Contributing Factors to Gender Disparity in Upper-administrative Levels of Public Secondary School: A Multiple-case Study in an Urban Area in China

by

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Abstract

While the advocacy of gender equality is growing and women are continuously showing up in leadership positions, women are underrepresented and underutilized as leaders in educational leadership, especially in upper-administrative levels. The purpose of this study is to explore the contributing factors to gender disparity in upper-administrative levels of public secondary schools in urban China. A qualitative multiple-case study research design was adopted to investigate the deep and complex reasons behind this phenomenon (gender disparity in senior education management) and capture the differences between each participant. Intentional sampling and convenience sampling were used in this study. Intentional sampling was used to sample principals, and convenience sampling for selecting the aspiring female educators. A total of four participants have reported their career experiences, their leadership practices, and their life experiences through semi-structured interviews. Results of the collected data indicate that various contributing factors under four themes (i.e. gender stereotype and social expectation, conflict between work and family, opportunities to access the leadership positions, self-imposed limitations and unwillingness to take the leadership roles) play a role in manifesting the disparity across gender in the upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary school in China.

Keywords: Contributing factors, gender disparity, upper-administrative management, secondary school, urban China.
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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

The problem investigated in the present study is the disparity across gender in upper-administrative levels of public secondary schools in an urban area (Xiang Yang) in China. Various contributing factors play a role in manifesting this disparity. From a feminist perspective, this study focuses on the barriers that Chinese female educators have encountered in the process of obtaining and maintaining their upper-administrative roles. It also analyzes the strategies that female school leaders adopt to manage their school. The aim of this study is to explore the contributing factors of the gender inequity in senior educational leadership positions, and to inspire female educators to strive for higher levels of leadership by way of self-discovery in a Chinese context.

Justification of the Study

For a long time, a variety of leadership fields have been dominated by men, while women in leadership positions have been in the minority or occupy lesser leadership positions. According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017), women only occupy 23.3% of seats in parliaments globally. Also, in the corporate context, only 26.5% of senior executive positions, 21.2% of board seats, and 5.2% of CEO positions at the S&P 500 companies are held by women (Catalyst, 2017). While the advocacy of gender equality is growing and females are continuously showing up in leadership positions, women have stopped making real advancement at the top of any field. This disparity means that women’s voices are not heard equally as their male counterparts when it comes to high-level and impactful decision making.

The disparity across gender at the top administrative level has not only existed in politics and business, but has also appeared in education. A variety of literature has documented that women are underrepresented and underutilized as leaders in educational
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leadership, especially at upper-administrative levels (Krüger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007; Lopez, 2008; Hallinger, Dongyu & Wang, 2016; Shaked, Gross & Glanz, 2017). For example, in the United States, although 70% of teachers are women, they are underrepresented in senior school administration and superintendent positions (Lopez, 2008). A study of superintendents found that in 2010, only 24.1% of superintendents in America are women (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young & Ellerson, 2011). In South Africa, gender imbalances are still prevalent, with only a low number of females holding leadership positions in education sectors (Naido & Perunal, 2014).

In China, the situation is similar. The number of women in school leadership positions is much smaller than the proportion of women working in this field. According to official data published by the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China (2016), at the secondary school level, women account for 54% of teachers, but their proportion in senior management positions is only 27%. Research links this situation with the barriers faced by women in acquiring and maintaining leadership positions (Airini et al., 2012; Eagly & Carli, 2007; McNeill, 2007; Kelly, 2011; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010).

Compared with male leaders, female leaders are suffering more difficulties and challenges in reaching leadership roles and getting further promotion. For example, Eagly and Carli (2007) pointed out that women face more difficulties and hardships in their careers than men; also, female leaders need to expend more effort than their male counterparts to get additional opportunities and further promotion. However, studies on the topic of female and school leadership are mostly focused on higher education (Airini et al., 2012; McNeill, 2007; Kelly, 2011; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010). Also, research that identifies the barriers for women pursuing leadership and management roles, in most cases, are located in an Anglo-American culture. There is scant research to investigate the barriers associated with culture, gender stereotypes, social expectations, family issues, and self-imposed limitations that women face.
in advancement as leaders at the secondary school level in China.

For these reasons, this study aims to provide some insights to enrich existing documents in the field of female school leadership. In focusing on the secondary school level, this study seeks to identify strategies to empower women leaders in an urban area China. The goal of empowering women is not only to achieve gender equality, but also to promote the development of effective educational leadership in order to build successful schools. Furthermore, this study sheds light on women’s self-discovery process of being school leaders. It allows female leaders to reflect on the internal impediments that contribute to the imbalance of gender in senior administrative levels. The information gathered here could also serve as a guide for future women educators to recognize their professional identities. Finally, hopefully, this study could draw administrators’ attention to the issue of gender disparity, encouraging them to make improvements in policy that bring benefits to female leaders.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

The following research question is proposed for the present study: What are the contributing factors to gender disparity in upper-administrative levels of public secondary schools in urban China.

The present study proposes that culture, gender stereotypes, social expectations, family issues, and self-imposed limitations are contributing factors to gender disparity at the upper-administrative level of education in public secondary schools in urban China. Furthermore, the author suggests that these factors create challenges for women to access and hold their leadership positions.

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions of the terms will be used in this study.

a) *Upper-administrative level of education* is also presented as senior educational leadership position in this study, referring to principals, superintendents and other
b) The disparity of gender or gender disparity refers to the imbalance between male and females in the senior administrative positions in educational management.

c) Head-teacher is the senior teacher of a school who is in charge of a class. Head-teachers are informal leaders in schools who are responsible for the education of all students and for school policy making. They often have the desire to apply for formal leadership positions.

d) Discipline instructor is a low level administrator in a school who is in charge of a team that consists of several head-teachers.

e) General secondary school is a public secondary school which is established by the government.

f) Leadership, according to Yukl, is “a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person [or group] over other people [or groups] to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization” (as cited in Pont et al., 2008).

g) School leadership is also presented as educational leadership in this study, referring to school management and school administration. The purpose is to establish a successful school (Pont et al., 2008).

h) Leadership style is defined as a relatively stable behavior pattern exhibited by the leader, or another way in which the leader establishes an interactive behavior to achieve the leader's role.

i) Gender stereotype can be recognized as gender bias which is a conscious or unconscious preference for a gender. Gender stereotype may not necessarily result in actions, but it may cause negatively influence on one gender.

j) Social expectation is the general mood of the public opinion and social agreement
about what people should do.

**Brief Overview of Study**

The present study investigated the various contributing factors to the disparity across gender in senior educational leadership positions. Participants reported their career experiences, their leadership practices, and their life experiences through interviews. The obtained data were transcribed and translated (from Mandarin Chinese to English) by the researcher to explore how culture, gender stereotypes, social expectations, family issues, or self-imposed limitations impact Chinese female educators in obtaining and maintaining upper-administrative leadership positions.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to deepen understanding of issues related to female education leaders by reviewing empirical research and academic work, and to provide readers with an overview of previous research in this area. Also, it may be noted that the articles included in this literature review were selected based on the relevance of the content. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the gender imbalance in education leaders and the barriers faced by female educational leaders; the second section sheds light on the professional identity of female educational leaders; and the third section focuses on the career pathway of Chinese female educational leaders.

Gender Imbalance and Barriers

In focusing on the gender imbalance in educational leadership in Spain, Gutierrez (2016) explored the reasons behind this phenomenon. Gutierrez analyzed both external barriers and internal motives. Gutierrez also investigated these factors from different genders’ perspectives.

The methodology Gutierrez approached is called triangulation which is considered comprehensive (Gutierrez, 2016). The population of Gutierrez’s study consisted of teachers and principals in the K-12 level from all over Spain. Of the 2772 subjects in the study sample, 2022 were female teachers, 430 were female principals, and 322 were male principals (Gutierrez, 2016). Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, group discussions, observations, and autobiographical narratives were all used to collect data in this large scale investigation by Gutierrez.

By using various techniques to analyze the quantitative data, Gutierrez (2016) identified that the barriers women face to access leadership positions are both from external and internal aspects such as social pressures and cultural stereotypes, social expectations, and
a lack of self-confidence. In addition, positive motivations were found for women to assume leadership positions (Gutierrez, 2016). Moreover, the result of Gutierrez’s study showed that women who have held leadership positions were satisfied with their performance, and their self-esteem increased (Gutierrez, 2016).

The findings of Gutierrez’s study clarify various challenges that women encounter in accessing leadership. These challenges are related to the male network advantage, which is reflected in a series of rules and structures that promote male career development models and achieve educational leadership (Gutierrez, 2016). In addition, Gutierrez investigates this area from different genders’ perspectives, demonstrating a more holistic approach to the issue. The study reveals that gender stereotypes that prevail in Spain’s society are not only coming from men, but also often recognized by women themselves. This finding represents a general reality, and explains the reasons why women exist in minority positions in the educational leadership field in Spain. However, the scale of Gutierrez’s research is considerably large which may not be easy for others to replicate. Also, Gutierrez does not provide any suggestions for women to overcome the barriers, which may need further exploration.

In a similar study, Pirouznia (2009) explored the possible barriers that women encounter when approaching the position of principal. While examining the possible obstacles, Pirouznia (2009) tried to discover whether these hindrances have changed in the past two decades because of the change in female roles (from the role of women as mothers and wives to the role of women as professional women). Also, by analyzing the obtained data, Pirouznia (2009) attempted to develop some strategies to solve these obstacles so that women can better serve educational leadership positions.

The instrument Pirouznia (2009) adopted was a 31-item questionnaire, which was based on a previous study. Also, the questionnaire was reviewed by Cronbach’s Coefficient alpha and can therefore be considered as reliable questionnaire. Beside these factors, the
questionnaire consists of two parts: demographic information of participants and obstacles encountered by participants, and the questions were answered by using a Likert scale (Pirouznia, 2009).

The population of Pirouznia’s study was drawn from all women who received a certificate from the principal in Franklin County, Ohio, from September 1996 to September 2000, and currently held an education position at Franklin County (Pirouznia, 2009). Pirouznia (2009) mailed a 31-item questionnaire to 299 women to investigate potential barriers women face when approaching principalship in educational administration, and received 92 responses (Pirouznia, 2009). Since 92 of the 299 samples is a relatively small sample, 92 respondents may not be representative. Additionally, according to the information collected by the questionnaire, Pirouznia (2009) divided the 92 respondents into three groups: women who got the position of principal, women who got the position of assistant principal, and women who wanted to pursue but did not have the position of principal. This grouping method laid a good foundation for subsequent data analysis.

