Advancing Women in Leadership

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Full Length Research Paper

Advancing Gender Equity and Women's Leadership Capacity: Mentoring, Networking, Training

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To overcome barriers to leadership opportunities that exist for women and promote gender equity in the workforce, it is essential for organizations to provide leadership development programs specifically targeted towards women. The purpose of this study was to understand professional and personal outcomes associated with participation in a leadership development program. All participants in this study were female. Key findings from this study indicated that as a result of participating in the Leadership Academy leadership training program, most participants expressed high levels of self-confidence regarding leadership positions as well as knowing their individual strengths. Results of the qualitative findings suggested four emerging and descriptive themes associated with program outcomes: confidence builder, network facilitator, opportunity booster, and paying it forward. This study adds to existing literature suggesting that formal women-focused leadership training programs can facilitate gender equity in the workforce.

Gender equity in leadership is required for organizational success in the increasingly complex and global world, yet barriers to leadership opportunities exist for women. Representation disparity among the female workforce is prevalent: women represent approximately 54.3% of the workforce (UN Women, 2022) yet only 35% of senior leadership positions (Ariella, 2022). The recent COVID-19 global pandemic has amplified this organizational leadership challenge for women. In fact, during the pandemic, women experienced unprecedented job losses and were 24% more likely to permanently lose their jobs compared to men (Catalyst, 2021). An effective solution for addressing inequity in the workforce is for researchers, practitioners, human resource and leadership professionals to promote leadership development programs for women (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

Literature Review

Leadership Development

Leadership has drawn increased attention as many believe it is a way to improve one's personal, social, and professional life; an idea reinforced by corporations and organizations seeking those with leadership ability to help achieve organizational objectives (Northouse, 2016). While there is no common definition of leadership, common understandings have emerged from scholarship positioning leadership as a multidimensional and reciprocal construct that can mobilize, influence, and persuade others to a common goal or course of action (Barnard, 1938; Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2016). Bush and Glover (2003) extend the definition of leadership by explaining it in three ways: (a) a process of influence to structure and organize processes, (b) related to organizational values and committing people to these values, and (c) vision-oriented. Primary indicators of leadership interest are the resources and programs devoted to leadership development evidenced by countless discussions in schools, corporations, churches, and communities as well as the over two billion Google search results using "leadership development".

Leadership development is defined as the investment in developing and mentoring leaders and expanding the collective capacity of organizational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; McCauley & Brutus, 1998). In this way, leadership development is seen as a practice and discipline that builds capacity and helps leaders navigate complexity, uncertainty, and emergent dynamics. Day (2001) asserts that leadership development should emphasize capacity building and use interpersonal competence. Interpersonal competence includes social awareness (e.g.,

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empathy and emotional intelligence) and social skills (e.g., collaboration and relationship building). Taking these perspectives, leadership development can be an integration strategy that helps individuals enhance their self-understanding, relate to others, and build the competence to determine and execute strategic initiatives.

Leadership Programs for Women

Buck (2003) identified the need to build capacity for individuals, groups, and projects as a way to increase internal and external leadership skills. She proposed formal leadership development programs to build capacity to provide leadership for communities and for the roles in which individuals live, work, and serve. Underrepresentation of women in leadership roles (Levine, et al., 2015) and the need for leadership skills in women have prompted developmental programs specifically targeted to women. In general, reported outcomes have been positive. Khalid et al. (2021) examined post-training scores that revealed an increase in knowledge and leadership skills. Vinnicombe and Singh (2002) stated that women-only training enables women to clarify leadership ambitions and recognize their strengths.

Expounding on previous research, Chuang (2019) provided evidence that women-only leadership programs are a suitable approach to address gender inequality in the workplace (Clarke, 2011; Limerick et al., 1995; Willis & Daisley, 1997). In that vein, Lewis and Fagenson (1995) examined women-only training programs and noted that they provided a forum for women to express themselves without being discriminated against. Additionally, Lewis and Fagenson (1995) found the programs provided support among women who felt the same disadvantages in the workplace.

Harris and Leberman (2012), in a longitudinal study, found increases in participant self-confidence, application of new skills, including networking and promotions. Similarly, Levine et al. (2015) discovered that after the program, participants were more likely to ask for promotions and negotiate salaries. This supports the findings of Longman and Lafeniere (2012), Maher and Atack (2011), and O'Bannon et al. (2010) who assert that participation in women-only leadership development programs builds self-efficacy and creates opportunity for networking and career advancement (Clarke, 2011). Brush and Crosina (2016) also found that such programs significantly develop female entrepreneurial talent.

