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“The Road Less Travelled;”
Women’s Journeys to Community Leadership within the Region of Waterloo
by
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Bachelor of Social Work, St. Thomas University, 2006
THESIS
Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of women within the Region of Waterloo along their journeys to community leadership. The literature review reveals the predominance of deficits-based research on the barriers preventing women from attaining positions of leadership and a significant gap in scholarship on female community leaders. This qualitative study consisted of semi-structured interviews with 15 female community leaders. It was influenced by an intersectional feminist perspective and used a constructivist grounded theory approach. The findings of this study offer three groups of related factors that can encourage, support and recognize the increasing number of women attaining positions of leadership within their communities. The first group of related factors reconceptualises community leadership based on the experiences of the participants. The second group of related factors addresses the precursors that foster the emergence of community leadership capacity in girls and young women. The third group of related factors addresses the main sustaining factors for female community leaders. Recommendations and possible implementation channels are described for each of these groups of related factors. The findings of this pioneering research study provide initial contributions to this under-theorized area of leadership scholarship.

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The Road Not Taken

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

(Frost, 1920)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite the advancements of women's political and civil rights and the significant growth of career and educational opportunities, women remain chronically underrepresented in leadership positions across all sectors of our society (Cukier, Bindhani, Amato, Smarz, & Saekang, 2012). A majority of the research on women in leadership has focused on the barriers, biases, and limitations, commonly referred to as "the glass ceiling," that block women from achieving leadership positions (Berry & Franks, 2010; Bullough, Newburry, Kroeck, Kundu, & Lowe, 2012; Carbert, 2003; Godwin, 2010; Heilman, 2001; Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). These studies limited their scope to the experiences of female corporate leaders, leaving the experiences of female community leaders grossly under-theorized and neglected within the scholarship. A growing number of women are emerging as community leaders, yet little is known on how women maneuver along their journeys to attain these leadership positions within their communities (Bond, Holmes, Byrne, Babchuck, & Kirton-Robbins, 2008). This study of female leaders' journeys seeks to provide valuable insights in the development of groups of factors related to encouraging, supporting and recognizing women's community leadership. These groups of related factors will assist in the ongoing efforts to increase the representation of women in community leadership.

Definition of Leadership

As noted by Warren Bennis (2007) in the introduction of his article titled, *The Challenge of Leadership in the Modern World*, "It is almost a cliché of the leadership literature that a single definition of leadership is lacking," (p.2). For the purpose of this study I have defined leadership as having influence over a group of people to achieve a desired result (Northhouse, 2007).

Leaders may be individuals who have been appointed to specific authority positions or may have emerged from within informal organizations. Community leadership positions include positions that have both power and influence over decisions that have impact on the community.

Examples include elected officials, leaders of advocacy groups, faith-based or cultural leaders, public figures, and prominent activists. Critiques of this definition will be explored in the literature review; nevertheless, I submit that it is within these leadership positions that the most pronounced and immediate changes in society can occur.

Thesis Outline

The objective of this research study is to determine what happens along women's journeys to enable them to become community leaders. I will begin by situating myself in relation to this topic and research study. This will be followed by a review of the existing literature that examines the scholarship on leader emergence theories, gendered leadership styles, and barriers to women's attainment of leadership positions. This review will conclude with a discussion on this topic's relevance to social work. The research questions will then be clearly stated, followed by a discussion of intersectional feminist theory. The constructivist grounded theory approach and qualitative methods of this research study will be then outlined. I will then share the themes that emerged during my data analysis and propose a reconceptualization of community leadership. I will then propose two groups of related factors that explain how to encourage and support women on their journeys to community leadership. These three groups of related factors will be explored and their implications will be discussed. I will then review the limitations of this study, followed by suggestions for future research. I will conclude with a discussion of the practical and pedagogical implications of this study for social work.

Interest in Topic Area

Feminist theorists (Ellingson, 2011; Harding, 1987; Wuest, 1995) acknowledge the importance of the researcher's social location to the research process noting, "all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced and that it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed," (Mann & Kelley, 1997, p. 392). Grounded theory also recognizes that the researcher's previous experience, "forms guidelines and reference points that the researcher uses to deductively formulate questions that may then elicit data that leads to inductive concepts being formulated later," (Glaser, 1978, p. 39). Thus, it is only appropriate to begin by discussing my relevant experience and personal motivations for conducting this study.

My parents are both from rural Prince Edward Island and grew up in deep poverty. My mother grew up on a dairy farm and my father grew up in a family of fishermen. My parents used to joke that my father could not afford milk for his tea and my mother could not afford tea for her milk. My parents went on to become educated, working professionals and decided to move away from Prince Edward Island to build a more economically stable life.

My parents moved to Moncton, New Brunswick and had my younger brother and me. My younger brother was born with a physical disability and uses a wheelchair. He required most of my parent's attention and support. I understood at a very early age that not everyone is born with the same opportunities and I had a personal responsibility to help not only my brother, but my community. As a teenager I was very involved in our church and my faith instilled a strong sense of personal responsibility for the wellbeing of the community, as well as a deep commitment to serve.

