teacher:

We're doing this [intervention], and it's going to help kids; it's not just about your kids, and you have to really appreciate that it's going to help all kids, and that's what we're going to do here. I'm not just going to worry about one class. We've got to worry about the whole school.

Tom recalled that the instructor responded by applauding his approach and remarking, “You have grown so butch!” Tom felt that this feedback encouraged him to take a fairly autocratic stance, refusing to back down when faced with resistance. While such a stance may have been most appropriate given the circumstances, it emphasizes power over compromise. All of the men received feedback to build on existing behaviors that favored an agentic orientation of leadership; they were encouraged to be more forceful and confident while persuading others to take on their viewpoints.

The female participants also indicated that, in keeping with the program's emphasis on effective communication, they felt the feedback was aimed at helping them more clearly articulate their vision and goals; however, their perceptions of the underlying reasons for these changes were different than their male colleagues'. Rather than understand the feedback as improving their ability to take a stand or build on their strengths, the women said that they felt the goal was, as Sandra put it, "to be to other people what they need me to be."

Indeed, female participants reported that program leaders often gave them negative feedback on how they presented themselves. Some reported that this feedback focused on their physicality (e.g., gestures, facial expressions) and the potential messages it sent to the audience. Thali, in particular, said she was told to refrain from wearing bangle bracelets because they were too distracting, especially given her proclivity for using her hands while talking. Wendy reported receiving similar feedback, that she needed to limit her nonverbal communication because it was "distracting" and sent mixed messages to the audience. When asked to describe any new learning experienced during program sessions, she explained:

There were two things about my leadership. One is the way in which I present myself, which I notice I'm doing already right now—my hands going crazy. So body language and the way that I present myself as a leader has been one piece that we spent a lot of time on, talking about it . . . I do a lot of this, head shaking. I also joked on myself during the weeks, like, I'm a bobble head, "yes, yes, yes," you know. And so stopping that, giving those cues to those I'm speaking with, being able to present myself in a very neutral way.

This sense that the feedback was to help the speaker present as "neutral" was repeated by the other female participants and seemed aligned with programmatic goals of helping participants "manage emotions." And yet, it was only the female participants who reported being told to "tone down" their communication. The implicit message is that others would be uncomfortable or fail to take the (female) speaker seriously unless her style changed and she became less emotive. In this way, the female participants received messaging to be less communal, less emotional, and hence to act less stereotypically female in order to be seen as more effective leaders—more agentic and hence more stereotypically masculine.

Though, according to participants, it was never explicitly stated, the message that it would be necessary for women leaders to lessen discomfort they might cause when exerting their leadership was picked up by female participants and reinforced by other feedback telling them they needed to "be political" or "keep their mouths shut" to be successful. As Thali explained when asked to describe where she was in her learning trajectory:

At the end of summer intensive we had to write where we felt our strengths were, but then also where we felt that we needed improvement on . . . And mine was communication and the way that I come across, because I tend to come across

very passionate on education, which sometimes could be taken wrong because sometimes the passion may come across as being aggressive or narrow-minded or—That was some of the feedback that I had gotten.

Other female participants made similar remarks, placing their feedback experiences in contrast to their male counterparts who felt encouraged to stand their ground when facing disagreement. The contrasting feedback received by the female and male participants further reinforces the double bind experienced by the women in the cohort. The men were encouraged to continue behaving in ways consistent with their stereotypical gender roles (e.g., “butch”) that are also congruent with perceptions of effective leadership. Only the women were instructed to temper their behavior (e.g., be less emotional). However, though such tempering would make them, in the eyes of the program leaders, more effective, it would likely also, due to gendered stereotypes of women as more emotive, move them to break with accepted social roles and potentially make them, like women in other industries, less likable and thus less employable as leaders (see Rudman & Glick, 2001). However, despite these differences in feedback, participants said that the relationship between gender and leadership was never mentioned in program sessions, an observation confirmed by program representatives.

#### — Site-Based Feedback

Though it was rare for participants to speak directly about feedback they received from their principal mentors, participants’ descriptions of these mentor-mentee relationships provided insight on the mentor’s view of the participant and vice versa. Subtle but clear differences between the male and female participants’ descriptions of these relationships emerged, appearing despite variability regarding the principal mentors’ demographic backgrounds, leadership orientations, effectiveness, and school types.