By using the statistical package “Minitab” (Pirouznia, 2009, p. 4), Pirouznia (2009) performed multidimensional comparative analysis on the three groups of acquired data. The result of Pirouznia’s study shows that regardless of whether women have obtained the position of principal or assistant principal, the barriers to their leadership in education are mainly gender stereotypes, followed by family responsibilities (Pirouznia, 2009). However, there are some differences among the three groups. For example, compared to women who got the position of assistant principal and women who wanted to pursue but did not have the position of principal, women principals felt stronger about the barriers of gender stereotypes and family responsibilities (Pirouznia, 2009). Additionally, in contrast with women who wanted to pursue but did not have the position of principal, women who successfully obtained the position of assistant principal did not recognize that they encountered obstacles.
to their appointment (Pirouznia, 2009). Furthermore, unlike the female principals and female assistant principals, women who did not have the position of principal indicated that the lack of a network affect the success of acquiring the leadership positions (Pirouznia, 2009).

In all, the findings of Pirouznia’s study verify that women’s barriers and problems in gaining leadership have not changed much in the past two decades (Pirouznia, 2009). In addition, the methodology, instrument, and data analysis of Pirouznia’s study illustrate both qualitative and quantitative areas of study. However, the procedure of Pirouznia’s study is not specific, which may make readers wonder about the research process. Moreover, although Pirouznia does provide some suggestions to overcome those obstacles (e.g. redefining gender behavior and reconstructing masculinity from early school stage), these recommendations may not be practical.

In another study, focusing on female academic managers in Vietnamese higher education, Nyuyen (2013) attempted to identify the obstacles and facilitating factors for the career development of female deans. Nguyen studied the opinions of university leaders and female deans, and the reflections of female deans. Six female deans, three male university leaders and two male Human Resources Managers were invited to face-to-face interviews to share their perceptions. Nyuyen (2013) also examined the experiences of the six female deans in work or non-work environments, and the factors that helped (or hindered) their growth as university administrators.

Nyuyen (2013) employed a common social structure framework as a guide for analyzing statistical data. In addition, “two main components of this framework are barriers to and facilitators for women assuming leadership and management positions” (Nyuyen, 2013, p. 124). Moreover, Nyuen specified each component into four themes (e.g. psychological barriers, culture barriers, family support, and mentor support). From these themes, Nyuyen (2013) found that the main barriers are strong family obligations, negative gender stereotypes
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and women’s reluctance to assume leadership roles. On the other hand, the main facilitators
are “self-effort, strong family support, and a favorable promotion context” (Nyuyen, 2013, p.
132).

The findings of Nyuyen’s study provide ample evidence that family support is a key
factor in the development of women’s academic careers in Vietnam (Nyuyen, 2013). In
addition, Nyuyen’s study shows that in empowering female leadership, “women themselves
can be both an object and an agent of change” (Nyuyen, 2013, p. 136). These findings fill the
gap in current literature on female academic leadership in the Vietnam context (Nyuyen,
2013). Moreover, in Nyuyen’s study, there is an important observation that should be noted:
Unlike the female secondary school leaders in other studies (Kaparou & Bush, 2007;
Pirouznia, 2009; Moorosi, 2010; Li, 2014; Gutierrez, 2016; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017),
female deans in Vietnam University were satisfied with their university’s structures and
policies. Those female deans in Nyuyen’s study claimed that they felt supported by the
university’s promotion criteria. However, Nyuyen did not explain what the support criteria
were, which may give readers some doubts. Besides, the scale of Nyuyen’s study is very
small and based on one certain university, thus the results may not represent the entire
Vietnamese higher education.

In a similar study, Moorosi (2010) explored the experience of South African female
principals in their career of being secondary school principals. Moorosi also analyzed data
from a provincial representative sample of female principals of secondary schools to evaluate
how personal, organizational and social factors influence the career paths of these female
principals (Moorosi, 2010).

Questionnaires were sent to all female principals in all secondary schools across the
province to select samples intentionally (Moorosi, 2010). The systematic sampling method
and stratification of Moorosi’s study ensured that the sample was representative of female
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principals with respect to race, region, and professional history. The final sample was comprised of 28 female principals (24 African, two Indian, and two white), 10 provincial Department of Education (DoE) officials (circuit managers) and 10 school governing body (SGB) chairpersons (Moorosi, 2010). After sampling was completed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all the participants to collect data (Moorosi, 2010).

An analytical framework was adopted by Moorosi to guide the analysis of obtained data (Moorosi, 2010). This framework suggested that female principals encountered more obstacles in their careers than male counterparts, which were mainly manifested in three stages: expectation, acquisition and performance (Moorosi, 2010).

By using a qualitative feminist approach to analyze the data, Moorosi (2010) found that “traditional cultural value systems, gendered circumstances, and structural arrangements within the schools ultimately determine the status of women in education management” (Moorosi, 2010, p. 560).

In an attempt to understand the challenges women face in their careers as principals, Moorosi’s study has identified some typical factors that influence women’s full participation in education management, including traditional cultural, gender environment and internal structure of the school. By employing semi-structured interviews as instruments to collect data, Moorosi’s study captured the complexity of the obstacles faced by female principals. For instance, participants in Moorosi’s study emphasized the gender environment in which they work (Moorosi, 2010). Unlike female principals who are always committed to actual management in other studies (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Gutierrez, 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Murakami and Törnsen, 2017), female principals in Moorosi’s research put most of their energy into opposing gender-discriminatory cultural attitudes in the community and school environment. Also, the result of Moorosi’s study shows that the network is not an important part of the
participation of female principals in management. However, there are some limitations in Moorosi’s research: First, Moorosi did not propose any follow-up research suggestions and solutions; second, the population of Moorosi’s study is only from one province, which may not be representative of the whole of South Africa.

In another study, while examining the career development of female principals and the underrepresentation of women in management positions in Greek secondary schools, Kaparou and Bush (2007) explored the factors that influence women’s participation in school management.

Kaparou and Bush employed a qualitative method to investigated female secondary school principals in Athens (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). The population of Kaparou and Bush’s study consisted of six female principals from different Greek secondary state schools (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). These female secondary school principals were selected through intentional criteria that satisfied Kaparou and Bush’s specific needs. These principals were all mature women in their fifties, married, mothers, and had more than five years of principal experience (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). Kaparou and Bush also adopted semi-structured interviews as instruments to collect data (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). Although the data obtained by this method was not widely representative, it was suitable for in-depth study of complex phenomena.

The data analysis was based on themes, which were found from literature reviews and interviews (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). By interviewing the six female principals with four major questions, Kaparou and Bush (2007) identified eleven themes in relation to career opportunities including: Barriers to women’s career progress; family responsibilities; social perceptions and male cultural domination; demands of management; and the motivation to seek promotion. From these themes, Kaparou and Bush (2007) found that although the Greek constitution provides equal opportunities for men and women to obtain management
positions, women are still a minority in secondary school management positions. Also, a lack of motivation and self-confidence hindered women from pursuing leadership positions (Kaparou & Bush, 2007).

Kaparou and Bush’s study of the female principals of Athens indicates subjective and insidious discrimination in the selection process of female principals, verifying the view that female leaders face invisible obstacles when seeking promotion (Kaparou & Bush, 2007). On the other hand, Kaparou and Bush’s research has an interesting finding that the “career break” (women leave their work for a few years to give birth and take care of their babies) is not considered an obstacle for female principals. This is different from other research and literature, which indicates that “career break” is a potential factor affecting the promotion of educational administrators. However, the six female principals of Kaparou and Bush’s study are all specific single principals in a particular school context based on a certain city (Athens) which may lack generalizability.

In focusing on the disparity across gender in the upper-administrative levels, Neale and Özkanlı (2010) explored the institutional barriers faced by women in senior management positions at universities in Turkey and New Zealand. By discussing the impacts of time management, support from colleagues, and role conflicts between work and non-work life on this issue, Neale and Özkanlı (2010) found that women (and even men) in Turkey and New Zealand experienced similar problems.

The data of Neal and Özkanlı’s study was drawn from a large scale cross-cultural study. A total of 24 senior executives from different universities in Turkey were interviewed, including eight female senior administrators and 16 male senior managers (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010). Meanwhile, 26 university senior managers from New Zealand were interviewed, half of whom were men and half were women (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010).

By analyzing the obtained data, Neale and Özkanlı (2010) identified three themes in
relation to barriers women face in educational leadership including time management, role 
conflicts between work and life (role as wives and mothers or role as professional women), 
and support from colleagues. Neale and Özkanlı (2010) found that senior managers 
(including men and women) in Turkey and New Zealand both considered time to be a main 
obstacle to being in senior management, especially for female senior managers. In addition, 
the other main barrier women senior managers faced in both Turkey’s and New Zealand’s 
universities were “the dominance of masculine styles and cultures” (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010, 
p. 551). According to Neale and Özkanlı (2010), traditional university workplaces are 
essentially patriarchal. For example, men usually hold senior positions, so they control the 
workplace and maintain male values and norms. Meanwhile, role conflicts existed not only 
between work and life, but also between work and work. Neale and Özkanlı (2010) found 
that many respondents in both Turkey and New Zealand indicated that it is difficult for senior 
managers (including males and females) to balance the timing between being a scholar and 
holding senior management positions. Furthermore, the conflicts between work and life are 
more common among female upper administrators, especially in Turkey (Neale & Özkanlı, 
2010).

The findings of Neale and Özkanlı’s study contributed to the current literature by 
providing some implications for further research in the field of educational leadership. For 
instance, Neale and Özkanlı (2010) found that other senior managers and senior academic 
colleagues are considered essential factors in supporting female scholars to enter senior 
management. Therefore, future research can further explore how better to empower women 
based on this perspective. Moreover, the voices of both male and female senior managers are 
both included in the study of Neale and Özkanlı, which is thoughtful, and adds a holistic and 
balanced dimension to the study. From the different genders’ perspective, the result of Neale 
and Özkanlı’s study shows that in achieving senior management positions in universities,
some barriers (e.g. time management and role conflicts between work and work) are faced not only by female scholars, but also by male scholars. This has not been mentioned in other research and literature.

Professional Identity of Female Educational Leaders

When reviewing the literature, many studies also suggest female educational leaders encounter barriers when developing their careers and building their professional identities. However, if female principals can find ways to negotiate and recognize their professional identity in the complex context, this will help women gain fair access to education leadership.

In focusing on schools in Sweden and Texas, USA, Murakami and Törnsen (2017) investigated equity issues in educational leadership, paying specific attention to the development of female high school principals’ professional identities. Two successful female high school principals were interviewed twice in 60 to 90 minutes sessions. Murakami and Törnsen (2017) evaluated how the interviewees negotiated their identities, relationships, and positions in their context.

