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Examining the Effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs

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Abstract:

Attempts to combat gender inequality in all facets of life have become more prevalent in recent years. Despite these efforts, there remains a need to increase gender diversity in leadership roles within organizations, Women's Leadership Programs are aiming to facilitate opportunity for all women within the workplace, their career paths and improve access to leadership roles. This body of research aims to examine the conditions under which Women Leadership Programs can be effective in attaining these goals. Utilizing a qualitative research design, a thematic analysis of scholarly literature was performed in order to identify patterns, concepts and key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs. Intersectionality, networking, being seen, heard and vulnerable, women only programs, and transformational learning are the major themes that emerged from the existing literature. Analysis of five specific Women's Leadership Programs takes into consideration many factors influencing the success of these programs, such as program goals, long-term effectiveness, funding and diversity in order to evaluate how these factors further the success of WLP's. This research aims to contribute to the conversation around gender equality and provide insight into which qualities foster inclusive and equitable leadership programs. Additionally, it aims to add to the body of knowledge on the optimal composition of a WLP to yield the highest success.

Introduction:

This body of research will examine the qualities of an effective leadership program by reviewing existing literature and then conducting a thorough analysis of five Women's Leadership Program's using ten criteria. Research will be conducted in an effort to answer the

research question *Under what conditions can a Women's Leadership Program be effective?* This research is being conducted, as it aims to contribute to the existing knowledge of successful WLP design and how these programs can be improved upon. Furthermore, the research of effective qualities of WLP's can provide knowledge on how these programs help women navigate barriers, promote equal opportunity and prepare women for success in their careers. This research will focus mainly in the context of United States Women's Leadership Programs, as they are able to provide understanding of the challenges and opportunities women endure in the US. Moreover, there is an opportunity to utilize the major influence the United States has on differing sectors to contribute to understanding the importance of gender equality. Continually, the intersecting of gender with other factors such as race, ethnicity and socioeconomic background can be addressed and researched further and can be used as a cross-cultural assessment tool for other parts of the world. By providing historical background, conducting a thematic analysis of existing literature and subsequently performing an analysis of five WLP's, a more well-rounded understanding of the problem and research question will be presented. Following will be a discussion of the analysis and areas of improvement for Women's Leadership Programs. Lastly, a conclusion will elaborate on the findings and outcome of this research.

The History of Women's Leadership Programs has been anything but linear. The overarching idea of a Women's Leadership Program has developed over time. The transition to the systematic programs we have today has been a slow and gradual evolution. Despite not being labeled as Women's Leadership Programs, there have been many notable efforts and initiatives that have contributed to the overall success of today's Women Leadership Programs. For instance, in 1848, the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, thus

beginning the women's suffrage movement (National Archives, n.d.). Within this meeting, women produced a list of demands, named The Declaration of Sentiments, asking for educational and professional opportunities and the right of married women to control their wages and property. Following this movement, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed the National Women Suffrage Association (NWSA) in 1869 (National Archives, n.d.). Alongside Stanton and Anthony, Frederick Douglas, formally enslaved leader of the abolition movement, showed his support in the fight for women to vote. This support spread quickly, as many black women began developing women's clubs throughout the United States. Leader and president of the National Association of Colored Women, Mary Church Terrell, insisted that if white women need the right to vote, black women, victims of racism *and* sexism, needed the vote even more (National Archives, n.d.). Over 70 years after the initial meeting in Seneca Falls, women were granted the right to vote with the 19th Amendment to the US constitution.

Although strong and determined women had made major progress over the 18th century, there were still many barriers to face going forward. One of those barriers regarding education. As of 1835, there was not a single college that allowed the admittance of female students (Carlton, 2023). Before the rise in female colleges, the idea of education was majorly dominated by men. In comparison to men's colleges of this time, women's colleges were small, usually in a cramped, secluded building. Between 1836 and 1875, more than 50 women's colleges were established — creating more opportunities for women to be educated, but also creating jobs for female faculty members (Carlton, 2023). Still these advancements for women did not benefit everyone, as most colleges continued to bar students of color until the late 1800's. In this way, women of color continued to face barriers, while white women were being offered opportunities

to be educated. Still, women were faced with strict rules within their colleges, while co-ed colleges did not enforce such restrictions (Carlton, 2023). In the subsequent years, there were many higher education institutions that continue to uphold a renowned reputation. In Europe, University of Bologna, University of Cambridge, University of Oxford and the University of Padua. In North America and South America there are Harvard and Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo. Those in Africa are University of Al-Karaouine and University of Santo Tomas (Bouchrika, 2023). These Universities are an embodiment of the ongoing pursuit of education.

With their newfound freedom of voting and the ability to be educated, women were strapped with more tools in the fight for equality. In the early 20th century, gearing for World War I, organizations began to form specifically to address the issues of working women. There was a call from the government for a group that could identify the skills and experience of professional women. Thus, *The National Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.,* was born out of this perceived need. This organization was formed in 1919 by leader Lena Madisen Phillips (NFBPWC, 2023). This was a fundamental milestone for the gender equality movement, as this was the first organization in the world to focus on the issues of working women (NFBPWC, 2023). Following its creation, in the 1930's, The International Federation of Business and Professional Women was created in Geneva, Switzerland on August 26, 1930 (NFBPWC, 2023). Dr. Lena Madisen Phillips organized many tours in Europe, in which hundreds of American women participated. Consequently, this facilitated meeting and networking with other professional and established women and fostering collaboration between women from all around the world. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women was successful in campaigning for outlawing the legislation that barred married women

from jobs and also ended the legal practice of workplace preference of unmarried people.

Furthermore, the BPW/USA was one of the first women's organizations to endorse the Equal

Rights Amendment in 1937 (NFBPWC, 2023).

With more and more women joining the workforce, the issue of wage discrimination

became prevalent — an issue that is still affecting women today. The issue rose as a result of

World War II, as 19,170,000 women (about the population of New York) were recruited to work

for the U.S. Armed Forces (Hartmann, 1982). Moreover, the percentage of women in the

workforce between 1940 and 1945 grew by 50% (Hartmann, 1982). Following the end of the

war, the *Women's Pay Act of 1945* was introduced—the first ever legislation to require equal pay

(NFBPWC, 2023). Equal pay legislation was certainly a step in the right direction, unfortunately,

the bill would not be passed for another 18 years. However, the BPW was still motivated to

continue their fight for equality. The BPW Foundation was founded in 1956 — focusing solely

on working women. The effort made by BPW continued to fuel the fire, as the "Status of

Women" commission was founded in 1963 (NFBPWC, 2023). Throughout the late 90's and early

2000's, the fight continued, with efforts focusing on work and equal pay, with the Equal Pay Act

and the Paycheck Fairness Act. This portion of Women's Rights History began to pave the way

for working women today.

As a result of these progressive changes, the United States government continued to work

towards a more equitable and fair society, particularly through legislation and programs, such as

affirmative action. In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson set in motion an Executive Order that

prohibited discrimination in the workplace, "Executive Order 11246 requires federal contractors

to take affirmative action to promote the full realization of equal opportunity for women and

minorities," a major milestone in the fight for equal opportunity in the workplace (UCI, 2023).

Affirmative action allowed for women to have an opportunity to hold leadership positions.

Moreover, the affirmative action movement also influenced the origins of the Diversity, Equity

and Inclusion (DEI) act in the 1960's. The DEI in the late 1960's and early 1970's was focused

on integration. There was a heavy focus on accepting the integration of workplaces, schools and

communities. Furthermore, from the 1970's through the 1990's focus was placed on

"multiculturalism and being aware of the achievements of various racial and ethnic minorities,"

emphasizing the importance of accountability to achieve an equal society (Edmunds & Lind,

2021). These initiatives have contributed overall to the creation of the more defined Women's

Leadership Programs that we know today. Throughout the late 20th century, more companies and

organizations began implementing inclusion and leadership development programs, which aimed

to benefit women and underrepresented groups. For example, universities such as Carnegie

Mellon provided opportunities, "professional development, networking and support programs

were developed for graduate women in the sciences and engineering and for graduate students of

color in all disciplines," inviting women and and underrepresented groups of women to further

their education (CMU, 2023). These programs were successful, as more women were

participating in the science and engineering fields, which prior were male dominated.

It is certainly difficult to identify the *first* Women's Leadership Program, as WLP's have

been in development throughout history in one way or another. The creation of Women's

Leadership Programs has not been linear but has progressed gradually over time. Women's

Leadership Programs have been shaped into how we know them today overtime through

evolving societal, legal and organizational contexts. There are some specific initiatives that have

laid the foundation for further development. On September 15 1995, more than 30,000 women

and representatives from 189 different countries band together to stand up for gender equality

and create The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Rockefeller Foundation, 2023). The

United Nations provides the entire Beijing Declaration, which can be found at the following link

(United Nations, un.org, n.d.): chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf. The Beijing Declaration and

Platform for Action is the beginning of the gender equality movement. At the Fourth World

Conference on Women, there was outstanding attention on the issue of gender inequality and

women's rights. Hillary Clinton, at the time of the Beijing Conference, was the First Lady of the

United States—her speech has echoed for years, as she states, "Human rights are women's rights

and women's rights are human rights," now, this has become a slogan associated with feminism

(UN Women, 2020). Without the Beijing Conference, there may not have been such

advancements in the fight toward gender equality. Moreover, the Beijing Conference was the

most comprehensive blueprint for women's equality in history, as it paved the way for all gender

equality movements to come (Rockefeller Foundation, 2023). The Declaration highlighted

twelve areas in which steps needed to be taken to create more equality and opportunity for

women (UN Women, 2020). These twelve areas were as follows (UN Women, 2020):

    1. Women and Poverty

    2. Education and Training of Women

    3. Women and Health

    4. Violence Against Women

    5. Women and Armed Conflict

6. Women and the Economy

7. Women in Power and Decision-making

8. Institutional Mechanisms

9. Human Rights of Women

10. Women and the Media

11. Women and the Environment

12. The Girl Child

The long and arduous history of women's suffrage and fight for equality fueled the motivation to create such a platform. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action began to confront issues such as environment, violence against women, poverty, equal participation of women in labor markets, STEM industries and women in senior management (Rockefeller Foundation, 2023).

The Beijing Conference and Platform for Action affected hundreds of countries, with an important agenda of the conference being gender roles. There was a commitment to balance the domestic responsibilities and paid work between women and men. In Thailand, Jaded Chouwilai is one of the few men who operates a business that supports working women. Many men still are not seeing women as equal, as Jaded Chouwilai states in an interview, "in a poll we found that 60% of men still think that household work is a job for women. For men and boys to achieve an equal world, they first need to realize that gender [inequality] is also their problem," highlighting the fact that men need to actively change the way they view women for society to progress to a better, more equal place (UN Women, Asia and the Pacific, 2020). Furthermore, the interviewer highlights the importance of policy change, "when changes are implemented, then change can occur" (UN Women, Asia and the Pacific, 2020). The mission statement of the Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action is a clear and concise assertion of the necessary steps

needed to foster opportunities and create a safer, more beneficial society for women:

> "The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment. It aims at accelerating
>
> the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of
>
> Women and at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of
>
> public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and
>
> political decision-making. This means that the principle of shared power and
>
> responsibility should be established between women and men at home, in the workplace
>
> and in the wider national and international communities. Equality between women and
>
> men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary
>
> and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed
>
> partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centered
>
> sustainable development. A sustained and long-term commitment is essential, so that
>
> women and men can work together for themselves, for their children and for society to
>
> meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. (Beijing Declaration and Platform for
>
> Action, 1995)"

With its comprehensive agenda, the Declaration created a global consensus on the

importance of acting against gender inequalities and violence toward women. Not only did the

Declaration state what should change, it also laid out specific ways in which countries could

bring about that change. This action-oriented aspect of the Declaration aided governments and

organizations in implementing plans of action that could be successful. Additionally, monitoring

progress and holding governments accountable to their commitments is an important aspect of

the declaration. There is a system that periodically reviews countries and assesses how they are

implementing action and progressing toward the goals outlined in the declaration. The Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action was not just a list of goals and outlines for action; it

represents a significant historical moment in which there was global work and agreement on

gender equality and women's rights. The Declaration got the ball rolling for other gender

equality projects, organizations and efforts in the future.