The women tended to frame these mentor/mentee relationships as apprenticeships, positioning the mentor principal as an expert and themselves as building expertise. These relationships were usually presented positively, with the leader supporting the participant’s growth and development. For example, when asked how she was feeling about her residency, Sandra said:

I am feeling very positive and very satisfied with the program, with the experience, with the mentor principal I’ve had. He is—I couldn’t ask for more. So I just feel really, really fortunate that I was placed at that school with that principal . . . It was just really satisfying and exciting to be a part of that process. So watching [him] . . . and how he navigated that in just this kind of calm and yet very deliberate way.

Beyond presenting her principal as an effective leader, Sandra highlighted how she learned by watching him in action. Even when female participants disagreed with their mentors’ behaviors or approaches, these disagreements were framed as learning opportunities. In this way, the female participants,

like many women working in other contexts, consistently framed themselves as lacking confidence in leadership and as needing to learn, as perpetual apprentices (Janjuha-Jivraj & Chisholm, 2016). This is in contrast to men, who often position themselves as experts in leadership and actively self-promote this expertise to attain leadership positions (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). This orientation toward learning even when questioning the motivation and effectiveness of the person she was learning from was true for Thali, who felt that, even though her principal was jaded, he was a source of inspiration for her. When asked what she was learning from her mentor principal, Thali said:

I am at the beginning of my career and he's at the end of his career. And so I listen so much to him because he does have that jaded—no, he really does. He has that jadedness, but it comes from somewhere, right? So it probably comes from multiple approaches to things that have been either shot down or things that make no sense which he tells me . . . He says, "I don't have the energy anymore to fight the fight, but you do." And so he inspires me in that way, where he says, "Hey, all things are possible, and if you feel this way, if you feel this passionate."

Additionally, female participants reported taking on important positions at their residency schools, such as grade-level dean or administrator and team leader. However, in probing more deeply, we found that the women reported receiving less oversight and support than their male counterparts. This limited access to resources, including their mentors' time, was presented most often by Anjale and Wendy, who had important school responsibilities but reported difficulty accessing the principal for mentoring or even simple direction. Wendy described her role at her residency:

I call myself an ambulance chaser. I'm always on the walkie-talkie looking for things to do, inviting myself or—"Please invite me to your meetings, I would love to do that" . . . And she's [the principal] been really like, "Yeah, go do your own thing, whatever you need" . . . But also I need one-on-one time with her, and that hasn't been happening. I ask a question at 11:00 and oftentimes I will hopefully get an answer by 4:00, and I've asked her four times. So there's—those are some of the frustrations that I have around being present.

When asked how her residency was going, Anjale similarly recalled her experiences working with her mentor principal:

It's very hard to like, you know, hone him down. And I don't want to seem like I'm like his boss—"What are you doing next week and let me know," you know? But you know, I present it as in like, "Hey, I'm wondering if we can meet on Mondays for fifteen minutes so we can compare the calendar and the schedule so I can make sure that I'm there learning from the important meetings that you're running, because I really wanna learn how to network?" "Yeah, yeah, yeah"—and it never happens.

Alternatively, none of the men complained about being unable to make appointments with or receive timely feedback from their mentors. Beyond this



increased access, their framing of and the substance of these relationships also frequently appeared to differ from the women's. With the exception of Tom, who framed his principal as the building's expert, the men described themselves as having important and unique expertise from which the mentor principal could gain. This sentiment was expressed explicitly by Bob, who said he wanted to help "push" the principal's resource use, common planning time, and in-school suspensions, and by Juan, who felt that the current head's leadership approach needed improvement. When asked to describe the culture of the school, Juan explained:

I would hear things from her [the principal] and from the teachers, and they would complain about, you know, the amount of work or the specificity of the plan that they needed to turn in . . . "Oh, so and so is not that great, or whatever" . . . And so I think maybe—maybe where that does make sense is because [principal name]'s style is so much of a compassionate person, kind of kind . . . and warm. It's not really like to come in and lay the law like, "That, we're not doing that" . . . I think long term for sustainability, if you want people to hang around, they have got to love what they do and—and who they are doing it with. You might be best friends with everybody, but I think there needs to be that respect level and the trust, you know, that we can all be depended upon because we care about the kids, we're willing to do the work.

Not only does Juan frame his mentor's leadership as problematic, he does so because it is overly communal. The problem is that this leader is "so much of a compassionate person" and therefore is unable to be agentic and "lay the law." Such comments provide a strong example of how positioning effective leadership as agentic and gender stereotypes regarding women's communal approach to leadership may come together to produce negative evaluations of women leaders.