Levine et al. (2015) and Longman and Lafreniere (2012) indicated that the ability to network with other women was valued and enhanced via leadership programs. Networking was also the focus of the work of Tsen et al. (2012) who found that a mentoring leadership program provided confidence in mentoring skills, enthusiasm for mentoring, and diversification of mentoring relationships.

More generally, in a statement focused on the benefits of leadership training for women, Gautam (2005) asserted that skill-building sessions can help women realize their abilities and provide inspiration to act. She also expressed that it is not necessary to hold an administrative title or position to be a leader. Geary (2016) asserted that training can assist women to balance work and family, support career development, build self-awareness and self-confidence, and adopt a leadership identity as well as deal with socio-cultural and structural barriers. When summarizing the advantages of leadership training programs focused on women Chuang (2019) included (a) addressing feminine strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics, (b) developing confidence and self-awareness, (c) providing a supportive and non-threatening learning environment, (d) increasing chances of participation in discussion and learning activities, (e) discussing sensitive topics more openly, (f) developing relationships, (g) building supportive networks; (h) creating opportunities for continuous professional development, (i) engaging in an environment free from male-domination, and (j) promoting gender equity.

Leadership Development through Capacity Building: Mentoring and Networking

Mentoring

Mentoring is described as an advising and development relationship, usually with an experienced or senior individual. Scott (2010) says that mentoring is a fruitful way to develop leaders. Positive mentoring experiences significantly improve productivity, retention, commitment, satisfaction, leadership growth, and succession planning (Welchin, 2020). Key aspects of mentoring programs include identifying high-potential future leaders within the association, executing mentor programs, and creating individual development programs (Al Suwaidi et al., 2020). Mentors can help to build and refine critical soft skills such as listening, collaboration, and professionalism. Additionally, mentors can help mentees (or partners) assess their strengths and weaknesses and clarify leadership roles and opportunities. Whether mentoring is formal or informal and planned or not, the relationship must be maintained and monitored. Heavily skewed toward support, mentoring is seen as an especially effective component of development. Skill-building training is an important aspect of successful mentoring within leadership programs. This training brings many skills and talents to bear including effective listening and communication skills, patience, industry and organizational knowledge, the ability to read and understand others, as well as honesty and trustworthiness (Scott, 2010). In these ways, mentoring helps develop a more sophisticated and strategic perspective on the organization.

Networking Opportunities

Networking is described as connecting to others in divergent functions and areas (Welchin, 2020). Networking is about expanding understanding through exposure, which can challenge basic assumptions about what we think we know. It is also a means of encouraging organizational members to form commitments with others outside of their immediate sphere of influence, work group, or social network. In this way, networking is about investing in and developing social capital

with a primary development emphasis on building support. Networking benefits are optimized when individuals have the requisite self-awareness, motivation, and self-regulation (i.e., intrapersonal competence) (Welchin, 2020). Networking is a prime means of enhancing social capital and fostering peer relationships in an organization. The best leadership development programs provide opportunities for participants to network with key leaders within the organization (Mercer, 2005).

Leadership Training

Strategically relevant leadership training programs can be enormously valuable (Welchin, 2020). Training can play a significant part of learning when (a) it is used as an opportunity to reflect on and make better sense of actual experience; (b) it substitutes for experiences that are either unavailable to enough people or are too risky or expensive to use for development; and (c) it provides experiences that are not available online such as scenarios for future states of the organization (McCall, 2004). Aas (2016) suggested that experiential learning and hands-on training helps to effectively implement changes in daily practice. Zhang and Brundrett (2010) also suggested mentoring and coaching as invaluable aspects of leadership development training. Wright and da Costa (2016) emphasized effective professional development that helps to extend and redefine experiences such as challenging assignments and exposure to other leaders over time.