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) is the longest historical project that

looks at women/men in news reporting representation and focuses on how women are being

presented in the media (WACC, n.d. https://waccglobal.org/our-work/global-media-monitoring-

project-gmmp/). Additionally, the GMMP is the leader in advocating for change in the

representation of women in the world's news media. The monitoring is done by a variety of

people, ranging from community organizations to students and researchers. Beginning in 1995,

every five years this group of diverse bodies conducts research to try to create a more balanced

portrayal of women in the media (WACC, n.d.). An international group of researchers conduct

collaborative effort to shine a light on the biases in media and provide a look at the

representation of women in news and media. Having a diverse perspective can allow for a deeper

understanding of gender issues worldwide, while also offering an opportunity to address global

challenges in relation to gender representation in media. Through their research efforts, concrete

evidence of gender bias in the media is presented. The importance of this cannot be understated,

as many attitudes, opinions and public perceptions are crafted by what is presented in the media.

Moreover, the GMMP provides useful data that can be used to hold media organizations

accountable for the way in which they represent women in the media (WACC, n.d.). In turn, this

can help change the way that the public formulates opinions and ideas of women. Additionally,

the Global Media Monitoring project also focuses their research on intersectionality. They take a more holistic approach by including, for example, not only gender, but also race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability and how these factors relate to their representation in the media. Overall, the Global Media Monitoring project is notable for its crucial role in raising awareness of gender inequality in the media. The GMMP contributes to a more equitable society, as they hold the media accountable for their representations of women; helping to refigure the public opinions of women that are formed from their portrayal in news and media.

The Gendered Innovations project from Stanford University is an important project trying to find the crux of the gender inequality issue and find solutions. The discussion of this project by Barbara Wilcox can be found at the following link: https://news.stanford.edu/2015/02/03/gender-innovate-research-020315/#:~:text=The%20second%2C%20%E2%80%9CFix%20the%20Institutions,and%20gender%20analysis%20into%20research (2015). Led by lead researcher Londa Schiebinger, a team of sixty scientists, engineers and gender experts have been working to understand and analyze how gender can lead to new discoveries. Schiebinger believes that diving deep into gender studies, "has the potential to save lives and money," naming this the focus of the *Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine, Engineering, and Environment* (Wilcox, 2015). Schiebinger and colleagues have conducted over twenty-three case studies in which they used to show how gender analysis can lead to breakthroughs in science and technology. The purpose of prefacing research by adding a gender component is to avoid problems after research has been completed or products have been developed. Schiebinger's work has made headway in many other fields. In 2014, "EU Research and Innovation program identified 137 fields of science and technology

where gender analysis could benefit research. These include computer hardware and architecture, nanotechnology, oceanography, geosciences, organic chemistry, aeronautics, space medicine, biodiversity, ecology and biophysics, among others," clearly highlighting the fact that gender is heavily intertwined into many facets of life (Wilcox, 2015).

Schiebinger recently has edited the *Women and Gender in Science and Technology,* which is a reference work, including over thirty years of research from varying contexts. Some of the contributions include research from historians, sociologists, biologists, philosophers and cultural critics. All contributing a different look on the many facets of gender and how it is influenced by access of means of scientific production or a review of how science has studied male and female bodies (Wilcox, 2015). Schiebinger edited this research work in order to help shape future research and science. The edits made to the research are quite unique in their approach to studying gender and attempting to fix gender equality issues. "Fixing" the knowledge focuses to "integrate sex and gender analysis into research" (Wilcox, 2015).

Schiebinger focuses on *three* ways that gender equality can be promoted —

1. *Fixing the number of Women,* — centered on growing the number of women involved in science and engineering through training, providing affirmative action or offering opportunities (Wilcox, 2015).

2. *Fixing Institutions* — creating a safer environment in the media for women, enabling the possibility for women to have careers, done by structural change within research organizations (Wilcox, 2015).

3. *Fixing the Knowledge* — Research, changing the way knowledge is produced and consumed, Altering the way in which this knowledge is used and put into action (Wilcox, 2015).

These three actions are rooted in the issue that the National Institutes of Health do not require women or minorities to be included in preliminary research, creating potentially dangerous situations. Schiebinger points out that, "80% of rodent drug studies are conducted using male models," meaning women are ostracized from the beginning stages of research (Wilcox, 2015). Researchers are overlooking the possibility to broaden their understanding of the differing biological systems from their beginnings, which Schiebinger argues should be one of the main objects of science. Schiebinger and colleagues work has made improvements in research methods, as the U.S. National Institutes of Health decided to require sex and gender inclusion in future preclinical research (Wilcox, 2015). Still, there is a lot of progress to be made, but the *Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine, Engineering, and Environment* research has made important steps toward equality in research and scientific discovery.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Global Media Monitoring Project and the Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine, Engineering, and Environment have played a key role in laying the foundation for the gender equality movement. Moreover, Women's Leadership Programs adopt and align with the core gender equality values that these projects and research have developed overtime. Taking up the strategies presented by these programs to combat gender bias within WLP's can foster participation and success of women in leadership positions. Additionally, movements like the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasize the importance of women's rights from an international perspective. Basing a Women's Leadership Program on these ideals will inevitably foster a more inclusive and diverse outlook on women's leadership. When Women's Leadership Programs support the philosophies and aims of The Beijing Declaration it bolsters their ability to empower, promote awareness and

support women in leadership positions. Additionally, it helps to support the goals of a gender equal society, gender equality in leadership and safety for women, which consequently strengthens their own effectiveness. The Beijing Deceleration presents tools and strategies that can be utilized to address biases and successfully promote women leaders and further their careers. Standing by the goals and values of the Beijing Platform for Action, Gendered Innovations Project and the Global Media Monitoring Project, Women's Leadership Programs may be able to further their success in achieving gender equality.

Why does Gender Bias exist?

As discussed above, Women have endured a long history of inequality and suffrage. Everything they have done has not only been in the fight toward a more equitable society, but also a fight for human rights. Even with all the historical background of women and their fight towards equality, the question remains: Why does Gender Bias exist? There is no one answer to this question, however in this section, a systematic review of the reasons behind unequal opportunity will be presented. The answer is a combination of many different factors including historical, cultural, social, personal, institutional and societal reasons. Although there are several factors that add to the entire problem, there is a common theme amongst them all; limiting the freedom of women. Many of the reasons behind unequal opportunity stem from women not having the same opportunities and freedom of making choices as men do. Moreover, it is a democratic issue. Meaning gender differences in leadership reflect and interrogate developments in the democratic system.

Societal norms contribute to the continuation of gender inequality. Often, these false

ideas about women and men prescribe actions, behaviors, career paths, personality traits or looks

to men and to women. Straying from societal norms can instill fear, as many face discrimination

or bias when acting out of what is typically considered to be "normal." Furthermore, from

childhood, some children are taught to understand what is strictly feminine and what is strictly

masculine. Through the media they consume, the family they are raised by, the peers they

associate with and the place in which they are educated all contribute to the unconscious biases

they may develop over time. Especially media that is consumed from a young age can shape

ideas and therefore perpetuate gendered stereotypes, contributing to unequal opportunity later in

life. Movies, magazines, television, forms of advertising and social media usually perpetuate

traditional gender roles and therefore reinforce false ideas about gender. Deeply rooted in history,

many societies have been or continue to be patriarchal; men are responsible for holding positions

of power and are privileged in comparison to women. As these patriarchies have been around for

many years, their ideals and views of women have become ingrained in society, leading to

gender biases and perceptions that influence people's attitudes and behaviors today.

Despite the progress that has been made for women over the years, there are still large

gaps in access and opportunities when compared to men. Soken-Huberty elaborates on the

staggering statistics pointing out that, "around the world, women still have less access to

education than men. One-fourth of young women between 15-24 will not finish primary school"

(Soken-Huberty, n.d.). When women have unequal access to education, it damages their ability

to grasp the same opportunities as men. Lack of employment equality is a major contributor to

gender inequality, as "only 6 countries in the world give women the same legal work rights as

men" (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). Furthermore, in some societies, there is a line drawn to segregate

"gendered" jobs. Meaning that some societies believe that women are less equipped than men to

do a specific job. Some societies have a perception of women being weaker, more emotional and

therefore "unfit" to do the same job as men — usually these jobs are the highest paid and come

with the most responsibility. Some countries also do not have legal protection for women and the

violence that they endure. As Soken-Huberty points out, "over one billion women don't have

legal protection against domestic sexual violence or domestic economic violence," highlighting a

debilitating disparity for women (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). Women are not able to live in the same

way men can without restriction. Women need to constantly be on the lookout, so to say, and

therefore they cannot thrive in an unsafe environment. When women can gain a position in the

workplace, there is not always laws in place to protect them. For instance, many countries do not

have laws prohibiting harassment in the workplace, in school and even in public spaces. Women

are forced to make decisions that impact their career in order to protect themselves from these

potential dangers. Consequently, their goals and aspirations have to be put aside, so they can

protect themselves from harm. All while men are claiming positions in the workplace and

furthering their careers, contributing to gender inequality. Furthermore, in some countries and

societies, women do not have control over their own bodies, when they marry or when they have

children. Soken-huberty in her article points out that, according to the World Health

Organization, "over 200 million women who don't want to get pregnant are not using

contraception — some do not have access to birth control, lack of options, or cultural/religious

opposition" (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). These women who do not have control over their bodies and

become pregnant are forced to be dependent on someone else, perpetuating the loss of their

freedom. Along the same line of access to contraception is access to healthcare. Lack of education and opportunity result in a higher percentage of women living in poverty. As a result of having less access and opportunities in the workforce, women are less likely than men to be able to pay for healthcare. Now, women are not able to seek medical attention and may experience diseases that affect women more than men, such as autoimmune disorders and chronic pain conditions (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). Some societies also unfortunately have discrimination embedded within the medical system. Some doctors may be more likely to dismiss women, widening the inequality gap in healthcare between men and women.

Structural and Institutional bias is a large part of unequal opportunity. Ingrained within the systems, policies and practices of institutions and structures, this form of bias leads to unequal opportunity. For underrepresented groups of people, this structural and institutional bias can heavily affect their ability to succeed. This systemic racism may not be visible, but it is "deeply embedded in systems, laws, written policies and entrenched practices and beliefs that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment and oppression of people of color, with adverse consequences" (Braveman, et al., 2022). Some organizations or institutions could have policies that favor one group over another, contributing to unequal educational, employment, and healthcare opportunities. Within these institutions and organizations, there is often a lack of representation in leadership positions. Without having a diverse and intersectional body of employees, representation is limited, and marginalized groups are unable to participate in decision-making and policy creation, furthering the unequal opportunity. Furthermore, those making decisions are capable of deciding where resources are allocated. Meaning, structural and institutional biases can influence the distribution of these resources. An unequal distribution of

resources may lead to some groups having better or more vast opportunities than others. This bias extends also to the hiring and promotional process within organizations and institutions. Career advancement is heavily dependent on who is making the decisions. Some groups of people, be it women, or people of color, may have less opportunity than their male or white co-workers because of the structural and institutional biases that exist within their organization. For example, HR practices in the workplace have been proven to increase gender inequalities. Cailin S. Stamarski and Leanne S. Son Hing discuss this phenomenon in their work, *Gender Inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism.* They discuss how the workplace is littered with inequalities that directly affect women, one of them being HR practices. They determined that there are two potential ways women are discriminated against through Human Resources. The first being "institutional discrimination stemming from organizational structures, processes, and practices and the second being the personal discrimination stemming from organizational decision makers' level of sexism" (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Overall, their findings prove that the institutional discrimination within Human Resources can contribute to the discrimination women face in the workplace. Furthermore, "gender inequalities within the structures, processes and practices are interrelated and may affect the others, creating a self-reinforcing system that can perpetuate institutional discrimination throughout the organization and that can lead to discrimination in HR policies, decision-making, and enactment" (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Overall, this work is simply one example of many that prove the importance of addressing structural and institutional bias. Integral to this process is confronting biases within the systems,

institutions, policies and practices, advocating for inclusivity within institutions in order to ensure fair and equal opportunities for everyone involved.