Alternatively, Bob and Juan might have been warranted in their critiques of their mentors, particularly Bob, who was the only participant to have previously served as a principal. However, even so, their comments frame the mentor/mentee relationship quite differently than an apprenticeship. Rather than experts, the mentor principals are presented as having equal or less expertise than the mentee. This dynamic—that these two male participants entered the residency already capable of leading a school (and for Bob this may have been true)—then played out in different ways. For Juan, this positioning was a natural extension of his role as the developer of a new charter high school over which he was given greater autonomy over time. With Bob, the result was that he felt he had little to learn from his initial placement and subsequently asked to be, and was, transferred to another site.

Taken together, these experiences served to place the women in another type of double bind. On one hand, despite the fact that participants lacked access to resources, by framing the relationship to their mentors as one of neophyte and expert, it made it difficult for these women to outwardly challenge their mentors' behaviors. At the same time, had they acted as experts

and made demands, they would have to break with stereotyped gender roles, potentially being positioned as “pushy” and thus losing the somewhat more meager access they had been granted.

### *The Hiring Process*

The intersection between participants’ gender, view of themselves as leaders, and experience of the program feedback served to shape particular understandings of their promise as turnaround leaders. As participants carried those understandings into the larger community, they were reinforced and extended through the hiring process. This included further messaging to female participants regarding their lack of fit with effective school leadership. For example, many of the female participants were told to consider secondary leadership roles (e.g., vice principal) and that they did not seem to be ready or a “good fit” for principal positions.

This was in stark contrast to male participants’ experiences on the job market. First, all the men were hired quickly, before any of the women, and without incident. In speaking about the hiring process and their transition to leadership, the male participants indicated things went fairly smoothly; two were hired after their first interview, the third after three. Moreover, none reported receiving negative feedback regarding their suitability for the position, nor were any men given suggestions to look for other types of positions (e.g., vice principals). The quick time frame for finding a job and the relatively low stress each man faced in the process seemed to reinforce their prior experiences that leadership was a natural result of continued effort—they had worked hard to obtain their certification and therefore were able to obtain principal posts.

In contrast, the women struggled to find positions, reporting anxiety about the process and concern over whether they would get a job. Additionally, and unlike the men, some felt constrained due to familial considerations. This was true for Kelly, who pointed out that her familial commitments shaped her employment decisions. For example, despite feeling pressure from those around her to apply to high schools, since they had the greatest number of vacancies, Kelly only looked to lead elementary schools. The reason for this, she explained, was the lesser burden in elementary schools to attend numerous afterschool and weekend events.

Something I’ve talked with my husband a lot about is being very deliberate as a family about the position I set. In the past I jumped into things and he’s been awesome to put up with it. [Laughter] I’ve always been a bit of a workaholic, but since [daughter’s name] came into our lives, I’m able to leave work behind and go home and be there and be present, and it’s good for us as parents, for our marriage—I want to have family involved and feel good about being involved in the life at the school. They can help me, too, but I wouldn’t want us all living at the school. I wouldn’t want them to feel like they had to come to school to see me, period.

This framing suggests that Kelly perceives the responsibility for creating a work/life balance as her own and that she must make accommodations in her career to be present at home. This is in contrast to the male participants, who, despite all having children, and some new babies, did not mention familial commitments as a factor in their professional decision making. Only when the researcher directly asked about work/life balance did they mention their families or how they might be impacted.

In addition to feeling constrained by family in ways typical for many women attempting to take on school leadership positions (Adams & Hambricht, 2004), some of the women, specifically Wendy and Thali, reported that, as they perceived it, those in charge of hiring viewed them as less capable of effectively leading a turnaround school because they were women. In speaking about her experience being passed over for a position, Thali explained,

The feedback I got from specific people that—not from the interview panel but other people—were that they were really looking for a male leader for the building. They felt more comfortable being led by a male . . . I think elementary, especially, world is—I think that they're worried about discipline. I don't know. I—I can't pinpoint it, but that's why I say, this whole week, or last two weeks, I need to really sit and meditate and think about some of this stuff, because what does that mean?

Faced with these difficulties, Thali and other women sought support from mentors, including the program instructors. In response, participants said it was frequently suggested that they consider applying to be assistant principals. While most participants framed these suggestions as attempts at being helpful—and perhaps they were—there was also the sense that an assistant principal position did not align with the women's capabilities or goals. When asked if she would consider taking on this role, Thali explained:

So somebody from—that is a principal now—said to me, "You know, maybe you should consider being assistant principal." And all weekend long I thought about this. And I can say right now, I will not—I will not take the assistant principal job, even if it's given to me. I won't do it. And my husband and I have talked and I'm like, "It's not a pride thing." If I have shown you the work that I can do, time and time again, and because of either my gender or because of my personality traits of go-getter and, you know, really doing what's best for kids and being a hard worker—if that's intimidating, I am then not going to take an AP position to be the same person that I am and still be, probably, with a lot of incompetent leaders that I have seen. So I just won't do it.