Research Purpose & Questions

To support leadership opportunities for women, within and external to the organization, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) developed the AAFCS Leadership Academy (Leadership Academy). Developed to create a pool of competent future leaders to drive and support the organization, the Leadership Academy includes leadership training, mentoring programs, and networking opportunities. Grounded in both transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), the Leadership Academy model also follows the work of Kouzes and Posner (2017), integrates emotional intelligence (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009), and encourages the discovery and use of participants' strengths (Rath, 2007). While the organization wanted to ensure a future pipeline of qualified leaders, participant benefits extended beyond the organization (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). Drawing from a previous study (Brooks et al., 2022) assessing the impacts of the Leadership Academy on participant leadership preparation and experiences to assume leadership roles in AAFCS, the purpose of this study was to understand professional and personal outcomes associated with participation in a leadership development program.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. In what ways can participants apply knowledge and skills after participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy program?

2. What are the non-organizational experiences and benefits participants realize after participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy program?

Methods

This mixed methods research design combined both quantitative and qualitative data to adequately answer both research questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Conducted between October 2021 and January 2022, this study was open to all participants of the bi-annual AAFCS Leadership Academy since inception: (2013; n = 15), (2015; n = 14), (2017; n = 12), (2019; n = 13), (2021; n = 12). Before data collection, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from The University of Houston.

We employed an explanatory sequential design using survey methodology (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) and focus groups. Emails were sent to all Leadership Academy participants with an invitation to respond to a web-based questionnaire. To increase participation, cohort-specific email invitations were sent to participants. Non-responders were prompted to reply with follow-up invitations. Upon completion of the survey, all respondents were invited to join an online focus group to further discuss the ways in which the Leadership Academy.

Building on a prior study of Leadership Academy participants (Stewart et al., 2023), this questionnaire was designed, by the researchers, to assess individual-level effects associated with leadership development program outcomes. The researchers developed the questionnaire based on the program objectives and a thorough review of professional leadership scholarship. Grounding this research in leadership development program outcomes, specifically the Theoretical Model of Leadership (Black & Earnest, 2009) and the EvaluLEAD framework (Grove, Kibel, & Haas, 2005) helped to address concerns of validity. The 24-item survey (including 6 demographic questions), shown in Table 1, took less than 5 minutes to complete, and remained open for four weeks.

Table 1

Survey Instrument

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1. I accepted a non-AAFCS leadership role (e.g., managerial, non-managerial, executive level).
2. I received a promotion within my organization.
3. I accepted a new professional role/position – external to the organization.
4. I can develop and pursue a personal leadership development plan.
5. My total compensation has increased.
6. I consider myself a leader.
7. I know my strengths as defined by the Strengths Finder tool.
8. I use my strengths.
9. I am confident in my networking skills.
10. I continue to seek development opportunities.

11. I am satisfied with my career.
12. I have a high-level of self-efficacy regarding leadership positions.
13. I have a high-level of self-confidence in my skills as a leader.
14. My quality of life has been improved.
15. In one word, how would you describe the impact of the AAFCS Leadership Academy on your personal life?[a]
16. In one word, how would you describe the impact of the AAFCS Leadership Academy on your professional life?[a]
17. What non-AAFCS benefit(s) and/or opportunities have you received as a result of your participation in the AAFCS Leadership Academy?[a]
18. Please use the space below to share any other comments about the impact of the AAFCS Leadership Academy. [a]

[a] Survey question listed verbatim. All other items begin with the stem: "As a result of participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy".

Of the total population (N = 49), the response rate was 51 percent (n = 25). Of the 25 participants that completed the survey, a majority were white, female, and under the age of forty. Other collected demographics are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Data

Characteristic	n	Percent
Race		
White	20	76.9%
Non-white	6	23.1%
AAFCS Membership Status		
AAFCS	23	88.5%
Non-AAFCS	3	11.5%
Age		
20-29 years	6	23.1%
30-39 years	9	34.6%
40-49 years	6	23.1%
>50 years	5	19.2%

Focus group methodology was used to help clarify the survey and provided an opportunity for open interaction and sharing between participants (Tveito et al., 2010). The focus group protocol is listed in Table 3. Of those that expressed interest (n = 9), six participated in a 65-minute focus group. The focus group was facilitated online via Zoom, using semi-structured, open-ended questions. To ensure accuracy, focus group interview transcript review was employed by which each participant received an opportunity to review and correct the cleaned, de-identified transcript. To ensure reliability, dependability, and validity of the results, two researchers separately reviewed the data. Using the cleaned transcript and researcher journal notes, key words and phrases were organized and analyzed using hand coding ultimately yielding 36 codes and four themes that helped to explain Leadership Academy experiences: confidence builder, network facilitator, opportunity booster, and paying it forward.