Murakami and Törnsen adopted a feminist post-structural discourse analysis, and the participants, two successful female upper secondary school principals in Sweden and Texas, were drawn from the International Successful School Principals Project. By interviewing the two principals with five questions, Murakami and Törnsen (2017) found that successful upper secondary female principals face challenges in sustaining their leadership position and in developing their professional growth. These challenges come from the low attention to female principals’ talent, low awareness of female principals’ effectiveness, and low support from female principals’ peers and mentors. Also, the interaction between these challenges has led to the lack of self-confidence of female principals, which has affected the continued development of their careers and the stable development of their professional identities.

Besides, Murakami and Törnsen (2017) indicated that when the leadership role in the school
is dominated by men, the female principal may change their leadership style to cater to these male leaders, which protects them from the risk of being evaluated negatively. This is consistent with other studies.

In all, the result of Murakami and Törnsen’s study shows that female principals still face threats while maintaining their leadership positions and developing their professional identities. On the other hand, the findings of Murakami and Törnsen’s study imply that developing and recognizing female leaders’ professional identities is important to establish equitable procedures to sustain females’ success in educational leadership (Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). Therefore, further research is needed to help female principals envisage and develop their professional identity.

In another study, while examining the different leadership styles of female high school principals working in both public schools and private schools in Hangzhou City, China, Li (2014) explored the role of gender in female leaders’ negotiations in personal life, as well as social and institutional cultural expectations. Li (2014) adopted a cross-cultural framework to evaluate how gender, culture, context, and personal background shape the leadership of female principals.

Li employed case study as her methodology to investigate each participant’s case. By adopting this methodology, Li captured the complexity of each individual. The participants of Li’s study consisted of four female high school principals, two of them from public schools and the other two from private schools (Li, 2014). Li selected these four samples from nine female principal volunteers with the consideration of different backgrounds (i.e. age, family background, professional history), and she used hybrid strategies to collect data, which included semi-structure interview, document analysis, and participant observation, and all data was translated by Li from Mandarin Chinese to English (Li, 2014).

By using narrative analysis and content analysis to analyze data, Li (2014) identified
three themes: how female principals gain leadership positions; how female principals negotiate with traditional social expectations; and how female principals define educational leadership in public schools and private schools. The findings of Li’s study showed that female leadership is a dynamic process that is based on social, experiential, and organizational contexts (Li, 2014). The dynamic process means that none of the influencing factors (e.g. culture, family, age, and working experience) can stand alone to affect female principals’ leadership. Without considering these factors in an integrated manner, researchers are less likely to fully understand gender-based barriers in education leadership. This idea is different from previous studies.

Li’s study provides some inspiration for Chinese female principals. Li (2014) suggested that female educational leaders can use personal strengths (e.g. interpersonal skills, cooperation skills, and instructional skills) as strategies to build trust, obtain respect and accumulate leadership skills to develop their careers and professional identities. However, it should be noted that Li’s findings of this qualitative study may just provide insights into female leadership in an urban area (i.e. Hangzhou City), rather than to describe a general reality that may extend to other parts of China. Also, the voice of male principals and teachers are not considered in Li’s study which is a limitation.

In focusing on women’s underrepresentation in leadership in higher education context in China, Zhao and Jones (2017) have explored how female scholars in Chinese higher education establish their own gender identity. Zhao and Jones (2017) also employed “an inductive interpretative research strategy” to investigate how female scholars’ identities were influenced by traditional and cultural discourses in Chinese society (Zhao & Jones, 2017, p. 5).

The population of Zhao and Jones’ research was obtained through snowball sampling technology, and semi-structured interviews were used as instruments to collect data
This process helped Zhao and Jones to gain the comprehensive understanding of female scholars’ identities in China’s context. By analyzing the obtained data from the perspective of discourse and social constructivism, Zhao and Jones (2017) found that women describe multiple identities (e.g. mother, wife, teacher, and leader) from both private and social life. In addition, the results of Zhao and Jones’ study showed although there is some interaction and tension among competing multiple identities, these tensions and interactions do not have a negative influence on female scholars’ professional careers. Moreover, Zhao and Jones (2017) pointed out that female scholars who are in middle management positions and early stages of their careers all denied their identities as leaders. When participants were asked to define leaders, they referred to senior managers such as principals and superintendents, which is consistent with the definition of leaders in traditional Chinese culture (i.e. leaders have power). Therefore, female scholars in middle management positions and early career stages see themselves as leaders' assistants rather than leaders.

Zhao and Jones’ research contribute to understanding women's process of building their identity in the context of Chinese history, culture, and gender-driven discourse (Zhao & Jones, 2017). In addition, Zhao and Jones provided unique insights into how culture and language build and reflect gender in the higher education context in China (Zhao & Jones, 2017). The result of Zhao and Jones’ study shows that female educators have found their own way to position themselves in a way that is consistent with social and cultural norms and expectations (Zhao & Jones, 2017). Positioning themselves this way helps these female leaders build their identity and lead the work. The findings of Zhao and Jones are different from other literature, which argues that cultural and social expectations conflict with the identity of female leaders.

**Career Pathway of Chinese Female Educational Leaders**

Under this section, literature was reviewed to discuss how culture, society, policy, and
organization structure shaped the leadership and career pathway of Chinese female educational leaders; and in what methods these females find ways to empower themselves against the barriers they encountered.

In focusing on the relationship among culture, gender, and school leadership, Law (2013) tried to figure out the gender differences in the direction of leadership between Chinese male and female principals. At the same time, Law (2013) further explored two specific questions: (1) In what aspects and to what extent do the leadership directions of Chinese male and female principals differ (or remain similar)? (2) Why are there different (or similar) modes?

The instruments used in Law’s study are an anonymous questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire of Law’s study consists of two parts to collect the basic information of participants and gender differences in leadership direction of Chinese school leaders (Law, 2013). Meanwhile, the semi-structured interviews cover four broad questions to gain in-depth information (Law, 2013). The combination of these two methods gives this study a wide range of perspectives and in-depth discussions on Chinese school leaders; it is both qualitative and quantitative. At the same time, the population of Law’s study consists of principals, vice-principals, and deputy party secretaries from all over China (Law, 2013). This makes Law’s study diversely representative.

By using various techniques to analyze the quantitative data, Law (2013) identified that there is a mixed pattern of gender differences in Chinese school leadership. This mixed pattern can be interpreted as resulting from the dynamic interplay among traditional Chinese culture, contemporary political context and organizational settings into which Chinese school leaders are socialized and in which their leadership styles and behaviors are shaped and leadership is exercised. (Law, 2013, p. 296)
Also, unlike the previous studies located in Anglo-American culture, Law (2013) found that the leadership styles of Chinese male and female school leaders are not significantly different. The difference in leadership style of Chinese male and female school leaders is only in degree: The tendency of Chinese female school leaders to adopt the mixed pattern (i.e. the leadership style that formed by the dynamic interaction between Chinese traditional culture, political environment and organizational structure) is greater than males (Law, 2013). Law also indicated that the mixed pattern is a way for female leaders to go against the gender discriminations and stereotypes, and to meet social and institutional expectations and the need for good leadership in a male-dominated Chinese culture. This insight provides some inspiration for female educational leaders to cope with the challenges they encounter in acquiring and maintaining their leadership positions.

However, although the combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews allowed Law’s study to explore school leaders’ ideas, attitudes, and values, the leadership styles of these school leaders in practice are not known. Therefore, further study is needed to explore the practical leadership styles of Chinese school leaders in detail, which can offer specific strategies to empower female educational leaders in their career pathway.

In another study, Zhong and Ehrich (2010) examined the leadership practice of two female principals in urban primary schools in mainland China in two ways: how the two principals practice leadership in their school and how they use power to influence others and achieve their goals. Zhong and Ehrich (2010) also investigated the influence of Chinese traditional culture, social background and institutional context on the two female principals’ leadership.

A qualitative case study was employed as the methodology to investigate each participant. Also, the participants of Zhong and Ehrich’s study consisted of two female primary school principals, six teachers (half male and half female), and one superintendent.
In addition, the two female principals were selected with the consideration of four criteria (i.e. working status, professional history, age, and achievement) (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010). Meanwhile, Zhong and Ehrich (2010) employed hybrid strategies to collect data, which included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. The hybrid strategies provided insights into each principal’s daily leadership practices.

By using a cross-case synthesis to analyze the obtained data, Zhong and Ehrich (2010) identified teaching and learning as the core components of the two principals’ daily practice; and this is influenced and shaped by Chinese traditional culture, current social culture, organizational background, and Chinese education policy. The difference between the two principals is that one principal pays more attention to the curriculum while the other principal emphasizes teaching (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010). This is the first dimension of Zhong and Ehrich’s study. In the second dimension, Zhong and Ehrich stated that both of the principals adopt a top-down method to manage their schools. This kind of approach is in line with the traditional and historical Chinese management style. However, this is contrary to the studies located in Anglo-American culture, which suggested that female principals are likely to show democratic leadership or instructional leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Krüger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007; Lopez, 2008; Airini et al., 2012; Hallinger, Dongyu & Wang, 2016).

The findings of Zhong and Ehrich’s study did give an overview of the two female principals’ leadership practice in the two certain dimensions (i.e. teaching and learning, and power utilization in their schools) (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010). Meanwhile, Zhong and Ehrich suggested that the culture context is the main shaper of principals’ leadership practice. However, it should be noted that Zhong and Ehrich’s findings of this qualitative study may just provide insights into female leadership in urban primary schools rather than describing a
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general reality that may extend to other school levels and other parts of China. Additionally, the study of Zhong and Ehrich investigated only two dimensions on principal leadership, and did not explore the multi-aspects of principal leadership, such as personal experiences, family background, and professional history, aspects which also shape principals’ leadership. These are the limitations of Zhong and Ehrich’s study.

By exploring the importance of the socio-political, cultural background, and history of Hong Kong, Chan, Ngai, and Choi (2016) critically examined the career path of female principals in Hong Kong. Chan et al. (2016) also investigated “how and why, in the absence of active and positive gender equity policies, the proportion of women leaders in primary schools is able to rise” (Chan et al., 2016, p. 208).

Chan et al. adopted a purposeful sampling method to select the participant (Chan et al., 2016). Eight female primary principals, who were drawn from a larger research project based on the criterion of working experience, professional reputation and willingness, participated in the research of Chan et al. (2016). Questionnaires, interviews, and life history were all used to collect data in the investigation by Chan et al. This hybrid strategy of collecting data allowed Chan et al.’s study to capture the complexity of each individual, which can be considered as a qualitative research.

By using NVivo for coding and analyzing the obtained data, Chan et al. (2016) found that institutional, social, and personal factors constituted the assessment and professional experience of these female school leaders. In addition, Chan et al. (2016) indicated that “the expansion of promotion opportunities, strong values placed on education and training, professional encouragement and support and help in relieving family responsibilities” are the facilitators to increase the proportion of women leaders in primary schools in Hong Kong (Chan et al., 2016, p. 209). Moreover, the study of Chan et al. did provide a profound understanding of the Chinese patriarchal system, which is a persistent obstacle to the
development of women’s careers. For example, the stereotype of “men are strong, women are weak” and “men are better than women” leads to discrimination against female leaders and negation of their professional competence (Chan et al., 2016, p.198).