While their reactions varied, the implicit messages underlying this suggestion—that either the women were not able or would not be seen as able to be principals—were consistently received by all female participants.

During the hiring process, women's responses to their early lack of success varied. One group (Sandra, Wendy, and Frances) heeded the advice to apply

to different and lower-tiered positions. These decisions were felt to be borne out of necessity, including financial necessity. Sandra explained:

I gave my whole year and I relocated my entire life over here. So I . . . yeah. I am just going to have to take whatever I get, honestly, and whether it is AP, principal, middle school, elementary, high school. It could be in [nearby state]. It could be anywhere.

Another group (Kelly and Thali) remained steadfast in becoming principals, even if it meant continuing through the somewhat painful hiring process. Though they were eventually hired as principals, the stress and disappointment with the process negatively affected them and their views of those leading the hiring process. Thali offered her thoughts and expressed disillusionment as she reflected on the hiring process for all members of the cohort.

I'm really fixated, like, on the male and female thing . . . We have six females and three males. [Name of colleague], who is—her expertise is, phenomenal. Like, she is amazing. She didn't get a callback. One of our male cohorts did . . . He's awesome, trust me. Like, I am not saying he's not, but when I start to look at who, you know, who am I competing against, I'm thinking her and I. And then this happens—he gets a callback and she doesn't even get a callback, and I'm going—I can't shake the—and then to get the verification of they were really looking to a male leader.

Here Thali reflects on the double bind she and her female cohort members experienced: she views her female colleagues as the most qualified candidates in terms of their leadership skills. However, she notes that the hiring process seemed to implicitly favor the male candidates, and it became difficult for the most outwardly qualified female candidates to be truly considered for these roles. At the same time, and also later in the interview, she expresses frustration and a feeling that perceptions of her competency were outside her control. These feelings were shared by her female colleagues, as were concerns regarding their ability to access school leadership roles and how they might be treated if selected.

## Discussion

At the program's beginning, men's and women's views of effective leadership were aligned in their communal orientation and focus on community and professional culture. This orientation may be somewhat surprising given their desire to become turnaround leaders and turnaround policies' tendency to frame leadership as heroic and autocratic in nature (Peck et al., 2013). And yet, participants' expressions of their values regarding leadership align with research naming collaboration, capacity building, and shared decision making as key elements in supporting school improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Marks & Printy, 2003; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Moreover, these communal attributes

are more closely associated with transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006), a paradigm frequently used by (Eagly & Carli, 2003), and often considered more typical for, women in leadership (Stempel, Rigotti, & Mohr, 2015).

Despite general agreement regarding the type of principal behaviors and attitudes they valued, female and male participants had very different narratives about themselves as leaders. Aligned with prior research by Eckman (2004) and others (Muñoz et al., 2014; Peters, 2010), in this study the men, encouraged and cultivated by authority figures to take on leadership roles, moved quickly through the teaching ranks toward school administration and leadership, and they described their leadership journeys as natural and somewhat inevitable. Alternatively, our female participants tended to frame their story in terms of challenge; they had to fight to attain leadership, often with others actively discouraging their efforts. Such resistance reflects role stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002), as the participants perceived leadership and masculine gender roles as congruent for male participants and incongruent for the females.

#### *Perpetuating the Double Bind for Women in Leadership*

Throughout the program, the feedback female participants received, while meant to advance their leadership skills, contributed to and further complicated the double bind they experienced. Based on participants' descriptions and programmatic materials, it appears that the program may have favored a somewhat agentic orientation to leadership, particularly in connection to communication style and "managing emotions." As true in research on women leaders in different contexts (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Smith et al., 2016), female participants in this study were told to tone down behaviors often ascribed to female gender roles (warm, emotional) in favor of appearing more "controlled" or "neutral."

Like other programs that mete out this type of "dominance penalty" (Williams & Tiedens, 2016) to women for explicitly displaying gendered behavior, this principal preparation program placed women in a double bind. The feedback pushed behavior that was less feminine in nature and thus more aligned with masculine-oriented and agentic leadership, which, in breaking from gender-role expectations, may have made women less likable and, hence, less likely to be hired for leadership positions. At the same time, the men received a different message—to "butch" it up and display more overt dominance.