Another prominent factor contributing to unequal opportunity and gender inequality is the lack of religious freedom. Some societies religious beliefs limit the actions of women. In extreme societies, such as those with ISIS, religious freedoms are heavily restricted, consequently impacting gender inequality. Soken-Huberty highlights the effect of lack of religious freedom on women, as she states, "in a study performed by Georgetown University and Brigham Young University, researchers were able to connect religious intolerance with women's ability to participate in the economy, when there's more religious freedom, an economy becomes more stable thanks to women's participation," meaning when women are oppressed, other important facets of society are also negatively impacted (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). Having women be free to participate in the economy can be beneficial, as it can lead to a more diverse body of workers, which consequently boosts productivity and therefore triggers a more stable economy. Furthermore, economies and businesses suffer, as ostracizing women can lead to a less innovative and diverse team. Including different minds and different people fosters a healthy, creative work environment in which new ideas, products and services can be made also through a female lens. A more productive and skilled workforce can be created when women are allowed to use their full potential to better an organization, product or industry. Women bolster economies and offer crucial insight from a much-needed, female, perspective.

The impacts of the lack of representation in the workforce on unequal opportunity and gender inequality are compounded by a lack of political representation for women. A lack of women in political positions has been a problem for centuries, one that is still existent today.

Laura Clancy and Sarah Austin highlight the major disparities of female political leadership in their article titled, *Fewer than a third of UN member states have ever had a woman leader*. They highlight that women currently serve as the head of government in just 13 of the 193 member states of the United Nations (Clancy & Austin, 2023). Out of all 193 member states, only 59 have ever had a female leader in their history (Clancy & Austin, 2023). Clancy and Austin make prominent the facts, as they state, "At the country level, Bangladesh has had the most years of leadership by women since 1945, 29 years. Sri Lanka, Norway, New Zealand, Germany, India and the Philippines were each led by women for at least 15 years. Only five other countries have had a decade or more of leadership by women," emphasizing the distinction between the number of years served by women, than men (Clancy & Austin, 2023). Although there has been progress in this area in recent years, female political leaders are scarce and underrepresented in the political process. This has negative consequences for women in general, as men are less likely to be attentive to and discuss publicly issues that affect women. Some of these issues being childcare, contraceptives, women's health, parental leave, gender equality laws and gender-based violence are just some of the issues that are ignored by male political leaders.

Continually, racism plays a role in the inequality of women. Specifically for women of color, racism effects their lives in a myriad of ways. For example, racism affects job opportunities, career advancement, amount of pay and additionally how they are viewed by legal and healthcare systems (Soken-Huberty). Racism and gender inequality are heavily intertwined. Soken-Huberty makes evident the historical systemic racism that has contributed to gender-inequality, as she states, "According to Sally Kitch, a professor and author, European settlers in Virginia decided that work could be taxed based on the race of the woman performing the work.

African women's work was 'labor,' so it was taxable, while work performed by English women was 'domestic' and not taxable. The pay gaps between white women and women of color continues that legacy of discrimination and contributes to gender inequality," stressing the historical racism that still affects women of color today (Soken-Huberty, n.d.). The intersection of race and gender must be considered together, as the experiences of women of color cannot be understood by only focusing on one aspect of their lives. Having a complete and well-rounded understanding of the history of racism and inequality is essential to addressing modern-day social issues. Being educated in history can offer an opportunity to move toward a more equitable future, one in which intersecting forms of oppression are addressed and steps are taken to end this injustice.

A less obvious, but very important contributor to unequal opportunity and gender inequality is the mindset of a certain society. The way people think of and perceive women can have a large impact on gender inequality. Cultural norms, traditions and social expectations contribute to the shaping of mindsets about gender inequality. Societies may value men and women differently — this differentiation can take place in the workforce, legal systems or healthcare systems. Negative mindsets of women contribute to the overall inequality that may exist in a society. By having beliefs about unequal gender, it can affect the progress that is attempting to be made to close the gender gap. For instance, having negative beliefs about women leaders, inadvertently affects their representation in leadership positions. Moreover, these cultural norms and traditions can contribute to implicit biases about women. Meaning they are ingrained ideals that impose unconscious ideas and associations of gender to specific characteristics or abilities, i.e. men with powerful leadership positions. Even though they are

unconscious, some people may be affected by their mindset without them fully understanding, and consequently these biases can shape decision-making processes in different areas such as hiring, promotion, and education, which result in more gender inequality and broadens the prejudice against women. Furthermore, these societal mindsets are a way to create the normalization of double-standards for women and men. Some may associate a certain trait with "femininity" as well as some with "masculinity." These double standards are contributors of societal "gender roles" and unfair treatment of women. An example of a harmful double standard is the idea that men in power are considered assertive, successful and respectable. On the other hand, when women are in the same position, acting the same way, they are considered bossy, rude or emotional. In a 2012 study published in Research in Organizational Behavior, it was discovered that there are many factors that stand in the way of the professional advancement of women. This study found that there are descriptive gender stereotypes (ideas about what women *are* like) and prescriptive gender stereotypes (ideas about what women *should* be like (Lakritz, 2022). Both stereotypes alter the way women are perceived, impacting their professional lives. Lakrtiz highlights the fact that, "when women exhibit a more assertive leadership style, stereotypically associated with men, they face 'disapproval and social penalties' that keep them from getting promoted," pointing out the detrimental effects of gender-based stereotypes (2022). Women face all sorts of double standards in relation to their sexual history to the way they dress and face heavy criticism about the way they look. Women are faced with more expectations in terms of reproduction and caregiving, limiting their career opportunities. By reinforcing mindsets, attitudes and behaviors about women, gender inequalities continue to strengthen biases

and stereotypes. By educating people, spreading awareness, offering advocacy and fighting for policy change, a more equitable, fair and safe society can be facilitated.

The consequences of the perpetuation of gender bias and unequal opportunity echo throughout society. The United Nations in their article titled, *Inequality — Bridging the Divide,* discusses different ways and factors that drive inequality. An important highlight in this article is that "high levels of inequality of opportunity discourage skills accumulation, choke economic and social mobility, and human development and, consequently, depress economic growth. It also entrenches uncertainty, vulnerability and insecurity, undermines trust in institutions and government, increases social discord and tensions and trigger violence and conflicts," providing insight onto the many consequences of unequal opportunity (United Nations, 2020).

Overall, unequal opportunity develops political underrepresentation, consequently limiting the diversity of perspective in office and decision-making processes. Violence and Harassment, reinforcement of stereotypes and mental and emotional health are also large concerns because of unequal opportunity and gender-inequality. Additionally, these gender biases can perpetuate and affect future generations. Addressing these gender biases and unequal opportunities, implementing change, and challenging stereotypes can help progress society to a more equal and just position.

Thematic Analysis of Effective Qualities in Women's Leadership Program:

In this section, there will be an analysis of existing literature on the qualities of an effective Women's Leadership Programs. The purpose of this literature review is to highlight common themes found across the existing research, in the hopes of gaining a more well-rounded

understanding of what has already been discovered and what is successful in advancing the effectiveness of WLP's. Throughout this review, major themes that were identified will be discussed; Intersectionality, networking, transformational learning, women-only programs, and being seen, heard and vulnerable. Additionally, this review aims to aid in the development of new criteria in which Women's Leadership Programs can be evaluated upon.

The purpose of this literature review is to identify common themes used in the evaluation of Women's Leadership Programs. This review will be making use of a qualitative research design, using several scholarly and non-scholarly, peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed studies and articles. Existing research will be analyzed to understand further the concept of effective qualities of a Women's Leadership Program. Making use of this non-numerical data to understand common themes within the literature will allow for better knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of Women's Leadership Programs. Using a thematic analysis, this review will comb through data, with the goal of identifying repeated patterns. These repeated patterns, or themes, will be used to interpret meaning to answer the research question *under what conditions can women leadership programs be effective?*

Included within this systematic review were studies and articles written in English, spanning across a diverse body of academic disciplines, such as social sciences, gender studies, business and women's studies. A large amount of these studies were focused on the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs. Studies that used a quantitative or mixed-method approach to their analysis were excluded from the review. Other studies that were excluded included those that did not evaluate the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs in some form. Some fell out of the publication date requirements, meaning they were published more than fifteen years

ago. Many publications were omitted as they were duplicates of existing literature already reviewed for this research. Others were exclusive, in that the full PDF publication was not accessible without special credentials or were only accessible upon payment for access and some were omitted due to the language.

Analyzing the literature allowed for the development of the criteria to evaluate the Women's Leadership Programs further on in this research. In their article *Experiences and outcomes of a women's leadership development program: A phenomenological investigation,* Brue and Brue discuss how within their interviews of participants of WLP's, women stated what they believed to be the most effective aspects of their programs. They highlight beneficial aspects of a WLP, as they state, "Women's Leadership Programs offer opportunities for cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth: engaging learning activities, social capital development, and related model methodologies were perceived as most helpful in leadership development." (Brue & Brue, 2019). This study provides very useful insight into the true experiences of former participants of WLP's and the effect they have on their participants. Women were able to boost their self-confidence by viewing other female leaders, harnessing the ability to truly, "learn to listen, look for those opportunities to step into a situation or moment and take charge of it. For me it was finding a way to hear myself," highlighting the importance of diverse tools and lessons to focus on how leaders think, feel and act (Brue & Brue, 2019). Moreover, Brue & Brue discuss how a very important part of a Women's Leadership program is the actual content, activities and lessons within it. In their article *Rethinking Women's Leadership Development: Voices from the Trenches,* the authors highlight the fact that "effectively developing women leaders takes work on the personal, interpersonal and organizational levels,

and that these levels are all interrelated and interdependent" (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017).

Their research revealed eight major emerging themes (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017):

First, on the Personal Level —

      1. Vulnerability

      2. Structured space for reflection

      3. Being seen and heard

Secondly, on the Interpersonal Level —

      4. Intersectionality

      5. Supportive community for vulnerability

      6. Networking

And lastly, on the Institutional Level —

      7. Cultivation of authentic leadership

      8. Changed culture

These eight emerging themes highlight the fact that the development of women's leadership begins with individual introspection, needs institutional support and it is necessary to then engage with other women to do identity work (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). Although not all these themes discussed above are integral to the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs, there are several of them that will be discussed throughout this literature review. Intersectionality, Networking, women only programs, being seen, heard and vulnerable and supportive community for vulnerability are a few of the themes that were also discovered throughout this thematic analysis. These themes were the most prominent throughout all of the

literature analyzed and therefore could be considered the most pertinent to the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs.