In all, Chan et al.’s study has contributed to existing literature in the field of gender and education leadership. Chan et al.’s study discussed the facilitators in female careers’ progress, while most existing studies focused on the barriers women faced in educational leadership. However, it should be noted that only one of the facilitators comes from a formal institution (i.e. the expansion of promotion opportunities), and other facilitators are all informal, and personal. This means that institution systems and national policies still need to be improved in promoting women’s career progress.

**Conclusion**

Based on the reviewed literature, it is clear that the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership exists widely (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Nyuyen, 2013; Gutierrez, 2016). Meanwhile, many of the studies reviewed above made use of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interview (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Gutierrez, 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). Qualitative approaches, including interview methods, are able to explore the deep and complex reasons behind this phenomenon and capture the differences between each participant. Meanwhile, due to different regions, the factors that lead to women’s minority in upper-administrative positions are multifaceted, but mainly include: historical and culture reasons, social expectations, family issues, gender discrimination, organizational barriers, low self-confidence and low motivation (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Gutierrez, 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017;
Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). In addition, while discussing the disparity across gender in the educational leadership field, researchers explored the identities of female education leaders in their career pathway (Li, 2014; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). Some researchers also investigated the difference of leadership direction between male and female principals (Neale & Özkânlı, 2010; Law, 2013; Gutierrez, 2016). However, there are only a few studies that discussed how to deal with these obstacles and in what ways the proportion of women leaders in executive education positions are able to rise (Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016).

Despite the increased representation of women in the field of education leadership, women are still underrepresented in upper-administrative roles, such as principal. This literature review presents many of the factors that contribute to this imbalance. The contributing factors cited within this thesis include: culture, social expectations, gender stereotype, policy, and other personal factors. Using the qualitative approach to focus on individual differences, this study explores these experiences further. Through semi-structured interviews with current and aspiring female education leaders, women’s voices are illuminated and heard to gain a deeper understanding of the disparity across gender in educational leadership.
Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

Description of the Research Design

*Multiple-case study* as an ideal methodological approach can draw different sources of information and data to increase the richness and validity to the present research. Moreover, case study methodology can focus not only on a single case but also multiple cases. This allows similar or different results to come out from cross-case study analysis in a multiple-case study. Therefore, a qualitative multiple-case study research design was adopted to investigate the contributing factors to the disparity across gender in upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary schools in an urban area (Xiang Yang) in China.

The contributing factors of the gender inequity in senior educational leadership positions were reported by four participants through interviews. Interviews were conducted with participants respectively, and focused on their career experiences, their leadership practices, and their life experiences. These areas were chosen in order to explore how culture, gender stereotypes, social expectations, family issues, or self-imposed limitations impact their role in leadership positions.

The obtained data were recorded, transcribed, and translated (from Mandarin Chinese to English) by the researcher. In doing so, the researcher was seeking to understand the contributing factors that female educators have identified in their process of obtaining and maintaining their upper-administrative roles. Furthermore, the researcher was interested in gathering data on the strategies that female school leaders adopt to manage their school in the Chinese context.

Description of the Sample

Participants in this study were found from an urban area (Xiang Yang) in China. There were two separate groups of participants, which included: female administrators who have successfully obtained the senior educational leadership position; and female educators who
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have an interest in pursuing an educational leadership position.

For the recruitment, this study used both criterion sampling and purposive sampling methods. Criterion sampling was chosen because the criteria discussed below is essential to the purpose of this research. Also, purposive sampling was selected for this study due to the specific type of participants required.

To best serve the purpose of this study, the selection was based on the following criteria:

a) All participants should come from secondary schools.
b) All participants must be females.
c) All participants must be employed as educators for a minimum of five years.
d) Participants who demonstrated a desire to pursue educational leadership positions.
e) Participants who have successfully obtained a senior educational leadership position (i.e. principal, vice-principal, or superintendent) were active in their current position.

A total of four participants were included in this study. For the convenience of data analysis, the researcher divided the participants into two groups. Group A is female administrators’ group, and group B is female educators’ group. In group A, one participant is a secondary school principal, and the other one is a vice-principal. Although they are working in different schools, they were both recommended by a professor working in an educational institute in the city of Xiang Yang, and with his assistance the researcher gained the participants’ agreement to participate in this study. The two female educators in group B were recruited by convenience, and both of them are previous colleagues of the researcher. The researcher of current study is no longer working with these two female educators. Therefore, it is not a problem in the current study. In terms of age, the two female principals are around 50 years old, and the two head-teachers are around 30 years old. All participants grew up in Xiang Yang City, and are currently working in Xiang Yang City. The specific information
about the four participants is as follows:

J is a female principal and comes from a secondary school that is one of the 100 best performing secondary schools in China. J has worked in education for 26 years and has served as a secondary school principal for seven years. J was a history teacher before she became a principal. J is married and her husband is a teacher, too.

R, the other female vice-principal, comes from a secondary school that is famous for its art courses. R has worked in education for 21 years and has served as a secondary school vice-principal for four years. R served as a counselor eight years, and then taught social studies in her school. R is single and has no children.

The remaining two educators are F and Z. They are from the same school which is among the best performing secondary schools in Xiang Yang City. F is a discipline instructor and also a science teacher. She has been a teacher for eight years and served as a discipline instructor for four years. Z is a head-teacher and also teaches math in her school. Z has worked for six years. F has been married for four years. Z is single, but has a boyfriend and plans to get married.

**Description of the Instruments Used**

The instruments used in the present study were two sets of semi-structured interviews (Appendix C, English version; Appendix D, Chinese version). In addition, the researcher used digital devices to record all the interviews and made field notes during the interviews.

The semi-structured interviews were designed by the author to collect data from the two separate groups of participants (as discussed in the description of the sample). All interview questions were conducted in Mandarin Chinese and were asked from the Interview Protocol (Appendix C, and Appendix D). The designed questions sought to gather participants’ views based on their working and life experiences, the challenges they encountered, as well as the strategies they used to cope with these difficulties. For both of the
groups, the interview questions began with some general topics, such as their education background, working experiences or life stories. Following this, there were nine specific questions asking the participants to share about their own experiences in accessing or maintaining the upper level administrative leadership positions. After this, participants were asked two to four questions to give their opinion about women’s advancement in leadership positions. Finally, for the female administrators’ group, participants were asked to give some advice for future female educational leaders. For the female educators’ group, participants were asked to talk about the leadership style they would like to adopt in future.

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

In total, four independent interviews were conducted with four participants respectively, ranging from 40 minutes to one hour. Before the interview, participants were informed of the purpose, content and process of the interview and the present study. In addition, the researchers reminded each participant that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the process of the entire study. After all the information was communicated, the researcher began to make appointments with participants. The total four interviews in this study were conducted at a time and place selected by the participants to ensure that the interviews did not interfere with the participants’ daily teaching and work. In the interviews, the researcher approached the questions from general to specific and further probed when necessary and as applicable. Finally, the interview transcripts were translated by the researcher from Mandarin Chinese to English, and were member checked by the participants.

**Discussion of Validity**

The interview serves as a qualitative research strategy that allows the researcher (interviewer) to obtain spontaneous answers from participants (interviewees). In addition to the interviewees’ verbal responses, the researcher can get meaningful data by observing the participants during the interview process. Moreover, face-to-face interviews enabled the
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researcher to have the opportunity to explore the stories behind each participant’s experience and gain an in-depth information around the purpose of the research. Further, participants were provided with the transcripts of the interviews in both Mandarin Chinese and English to minimize the risk of distorting the thoughts and ideas of participants, and to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts’ contents.

Description and Justification of the Statistical Techniques Used

The data obtained from the research instruments were processed and analyzed by an inductive approach during and after the data collection period. By reviewing the transcripts and notes, the researcher was able to discover emerging themes or categories which relate to the contributing factors of gender disparity in upper-administrative levels of public secondary schools in an urban area in China. Also, throughout the reviewing process, transcripts were grouped or reorganized based on similarities and differences. After the reorganization, the processed data were compared with the researcher’s hypothesis and the literature to further interpret the key themes.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, the author presents the analysis of the data collected from four semi-structured interviews. The purpose is to explore the contributing factors of the disparity across gender in the upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary school in China. Based on the author’s hypothesis and data coding, five themes arose during the process of data analysis, namely, gender stereotypes and social expectations; conflict between work and family; opportunities to access the leadership positions; and self-imposed limitations and unwillingness to take the leadership roles.

Gender Stereotype and Social Expectation

Gender stereotype and social expectations, as major barriers that hinder the advancement of women’s pathway to the top executive positions, have been discussed many times in previous literature (Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016). Through conversations with four participants, the author of this study found that gender stereotypes and social expectations have a particularly strong impact on women’s career development in the context of China. Furthermore, these two barriers are related to China’s traditional culture and historical values.

The traditional Chinese culture represented by Confucianism emphasizes the importance of obedience in a feudal society. In order to maintain social stability and harmony, Confucianism emphasizes three principles: The officer obeys the emperor, the son obeys the father, and the wife obeys the husband. Among the three principles, the last one, the wife obeys the husband, has been continued in China’s history and culture for more than 2000 years, gradually evolving into more focused gender stereotypes and social expectations in China’s society. Under this principle (the wife obeys the husband), there are three notions
which relate to gender stereotypes and social expectations. The first notion is that male is superior to female. The second one is that caring for the family is the most significant task for women. And the last one emphasizes that women’s lack of talent is a virtue.

Despite changes in society and the times, these three concepts are still deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, which exposes women to gender discrimination from all aspects (Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016). Also, because of the persistence of the male-dominant leadership culture, women have a hard time in acquiring and maintaining leadership positions. This is illustrated in F’s response:

“…I had been a discipline instructor for almost two years and wanted to get a higher position (dean of students). So I talked to the principal. The principal said that in other schools, this position was all held by men, because it involves some activities that are not good for a woman, such as cooperation with outside companies, social entertainment, and so on. He told me that work is totally different from teaching classes in school. He said that I was suitable for dealing with students in school, that is the job for women, the world out of school is too complex for me. I knew this was a euphemistic rejection…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

In the above quotations, F indicated that she has experienced gender discrimination when asking for a promotion. The principal of her school rejected her application for the reason that women are not capable for the position (dean of students).