The female participants' residency experiences also caught them in a double bind. On the one hand, their described behavior tended to align with gendered expectations in that they were deferential to their mentors and framed their relationships as apprenticeships. Yet, and perhaps by doing so, it also seemed that they had less access to resources, including face time with their mentor to support leadership development and perhaps softer resources like networking. Simultaneously, we might imagine, and research suggests (e.g., Heilman, 2012), that if the women were perceived by the mentor principals as

more demanding, they could be seen as “pushy” or “aggressive,” thus decreasing the chance that their mentors would give them opportunities for leadership. Male participants did not seem to face this issue; as is true for men in other contexts (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014), the men were given greater access to resources meant to cultivate their leadership skills. However, neither the principal mentors nor the program leaders acknowledged (or perhaps recognized) that these experiences may have been gendered. As such, those providing resources failed to acknowledge that this differential access may impact later success.

### *The “Vicious Cycle” of Leadership Development*

As participants looked for full-time employment, external barriers involving work-family balance were more salient for female participants. Only the women described making adjustments to accommodate the demands of the principal position and family expectations, a trend we also see in other literature examining experiences of women in school leadership (Eckman, 2004; Loder, 2005).

Additionally, the hiring process seemed to reinforce what Ely et al. (2011) calls a “vicious cycle” of leadership development. Male participants were perceived as better suited for leadership roles, propelling them into principal positions. Alternatively, the double bind for women was evident when the female participants received typically gendered feedback or were taken less seriously as leaders. Lacking structured ways to consider how gender identity may impact their leadership experiences in the program, hiring process, or elsewhere, female participants expressed feeling frustration and a lack of efficacy, while gendered practices in the program remained unquestioned and intact.

### Implications

These results have a number of implications for research and practice. First, our findings make it clear that more research is needed on how gender identity and stereotyping in principal preparation programs may impact participants’ experiences and understandings of leadership. This includes expanding these questions across a fuller spectrum of preparation programs. Doing so will provide insights into how particular structures (e.g., cohort models, residency requirements, etc.) and instructional content may mitigate or exacerbate gender stereotypes regarding leadership. Longitudinal work looking at the saliency of these experiences on women’s choices to stay in leadership would also be useful.

In terms of practice, and as is the case in other leadership programs, gender (and identity more broadly) and its relationship to leadership appeared to be excluded from this program’s curriculum (Rusch, 2004). Given that opportunities to internalize leadership through social and relational processes are

a key component of effective leadership development (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), it seems important that preparation programs take a more active role in engaging in these admittedly difficult but critical conversations (Young & Brooks, 2008).

Our findings also suggest that interactions with their mentors heavily shaped participants' views and experiences. It was also clear that these mentors, perhaps unintentionally, often reinforced gender stereotypes of leadership. As scholars continue to call for expanded residency experiences in principal preparation (Gooden, Bell, Gonzales, & Lippa, 2011), there is also a need to better understand how principal mentors in such residencies might impact gender stereotyping.

## Conclusion

This work is significant in that it gives new insights into why women are still underrepresented as principals. Our findings support and extend the concept of the double bind for women in educational leadership. Women's narratives regarding their understanding of principal leadership and perceptions of their leadership capabilities may lead to a dissonance not experienced by their male colleagues. Further, while such a narrative may provide women resiliency to fight for their place at the table, it may also make them more vulnerable to internalizing critiques that are gendered but not explicitly stated as such. Our findings also suggest a need to infuse a discussion of gender role stereotyping into principal preparation, to evaluate how mentorship perpetuates stereotypes of effective leadership, and to consider how current discourses on turnaround schools serve to reinforce existing stereotypes about leadership as a primarily male endeavor. Such inquiries could help us develop new narratives and interventions to support women and men along their leadership trajectories and to produce a new and more equitable generation of principals.

## Notes

1. Introduced in 2009 by the Obama administration through its Race to the Top competition, *turnaround* defines four intervention models meant to enhance performance in schools labeled as chronically underperforming via student test results: *turnaround*, where the school is redesigned and the principal and at least half the staff are replaced; *restart*, where the school is converted to a charter school; *transformation*, where the school engages in redesign and only the principal is replaced; and *school closure*, where the school is closed and students are sent elsewhere. Program participants were being trained to lead schools currently engaged in or about to start turnaround, transformation, or restart interventions.
2. We paraphrase here to help maintain the confidentiality of the location of the program and of its participants.
3. All names are pseudonyms, and we indicate only whether the individual was white or nonwhite to help ensure participant confidentiality.

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