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Editorial Overview: Exploring Leadership, Mentorship, and Gender in Academia: Insights from Recent Research

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The 2024 Volume of Advancing Women in Leadership Journal (AWLJ) includes researchers from around the world. They are from Canada (Ontario and British Columbia), the Philippines, Australia, and the United States, including California, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio, and the work that is published here also highlights women from these locations and Trinidad and Ghana. These researchers dealt with structural impediments to women's opportunities, highlighting the transformative power of mentorship, resilience, and targeted strategies against professional obstacles. This is a valuable collection because it underlines how gendered expectations, cultural biases, and organizational structures continue to be essential factors in the construction of women's leadership experiences. Yet it also points out some novel approaches, such as informal and peer mentoring, narrative inquiry, and digital advocacy, reflecting the potent role of collective action and relational support in promoting better levels of empowerment and equity.

Sectors like health and education are still wracked by unconscious bias and structural hurdles in achieving equity. These studies prove that such challenges can be avoided with innovative strategies. For example, mentorship programs have enhanced women's skills, knowledge, and confidence. Emphasis on informal and peer mentoring and narrative inquiry testifies to how storytelling and relational support can empower and bring about equity among women. These approaches offer the necessary guidance and create networks, which are very important for professional development.

The AWLJ 2024 volume delves into specific case studies to highlight an intertwined relationship between individual agency and systemic constraints. Research on health leadership brings out a clear need to deal with structural biases and exploit workplace facilitators to create more equal opportunities. The resilience of adolescent women and working mothers while they play a dual role is echoed by the researchers, often out of environments riddled with gender discrimination. The tailored strategies include mentoring programs for Latina nonprofit leaders and salary negotiation training for female sports

management students. This reflects how shared expertise is important to surmount professional challenges for which few successful examples exist.

Digital platforms create significant avenues through which advocacy can be conducted, giving a voice to marginalized communities and building systemic change. While constituting a call for much-needed systemic change, it builds on the remarkable potential for progress possible when supportive structures are in place. The research presented in the AWLJ 2024 volume presents how informal mentoring relationships and the force of shared stories alone stand to comprehensively share how women have negotiated and overcome so much while on their way up into leadership and equitable positions.

In the healthcare sector, Billie Jane Hermosura and Ivy Lynn Bourgeault's study, "*It Takes a Village to Raise a Leader*": *Overcoming Gender-specific Barriers Through Individual, Workplace, and Organizational Level Facilitators*," examined the systemic barriers women encounter in Canada's healthcare leadership. Through thematic analysis, the authors identified motivations, enablers, and challenges, underscoring the urgent need to address unconscious biases and structural hurdles that hinder gender equity in leadership.

Shifting the focus to education, Socorro Perpetual F. Esguerra-Escarez investigated the leadership journeys of adolescent women in the Philippines in "*Leading in a Room Full of Boys: A Retrospective Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Leadership Experiences of Adolescent Women as a Minority in a Coed Senior High School in the Philippines*." These researchers explored the experiences of young women transitioning from single-sex to coeducational environments, emphasizing resilience, social support, and strategies to confront gender discrimination. Similarly, Julie Hasson, Kimberly Money, and Olivia Sikes explored the dual roles of motherhood and leadership in their study, "*The Benefits and Challenges of Inhabiting the Dual Role of Mother/ Leader*." Their findings reveal how these roles uniquely shape leadership styles while posing significant challenges in achieving work-life balance.

Mentorship emerges as a powerful tool for leadership development across various studies. Belinda Hernández, in her article, *“What’s My Type? Characteristics of Quality Mentoring Relationships for Nonprofit Latina CEOs as Mentees in California,”* highlights the role of informal mentoring in empowering Latina nonprofit leaders in California. Similarly, Heidi Grappendorf, Cindy Veraldo, A. J. Grube, and Annemarie Farrell, in their study, *“Mentoring in Salary Negotiations for Female Sport Management Students,”* underscore the importance of mentoring in addressing gendered salary negotiations in sport management academia.

the importance of systemic change, inclusive practices, and innovative mentoring models in fostering equity and empowerment across professional landscapes.

Digital platforms and advocacy also play critical roles in fostering equity. Felicity Sena Dogbatse’s work, *“Let the Silenced Speak: Digital Platform Usage by Feminist and Gender Equity Nongovernmental Organizations in Ghana,”* examined how feminist NGOs in Ghana leverage digital platforms for advocacy and empowerment. Despite challenges like misinformation, these platforms amplify the voices of marginalized communities and drive gender equity efforts.

In higher education, Kimberly Havens-McVea explored the significance of informal mentoring in *“Black Women College Administrators’ Perspectives on Informal Mentoring: A Phenomenological Case Study.”* Her findings revealed how these relationships support Black women in predominantly white institutions, addressing systemic challenges such as microaggressions and career stagnation. Further examining higher education, Molly Bradshaw and colleagues, in their work entitled *“The Effects of Burnout in Female Higher Education Administrators,”* investigated the interplay of gendered challenges, burnout, and compassion fatigue among women in male-dominated academic fields.

Narrative inquiry and storytelling also emerge as tools for exploring leadership dynamics. Crystal Washington and Tatiana Gounko’s *“Understanding Through Stories: Leadership Experiences of Trinidadian Women of Color”* examined the leadership experiences of Trinidadian women principals. They highlighted ethics of care and collaborative leadership while addressing the biases these women face within their cultural context.

Finally, Cindy Ann Smith, Felicity McLure, Sonja Kuzich, Sonia Ferns, and Sally Murphy focused on second-career female academics in *“Empowering Second+ Career Female Academics: Strengthening Relationships through Mentoring for Personal and Professional Growth.”* These researchers underscored the unique challenges faced by women entering academia later in life and the transformative role of peer mentoring groups. These groups address disempowerment and enable career progression by fostering belonging, self-efficacy, and relational problem-solving.

These studies collectively illuminate the complexities of leadership and mentorship in diverse contexts. They underscore