In a similar way, since most of the school’s leaders are male, the female principal seems to be a special existence. Their words and deeds are keenly observed and commented on by others, which puts them under tremendous psychological pressure. Respondents felt that their female identities conflicted with their status as education administrators because of direct and indirect gender discrimination:
“… I am not sure. But I have doubted myself many times. I was a very gentle person, but sometimes I have to show my tough side because of my work needs. Otherwise, the work will not go on, because no one will listen to what you are saying, and your ideas and proposals will be ignored. You know, when I first took over the role as a principal, I was criticized for wearing a skirt to go to work. They said that I did not look serious enough. Since then, I have never worn a skirt to go to work. And I decided to be tough and strong. However, no matter what I did, there are always varieties of criticisms. You know, I have to deal with all kinds of things, facing all kinds of people every day. Sometimes I really do not know which mask I should put on my face. No matter what I say or do, from the speech of the meeting to what to wear for work, I have to think carefully, I am afraid of being criticized…”

(R, group A, vice-principal)

In this excerpt, R clearly expresses the pressure she faces as a woman, and she realizes that the clothes she wears or what she says will be carefully examined by her colleagues. She cannot just be herself. She must wear a mask, be tough, and ready for criticism, all because of her gender.

Another example of this type of gender stereotyping comes from J:

“…Yes, of course. I have been through a lot of gossip. When I was young, I got a little bit of success, and immediately people say that I was playing dirty, using my female identity to get ahead. I will not go into the details, but you know what it means. In a word, if I do a bad job, my ability will be questioned. If I do a good job, my character will be questioned. Later, when I was a little older, some people said that I was not like a woman and did not know how to take care of the family. There are other people who talked about my husband. They said my husband had no ability to control me, no ability to raise me, let me to show up outside. They said I switched gender roles with
my husband. Anyway, there are all kinds of ugly things to say. I have to bear all these accusations and slanders. Many times those things make me feel very uncomfortable. I have reflected and questioned myself in times. Am I really like what people said…”

(J, group A, principal)

In J’s reporting, she has suffered various kinds of rumors about her ability as a principal. Gender discrimination has put psychological pressure on her and makes her doubt herself.

Just as Gang and Jinzhang (2008) pointed out

Women and men are like athletes running on the same runway, but men are lightly loaded, while women are holding their children in one hand and holding the kitchen in one hand. Even if there are women with heavy obstacles running as fast as men, people will criticize that they are not running elegantly enough. (Gang & Jinzhang, 2008, p. 14)

For instance, one participant stated that gender stereotypes undermined her enthusiasm for work in times:

“…this is the stereotype of society and people. So people will go to ‘label’ and think that female teachers should just do a good job in teaching; the management and leadership are the responsibilities of men…I am trying to ignore the ‘label’ on me, but I cannot really get away from it. Especially when I saw my male colleague promoted, I was very frustrated and I think this is not fair, because my ability is not worse than them, and even in many ways I am better than them…”

“…Do you know? Sometimes even students would discriminate against you, although they are not malicious. In the earlier days of my work, there were a few naughty students in my class. They always messed up in my classroom, but they performed well in other male teachers’ classrooms. I later asked them why; they said that they thought female teachers are weak and easy to bully. Honestly, I feel sad about that…”
(Z, group B, head-teacher)

The quotations from Z display how she responded to gender stereotyping. She tried to ignore it but failed. Z also articulated that even her students had a stereotype of her. She is frustrated by the unfair treatment from her school and the bullying from her students.

Conflict between Work and Family

Based on the profound influence of gender stereotypes and social expectations, how to fulfill their role between work and family appeared as a second main obstacle that participants faced in pursuing and holding leadership positions. This has been recognized by both female principals and female teachers in the current study. All participants said they could only fully fulfill one of the roles (role in work or role in family), rather than both. For example, one of the respondents indicated that she missed many “family moments” because she put too much energy and time into her work:

“…I am already in my 50s; you know, at my age, people who are not married and have no children are very rare, especially in China. Chinese women, in general, still focus on the family. They must get married and have children. This is something that traditional culture or the social environment has set for you to go through. I think you must have heard lots of stories about how young people are being pushed to get married by their family. Maybe the friends around you have experienced this. This is the social environment in China. If a woman is not married in her 30s, relatives and friends even strangers will start to urge her. I was urged many times by everyone around me, even my students’ parents. But to be honest, I was also anxious at first, and then I got used to it. And my work also filled the “blank”. But sometimes I am confused, especially when I see other people’s harmonious families. I think I may have paid too much for my work. Also, from the bottom of my heart, I really feel that I owe my father and my mother a lot. That is because, my father still worried that I
was not married before he died. My mother did not say anything, but I can feel she is also worried about that…”

(R, group A, vice-principal)

In the above extract, R clearly stated her inner struggle. This struggle comes from the conflict between work and family: the busy work leaves R no time to marry and have children. Meanwhile, the lack of family life made her feel that she owes her parents. On the other hand, R’s feeling of owing her parents is influenced by the traditional Chinese culture’s social expectations of women. R’s experience illustrates the complex interaction between social expectations, gender stereotypes, and traditional Chinese culture.

The other participant claimed that she would not be able to obtain today’s position if she had no spouse or parents to help her to take care of the family:

“…But in life, I really did not do anything for my family. I think I owe my husband and my mother too much. For more than a decade, since I became the teaching director, my husband and my mother have been taking care of the family all the time. I am really grateful for their support for me over the years. Without them to pay quietly behind, I can’t put all my energy into my work without worry. I also feel sorry for my son. I have not taken care of him since he was in elementary school. His father has been taking care of him. Can you imagine? I have hosted many parent conferences, but I have never attended my son’s parent conference. Therefore, my son and I have been very alienated. My husband always taught him to understand me. I do not know if my son can understand me, but I really appreciate my husband. He gives me too much support…”

(J, group A, principal)

J’s experience shows that the conflict between work and family is a barrier in sustaining her principal position. Actually, the hindrance sometimes is not practically, but
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emotional and psychological. J claimed that without the help from her husband and her mother, she would not be able to fulfill her principal role.

Meanwhile, according to previous literature, unlike men, women’s decisions to pursue higher leadership positions are often impacted by their plans for raising a family (Powell & Graves, 2003). For example, some participants even gave up or were prepared to give up the pursuit of higher positions because of family responsibilities:

“…over the past few years, I have been thinking about whether to have a baby or not, because that is the golden age of childbearing. I plan to quit my present administrative position after the Spring Festival of 2019 because I’m pregnant. And my family is worried that my busy work will have a bad impact on pregnancy. Also when the baby is born, I have to take care of the baby, so I really do not have enough energy to handle both administrative and teaching work. Therefore, it is better to quit the administrative work, so I can take care of the children and do a good job at teaching…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

Similarly, Z expressed her thoughts in this way:

“Not yet. I think maybe because I haven’t gotten married yet, so there are no concerns about family and children…”

“…But if I am getting married in the future, I think there will be some conflicts. For example, how to allocate working hours and family time. But I will try my best to balance. When I can’t balance, I will choose to take care of my family. Such a decision may be influenced by my mother because that’s what she did. Her previous career was very successful, but she later gave up some good promotion opportunities to take care of me. I think I will be like her…”

(Z, group B, head-teacher)
As discussed above, it is obvious that in the conflict between work and life, there is always something to be sacrificed. However, it is interesting to note that women who have already acquired the upper-administrative positions always choose to “give up” their family; and women who are pursuing the higher leadership positions always “sacrificed” their career path.

**Opportunities to Access the Leadership Positions**

According to the Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests (established in 1992, amended in 2005), “In terms of promotion and assessment of professional and technical positions, the principle of equality between men and women shall be adhered to and women shall not be discriminated against” (Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests, 2005, p. 5). However, some participants in this study stated that they did not experience this equality in their daily work:

“…especially when I saw my male colleague promoted, I was very frustrated and I think this is not fair, because my ability is not worse than them, and even in many ways I am better than them. For example, in the last semester, my class was ahead of the other male teacher's class in all aspects of the index. However, I lost to him in the selection of the best head-teacher at the end of the semester. I do not think this is a problem with my ability… I think that females are not given that opportunity as much as men are.”

(Z, group B, head-teacher)

From the quotes of Z, it can be seen that even though Z did a better job than her male competitor, she still lost in the selection of the best head-teacher. Z feels that she has suffered unfair treatment in terms of accessing the opportunity to advancement because of her gender.

At the same time, although the government of China attaches great importance to the
participation of women in various fields, there are still some policies that limit women’s opportunities to obtain further promotion in their career pathway. According to the Interim Measures of the State Council on the Resettlement of Old, Weak, Sick and Disabled Cadres (1978), the retirement age of female cadres in state organizations and institutions is 55 years and men are 60 years old. This makes women’s careers shorter than men’s for five years. Therefore, when women are reaching their 50th, their chances of getting promoted are much lesser than those of men. One of the participants indicated that she has no chance to get the higher position because of her age:

“…I want a higher position, but it is nearly impossible. I am 50 years old, that is to say, I have to retire in 5 years. People who are about to retire will not be promoted, that is the truth…”

(J, group A, principal)

J’s statement has shown her helplessness. Although she still wants to pursue a higher level position, she cannot do it. This is not because of her lack of ability and experience, but because she is about to reach retirement age. Unfair retirement policies leave J with no choice.

Moreover, previous research showed that female leaders need to expend more effort than their male counterparts to get opportunities for further promotion (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016). For example, according to Grogan and Shakeshaft, women are usually selected as principals after more years of teaching experience and after more academic and professional studies (as cited in Hallinger, Dongyu, & Wang, 2016). This view is validated in the personal experience of the participants of this study:

“…after 13 years of teaching, I transferred to the administrative department and began to do administrative work… I have been a teaching director nearly four years. Then
the school sent me to study for a year. When I returned to school, I naturally served as the duty principal. Then I spent more than two years as a duty principal. After the Spring Festival of 2013, a male principal of my school retired. Our upper unit (Education Bureau) held an internal meeting for several vice-principals of the school and proposed to select a new principal candidate. So I went to the competition and won the principal’s position. I think my promotion is relatively fast, compare with other female principals…”

(J, group A, principal)

R also has a similar experience:

“…I have been a psychological counselor for nearly 8 years. Later, when the school opened a social class, I switched to teaching social classes. I served as a social class teacher for 7 years. Then when the school publicly elected the vice-principal in 2014, I participated in the election and was selected as the vice-principal by the teachers and students of the school…”

(R, group A, vice-principal)

The work history of J and R clearly shows that women spend more time and energy to become education leaders. At the same time, their long-term work in non-leadership positions has shortened their time as principal. This affects the further promotion in their professional careers.