Table 3

Focus Group Protocol

1. How do you define or describe leadership?
2. How would you describe the AAFCS Leadership Academy (referred to as Leadership Academy for our remaining time together)?
3. In what ways has your leadership improved as a result of participating in the Leadership Academy?
4. How did your participation in the Leadership Academy influence your non-AAFCS aspirations and (personal/professional) trajectory?
5. Please share a significant accomplishment that you can attribute to what you learned during the Leadership Academy?
6. There were many concepts covered during the Leadership Academy, including Emotional Intelligence, Strengths Finders, and time management. Thinking of a specific concept that was meaningful, what comes to mind? How have you embraced and implemented what you've learned?
7. Thinking back to the Emotional Intelligence session and content, specifically, what did you learn about yourself? Might there be things you've started, continued, or stopped based on what you learned?
8. Can you describe specific aspects of your mentor/mentee relationship that helped you?
9. What is your most memorable Leadership Academy experience? Why?
10. If you could wave a magic wand and improve one aspect of the Leadership Academy, what would you select and why?
11. Is there anything else that you wished I would have asked?

Results

Survey Results: Quantitative Findings

Analysis of forced-choice survey items used descriptive statistics to identify respondents' experiences and perceptions as a result of Leadership Academy participation. Open-ended survey items were analyzed by thematic recognition of words. All responses were anonymous.

Descriptives, including frequency distributions, are shown in Table 4. Most notable are the findings that as a result of Leadership Academy participation, 92% of participants expressed (a) a high level of self-confidence regarding leadership positions, and (b) knowing their individual strengths as defined by the Strengths Finder tool. Additionally, as a result of their Leadership Academy participation, 88% of participants (a) considered themselves a leader, (b) were able to develop and pursue a personal leadership development plan, and (c) used their strengths (also defined by the Strength Finder tool).

To further understand the influence of demographic variables on experiences and perceptions as a result of Leadership Academy participation, cross-tabulation analyses were conducted for age and race. While neither indicated significance, it was noted that age did provide some variation on (a) self-confidence in skills as

a leader, (b) seeking development opportunities, and (c) confidence in networking skills (see Tables 5-7).

Table 4

Experience and Perception as a Result of Leadership Academy Participation

Item	n	Percent
High-level of self-confidence regarding leadership positions[a]	23	92%
Know individual strengths as defined by the Strengths Finder tool[a]	23	92%
Consider myself a leader[a]	22	88%
Able to develop and pursue a personal leadership development plan[b]	22	88%
Use strengths[a]	22	88%
Seek development opportunities[a]	21	82%
Confident in networking skills[a]	20	80%
High-level of self-efficacy regarding leadership positions[a]	20	80%
Satisfied with career[a]	16	64%
Quality of life has improved[a]	14	56%
Accepted a new professional role/position external to current organization[b]	9	36%
Accepted a non-AAFCS leadership role[b]	8	32%
Total compensation increased[b]	4	16%
Received a promotion[b]	2	8%

Note. N=25
[a] Reflects the number and percentages of respondents' level of agreement (agree or strongly agree) to this question. [b] Reflects the number and percentage of participants answering "yes" to this question.

Table 5

Variation in Self-Confidence in Skills as a Leader by Age[a]

Age	N	Percent
20-29	2	8%
30-39	8	32%
40-49	7	28%
50-59	3	12%
60+	3	12%

Note: N=25
[a] Reflects the number and percentages of respondents' level of agreement (agree or strongly agree) to the question, "As a result of participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy, I have a high level of self-confidence in my skills as a leader."

Table 6

Variation in Seeking Development Opportunities by Age[a]

| Age	N	Percent
20-29	2	8%
30-39	7	28%
40-49	7	28%
50-59	3	12%
60+	2	8%

Note: N=25
[a] Reflects the number and percentages of respondents' level of agreement (agree or strongly agree) to the question, "As a result of participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy, I continue to seek development opportunities."

Table 7

Variation in Confidence in Networking Skills by Age[a]

Age	n	Percent
20-29	1	4%
30-39	8	32%
40-49	6	24%
50-59	2	8%
60+	3	12%

Note: N=25
[a] Reflects the number and percentages of respondents' level of agreement (agree or strongly agree) to the question, "As a result of participating in the AAFCS Leadership Academy, I am confident in my networking skills.