A major theme that was pulled after analyzing this body of literature was the importance of intersectionality within Women Leadership Programs. Having an intersectional body of women participating in a Leadership Program is an essential component to its effectiveness. Throughout the literature, almost every article analyzed highlights intersectionality as one of the necessary factors in promoting a more well-rounded, open-minded body of women. By adopting an intersectional perspective, women leaders can comprehensively examine their role as a female leader. Intersectional approaches allow women to understand more clearly the good and the bad, the experiences and the struggles of other women with diverse identities. One of the two most important aspects of intersectionality that are central to Women's Leadership Programs are based on racial and motherhood identities (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). In their article, *Rethinking Women's Leadership Development: Voices from the Trenches*, this group of researchers discusses the experiences of women who have participated in a WLP. Women who participated in this program stated that they were searching for a "safe space," in which they could discuss their roles as mothers and the work/life balance (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). Being able to discuss freely and relate to other women who have experienced similar challenges creates a network of women who are able to bond over their career journeys. Furthermore, these participants were able to bond over other common issues faced by women in the workplace — workplace attire, experiencing pregnancy while working and perceptions that arise from being pregnant at work (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). The role of intersectionality needs to be heavily considered in the creation of women's leadership programs. As women who long to be

involved in politics, become a leader or simply advance their career come from all different backgrounds and have identities that include a mixture of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality and other cultural differences (Debebe, Anderson, Bilimoria, Vinnicombe, 2016). Intersectionality is so critical because without it, WLP's would likely adopt a one-size-fits-all perspective. The women who fall outside of this very narrow perspective would likely experience ostracism. Furthermore, intersectionality in Women's Leadership Programs increases the likelihood that women from all walks of life have more of an equal opportunity to grab ahold of leadership positions and advance their careers. One of the foundational aspects of Women's Leadership Programs is intersectionality. Intersectionality empowers women to have a more thorough understanding of their own experiences and the experiences of others around them. Empowering women (specifically those who have intersectional identity) allows them to gain more confidence and have a strong, resilient attitude in their career, professional and personal life. Finally, without an intersectional approach, Women's Leadership Programs cannot be legitimate or credible. For many of the reasons discussed above, an intersectional approach proves that an organization or company is committed to equality and inclusion. Having an intersectional Women's Leadership Program provides the versatile skillset to navigate complex challenges that they may come across throughout their career.

The next theme that was collected while combing through the literature was that women only programs are more productive and effective than those that include male participants. The literature highlighted that women only leadership programs create a safe environment for women by creating a safe environment that buffers participation from gender pressure (Debebe,

Anderson, Vinnicombe, 2016). This safe environment gives women the confidence to speak

freely, sharing their challenges and experiences without the fear of being judged. These free

discussions empower women to honestly and openly discuss topics, experiences or situations that

they may have usually kept to themselves out of fear of exclusion or scrutiny. Furthermore,

women are more likely to enjoy this style of program as, "gender-sensitive teaching and learning

practices are congruent with women's preferred relational learning styles, putting women

learners at ease," meaning these teaching practices create an inclusive environment in which the

teaching styles align with how women learn best; connecting women together and allowing

participants to feel comfortable allows them to succeed inside and outside of the program

(Debebe, Anderson, Vinnicombe, 2016). Furthermore, it is believed that women only leadership

programs are more beneficial, as they allow for women to improve their self-confidence

alongside women who have similar goals. These women only programs foster a safe-space in

which women can be vulnerable, express their feelings, discuss their experiences and feel as

though they are being seen and heard by other women who can relate to their stories. Women can

learn from the experiences of successful role models in a supportive environment (Clarke, 2011).

Women only leadership programs are a key tool in aiding women to achieve their full potential.

For example, women only leadership programs are a great addition to other forms of leadership

training such as mentoring and coaching. Moreover, WLP's that are strictly women only, "enable

women to clarify their leadership ambitions, recognize their leadership strengths and access

leadership positions. Organizations that support such learning experiences will benefit from a

wider pool of talent than before" (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010). Clearly, this literature is stating

that not only do women-only leadership programs hold countless benefits for the participants, but

also for the organizations that hire these women who have been honing their leadership skills, gaining confidence and building a network of other women professionals.

In their article, *Women's Leadership Development Programs: Lessons learned and new frontiers,* Debebe, Anderson and Vinnicombe discuss their thoughts on "transformational learning," and how it is effective in the context of Women's Leadership Programs. Within their article, Transformational Learning is defined as "encountering a disorienting dilemma, meaning making and achieving transformative insight" (2016). These authors believe that specific WLP's that utilize transformational learning through activities, research and/or practice are more successful in the long run. "Encountering a disorienting dilemma," in this context, is when a woman encounters an event that changes the way she thinks, feels or produces an undesirable outcome. Then, women will seek to make meaning of this event/problem/dilemma through research, observation, having conversations or seeking new information to reveal more about the dilemma (Debebe, Anderson & Vinnicombe, 2016). Finally, there comes the third stage of the process which is called "achieving transformative insight," or gathering an understanding of the dilemma, which resolves the situation and provides the woman with a newfound sense of meaning. This transformative realization alters the way in which women see, think and feel not only in the present, but in their future career and personal lives. During this transitional phase, newfound ideas and perceptions are connected to the real world, simultaneously disrupting old ways of thinking — prompting changes to be made. This transformational learning process is vital in Women's Leadership Programs because they foster transformative change. This process helps women become aware of problems that are prevalent to their experiences as women and professionals and create a safe space to explore new ways of thinking, acting and solving

problems. Women's Leadership Programs foster transformative learning, as they create a safe space in which participants are guarded from gender-related pressures (Debebe, Anderson & Vinnicombe, 2016). This theory of transformational learning is key in the design of Women Leadership Programs. Utilizing a transformational learning perspective allows for participants to "gain awareness of unhelpful habitual patterns of thinking and acting that contribute to leadership difficulties, accessing resources that affirm the learners gendered experiences, and achieving breakthrough insights to guide future practice. In WLPs this occurs not only though the provision of an all-women setting, but also through gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices" (Debebe, Anderson & Vinnicombe, 2016).

Women only Leadership Programs bolster the importance of structural and institutional change. Their aim is to both enable women to bolster their leadership identity, all while instituting the skillset to deal with gender-related challenges and also maneuver through the complex personal and situational factors that will inevitably be presented throughout their leadership careers. Researchers Debebe, Anderson and Vinnicombe highlight the fact that women's leadership presence is a mixture of a woman's style of engagement, their unique voice and their "positive contributions," or actions/inititaves/ and efforts made that benefit an organization (2016). Women's leadership presence contains four main components:

1. Self-confidence: a sense of sureness in oneself

2. Self-efficacy: the confidence in one's ability to accomplish their goals

3. Influence: transformational, communal, and often indirect and tempered strategies to lead change (Debebe, Anderson & Vinnicombe, 2016)

4. Authenticity: everyday actions that align with one's values and beliefs

Women's leadership presence translates into many important aspects of not only a woman's personal life, but also their professional and leadership qualities. For example, areas that are influenced by the leadership presence could be communication style, emotional intelligence, adaptability, resilience, collaborative skills, ethical leadership, diversity and global perspective are only a few many aspects that could be impacted. This Women's Leadership Presence is a helpful tool in the skillset of a female leader, and it begins from women only leadership programs and the safe environment they create.

A theme that is involved with women only leadership programs is the idea of being seen, heard and vulnerable. As women only programs create a safe space in which women can feel comfortable to express their true emotions, they consequently foster the ability to be vulnerable. When women are vulnerable, they can freely open up about their past experiences, the struggles and the challenges that they have encountered throughout their lives. Opening up, voicing their opinions and confronting emotions with other women allows them to relate to each other. Relating with each other empowers women to have the confidence to express themselves and use their voices despite fear of consequence. When women relate to one another over shared experiences and troubles, they feel as though they are being seen and heard. The experiences, perspectives, emotions and unique challenges of participants are validated, as women are actively listening, encouraging participation and fostering a connection between each other. Recognizing the experiences of women will also promote inclusive and diverse perspectives and ways of thinking. This is increasingly important, as the lives and experiences of women from all backgrounds, religions, races, sexual orientations, genders and ethnicities are acknowledged. Being seen, heard and vulnerable promotes a supportive learning environment. In such an

environment women feel safe. This safety is vital, as it welcomes genuine discussion and fosters personal growth, which will translate into their professional careers. This vulnerability also promotes fearless leadership development. In her article *How Leading with Vulnerability Accelerates Women's Leadership,* Marie-Claude Brandys discusses how being vulnerable is an essential leadership quality. She highlights the importance, as she states, "Whether it's coming to work as your real self, working in a new role, trying a different leadership strategy, or asking someone for advice, leading with vulnerability can help us be fearless and direct our teams more effectively. It lets us find common ground with our colleagues and opens channels of communication, which in turn leads to constructive collaboration and challenge resolution," highlighting vulnerabilities positive benefits (Brandys, 2020). Being seen, heard and vulnerable contributes to the success, empowerment, trust-building, inclusivity and ability to develop authentic leadership skills among women participants.

Another vital aspect of Women's Leadership Programs highlighted throughout the literature is networking. Networking is a vital component of WLP's, as it provides women with a vast amount of opportunity. In their article, *Understanding "Why" One University's Women's Leadership Development Strategies are So Effective,* DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer and Wheatley discuss how their research showed in what ways WLP's were effective. These researchers found that WLP's thrive when there is relatedness, competencies, and autonomy; with one of the most important aspects being the ability to network (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Neidermeyer &Wheatley, 2017). They define relatedness as when members/participants create a sense of togetherness or belonging inside their program. Relating to one another is bolstered through networking, mentorship, personal growth and being mindful of others (DeFrank-Cole,

Latimer, Neidermeyer &Wheatley, 2017). Within the article, *Re-thinking Women's Leadership Development: Voices from the Trenches,* researchers discuss the importance of Networking, not only during WLP's, but also the long-term effects it holds after the program is completed. Selzer, Howton and Wallace discuss how networking is integral to the life of a professional. Not only in terms of Women's Leadership Programs, but also in general, networking helps in advancing career opportunities. A truly tangible achievement that one can gain from a WLP is career advancement. Knowing people or being able to network with other professional women with strong careers, allows for opportunities to grow. Women can collaborate with others, seek job opportunities or gain promotions that may have not been available or publicly advertised. This so-called hidden job market is available through connections and networking, as a vast amount of career opportunities are gained through personal connections. Having other women to lean on for career/professional advice is a great way to learn from the experiences of others. Being a mentor for another woman or having a mentor can be extremely beneficial for both parties. Both women can learn and connect with the other over shared experiences. Women can drive each other and help one another overcome challenges, solve problems and foster a diverse perspective that can aid them in their professional career.

Intersectionality, networking, being seen, heard and vulnerable, women only programs, and transformational learning are the major themes that emerged after examining the existing literature on the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs. These themes gave an opportunity to conceptualize what is working, and also what needs to be improved upon within WLP's. Women's Leadership Programs are intricate, multi-faceted organizations that are not simply labeled effective or non-effective based on an analysis of pre-existing research, even

though they offer an idea of what aids in the success of the participants. Collectively, these themes provide a foundation for future programs to build upon. Having these building blocks will make it easier to adapt to the changing and evolving necessities of Women's Leadership Programs in the future. Moreover, it is increasingly necessary to continue the examination of effectiveness, which is mapped out in the subsequent section, in which this research discusses ten criteria that were developed to continue research and cover a wider scope of elements that are related to Women's Leadership Programs. This continuation of research is in the hopes that other effective attributes can be discovered and used to enhance leadership programs and their effectiveness overall. All in hopes that it will lead to organizational successes and hopefully, better opportunities for women.

Methods:

Throughout this section, an analysis will be conducted of five Women's Leadership Programs. She Should Run, Running Start, Emily's List, Women's Leadership Institute and Women's Media Center will be analyzed using ten criteria. This analysis will explore which qualities foster success within these programs and where these programs can benefit from improvement. An elaboration of the decision-making process in terms of the programs and also the criteria will be explored.

In this analysis of effective qualities of a Women's Leadership Program, the selection of the programs that would be included in the evaluation was intentional. The programs that were chosen were specifically selected to showcase a range of WLP design — demonstrating what is working and what needs to be improved upon in the construction of a WLP. Furthermore, out of

the initial ten Women's Leadership Programs, these five were intentionally selected, as they demonstrate a wide range of WLP design. Through extensive research on these programs, ten were omitted due to a number of factors such as limited availability of information and due to the fact that some were outdated or no longer active. Others were omitted due to their reputation and questionable values. Moreover, some programs did not contribute a substantial amount of information to the identified criteria and overall purpose of the research. The consideration of these programs was purposeful, in that they showcase a wide-range of WLP design, including positive attributes and areas of improvement.