Apart from the above, according to the existing literature, since the education administration parts are dominated by men, these leaders habitually consider men when promoting new leaders, which greatly reduce women's access to management positions (Law, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017). One of the participants in the current study related a similar encounter:

“…I have to admit that men are more popular at the administrative level. I have
participated in the selection of young cadres within the school before. During that process, I found that, in most cases, my male colleagues will be given priority by the principal. I have discussed this thing with my friends in other schools; they said their male colleagues always get promotion faster…”

“…my husband also told me that he believes that Chinese society is a patriarchal society and women are not competitive…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

F’s report presents her own experience and the discussion between her female educator friends in other school: Men always get the priority by their principals. F’s husband also indicated that women are not competitive in a patriarchal society.

**Self-imposed Limitations**

In previous studies, researchers found that women’s low awareness of self-ability leads to their lack of self-confidence (Krüger et al., 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Moorosi, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Hallinger et al., 2016; Shaked et al., 2017; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). Women often attribute their success to external factors rather than internal factors (Krüger et al., 2007; Hallinger et al., 2016; Shaked et al., 2017). The author of the current study found that some respondents liked to attribute their opportunities of getting promoted to luck rather than personal ability or professional performance:

“…when the teachers and the students chose me to be the vice-principal, I was very worried that I could not do it. I even asked them to consider other candidates…”

“I feel I was so lucky, you know that the appointment of the vice-principal is usually decided by the upper department, but I was elected by the teachers and students. I was popular with teachers and students that is why they chose me…”

(R, group A, vice-principal)
The other participant expressed similar thoughts:

“…the reason for this success, I think, can be summed up in the old saying of China, ‘tian shi di li ren he’ (good timing, right place, and right people). So I got this position very easily. In fact, it depends mainly on good luck…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

The attribution of the success of R and F implies their lack of confidence. They do not believe that success is a combined result of their own abilities and efforts.

Meanwhile, women’s lack of self-confidence also leads to their low awareness of self-ability. Contrary to women’s attribution of their success, once women fail, they immediately attribute the failure to their lack of ability (Krüger et al., 2007; Hallinger et al., 2016; Shaked et al., 2017). The author found that women’s underestimation of their abilities has stopped them from continuing to pursue leadership positions:

“...I was prepared for that position for a long time. You see that I have learned a lot of psychology courses by myself because I think it may useful for the position. But I was failed. I think I am too young and my experience is not enough; maybe I should wait for a while…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

Z also made a similar decision:

“…I tried for apply the position, but I failed…Currently, I am not going to try it anymore. I think my ability and experience may not be enough. So I went to take the postgraduate course. I want to enrich myself…”

(Z, group B, head-teacher)

The above quotations show that females’ self-imposed limitation is mainly reflected in two aspects: lack of self-confidence and underestimating their own ability. The interaction between these two dimensions makes female educators stagnate in their development of
career progress.

**Unwillingness to Take Leadership Roles**

It should be noted that this theme is not directly derived from the participants in this study, but from the participants’ observations of their female colleagues.

In interviews with participants, the author of this study identified three factors that led women to be unwilling to take leadership roles. Among those factors, family bears the brunt:

“…yes, they all have the same reason: to take care of the children, take care of the family…”

(J, group A, principal)

“…yes, I can understand why they refused, because most of them have to take care of their families and children. Some of them have to take care of the elderly. It's really hard…”

(R, group A, vice-principal)

“…the main reason they refused to promote was that they focused on their families and children…”

(F, group B, discipline instructor)

The observations from J, R, and F clearly suggest that women’s reluctance for promotion is mainly because of their family. These female educators put their family first. They thought that taking leadership positions can take up too much time, which makes them unable to take care of their families. This observation also reflects that work and family conflicts are a key factor affecting women’s underrepresentation in school leadership positions.

Furthermore, huge work stress and heavy workload are also among the important reasons why women are reluctant to take up leadership positions (Madikizela, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Chan et al., 2016). This is also reflected in the reports of some participants:
“…they said they cannot stand the workload. Their energy is limited. And there is no way to responsible for both teaching and administrative work at same time…”
(R, group A, vice-principal)

“…they think it is easier to be a teacher because leaders always have a lot of things to do, not just in school but also outside school. They do not want to put too much pressure on themselves…”
(F, group B, discipline instructor)

This conflict between work and work has also been verified in previous research. Neale and Özkănli (2010) found that female educators are facing challenges allocating their time to be leaders and educators. The difficulty of being qualified in both teaching and administration leads to women’s unwillingness to take up leadership roles.

Unexpectedly, salary also plays a role in women’s unwillingness to join the administrative team:

“…There are also several teachers who refused because of the treatment problem. Yes, that is really a problem. In our school, the newly appointed executives do not receive administrative salary in the first two years. They only have the teacher salary. And in the third year, they begin to enjoy double pay (teacher and administrative salaries). Therefore, many people think that doing a double job (teaching and administration) only takes one salary, which is not cost-effective, so they do not want to do it…”
(J, group A, principal)

In the above excerpt, J explains the salary policy in Chinese secondary schools in detail. The unreasonable salary has greatly weakened women’s enthusiasm for pursuing leadership positions. Also, this is consistent with previous research. Gutierrez (2016) suggested that salary, social recognition, and social status play a role in women’s motivation to assume leadership positions.
Conclusion

This chapter provided an analysis of the results from data acquired through semi-structured interviews. Analysis of this data demonstrated that various contributing factors play a role in manifesting the disparity across gender in the upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary school in China. Those factors were evident during the discussions of the following themes: gender stereotype and social expectation, conflict between work and family, opportunities to access the leadership positions, self-imposed limitations, and unwillingness to take the leadership roles. The discussion of gender stereotyping and social expectations is closely related to China’s traditional culture and historical values. It reveals that females are suffering more difficulties and challenges in reaching out to leadership roles in this male-dominant cultural context. Also, when discussing the conflict between work and family the participants illustrated that there is a difference between women who have already acquired the upper-administrative positions and women who are still pursuing the administrative positions. Female administrators in this study prefer to “give up” their families, and female educators choose to sacrifice their career opportunities. At the same time, analyses of opportunities also lead to the discussion of the unfair policy which shortened women’s career life, as well as self-imposed limitations. Women’s lack of confidence in their abilities and lack of planning for their career paths have also led to a loss of promotion opportunities. Finally, the main topic present in the analysis of women’s unwillingness to take leadership roles includes: family issues, work pressure, workload, and salary. To sum up, the discussion of the obtained data displayed that female school leaders and aspiring female educators are still facing various challenges to hold and access leadership positions in secondary schools in urban China.
Chapter Five: Summary and Discussions

Summary of the Study

This study evolved from an observation of the author that women are in a minority position in the education leadership field in China. To find out the reasons behind this phenomenon, the author reviewed the literature on gender, education, and leadership. By reviewing the literature, the author found that research focusing on this topic, in most cases, is located in an Anglo-American culture. There is scant research on women as educational leaders at the secondary school level in China. Therefore, the author of the current study decided to pursue the present topic. Based on the existing literature, the author proposed a hypothesis that culture, gender stereotypes, social expectations, family responsibilities, and self-imposed limitations are contributing to the disparity of gender in upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary schools in urban areas of China, and these factors create challenges for women to access and hold their leadership positions. In order to verify this prediction, the author interviewed four female educators who are currently working in China’s secondary schools in an urban area. Participants reported their career experiences, their leadership practices, and their life experiences through the interviews. The data obtained from the interviews were processed and analyzed by an inductive approach during and after the data collection period. By reviewing the transcripts and notes, the researcher found five themes emerging: gender stereotype and social expectation; conflict between work and family; opportunities to access the leadership positions; self-imposed limitations, and unwillingness to take the leadership roles. These themes all relate to the contributing factors of the disparity across gender in the upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary schools in China.

Discussion

Culture, social expectations and gender stereotypes
China’s secondary school female principals and teachers live in a society with strong male rights. Therefore the words and deeds of these females are particularly criticized by others. Female education administrators, especially female principals, are often referred to as “iron ladies”, which is actually a concept of gender discrimination and implies a unique irony in the Chinese context. Their success is often considered to be: overbearing, cold-blooded, and ignoring the family. This is inconsistent with the expectations of the public for women (gentleness, obedience), and therefore attracts criticism. In the semi-structured interviews, the author found that when asked what pressures they face as female educational leaders, all female participants indicated gender stereotypes and social expectations. These have also been confirmed in previous studies (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Gutierrez, 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017).

The important influence of traditional culture, social expectations and gender stereotypes on the career development of female educational administrators is also reflected in the skepticism about their working ability (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016). Although the educational administrators work hard and perform well, they still encounter questions from all aspects of society about their ability. The public tends to think that female’ success is not because of their excellent ability, but for other reasons (i.e. using female charisma).

**Conflict between family and work**

The traditional concept of “male outside, female inside” (男主外，女主内) or “male busy with business, woman holding home” (男人工作，女人持家) lead to the thought that taking care of their families is the responsibility and obligation of women (Eagly & Carli, 2007; McNeill, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Kelly, 2011; Airini et al., 2012; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al.,...
2016). In the current study, some of the participants also indicated that managing a good family is more important than getting achievements in their careers. This special social expectation on gender determines the contradiction and conflict between “female” and “school administrators”. As female education managers, if women put all their energy into their work and neglect their families (i.e. failing to take care of their family), they may still be dissatisfied and criticized by the public even if they have made great achievements in their work (McNeill, 2007; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Kelly, 2011; Airini et al., 2012; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014). However, under the same circumstances, male educational administrators are more easily understood by the public (Eagly & Carli, 2007; McNeill, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Kelly, 2011; Airini et al., 2012; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016), because taking care of the family is not a man’s job. It can be seen that society has different expectations for women’s gender roles: as educational administrators, women must bear in mind that they are also women, mothers, and wives. These expectations have led to the conflict of their identity between work and life, and have created the difficulties women have encountered in their careers. The participants in this research all stated that they could not fulfill the two roles (role in work and role in family) at one time. And, there is always something to be sacrificed.

**Policy and opportunities**

As it has been mentioned in earlier studies, female educators lost more opportunities for equal competition than men (McNeill, 2007; Pirouznia, 2009; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Kelly, 2011; Airini et al., 2012; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Chan et al., 2016). For example, women have to take care of their families and have to give birth. Therefore, for the convenience of work, under the same conditions, the education administration is still more inclined to promote males as upper-level administrators, which
seriously dampens the confidence of females. This has also been found in the present study.