Survey: Open-Ended Responses

In the open-ended portion of the survey, respondents were asked to describe, in one word, the impact of the Leadership Academy on their personal and professional lives. The word cloud in Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the frequency of the open-ended responses whereby the larger the word, the greater the frequency. There were 32 words provided. Of these, the following were reported most frequently: networking ($n = 5$), good ($n = 3$), time ($n = 2$), impactful ($n = 2$), and enhanced ($n = 2$). Other words closely related to networking, such as network and connections, were consolidated into the count for networking. All other words were reported once.

Figure 1

Impacts of Leadership Academy on Personal and Professional Life
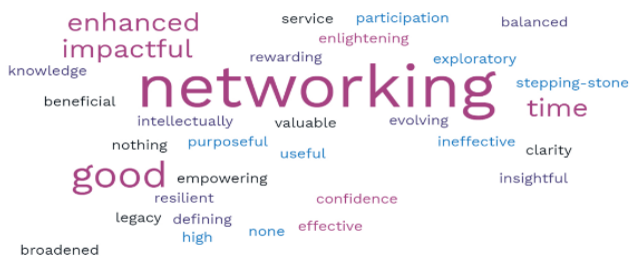
Respondents also shared non-association benefits and opportunities they received from Leadership Academy participation. Networking and mentorship were often mentioned. Additionally, six respondents indicated that their participation had led to increased leadership roles and opportunities, and two shared that they gained skills and tools helpful in new or expanded job roles.

Focus Group: Qualitative Findings

Data were organized inductively. Initial and axial coding was used to identify themes and trends in the data. The researcher remained as objective as possible and refrained from making interpretations until all data was coded. The coding process allowed the researcher to attach keywords to text segments and reduce data through the categorization of similar data chunks (Miles et al., 2018). The analysis process included a comparison of codes to develop themes related to leadership experiences and influencers. In total, 36 codes were identified through the data analysis. From these codes, four themes emerged: confidence builder, network facilitator, opportunity booster, and paying it forward. After the investigator classified the responses, a second independent researcher confirmed the codes, subcodes, and major themes (Miles et al., 2018). All identifying information was removed to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Focus group participants agreed that the Leadership Academy offered a comprehensive and robust program that improved self-awareness and helped participants learn more about themselves, develop higher-quality relationships and gain new skills and experiences. Participants talked about the community, affiliation, and sense of belonging that was built through the experience. Illustrations of the four emerging themes - confidence builder, network facilitator, opportunity booster, and paying it forward – follow.

Confidence Builder

All participants discussed how their confidence increased. One participant shared that

> "… some leaders reached out and asked me if I would be interested in [serving as a mentor]. I thought that was neat and kind of a vote of confidence that they knew me and thought I might be a good match so… that was good and so I'm serving as a mentor to [a current participant] which has been good."

Another participant offered that the program "… gave me the confidence to do those things and serve in different leadership roles outside of [our field]." Another participant expressed that the program "… gave [her] the confidence to go before [her] legislators… and before that [she] wouldn't have considered."

Network Facilitator

All participants expressed the benefits of meeting new people and making valuable connections. As expected, one participant shared that "… it was a really good way to network, meet people, and learn more about the organization" while another expressed how she was able to "engage with… professional leaders, you know people [that she] looked up to in that capacity. [Being in the Academy] really made me feel welcomed and included in the organization". Tied to the role of mentoring, one participant shared "meeting people that… encourage you to lead was helpful." While growing your network within the organization was expected, one participant mentioned the opportunity to "expand [their] horizon with the people that [they] work with." A final example was "It helped [me] develop a better network of like-[minded] people… definitely opened doors."

Opportunity Booster

One participant explained that "[Leadership Academy] just exposed me to opportunities to lead and made me feel more confident." Another participant expounded on this idea and shared that being a part of the Leadership Academy "better equipped me with the skills necessary to I don't want to say just lead but be involved with various opportunities that allowed me to lead, maybe not alone, but as a group or team and it definitely made me see that, I am a good leader and that I can do these things." Another participant explained that she "became the President of a [state] affiliate" while another discussed "serving on church boards and within the youth ministry."