Developing the criteria was integral to the overall goal of attempting to measure the conditions of an effective Women's Leadership Program. After reviewing the literature already researched on the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs, a few themes were adopted into this set of criteria to ensure a fundamental basis for the analysis. Then, other criteria were developed to form ten necessary qualities of a WLP to be considered within the analysis. The development of the criteria was aimed to include a holistic outlook of WLP design. A number of the criteria were purposefully different than those found within the existing research, in hopes of expanding the knowledge of effective qualities of WLP's. The meticulous decision to include the following criteria is aimed at providing a thorough analysis of the five programs. A set of questions was applied to each program to perform the analysis. These questions aim to elaborate on the decision-making process of which criteria to include, the importance of each criteria and how they contribute to the overall goal of expanding the knowledge of effective WLP qualities.

1. **What are the goals and objectives of the program?** The objectives and goals of each program need to be clearly outlined in order to measure success. Are they trying to

increase the number of leadership positions held by women? Teaching important skills of success? Aiding women in creating a network of other successful female leaders?

2. **What are the programs' mission and values?** Assessing what the program holds important within their organization is crucial to understanding what they stand for. Are their missions and values clear? Do they align with a gender equal perspective and stand for the empowerment of women?

3. **Are participants satisfied?** Assessing through reviews and feedback of participants. Did participants feel as though the program was beneficial? Did the program provide them with new and useful knowledge? Is there a platform for women to express their feedback?

4. **What are the long-term outcomes of the program?** Defining the long-term outcomes of the program allows for the ability to visualize the program's lasting effects. What is the long-term impact of the program? Did the program have a positive impact on their career path?

5. **Who is promoting the program?** Knowing who promotes the program is crucial, as promoters should align with the programs' values and missions. The programs' legitimacy is bolstered when the promoters are also aligned with their values.

6. **Who is funding the program?** Knowing who funds the program is important, as funders should align with the programs' values. The funding should be free of ethical concerns, as funding sources can have an effect on the content of the program. Transparency is key when considering who funds the program.

7. **Is the program diverse and inclusive? Intersectional?** The programs must be all-inclusive and incorporate a diverse body of women. Not only should the program be diverse, but also intersectionality is important to foster equal opportunity for all women. The programs should reflect the real world, in that they are inclusive of all backgrounds, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, disabilities and more.

8. **What kind of activities are included within the program?** The content of the program is one of the most important aspects. Content within the program should be effective in that it prepares women for leadership, teaches new skills and creates an opportunity to join a diverse network of female leaders.

9. **Is the program sustainable long-term?** The programs effectiveness in the long-term is difficult to measure. It can be done by observing the career advancement of participants and achievements of the alumni from the program. Additionally, the leadership positions held by participants after the completion of the program is another way to measure long-term success.

10. **Is the program affordable?** The affordability of the program is an important factor. If the program is expensive, it may not be reasonable for all women, meaning the program will not be inclusive and therefore does not meet the other criteria to be considered effective.

Gaining sound knowledge of the details of each programs' design and delivery allows for a more well-rounded analysis. By applying this set of questions, each program was analyzed, and it is then stated as to why they do, or do not, meet the necessary criteria.

Women's Leadership Programs are committed to aiding women in their journey to leadership. These programs aim to be inclusive by establishing diversity within their organizations in order to amplify voices from all types of people. The main approach to success within these programs is to educate women. Some schools may focus on media training, others may hone in on *how* to campaign through networking and building a personal brand. Some programs pride themselves on their research and exploring pertinent issues that women *will* face in their professional careers. By providing legitimate opportunities for women to learn leadership skills, media training and tools to become successful in their careers, Women's Leadership Programs help women develop confidence in themselves and their potential to overcome hardships. Organizations like these create female role-models for women of all ages. By putting successful female leaders on platforms, women can visualize the opportunities they have in their careers. Women's Leadership Programs back women in their career as they foster leadership skills, build networks, acknowledge obstacles and showcase successful female leadership. This research will explore women leadership training programs and what these organizations are doing to improve and educate women.

In recent years, there have been many efforts by different organizations to help bolster the success of women in politics. By educating and preparing women with the appropriate knowledge, practice and skills, these organizations and leadership programs are aiming to change the future. These organizations assist women in establishing a skillset to handle media relations and deal with media related issues in relation to their political careers. For example, *She Should Run*, is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. that works to boost the number of women that contemplate running for office. *She Should Run* aims to make campaign running

accessible to women who have never considered themselves ready to run for public office. Through the *She Should Run* leadership program, 40, 218 women have explored the possibility of public office (She Should Run, 2020). She Should Run highlights their motivation to recognize diverse voices, challenge the male-dominated political world and in-turn facilitate change through possibility.

She Should Run's main approach to preparing women is by educating women on the five major issues that negatively impact them — economy, climate change, reproductive health, gun violence and racism. She Should Run fit the criteria for organizations considered within the research. Their goals are specific and clear within their website — to "increase the number of women from all walks of life considering elected office, we have a bold goal to inspire 250,000 women to take their first steps toward public leadership and join our community by 2030," outlining their long-term commitment to gender equality (She Should Run, 2022). She Should Run aims to have 3,000 women join their community and begin their journey towards leadership (She Should Run, 2022). Moreover, She Should Run has started a program titled *The Way Forward.* The Way Forward is an initiative within local communities in which women are encouraged to tap into their leadership potential. This program has shown concrete results, as one-hundred individuals signed on to participate in the project before January 1, 2022. Additionally, She Should Run is funded by The Women's Funding Network. This network is an organization that provides funding to gender justice leaders and advocate organizations in an attempt to help them reach their goals. She Should Run is also promoted by several partners who share their beliefs and values. For example, Youthtothepeople has helped to reach women and allowed them to realize their leadership potential. Other promoters include Jayla Whitfield-

Anderson (national reporter), She + Geeks Out (Women's Leadership Program), and the Crimsonbridge Foundation (a philanthropic youth organization). Outlined on their website are also their long-term goals, in a step-by-step process. Some of these goals include, developing new ways to ensure anyone who wants to participate can benefit from their attempts to educate and foster a sense of community, and focusing on issues that are prominent to women. She Should Run offers their workshops at no cost to attendees, however custom workshops can be crafted specifically for an organization's needs, and the price is a reflection of the group size, format, and number of workshops offered. Workshops can be executed in a variety of modalities (virtually or in-presence) and can be executed for groups as small as five women, or more than five hundred. For this reason, She Should Run's cost is justifiable.

Past and present participants of She Should Run make it evident that they are satisfied with the program. Chelsea W. States, "After participating in the She Should Run Incubator and taking a good look at my personal story, I realized I have more power and grit than I give myself credit for," another participant, Kara C. states, "When I reached out to She Should Run, I found plenty of support, resources, and absolute faith from an amazing community of women who truly believe I can do this," (She Should Run, 2022). Moreover, She Should Run has a 4.6/5.0 stars overall, meaning that almost all of participants are satisfied with the program and its effectiveness. Overall, *She Should Run* aims to act as a trusted support system to encourage women to consider running for political positions and jump into roles that are so desperately in need of women, change and fresh policies.

The next Women's Leadership Program considered within the research is Emily's List. Firstly, Emily's List has clear and concise goals outlined on their website. Emily's List is an

organization working since 1985, with an intent to elect all Democratic, pro-choice women to office. This program gets the ball rolling by actively seeking out candidates and training them to prepare for their roles in the political sphere. With constant support and investment, Emily's List guarantees that their candidates will have strong resources that aid them in their race to victory. Like *She Should Run,* Emily's list incorporates women that reflect all types of people to ensure policy making is diverse and can suit various communities in our world.

Emily's List forms solid campaigns through their research. By investing research into issues that women politicians face, they have composed a team of experts on, "women voters, candidates, issues and elected officials," highlighting their proficiency and sincerity in helping women politicians (Emily's List, 2023). This leadership campaign is one of the largest independent expenditure operations for democrats. They work to operate many programs which aim to influence a key demographic of voters to ensure the success of their candidates. Emily's List continues to be progressive and successful. Based on past data, Emily's List is successful in reaching their long-term goals. In 2022, with the help of Emily's List, 353 Democratic pro-choice women were elected to State and Local offices, 36 women elected to the House and 8 women were elected to governor seats," proving this success is not by coincidence, but through hard work and motivation (Emily's List, 2023). Over 1,700 women have paved the road to victory with the help of this organization. Stretching back to 2018, over 46,000 women reached out to the organization with interests in running for office, "laying the groundwork for the next decade of progressive women in politics." (Emily's List, 2023). Over $460 million has been raised by Emily's List and over 14,000 women have been trained to harness their leadership skills.

In terms of cost, Emily's List previously required payment for the Training Center, however now, the Training Center is free of cost. Offering a free program ensures that the training and content is accessible to all women of different backgrounds. In turn, this cost-free participation facilitates a sustainable long-term program, as women will not face any barriers to entry. Funding for Emily's List is split between individuals and organizations. Their top investor is an organization called Women Vote. Women Vote is an affiliated organization that works to host campaigns to educate women voters (Emily's List, 2023). Women Vote is strongly aligned with the values and ideals of Emily's List and bolsters their initiative.

Additionally, participants have voiced their positive feedback within their testimonials. Barbara Mikulski, former U.S. Senator, states, "I would not be here as a United States senator if it had not been for EMILY." While Elizabeth Warren, U.S. Senator of Massachusetts states, "It is hard to put yourself out there. It's always something you don't know quite how it works. Even if you've helped out on campaigns, it's not the same as being out there on the tip. Knowing you're not alone…that to me is what EMILY's List is about. You know you're not alone (Emily's List, 2023)." Overall, this organization satisfied all the major conditions of an effective WLP. Emily's List continues to push the female democratic agenda, making way for change and encouraging women of all backgrounds to make their run for office.

Running Start is a program that offers a very practical approach to training women in the political field. Running Start is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. that works to provide diverse training programs, including preparation for media. Founded by Susannah Wellford, their training procedures are aimed to prepare women of all ages for political leadership. Running Start offers equal opportunity to women of all races, ethnicities, gender

identities, sexual orientations, nationalities, income levels, religions, abilities and more — as representation is an essential component to a sound government. Running Start has conjured up a unique approach to training; a combination of hands-on learning and real-world practice in order to heighten potential. Not all their efforts go towards training women. Educating women is of the utmost importance to Running Start.

For example, Running Start offers coaching beginning at the High School level. This summer course offers an opportunity to learn how to run for office. By simulating a campaign, inviting high-level political mentors and having one-on-ones with female Members of Congress, young women can start to become politically involved. Offering these opportunities to young women is so crucial, as more than 50% of Congresswomen and women state legislators got their start in student government, emphasizing the importance of training leaders of all ages (Running Start, 2023). As young women are impressionable and so often driven, allowing them to express and be involved teaches not only them, but other women that smashing the glass ceiling is not an impossible feat.

With clear goals and solid values, Running Start has fostered long-term success. This is visible by the women they have helped to gain different leadership positions. For example, Congresswoman Lauren Underwood, with the help of Running Start in 2015, became the youngest elected Black woman in the United States and the first woman and millennial to represent her district (Running Start, 2023). Furthermore, Underwood now speaks to young women who participate in the Running Start High School Program. Another concrete example of their long-term success is Shannon Kang, the youngest ever elected official in West Lafayette

Indiana. Kang, like Underwood, now instills the skills to succeed in young women; shaping the next generation of leaders, fostering long-term success.

Running Start educates women on the importance of running for office. Developed in part with the American Association of University Women, *Elect Her,* helps women to create a framework for their political journey. Despite professional experience and age, women are encouraged to map out their "campaign." By creating a speech about an issue, they are passionate about, connecting with local leaders, and developing a team, the perfect storm is created for a legitimate and effective campaign. High schools, Universities, Student Organizations or Religious Groups are all able to host this program at their own establishment. Offering an opportunity to educate a local community.

Running Start is promoted by many well-known organizations, including TeenVogue, Refinery29, The Washington Post, Washingtonian, U.S. News & World Report, POLITICO, The CUT, MSNBC, NPR, NOWTHIS, and more. Overall, Running Start has three main values that support their approach — confidence, capabilities and connections. Running Start believes that confidence is a skill that can be taught, individual potential is put to the test and lifelong career and personal connections are formed.