At the same time, the findings of this study have verified the evidence on how unfair policy disadvantages women have in their career advancement. According to previous studies, there are two key periods in the development of a woman’s career: 25-35 years old is the first key period, and 40-45 years old is the second key period (Kaparou & Bush, 2007; Gang & Jinzhang, 2008; Sheng & Yunlong, 2009; Yinhan, Yueqi & Yukai, 2013). But the first key period is also the golden age for women to get married and have children. Therefore, many women choose to give up the promotion opportunities in this period (Gang & Jinzhang, 2008; Sheng & Yunlong, 2009; Yinhan et al., 2013). However, men do not need to go through the reproductive period, so they will have more opportunities for promotion than women in the same period (Gang & Jinzhang, 2008; Sheng & Yunlong, 2009; Yinhan et al., 2013). This has led to the development of women's careers later than men. For example, based on the obtained data in this study, the first time women were promoted as principal is around 45 years old. And that is the end of the second key period. However, the growth of a competent principal may take 10 years. This means that when females complete this growth period and become experienced and capable principals, they are about to reach their retirement age. Therefore, as one participant said in the interview, there is no chance for these female principals to be promoted again because they are about to retire. This finding is also in line with other research and literature based on Anglo-American culture: “career break” is a constraint for potential managers in education.

**Other factors**

The current research has also found some factors which are barely mentioned in previous studies, such as salary and workload. Participants in the current study have reported that many of their female colleagues refused to get promotions due to these two reasons. In China’s secondary school the head-teachers and the low level administrators are usually
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responsible for both teaching and management. The huge workload puts these females (as well as males) under tremendous pressure; but even so, they can only receive a very low salary. The low salaries of new educational administrators and the heavy workload have reduced their enthusiasm for pursuing leadership positions. Interestingly, despite the differences in culture and school systems, according to Kaparu and Bush (2007), Greek women refused to seek progress for the same reasons. This is an important observation, and it also reveals the unreasonable organization system in Chinese secondary schools.

Meanwhile, instead of their ability and performance, some participants attribute their success to luck. This also reflects a fact that women underestimated themselves and lack self-confidence. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Krüger et al., 2007; Zhong & Ehrich, 2010; Law, 2013; Nyuyen, 2013; Li, 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Zhao & Jones, 2017; Hallinger et al., 2016; Shaked et al., 2017).

**Implications of the Findings**

The findings of the current study show that female educators and female education administrators are still facing many obstacles to prevent them accessing leadership position or going further. This is consistent with the existing literature. Also, among the barriers found in this study, family responsibilities presented the most important barrier to professional growth for females in China’s context. As can be seen from the interviews, most women gave up or avoided promotions for family reasons. Therefore, perhaps solving the conflict between family and work is the key to solving the imbalance in the gender ratio of senior education administrators. Furthermore, the study’s results identified that heavy workloads, unreasonable wages, and an unfair retirement policy undermined Chinese women's motivation to pursue high-level positions. Those factors are rarely mentioned in the existing literature focused on Anglo-American culture. Thus, policy makers in China may want to pay attention to making improvements in policy that bring benefits to female educational leaders. Finally, unlike
previous studies which only included female education leaders, this study covered the voices of women who are interested in becoming education administrators. This gave the study multiple perspectives to reflect on the impediments that contribute to the imbalance of gender in senior administrative levels. In all, the current study did provide some insights to enrich existing documents in the field of female school leadership based on the Chinese context, although it has some limitations.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations in the current study. First, the result of this study was drawn from four specific single cases in a particular school context based on one certain city. Therefore, it lacks generalizability and cannot be extended to other parts of China. Second, the voice of male principals and teachers is not considered in this research, thus the result may be subjective nature. Third, the questions in the interview protocol are quite broad, which makes the data obtained lacking in depth. Finally, the results of this current study only answered what are the barriers females encountered in their pathway to upper-administrative positions, but failed to identify the coping strategies.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

Further research is needed in the area of this study, especially in the situation that women have been in a minority and weak position in upper-administrative levels of education in public secondary school in China. The following suggestions emerged from the findings and the limitations of current study. First, it would be insightful if future research combines the views of both males and females. Incorporating men into future research on the gender disparity in educational leadership would help to foster a broader perspective and promote a deeper understanding of the barriers women encounter in gaining or maintaining educational leadership positions. As well, a detailed and broader investigation of how successful female principals have overcome obstacles and achieved career goals is required. This would be
helpful to identify strategies to empower women education leaders in urban China. Finally, although this is a small-scale qualitative study, it is important for future research to continue to problematize and investigate this gender disparity because to identify strategies to empower women leaders is not only to achieve gender equality, but also to promote the development of effective educational leadership to build successful schools.
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CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO GENDER DISPARITY


Appendix A
Consent Form for Interview Research

Contribution Factors to Gender Disparity in Upper-Administrative Levels of Public Secondary School: A Multiple-Case Study in an Urban Area in China

Yan Liang (Ruby)

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Purpose of the Study

I am a student in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research, entitled “What are the contributing factors to the disparity across gender in upper-administrative level of education in public secondary school: a multiple-case study in an urban area in China” aims to explore the contributing factors of the gender inequity in senior educational leadership positions in secondary schools in the Chinese context. My hope is that my research will make a valuable contribution to inspire female educators to strive for higher levels of leadership by way of self-discovery.

Study Procedures

Research participants are asked to complete a face-to-face research interview. If you agree, you would be asked open questions which focus on your experiences while attempting to become an educational administrator or your experiences with being a current educational administrator. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded. Your participation in the interview would require approximately 1−2 hours of your time.

− By returning this consent form to Yan Liang (Ruby), you consent to participate in the study.

− During the interview, I will read a scripted introduction outlining the purpose of the study and then ask you some questions concerning your experiences and perspectives on the contributing factors to the disparity across gender in upper-administrative level of education in public secondary school.
− The interview will take place at the time and place that selected by you to ensure that the interviews would not interfere with your daily teaching and work. The space can be your office or other quiet public areas.

− You will be asked to choose an alphanumeric code and will be referred to by this code in this study.

− The information you share will be recorded, transcribed and translated for analysis, and the results will be presented in my thesis paper.

− You will receive a copy of your transcribed response, and you can revise or remove content before your responses are published in my thesis paper.

Potential Risks
While there are no significant physical invasion of the body, physical distress, or risk of physical distress to you, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable discussing your personal experiences. Should you feel any psychological or emotional discomfort during the interview, you may stop the interview. Also, please be aware that the questions you will be asked may prompt you to share opinions that are critical of your employer, and thus, if your identity was unintentionally disclosed, your participation in the study may result in embarrassment, loss of reputation, and/or loss of employment opportunities. As strategies to minimize this risk, I will make every effort not to include any information that might directly or indirectly reveal your identity in the products of the research. You will also have an opportunity to review the transcript of our interview and withdraw any statements you made.

Potential Benefits
By providing an opportunity to discuss your experiences with educational leadership, this study will allow you to critically reflect on the current status of females and educational leadership. By engaging in critical dialogue about your experiences, this research will assist in developing a greater understanding about the barriers that Chinese female educators have encountered in the process of obtaining and maintaining their upper-administrative roles. By gathering detailed information about your experiences, opinions, and strategies, this research may also assist other female educators to strive for higher levels of leadership by way of self-discovery.

Confidentiality
All records of your participation would be kept confidential. Individual names will not be recorded, and alphanumeric codes will be used in place of real names. Only my supervisor and I will have access to information in which you are identified. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded, transcribed and translated into writing. At your request, you will be provided a copy of the transcript and invited to make changes to the transcript as you wish (e.g. if you would like to withdraw - or add to - a particular statement you made during an interview). All electronic data in this research will be stored on a password-protected USB and a personal laptop. Signed consent forms and paper copies of
interview transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the data. Data will be deleted and shredded after one year of the completion of this study, around April 20, 2020.

Results

The results of this study will be published in my Master’s thesis which may be published online in VIU library’s VIUSpace. The findings may also be presented at the annual Master of Education research conference in March 2019.

Consent

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the interview at any time, for any reason, and without explanation. If you choose to withdraw from the study after the interview, you may withdraw up until two weeks after you have viewed the transcript. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided during the interview would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

I consent to participate in this research. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I consent to be identified by an alphanumeric code in the products of the research. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I consent to the interview being audio recorded. ☐ Yes ☐ No

I consent to be quoted in the products of the research. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Name
_______________________________________________________________

Participant Signature
____________________________________________________________

Date
_________________________________________________________________________
I, Yan Liang (Ruby), promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principle Investigator Signature __________________________ Date _______________

**Concerns about Your Treatment in the Research**

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Board by telephone at 250-740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.
造成公立中学高层管理层面中性别差异的影响因素
——基于中国城市地区的多案例研究

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研究目的

我是温哥华岛大学（VIU）教育领导力专业的研究生。我的研究课题“造成公立中学高层管理层面中性别差异的影响因素是什么？——基于中国城市地区的多案例研究”旨在探讨中国中学教育领导岗位中性别不平等的影响因素。我希望我的研究将为鼓励女性教育者通过自我探究而争取更深层次的领导职务做出有价值的贡献。

研究过程

研究参与者将被要求完成一个面对面的研究访谈。如果您同意参与此次研究，研究专员会在访谈中向您提出一些开放性的问题。这些问题涉及到您在担任教育领导职务或者争取教育领导职位中的个人经历。在您的同意下，访谈将被录音。此项访谈大约需要1~2个小时的时间。
— 一旦您签订此访谈同意书并交还给梁琰（此项研究的研究者），就表示您同意参与此项研究。

— 在访谈期间，我会向您宣读本项研究的大纲和主旨，并向您提出一些开放性的问题。这些问题将涉及到您对公立中学高层管理层面中造成性别差异的影响因素的个人看法和经历。

— 访谈时间和地点将由您来决定，以确保不会影响您的正常工作和生活。访谈地点可以是您的个人办公室，或其它不会被人打扰的公共场所。

— 访谈将要求您选择一个字母作为您在此次研究中的代码。

— 您所提供的一切信息都将被录音，转录为文字并翻译成英文以供分析研究。分析结果将被写入我的研究生论文中。

— 在我发布论文前，您将收到一份关于您访谈记录的副本。您可以对此副本进行修订。

潜在风险

此项研究不存在任何形式的人身风险。但是由于访谈涉及到您的个人经历，您可能会感到心理或情绪上的不适。如果您在访谈中感到任何心理或情绪上的不适，您可以退出访谈。此外，访谈期间的所有信息都将保密。

潜在益处

在您参与此项研究的同时，您将有机会对女性教育者和女性教育领导者的现状进行批判性的探讨。这些基于您个人经历的批判性探讨将有助于更深入地了解中国女性教育工作者在获得和维持其上层管理职位过程中所遇到的障碍。此外，基于您所提供的宝贵意见和建议，此研究还可以帮助其他女性教育者通过自我探究来争取更高层次的领导职位。

保密事项

此项研究访谈的所有记录都是保密的。在研究记录中，您的真实姓名将由您自己选定的字母替代（只有本研究的研究者和其导师知道您的真实姓名）。在您的允许下，此次访谈将被录音，转录为文字并翻译成英文。
基于上文所述，您将收到一份关于您访谈记录的副本。您可以对此副本进行修订（比如，您想退出访谈，或删除/增加某些信息）。此项访谈的所有电子数据/资料都将存储在受密码保护的 U 盘和个人笔记本电脑上。已签署的访谈同意书和其它纸质材料将被存放在研究者家中上锁的柜子里。同样，只有此研究的研究者和其导师有资格参阅这些数据和资料。这些数据和资料将在本研究完成一年后被删除和销毁，大约在 2020 年 4 月 20 日左右。