Paying it Forward

Most of the participants have found ways to contribute to colleagues and society, more broadly. They valued the care, concern, and consideration shown towards them and because that care made such a personal impact, they desire to help others in similar ways. The idea of paying it forward was expressed as realizing "how you can play a role in [contributing to others]." Two participants shared specific projects that they have worked on:

> "I've started a mentorship group just to help others that were stuck in their dissertation phases and so far, at least one is almost done… I'm glad that the leadership skills I got have enabled me to say, yes, I can help others to achieve an objective…"

and …

> "I've been able to make [a local community] group more of a leadership type academy on a very small scale. And not only that program but other programs

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that I work with, [such as] volunteer groups. [Using the Leadership Academy principles and activities help to] take the program to the next level. I'm actually working with a state leadership group [using some of the tools] that can take the program up a notch [in terms of] leadership."

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to understand professional and personal outcomes associated with participation in a leadership development program. Blending the quantitative and qualitative data helps to validate the data and illuminate findings. Our findings were consistent with existing literature on leadership training programs for women; however, our research offers an interesting perspective on the broader implications associated with leadership development. Specifically, leading quantitative findings for this study indicated that as a result of participating in the Leadership Academy program, 92% (n = 23) of participants expressed high levels of self-confidence regarding leadership positions, as well as knowing their individual strengths as defined by the Strengths Finder tool. Additionally, 88% (n = 22) of participants (a) considered themselves a leader, (b) were able to develop and pursue a personal leadership development plan, and (c) used their strengths. In addition, the majority of participants were able to seek development opportunities (82%; n = 21), were confident in their networking skills (80%; n = 20) and had a high-level of self-efficacy regarding leadership positions (80%; n = 20). Not only are these findings consistent with previous literature, but they were also expected since the Leadership Academy training program included a mentor program and provided a variety of effective resources for developing self-efficacy. Moreover, the Leadership Academy provided multiple opportunities for networking with leaders in the field, such as board members and mentors. Quantitative items that were inconsistent with previous literature included those that were related to receiving increased compensation. Only 16% (n = 4) of participants reported increased compensation and only 8% (n = 2) reported receiving a promotion.

Qualitative findings indicate four emerging themes - confidence builder, network facilitator, opportunity booster, and paying it forward. Participants discussed how their confidence increased and expressed the benefits of meeting new people and making meaningful connections. Participants expressed increased positive attitudes and an openness to explore leadership opportunities. Finally, most of the participants discussed both the impact and modeling of the Leadership Academy planning team and other organizational leaders. The experiences with these leaders and the care, concern, and consideration shown during the Leadership Academy made such a profound impact on participants that they desired to help others in similar ways. The four emerging themes from this study are consistent with previous literature regarding leadership development training programs for women.

Future research should examine professional outcomes such as increased compensation and promotions. Researchers should also consider assessing leadership styles and traits and including assessments for emotional intelligence and personal strengths. Finally, more research is needed to understand other factors that build leadership capacity and help reduce gender disparity and inequity within organizational leadership ranks.

Limitations

There are important limitations to note for this study. First, the program participants volunteered to participate in the Leadership Academy. This self-selection bias threatens external validity. This study was also focused on outcomes as derived from program objectives not leadership theories. A focus on leadership theories would create an opportunity to use validated, reliable leadership scales. Finally, this study explored mentoring, networking, and training although there are many worthy factors that contribute to leadership capacity.

Implications

Women leaders remain largely underrepresented in organizational leadership. This study supports prior research showing that formal leadership development programs for women help improve self-confidence and self-efficacy; a solution to facilitate gender equity (Maher & Atack, 2011; Clarke, 2011; O'Bannon et al., 2010). Additionally, findings from this study suggests that these same programs can contribute to personal development as well. In fact, our study shows that leadership development programs can help women grow in personal, social, civic, and organizational leadership roles. Taken together, leadership development programs may have the power to support women in a holistic way –personally and professionally.

This study also suggests that mentoring relationships are integral to the success of leadership development. Specifically, we find that women engaged in a mentoring relationship – as mentee or partner - have a desire to help others. Organizational leaders might consider leadership development programs as a tool to improve work commitment and job satisfaction.

Both organizational leaders and leadership development practitioners can use findings from this study to inform interventions and programs with the goal of (1) providing support mechanisms and exposure that can help women leaders build and sustain their networks and (2) helping to build confidence and to encourage women to push past perceived boundaries. Both of these goals may help advance gender equity and women's leadership capacity.

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