Running Start offers many different programs and workshops. Their HBCU Women Leaders' Summit is free of cost and some travel scholarships are also given out to some participants and food is also free of charge during the program. The High School Program offered by Running Start, however, is not free of cost, and is seemingly a bit expensive. Offering their program for $2,500, it could be argued that it is not affordable for your average high school student — let alone students coming from low socioeconomic statuses. The purpose of these

programs is to be inclusive and diverse, and having a high expense program intended for people who are under the age of 18 does not seem realistic. However, this program also offers scholarships, free lodging and food and beyond that, over 85% of attendees stated that they felt as though this program fostered the confidence they would need to be qualified to run for office in the future (Running Start, 2023). Although the high school leadership program has such concrete and significant success from this program, the cost cannot be justified and therefore Running Start does not meet the criteria for an effective Women's Leadership Program.

The Women's Media Center is another program involved within this analysis. Undoubtedly, the media is a main factor in what shapes our thoughts, ideas and decision-making. The Women's Media Center is considered for this research, as it exceeds the necessary requirements to be considered effective. Firstly, their goals and values are clear and concise. The Women's Media Center is an organization based in Washington, D.C. that works, "toward media equality using interconnected strategies of research, original stories and articles, and promotion of women experts and media training" (Women's Media Center, 2023). This non-profit, non-partisan organization vows to bolster the visibility of diverse female voices in the media and in political representation. Efforts of the Women's Media Center are fueled by the severe underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in the media.

The Women's Media Center is also sustainable long-term, as they conduct extensive research to better understand these pressing issues against women to hopefully come closer to a solution. In a society that is becoming more integrated with media, social media and technology every day, this organization will never be at a loss of issues to solve. Reproductive rights, rape and rape culture, sexual assault, women in politics, reproductive issues and the gender-gap are

some of the issues WMC focuses on. Furthermore, WMC studies the representation of women in the media. By analyzing how women are portrayed in websites, newspapers, articles, social media, on the radio, video games, movies, and television WMC can conclude *how* women are seen and what needs to change, continually overtime. WMC conducted a report based on 109 studies in 2021 titled, "The Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2021," and there were some major findings. The results from this study concluded that women are substantially underrepresented in the media. When women are represented in the media, they are harshly criticized and exposed to many facets of gender-based discrimination. For instance, the research conducted by WMC found that, "79% of 115 surveyed women journalists in the United States said online harassment affected press freedom, and some added, fear of online abuse made them avoid reporting on certain kinds of stories," proving that the harassment women face online dramatically affects their performance at work (WMC, 2021). These statistics prove that women are perceived differently than men, and these perceptions manifest into their careers and opportunities. Negatively portraying women in the media can lead to more problems politically and impact outlooks on gender roles, violence toward women and can further societal issues.

Aside from their extensive research, WMC offers an array of activities for women interested in becoming a part of the political world. Progressive Women's Voices is a program to train women to be a media spokesperson in their career field. One of the main goals of this particular program is to amplify diverse voices despite race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability or generation. The WMC searches for women who want to make an impact with their voice and are trying to be a reformist within the political sphere. This program is one example of their concrete long-term successes. At the result of the Progressive Women's Voices program,

more than 500 women's voices have been featured in the Washington Post, The New York Times, Elle, ESSENCE Magazine, New York Magazine, USA Today, Forbes, Variety, the Wall Street Journal, New Republic, Los Angeles Times, Good Morning America, CNN, MSNBC, CBS Evening News, Fox News, ABC News, CNBC, Bill Moyers, numerous NPR shows; and within hundreds of other top-tier media outlets (WMC, 2023). Furthermore, the cost of this program is free to those who are admitted. However, if a person is not admitted, the WMC offers a lot of free resources on their website. Podcasts, articles, databases, reports, testimonies, statistics, and other projects such as the WMC Speech Project (dedicated to ending online abuse and amplifying female voices), WMC Climate (covers climate change and how it overtly affects women and people of color), WMC FBomb (an online intersectional space for teen feminists), and the WMC Women Under Siege (focuses on keeping stories of sexual violence and their devastating effect in the media to continually keep these women's voices heard and raise awareness). All of these resources are free, sustainable modes in which women can receive information and feel represented within the media.

The Women's Media Center is promoted and funded by many well-known people and organizations. For example, some of their promoters and funders are Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, Gloria Steinem, Robin Roberts, The United Nations Population Fund, and Guerrilla Girls. Other more well-known organizations promoting and including WMC are The New York Times, MSNBC, VOGUE, TIME, Forbes, CNN and PBS. Participants and viewers of the content presented by WMC are seemingly satisfied, as their Facebook page is listed at 4.7/5.0 stars, out of almost 400 reviews (Women's Media Center Facebook, n.d.). Some participants have stated, "The Women's Media Center provides a network of dedicated and impressive women, practical

training resources, and a database of women experts — all of which work together to strengthen women's voices in the media, (Feldt, 2010)." As another participant states, "my experience at the WMC has stretched my abilities as a filmmaker and a journalist to have a real voice: my voice (Jehan-harney, 2010). Overall, the WMC has shown that they fit the requirements through their goals, cost-free activities and resources, long-term success and sustainability, and their positive feedback from participants.

The Women's Leadership Institute, a non-profit organization based in Utah challenges businesses to engage in their ElevateHER Challenge. The Women's Leadership Institute is unique as is it the only female ran company that aims attention to enlist male leadership to transform corporate culture. This challenge has a solid foundation of six main goals (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.):

1. Increase the percentage of women in senior leadership

2. Increase retention rate for women

3. Increase the number of women on community and corporate boards

4. Monitor pay by gender

5. Establish or enhance mentoring and sponsorship programs for women

6. Increase the number of women in public office

So far, the WLI has managed to get over 300 CEOs in Utah to sign-up for the program. Large companies such as J.P. Morgan, The University of Utah and Chase Bank have all partook in the challenge to create a more gender-diverse work environment (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.). When five male CEOs who were part of the ElevateHER program were interviewed, they had much to say about the benefits and positive outcomes of this program. For instance, Hopkins

from Gariff Automotive stated that, "women in leadership improve employee morale, reduce turnover and bolster the return on investment of companies," pushing the fact that gender-equality in business benefits everyone (Jones, 2022). This program has had countless positive long-term outcomes including inspiring men to open doors for women and making available opportunity that may not have been available without this program. For instance, Anderson from the tech startup company Xevant stated, "More than an ally, become a sponsor for someone else. Open opportunities they might not have access to and develop introductions and connections for them," acknowledging the barriers women face and offering to give opportunities and more (Jones, 2022). WLI highlights the fact that if companies do not act progressively, they take the chance of losing not only their current female employees, but also future female leaders.

A shocking statistic from the Utah Women and Leadership Project shows that over 95% of Utah Companies have a male CEO, leaving only 4.7% of companies with a female CEO (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.). Aside from engaging male CEOs in their ElevateHer project, the WLI also hosts leadership development courses for women seeking to learn new skills and gain experience to become successful leaders. Their Political Development Series is a six-month course, hyper-focused on gaining the necessary skills to run for office. Be it media training, public speaking or networking, the WLI helps women to envision their future success as a politician. A main goal of this political development course is to create a space in which women are always able to have their questions answered. Having a supportive group of female role-models to guide the understanding of policy, makes for informed, confident students and future leaders. Educating women and helping to not only understand policies, but also how to change policies is integral to the Women's Leadership Institute. About 50% of women who

partake in this leadership course win their races after course completion (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.).

Not only does the WLI focus on Political Leadership, but they also offer courses for career development and a "Rising Leader Series." The Rising Leader Series is a program aimed to prepare women to be leaders. Again, the WLI challenges companies to invest in the women that already work for them. Women will be coached and follow activities to learn how to find their personal strengths and values, how to create a trajectory for their career, how to form a solid network of mentors and allies, how to handle difficult conversations and how to maximize their potential by delivering a strong personal brand (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.). Whether you are a female at a large corporation or in a smaller company, the Rising Leadership Program will aid in gaining the confidence and skills to step up as a strong, established leader. Women's Leadership Institute is sponsored by Zion's Bank, Deseret Management Corporation, The Jeffery R. And Katie C. Nelson Family Foundation, My City Journals, Copper Rock Championship, CHG Healthcare, and the Workers Compensation Fund amongst other businesses. These businesses are local Utah corporations, meaning it is not evident their morals, background and beliefs — for this reason, WLI does not meet this criterion. Some more well-known and local organizations promote the message of the Women's Leadership Institute in Utah including, *Yahoo! Finance,* Utah Business, The Salt Lake Tribune and Utah Business Magazine, but again, they are not known enough to confidently state they align with the goals and values of the WLI.

In terms of cost, the Women's Leadership Institute offers a few different programs at different expense levels. For instance, their 6-month Rising Leader Series is $695.00. Another program tailored to their Political Development Series costs $250.00 for 18 hours of training,

meeting and catered meals (Women's Leadership Institute, n.d.). Furthermore, they have a career

development series in which they charge a $995.00 fee for an eight-month duration of building

networks, learning leadership skills and fostering confidence in young women and potential

leaders. These programs are costly, yet they have an opportunity to yield substantial benefits.

Having extensive training for a long duration such as eight months or six months sets

participants up for success. Not rushing the learning process and covering a wide variety of

material promotes a well-rounded leadership education. Additionally, participants pay to have

exclusive access to high-level speakers, an online learning portal and will harness the skills

needed to make decisions, understand the psychology behind leadership, negotiation and

advocacy techniques and access to a network of influential women. Despite these positive

benefits, the program does not qualify for the "cost" criteria. The program may be beneficial and

effective; however it cannot be considered accessible. Consider a mother on welfare, or a woman

who would like to become a leader but cannot afford the cost of the program. Within the

Women's Leadership Institute, there's work to be done to make the program *truly* available to

women from *all* economic backgrounds. The cost of this program acts as a discriminatory agent

that perpetuates the exclusion of women that deal with economic disparity. Women's Leadership

Programs need to be affordable and accessible to all women to be truly effective. Despite this,

The Women's Leadership Institute, with their concrete solutions to gender inequality, creates new

and effective ways of holding CEOs accountable. Although they are making long-term progress

with realistic resolutions, The Women's Leadership Institute does not meet the criteria for an

effective Women's Leadership Program defined by this research.

Overall, two of the five programs, Running Start and Women's Leadership Institute were not selected to have effective qualities. Through this analysis, it was discovered that Women's Leadership Programs need to be cost-effective, as it is vital that they are accessible to women of different backgrounds. Additionally, it has been noted that the funders/promoters of the program should have clear, similar values of the WLP. Following is a chart summarizing the programs and the criteria they met or did not meet:

ORG. NAME ➡	SHE SHOULD RUN	EMILY'S LIST	RUNNING START	THE WOMEN'S MEDIA CENTER	WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
GOALS/ OBJECTIVES	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
FUNDERS/ PROMOTERS	✔	✔	✔	✔	✖
PARTICIPANT SATISFACTION	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
LONG-TERM OURCOMES	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
CONTENT	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
COST	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖
SELECTED	✔	✔	✖	✔	✖

Discussion:

        Throughout this discussion, the impact and caveats of Women's Leadership Programs will be investigated. Further background of the harsh inequalities women face will be provided along with the vitality of female voices in decision-making processes. Subsequently, a discussion will unfold involving the advantages of Women's Leadership Programs and the many strategies they utilize to empower and teach women. Afterward, this discussion outlines the areas in which Women's Leadership Programs can benefit from improvement — including the challenges such as cost and accessibility, the potential furthering of gender-based stereotypes and the vital role companies play in the overall success of WLP's. The purpose of this discourse is to highlight the need of inclusivity, further research on this topic and the necessity for collaboration between companies and WLP's. All of these topics are discussed to further the knowledge of what makes an effective WLP — in this way, programs can evolve, better the lives and career opportunities of women and continue to dismantle systemic barriers.