研究结果

这项研究的结果将会被写入我的硕士论文。该论文将发布在温哥华岛大学电子图书馆的 VIUSpace 中。研究结果也可能会在 2019 年 3 月份的年度教育硕士研讨会上展示。

协议条款

您的此次参与是完全自愿的。您可以无原因、无条件的随时退出此研究访谈。如果您在访谈之后选择退出此项研究，您可以在参阅访谈记录副本后两个星期内退出。在您退出此项研究后，您所提供的所有信息都将从此项研究中删除并销毁。

我已阅读并理解上述信息，特此同意在以下条件下参与此研究：

我同意参与此研究。 □ 是 □ 否
我同意在研究中以字母代码的形式出现。 □ 是 □ 否
我同意在访谈中被录音。 □ 是 □ 否
我同意在研究中被直接引用。 □ 是 □ 否
参与者姓名 ________________________________

参与者签字 ________________________________

日期 ________________________________
我，梁琰，承诺遵守以上条款。

研究者签名 ______________ 日期 ______________

关于此项研究的其它意见

如果您对参与此次研究有其它问题和顾虑，请联系温哥华岛大学研究伦理委员会。

电话: +1 250-740-6631;

电子邮件: reb@viu.ca。
Appendix C
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Contributing Factors to Gender Disparity in Upper-Administrative Levels of Public Secondary School: A Multiple-Case Study in an Urban Area in China

Yan Liang (Ruby)

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**Group A:** female administrators who have successfully obtained a senior educational leadership position (i.e. principal, vice-principal, or superintendent) were active in their current position.

1. **Tell me about your story.** For example, your educational background, working experiences, family members, or your marital status (to the extent you are comfortable).

2. **How did you come to your current leadership position?** For example, what interests you, motivates you, or supports you?

3. **Were you successful in your first attempt to becoming an educational administrator?** If yes, what explanation were you given to your success? If no, what explanation were you given as to why you did not receive the position (if applicable)?

4. **Describe your subsequent attempts and the outcomes of these attempts.**

5. **In relation to gender, if any, what are the perceived challenges to pursue a leadership position?**
6. What other challenges do you face while maintaining your current position?

7. What strategies do you use to cope with those challenges?

8. Do you feel supported by others (i.e. family members, friends, colleagues, or students’ parents) as an educational administrator? What the reasons were you given as to your feeling?

9. As a female education administrator, do you feel that your female identity conflicts with your status as an education administrator? If so, can you think of the time when this happened?

10. Has anyone ever made you feel doubtful about whether you should hold or give up your current leadership position? Explain the reasons.

11. Have you ever considered keep pursuing a higher position (i.e. superintendent or director)? Why or why not?

12. In your school, do female educators ask for promotion? In your opinion, why or why not?

13. In your school, do any female educators refuse to get promotion? If so, do you know the reasons? What do you think of this?

14. How do you describe your leadership style?

15. In your opinion, is there any method specific to the needs of female administrators?

16. What personal and professional benefits do you think there are to being a female educational administrator?

17. What advice would you provide for aspiring future female educational administrators?
**Group B**: female educators who are informal leaders in a school and have an interest in pursuing an educational leadership position (i.e. head-teachers).

1. Tell me about your story. For example, your educational background, working experiences, family members, or your marital status (to the extent you are comfortable).

2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

3. How did you come to your current position? For example, what interests you, motivates you, or supports you?

4. What interests you about pursuing a formal educational leadership position?

5. How have you prepared yourself to apply for a formal leadership position?

6. Have you tried asking for promotion? If yes, do you success? What explanation were you given to your success?

7. If no, why you think you didn’t get the promotion? Do you have any subsequent attempts? If yes, can you describe the following attempts? If no, why?

8. What are the perceived challenges that you have encountered in pursuing the formal leadership position?

9. What strategies, if any, do you use to cope with those challenges?

10. Do you feel supported by others (i.e. family members, friends, colleagues, or students’ parents) in your pursuing process? What the reasons were you given as to your feeling?

11. Has anyone ever made you feel doubtful about whether or not you should keep pursuing the formal leadership position? Explain the reasons.

12. As a female, do you ever feel as though your gender identity conflicts with your identity as a future educational administrator? If so, can you explain why?
13. Have you seen any of your female colleagues asking for promotion? Do they succeed? In
your opinion, what are the reasons for their success or failure?

14. Have you seen any of your female colleagues refuse to get promotion? If so, do you know
the reasons? What do you think of this?

15. What type of leadership style do you see yourself adopting upon being your current
position?

16. Describe, as best as you can, the leadership style you would like to adopt, in the future,
when you get a formal leadership position. Can you explain your reasons?
造成公立中学高层管理层面中性别差异的影响因素
——基于中国城市地区的多案例研究

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A组：现任高层教育领导职务并在其岗位上活跃的女性（例如，校长、副校长、年级主任）。

1. 请介绍谈论一下您自己。例如，您的教育经历、工作经历、家庭背景、婚姻状况（以您感到舒适为前提）。

2. 什么促使您当上这个职位？例如，什么吸引了您、激励了您、或是支持着您？
3. 您第一次争取教育领导职位的时候成功了吗？如果成功了，您认为您取得成功的原因是什么？如果没有成功，您对于未获得该职位给出什么样的解释？

4. 描述一下您后续的尝试和这些尝试的结果。

5. 您认为性别在您追求领导职位的时候给您造成过潜在的挑战或者难题吗？或者说您在追求领导职位的时候有因为性别而产生过疑惑吗？

6. 在您担任当前职务时，您遇到过那些挑战或者难题？

7. 您如何处理、应对这些挑战和难题呢？

8. 作为高层教育领导人员，您是否感受到来自他人的支持（例如，家人、朋友、同事、或学生家长）？您为什么会有这种感受？

9. 作为一个教育领导人员，您认为您的女性身份和您的教育领导者身份相冲突吗？如果您感到冲突，能给出一些例子来说明吗？

10. 有没有人使您质疑过该不该继续担任，或是放弃现在的职务？您能解释为什么吗？

11. 您有没有想过继续争取更高的职位？为什么？
12. 在您的学校里，女性教育工作者会主动要求晋升吗？您如何看待这个问题？

13. 在您的学校里，有没有女性教育工作者拒绝晋升？如果有，您知道拒绝的原因吗？您如何看待这个问题？

14. 您能描述一下您的领导风格吗？

15. 在您看来，有没有适合女性领导人员运用的独特管理方法？

16. 作为一名女性领导人员，您从中收获了什么？您得到什么？

17. 作为一个过来人，您对于未来的女性教育领导者有什么好的建议？

B组：有志成为教育领导人员的女性教育工作者（例如，班主任）。

1. 请介绍谈论一下你自己。例如，你的教育经历、工作经历、家庭背景、
   婚姻状况（以你感到舒适为前提）。

2. 你为什么选择教师这个职业？
3. 什么促使你当上这个职位？例如，什么吸引了你、激励了你、或是支持着你？

4. 什么吸引着你去追求高层的教育领导职位？

5. 你为争取领导职位做过准备吗？

6. 你尝试过主动要求过晋升吗？如果尝试过，你成功了吗？你如何解释你的成功？

7. 如果没有成功，你觉得为什么？你有继续尝试过吗？如果有，你能讲述一下你后续的尝试吗？如果没有，为什么呢？

8. 在你争取高层领导职位的时候，你遇到的潜在挑战是什么？

9. 你如何应对这些挑战呢？

10. 在你争取高层领导职位的时候，是否感受到来自他人的支持（例如，家人、朋友、同事、或是学生家长）？你为什么会有这种感受？

11. 有没有人使你质疑过该不该继续追求，或是放弃追求高层领导职位？你能解释为什么吗？

12. 作为一名女性，你认为你的女性身份和你未来作为教育领导者的身份相冲突吗？你为什么这么认为呢？
13. 你有见过你的女性同事主动要求晋升吗？她们成功了吗？在你看来，她们成功/失败的原因是什么？

14. 你有见过你的女性同事拒绝晋升吗？如果有，你知道原因吗？你怎么看待？

15. 在你现任的职务上，你采取了什么样的领导风格？

16. 能详细的描述一下等你取得高层领导职位后想运用的领导风格吗？你为什么想采取这种领导风格呢？
Contributing Factors to Gender Disparity in Upper-Administrative Levels of Public Secondary School: A Multiple-Case Study in an Urban Area in China

Yan Liang (Ruby)

Scripted Interview Introduction

This is a voluntary interview and you may withdraw from the study at any point. If you feel uncomfortable answering a question, please feel free to skip it. With your permission, the information you share will be audio-recorded and be kept completely confidential. Your real name will never be used in the study. You will only be referred to by an alphanumeric code in this study. I will not include any identifying information from you in my study.

Thank you for taking time to be interviewed. Your participation will help me to have a greater understanding of the contributing factors to the disparity across gender in upper-administrative level of education in public secondary school. It is my hope that through this research we can inspire female educators to strive for higher levels of leadership by way of self-discovery.

Scripted Interview Questions

See Appendix C/D.

Scripted Interview Conclusion

Thank you for taking time to answer the questions. I will be transcribing and translating your answers and will provide a copy of your response. You can review, revise, or remove content as you see appropriate. The results of my study will be made available to you upon
completion. Please feel free to contact me at any time. Again, thank you for your precious time and your participation in my study.
访谈草案-介绍和总结

造成公立中学高层管理层面中性别差异的影响因素
——基于中国城市地区的多案例研究

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访谈简介脚本

这是一次完全自愿参与的访谈。您可以在任何时间退出此次研究访谈。如果您不想回答访谈中的某个问题，您可以略过它。在您的允许下，您所提供的所有信息都将被录音并且完全保密。您的真实姓名将不会出现在此次研究中。您的身份将由您选择的字母所替代。此次研究访谈不会出现任何能辨别出您身份的信息。

感谢您抽出时间参与访谈。您的参与将有助于我更好地了解造成公立中学高层教育管理者性别差异的影响因素。我希望我的研究将为激励女性教育者通过自我探究而争取更高层次的领导职务做出有价值的贡献。

访谈问题脚本
访谈总结脚本

谢谢您在百忙中抽出时间回答这些问题。我将会把此次访谈转录为文字，翻译成英文，并为您提供一份副本以供您参阅、修订。我的研究结论将在此项研究完成后提供给您。如果您有任何疑问，请随时与我联系。最后，再次真诚的感谢您参与此项研究。