        Women are often subjected to the harsh reality of inequality. Aside from recent efforts to act progressively in modern society, women are still oppressed in many facets of their life and career. For example, women are severely underrepresented in the political world. Women have a long history of being deprived of education, empowerment in the workforce and involvement in decision making processes. Consequently, this oppression has narrowed their ability to participate politically. The UN Women has conducted research and found that "women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide and that achieving gender parity in political life is far off," starring the intense difficulty women must face to gain success (UN

Women, 2023). Strong participation of women in politics is integral to having equal and more balanced decision making and policies.

As one might imagine, the exclusion of women does not only affect women, it has a negative impact on everyone. Research has been focused on the fact that there are countless benefits to including women in policy making. *Gender Equality in Decision-Making Positions: The Efficiency Gains* highlights the fact that participation of women is a key factor in the "growth and stability equation," (Profeta, 2017). When women are included in decision-making processes it creates the opportunity for economic advancement and growth, which in turn will cause more gender equality. Large companies such as Forbes have also agreed on this to be fact. Solomon Amar, a Forbes Business Council Member stated, "research shows that companies with more women on their boards outperform those who do not by a significant margin, and organizations with greater gender diversity among senior leaders are more profitable," however still women are underrepresented in leadership positions (2023). Having women in leadership positions goes beyond just benefiting women, it provides advantage for the business or organization.

Furthermore, the promotion of women into the highest political positions is an essential part of the process to closing the gender gap and oppression of women. By giving women the opportunity to hold such positions, it will fight stereotypes such as: women are not capable of holding power, not educated enough or that they are too emotional. Not only will it help the portrayal of women but will also alter the status of male dominated careers. Even more crucial is the fact that including women in decision-making processes has shown to generate economic efficiency and improved function of organizations and institutions (Profeta, 2017). Women have

many barriers to success; lack of education & resources, gender-based stereotypes and harassment/discrimination. Fortunately, there are some organizations in the United States that are dedicated to helping women overcome these drawbacks.

The organizations analyzed in this research are just a few that aid women in gaining the tools they need to be properly trained in media training, public speaking, campaign development, brand creation and more. Moreover, these organizations offer an opportunity to create a large network of other women in leadership positions and other people in the political sphere. These mentorship programs and workshops assist women in not only their preparation, but also their long-term commitment to a career in politics. Without these leadership programs, many women would not know that they have the skills or the capabilities to defy societal norms and stereotypes. For instance, women may not have the same access to resources that are necessary to gain exposure, fund campaigns or assemble a team or network of supporters. This inequality in access creates substantial barriers that diminish attempts from women to challenge male competition, who undoubtedly hold a thorough plan of action for their campaign. Programs such as Running Start offer women the opportunity to create an all-encompassing plan to achieve success and navigate barriers.

Women face systemic barriers when trying to establish successful political careers. This harassment and discrimination deter women from searching out political positions and can even persuade them to quit. These leadership programs offer equal opportunity to a diverse body of women that represent different voices. This representation is so crucial, as it inspires women of all ages and backgrounds to become political leaders. Not only does it inspire, but a diverse body of policy makers inevitably will lead to more progressive decision making. Female leaders are

more likely to support causes that address issues important to families, women, gender equality and education.

Female leadership programs further the fact that women can hold political positions. Harsh criticism and gender-based stereotypes are damaging and challenge a woman's ability to be a leader. Although these ideas are false, women still must constantly fight the idea that they are weak, under-qualified, appearance-focused or emotional leaders. The language used to describe men and women differs greatly. For example, it seems as though men are allowed to react, while women overreact. Men are assertive, yet women are bad-tempered. Men are idealized and women are ignored. Women's Leadership Programs highlight the necessity of inclusive language, and coverage of diverse politicians and female leaders.

Despite their grand success and positive intentions, there is still room for improvement in regard to female leadership programs. For instance, these programs are not the most accessible in terms of finances. Some female training/leadership programs discussed in this research cost money, and often it is expensive. This high cost to participate in these programs limits the amount of women that can have access to the program. Seemingly, this creates a barrier that then contributes to the oppression they are trying to combat. Many underprivileged women may already face harrowing barriers to education, let alone success in their career. Female leadership schools that charge high enrollment fees are contributing to the overall struggle to advance, as women may already be struggling with various financial or personal challenges. Moreover, even if the female leadership schools offer opportunities such as scholarships or financial aid, women can have trouble balancing work and life. Filling out lengthy applications and doing paperwork is not entirely feasible for some women, especially those who are not financially stable and have

children to support. Finding the time and energy to complete applications just may not be in the cards — especially when their entrance to the program is not guaranteed.

Women's Leadership Programs are constantly evolving and adapting to the changes within the world and also to the needs of the women within these programs. Although there are many reasons to be proud of their accomplishments, Women's Leadership Programs still have many aspects in which they could benefit from improvement. For example, evaluation seems to be a facet that should be a definitive part of the program. Participants need a way to express their evaluations of a program (Gardiner, Chur-Hansen, Turnbull & Semmler, 2023). Likewise, programs need to offer an opportunity for their participants to state their satisfaction or lack thereof. Furthermore, all participants should have the opportunity to recount their experiences — good and bad, these testimonies offer solid evidence of the outcomes of the program. These evaluations could come in the form of a questionnaire, an exit interview or a forum in which women can freely discuss their experiences, what they liked or disliked and any ideas for improvement that they may have. Organizations could then take these reviews and benefit from them, adapting and changing aspects of their programs that need improvement, while utilizing the aspects that women reported useful for them. These evaluations benefit the women and the organization. Women get to express their concerns, all while the organization can measure the effectiveness of their programs and also track outcomes. Furthermore, offering the opportunity for feedback to everyone ensures that the collection of these reviews is inclusive and accessible to all. Moreover, evaluation protocol will aid organizations to tailor their programs in the future. The needs and expectations of program attendees will change and evolve over time, meaning this feedback is a crucial component to the design of future Women's Leadership Programs. Overall,

allowing participants to openly share their opinions about WLP's is not only beneficial for gathering feedback, but also shows participants that the organization is committed to a program development strategy centered around the real experiences and opinions of participants. Continually evolving ensures that programs will remain as effective as possible and meet the needs of women. Of the programs analyzed, none of them had any sort of mandatory feedback or evaluation portion of the program. Aside from Google and Facebook reviews, there was no forum found that allowed women to review these programs and provide feedback. For example, Emily's List is available on a third party website, greatnonprofits.org, in which participants can leave public reviews. This however, is not substantial. Providing a way for women to leave anonymous evaluations will benefit the company and the participants. Although it is not publicly stated on their websites, it could be possible that an evaluation is a part of their programs design, however even if this is the case, a suggestion is that the programs should state this on their website. Describing their commitment to evaluations will show potential participants they have a space where their voices can be heard.

Another aspect that needs more attention is the racial identities of participants. In their article *Rethinking Women's Leadership Development: Voices from the Trenches,* researchers Selzer, Howton and Wallace discuss how in their study of WLP participants, the women were mostly white. Throughout the program, the racial identities of the women were not discussed. Not discussing the racial identities of the participants does more harm than good, and does not invalidate the impact of race and racism on personal, professional and leadership development. There was a relevant example in this article in which the author, a woman of color, discussed her personal experience with racism within the workplace. She recounted that, "During

commencement, I straightened my hair. When this man saw me, he said I should wear my hair like that all the time. It looks better. I often feel that I won't be fully accepted into higher leadership roles. I can't be my true self. I have to conform to fit in," (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). This heart wrenching example is one of many that women of color and non-white women face so often within the workplace. As highlighted by the authors, this woman did not feel as though the WLP offered her the solace in which she could comfortably discuss her experiences with racism. Although most WLP's will state that diversity and inclusion are an integral part of their programs design, this particular WLP did not offer the support that should be central to their philosophy. It appears the WLP did not discuss the topic of race and racism, perhaps because many women in the class had not experienced racism, or difficulties because of their race. This instance of racism could have been an example and a learning opportunity for the other participants to reflect on their privilege, and how it effects their opportunities, leadership and other crucial aspects of their lives (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). This is an important aspect of the design of WLP's that needs to be improved upon, as the representation of diverse women is so important. Without proper representation and discussion of racism, many women may feel even more marginalized and that their voices are not heard, as the very programs that should educate on this topic are ignoring the topic all together, furthering the already existing problems many women face. All of the programs chosen explicitly stated that diversity and inclusion was central to their philosophy. These programs need to actively make race and racism a topic of discussion, providing resources, relevant information and dedicate sessions on race and leadership. Perhaps, women of color could be the leaders of these specific diversity programs and workshops. Having a role-model that women can relate to is crucial to facilitating the

representation of diverse backgrounds. Additionally, WLP's can produce and distribute more resources on race and racism, specifically on intersectionality. In this way, participants can become educated on these issues despite their race. It is inherent that female leadership organizations provide equal access to underprivileged women; taking into consideration the differing financial situations and strains women face. Providing support and resources that allow women from all backgrounds and demographics to participate is integral to building up *all* women and making concrete changes. Without equal access to these training programs, they will exclude women from different backgrounds creating a lack of diversity in their programs.

Another possible downside to female leadership programs could be that they perpetuate some gender-based stereotypes. Some argue that Women's Leadership Programs give off the idea that women are inadequate and need to be properly trained to be suitable candidates. The Harvard Business Review discusses this in depth, "sending only women to gender-specific leadership programs amplifies gender stereotypes that men have the traditionally valued agent leader traits, while women do not," highlighting that sending only women to leadership programs intensifies gender-stereotypes (Johnson, Smith, Christensen, 2023). These researchers claim that without further efforts of advancement or holding leaders/CEOs accountable, Women Leadership Programs can cause harm, rather than good. Moreover, this research highlights the point that these leadership programs may communicate to women that it is up to them to alter a company's gender-imbalance. For instance, working women must take time off to attend these programs. While women are working to better their leadership skills, male co-workers can continue their work, be one-on-one with their boss and ultimately work towards promotion. In addition, after women spend the time and money to complete these programs, what if they do not profit from

their commitment? CEO's and leaders within companies and organizations are responsible for the uplifting and advancement of female leaders. Without accountability, investment and true personal commitment from the heads of companies, women's efforts to better their careers could be seen as unproductive. Women's Leadership Programs can actively work to dismantle gender-based stereotypes. By including training to emphasize the promoting of leadership based skills, women can showcase their ability to be strong, independent and fair leaders. Leaders who emulate characteristics that are traditionally associated with male leadership. Furthermore, having an intersectional basis to their program and the activities within it is a great way to promote a diverse way of thinking. A diverse way of thinking will promote open discussion of experiences with gender-based stereotypes. Discussing these experiences can assist in the dismantling of these stereotypes, as it encourages critical thinking, in which participants will challenge the way in which they themselves, others and society make assumptions about gender.

Companies working together with WLP's play a vital role in the effectiveness of these programs and without them, their success could possibly be limited. In his article, *How to Make Women's Leadership Development Programs More Effective,* Lion Parsons discusses several changes and factors that can lead to the success of WLP's. Parsons states, "Putting the responsibility solely on women employees — WLP's are not the end-all to women's advancement in the workplace and attending these programs can often be a time commitment that does not pay off without appropriate manager support in their development," highlighting how they bolster the effectiveness of WLP's. Companies need to offer the opportunities to women after they complete their programs. If not, women have spent their time and money learning, creating networks and improving their confidence, but they are lacking a career

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opportunity. Parsons makes a point that without effort to further their careers after the completion

of the program, the professional advancement of women comes to a halt (Parsons, 2023).

Perhaps a few solutions to this problem are that companies should be more willing to embed

Women's Leadership Programs into their organizations, or perhaps offer programs that train

managers and male workers to learn about the experiences of Women and their hardships in

finding opportunity (Parsons, 2023). Furthermore, Parsons points out that, "According to a 2018

study conducted by Simmons University, WLPD's must be embedded into organizations to

encourage real culture change. Whether incorporating the programs into the organization's

business strategy or offering WLDP participants opportunities to engage in high-visibility, high

impact projects, women's advancement should be beyond a stand-alone training event,"

(Parsons, 2023). Parsons is highlighting the fact that Women's Leadership Programs are only one

facet of many that contribute to the success and furthering of women. Moreover, The Harvard

Business Review discusses some improvements that could hold leaders accountable for the

advancement of women in the workplace:

> "When a talented woman is offered the chance to attend leadership training, make it a
>
> requirement that her managers sponsor her for new — and appropriately compensated —
>
> opportunities upon her return. This should include promoting her potential and
>
> performance when she's not in the room, nominating her for stretch assignments, sharing
>
> social capital through deliberate networking, publicly supporting women in senior
>
> leadership roles, and voicing support for her in promotion decisions. (Johnson, Smith,
>
> Christensen, 2023)"

Keeping leaders responsible by asking for realistic and logical requests is just a few ways to aid in making the workplace a more gender-equal environment. Women should not have to be specifically trained to be qualified for a position that a man requires no training for. Additionally, keeping men in the loop throughout these Women Leadership Programs could be beneficial. Making male co-workers listen and learn from the experiences of women will not only allow *them* the opportunity to think about their actions in the workplace, but also will allow for the women to express what it's like to be a female trying to advance in their career. Men and Women working together will allow for a more comprehensive and unbiased work environment.

Companies need to focus on utilizing Women's Leadership Programs to better their organization, not solely on training women to be prepared for leadership positions. The Remarkable Women Program conducted a study of the benefits of Women Leadership Programs. They concluded that, "the content of the [programs] can help gauge how well the organization promotes effective leadership behavior and can offer a portal into where the company succeeds, as well as where it fails to foster an environment in which everyone can bring their best self to work," highlighting the importance of companies using WLP's to better themselves, not only the female workers that attend the program (Catalina & Marnane, 2019). The research overall discussed three main steps that describe how companies can actively alter their workplace:

1. They must broaden their leadership models (Catalina & Marnane, 2019)

2. Stimulate Dissent (Catalina & Marnane, 2019)

3. Encourage more effective introspection across the board (Catalina & Marnane, 2019)

First, companies should develop a larger definition of a leader. Most companies and workers for those companies consider a solid leader to have traditional leadership characteristics. For

example, some consider a leader to have good decision-making skills, domineering or the ability to rectify a negative situation. However, Catalina & Marnane conducted a study utilizing decade's worth of content from McKinsey's Remarkable Women Program and 150 interviews with participants from this program. The McKinsey research

Survey results suggest that women, more frequently than men, exhibit leadership traits that are highly applicable to future global challenges.

Relative importance of nine leadership traits to addressing future challenges, % of top executives identifying behavior[1]

Frequency of the behavior observed in each gender

■ Women apply more[2]   ■ Men apply more   ■ Women and men apply equally

Trait	Value
Inspiration	61
Participative decision making	57
Expectations and rewards	57
People development	38
Role modeling	34
Control and corrective action	18
Individualistic decision making	12
Intellectual stimulation	62
Efficient communication	23

[1]Respondents could choose up to 4 types of behavior.
[2]Includes "apply more" and "apply slightly more"; the types of behavior the survey suggests that women should apply slightly more are inspiration and participative decision making.
Source: *Women Matter: Time to accelerate—Ten years of insights into gender diversity*, October 2017, McKinsey.com

McKinsey
& Company

highlighted that, traits such as "inspiration, participative decision making, setting expectations and rewards, people development, and role modeling are more important than traditional, stereotypically male characteristics" (Catalina & Marnane, 2019). Above is a graph that depicts results from a survey, showing that women more often present leadership characteristics than men. It is evident through this research that many companies need to broaden their definitions of leadership traits.
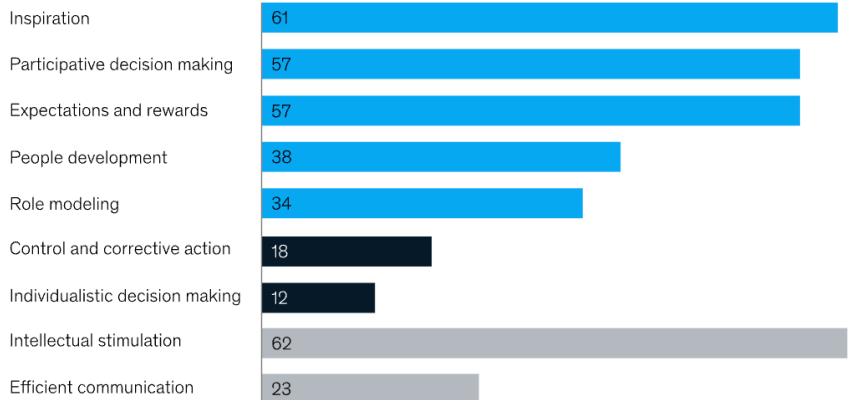
This research addressed another "disconnect" for women in the workplace. Often, women are recorded as not voicing to their superiors the hurdles they face in their workplaces. Women are at times forced to accept these barriers, as they fear to be seen as "weak, sensitive or seen as a complainer," if they point out things that are wrong (Catalina & Marnane, 2019). Some managers

or higher-ups may react negatively, thus instilling more fear into female workers when giving feedback or comments. Leaders in companies and organizations need to take into consideration the feelings and experiences that women face. So often, their problems are overlooked, as they are fearful of dampening their reputation. Catalina & Marnane highlight the necessary actions companies should complete, "Leaders must demonstrate through visible actions, that women's views will be respected and appropriately acted upon, while deeply ingraining in the corporate culture a sense that everyone must contribute, in large ways and small, to building a more inclusive system," making evident the importance of listening to women closely (2019). Guaranteeing that women will not be punished for using their voices is crucial for safety and equality in the workplace. Other women may feel encouraged and may also receive confidence when just one woman uses her voice to address problems. This could act as a domino effect for women in the workplace. If one woman sees another discussing issues, they are more than likely to either band together, or bring up issues that they are dealing with at that time. All in all, one woman's voice can validate so many others and spark enough outrage that change can occur. Banding together as women in the workplace may cause organizations and leaders to take action and prevent further inequalities in the future.

Creating an atmosphere in which workers are comfortable discussing and addressing conflicts constructively can have many positive effects. Not only in the workplace, but also on the people within the organization. Individuals, in particular women, will feel encouraged to voice their concerns. Leaders will be able to be more receptive and be more aware of the needs of their employees. While interviewing women who had participated in Women Leadership Programs, Catalina & Marnane discovered crucial information, "nearly every woman we

interviewed who did speak up encountered a receptive employer willing to take corrective measures and felt that highlighting systemic institutional problems helped the women coming up the ranks behind her," displaying the pros of WLP's and their effect on women (2019). Women Leadership Programs encourage open-mindedness and accountability. Leaders will be forced to review current issues and also problems that they believe to have been solved already. With this open communication, organizations can also visualize how common it is for concerns to go unsaid. Overall, organizations should be more aware of the positive aspects of Women Leadership Programs and what these programs can do to benefit not only the women, but the leaders and the company. Although the Women's Leadership Institute failed to meet the required criteria, they were the only program discussed in this research that challenges corporate culture. By challenging male leadership to increase the percentage of women in senior leadership by laying out a concrete list of actions that can be taken. Other Women's Leadership Programs can adopt this same effort to challenge corporations and male leadership. Challenging male leadership will actively advocate for change within corporate culture. Not only can a collaboration between WLP's and companies produce more effective research, it can also provide networking opportunities, consequently continuing to break barriers. This collaboration can inspire change at the corporate level, fostering a more diverse and equitable environment in the workplace.

In sum, this discussion has highlighted that although Women's Leadership Programs have made significant progress, there is still room for improvement. Creating an outlet for women to provide feedback is essential, as it can benefit the organization and also the participants of the program. Women's Leadership Programs need to be more focused on the racial identities of their

participants. As WLP's center their philosophy on diversity and inclusion, they need to create a safe space in which women can freely discuss their experiences with racism. This discussion is necessary to not further oppression and also provide learning experiences to those who have not had experiences with racism in their lives. Women's Leadership Programs could also be improved, in that they may perpetuate some gender-based stereotypes. Some argue that Women's Leadership Programs give off the idea that women are inadequate and need to be properly trained to be suitable candidates. WLP's can take necessary steps to help disprove claims of this perpetuation. Furthermore, companies and CEOs play a vital role in bolstering the empowerment of women. Companies and CEOs need to embed WLP's into their organizations, in an effort to not only offer opportunity to their female employees, but also to educate men and leaders on how to actively support women and the struggle they endure in the workplace, their personal lives and through the pressures of society. Companies should be held accountable for offering women opportunities, promoting them to leadership positions and speaking positively in their absence. Companies need to focus on utilizing Women's Leadership Programs to better their organization, not solely on training women to be prepared for leadership positions. Additionally, companies should work actively to facilitate a safe environment, in which women feel comfortable to discuss their experiences, positive and negative, in the workplace — ensuring that they are not fearful of the repercussions of speaking up about their experiences. In sum, Women's Leadership Programs have many areas that can benefit from improvement. Not only to benefit their programs, but also to improve the professional and personal lives of women and decrease gender inequality in the workplace.

Conclusion:

This body of research has provided a glance into the steps needed to not only analyze the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs, but also has attempted to define some characteristics of an effective WLP. By analyzing existing literature on this topic, major themes that define the qualities of an effective WLP were highlighted. Intersectionality, networking, being seen, heard and vulnerable, women only programs, and transformational learning are the major themes that emerged from the existing literature. These themes gave an opportunity to conceptualize what is working, and also what needs to be improved upon within WLP's. Using these criteria, this body of research built off the existing research and conducted an analysis of five WLP's. Goals/objectives, funders/promoters, participant satisfaction, long-term outcomes, diversity/inclusion, long-term sustainability and cost were the variables that were used to analyze five programs — She Should Run, Emily's List, Running Start, The Women's Media Center and Women's Leadership Institute. According to these criteria, Running Start and the Women's Leadership Institute did not fulfill the requirements to be considered "effective." The Women's Leadership Institute and Running start were not inclusive, as their program prices were quite high. Additionally, The Women's Leadership Institute had local funders and promoters with unclear goals/values, so it could not be decided that they align with the goals/values of the WLI. If women from all demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds cannot afford the program, it cannot be considered effective (according to this body of research).

The effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs is a complex, multifaceted topic, that cannot be solved from looking at a few aspects. The research question, *Under what circumstances can Women Leadership Programs be effective,* cannot be answered with a basic

yes or no answer, even after this research. There is no definitive conclusion or simple

categorization of the effectiveness of WLP's. This body of research and existing research on this

topic, be it beneficial and extremely valuable, is limited. More extensive research is necessary to

gain a more well-rounded understanding of the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs.

It's necessary for this further research to include studies on numerous organizations, program

designs, differing industries and additionally the experiences and reviews of the individuals,

what the organizations do with these reviews and other societal factors. Additionally, it is

important to have some long-term studies, aimed at capturing the impacts and outcomes that the

programs hold for their participants. Another idea that could help us to gain more knowledge is

having in-depth interviews with participants. These limitations in this field of study highlight the

need for much more rigorous research that is more inclusive of the many caveats and aspects of

Women's Leadership Programs. Until there is more research, that involves more of the above-

mentioned ideas, it is not just to answer the research question definitively, but the ongoing

commitment to this topic will likely continue to yield new discovery and foster opportunities for

women in the future. Women's Leadership Programs are constantly evolving and adapting to the

changes within the world and to the needs of the women within these programs. Although there

are many reasons to be proud of their accomplishments, Women's Leadership Programs still

have many aspects in which they could benefit from improvement including evaluation

availability, intervention from companies and their unintentional furthering of gender-based

stereotypes.

Overall, the effectiveness of Women's Leadership Programs cannot be answered with a

straightforward, black and white conclusion. There are too many facets that come into play when

analyzing each and every WLP. There is a necessity for more, well-rounded and long-term, research studies to gain more insight into all the factors that form an effective WLP. This is a vast topic, that needs intensive research in hopes of bettering organizations, programs and the lives of women in the future.

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