I decided to become a social worker when I was about twelve years old. I had initially

wanted to serve as a nun and completed an internship at our local convent during my last year of high school. Upon graduation, I attended St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick to pursue a Bachelors of Social Work. During my first year I was introduced to critical thinking for the first time, a subject that was sorely lacking during my upbringing. I took a course on Inequality and Society and began to recognize the oppressive structures created by patriarchy and capitalism. I became a radical activist, flirting with anarchism and communism, settling on socialism and feminism. I founded a women's collective on campus and was an active member of numerous community groups working for social change.

In early 2003, when Canada was considering joining in the United States' invasion of Iraq I was among the thousands of Canadians to protest against Canada's involvement. I remember that the newly elected leader of the NDP Jack Layton marched with the protesters. He had not yet won a seat in Parliament. When Prime Minister Chretien reluctantly declared that Canada would not officially join in the invasion I realized that it was ultimately up to him and not to those of us freezing on the streets. That realization led me to join the New Democratic Party (NDP) and at age nineteen I ran for the local federal nomination. I lost the nomination by a single vote and subsequently was hired by the successful candidate to work on his campaign. Since then, I have worked as an organizer and political staffer throughout New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario for the past eight years. The majority of my work has involved encouraging women to run for office and to take on leadership positions within the community. I have recruited close to one hundred candidates (and have had at least that many decline) in my time with the NDP, and have noted distinctions between how men and women become candidates.

Anecdotally, men have tended to approach the Party and offer to run as candidates, boasting their experience and expertise. Conversely, women seldom approach the Party in this

fashion and most require a concerted recruitment effort taking months and sometimes years of persuasion and deliberation. Although potential female candidates had the same leadership qualities and ties to the community as the men, they were far less likely to recognize their capacity to formally lead. Many appeared much more comfortable behind the scenes and, to a certain degree, felt more effective in that role.

I have embarked on this research project to explore the unique aspects of women's journeys to community leadership to find out how we, as a society, can best encourage and support them. As a social democratic feminist, I hold the belief that change will only happen when more women attain leadership positions, both at the community and political levels. Encouraging more women to become leaders is crucial for the advancement of women, as those with power and privilege are unlikely to recognize the concerns of those who do not (Hunt, 2007). As noted by McEldowney, Borrowksy, and Gramberg (2009) in their study on young female leaders, "High-level decision making is not shared equally across the population but is found among people who hold powerful positions in government as well as the public and private sectors of society" (p. 26). With the goal of supporting more women in leadership positions, the aim of this qualitative research project is to determine what happens along women's journeys to enable them to become community leaders. I hope that the findings from this research will assist in the efforts to encourage more women to attain leadership positions within their communities.

I am also interested in studying women's journeys to leadership for more selfish reasons. I consider myself to be on my own journey to community leadership. There have been times on this journey when I have been discouraged and considered walking off this path. I want to know

how female community leaders have made it to their positions and how they manage to sustain their resiliency, despite the obstacles and challenges they endure. Throughout my life there have been female leaders that have inspired me. I want to know more about them, but have always felt too intimidated to ask them personal questions about their journeys. This research study provides me with a legitimate process to enter into these discussions and explore the lives of female community leaders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review begins with an exploration of the main schools of thought on leader emergence and the feminist scholarships on leadership, followed by the topics of gendered leadership styles, barriers to women's leadership, and female community leaders. Lastly, the review illustrates this topic's relevance to social work practice and demonstrates the need for further research on the journeys of women to community leadership.

Much of the literature on women's leadership has focused on the barriers to women attaining leadership and differences in leadership styles between men and women. The scholarship that I was able to locate on the journeys of women to leadership was limited to the experiences of women as corporate or powerful political leaders, to the utter exclusion of community leaders' experiences. This research project will add significantly to this under-theorized facet of the feminist scholarship on women's experiences of leadership.

Leader Emergence Theories and Feminist Critiques

The question of how individuals become leaders has been studied for centuries (Burns, 1978). It is important to emphasize that the leadership literature has become so vast that a detailed review is beyond the scope of this study. My intention in this review is to merely highlight the two main schools of thought on leader emergence, followed by some feminist critiques.

Beginning in the 19th century, the concept of leadership was based upon an individual's specific attributes or characteristics such as one's intelligence, self-confidence, drive, and dependability. This conceptualization was first proposed by Carlyle in 1840 and was known as the "Great Man Theory" later "Trait Theory of Leadership," and later still, "Leader Attribute Approach." The theory proposes that leaders are born predisposed to becoming leaders as they

hold a set of stable personality traits (Sjoberg, 2009). This theory is limited as its studies only focused on a small set of individual attributes, failed to consider situational influences, assumed fixed identity, and only accounted for the leadership experiences of white men (Sjoberg, 2009).

In response to the earlier “Great Man Theories” of leadership, researchers sought to understand the efficacy of leadership behaviours, rather than traits. “Situational Leadership Theory” and later “Situational Contingency Theory” was first proposed by Hersey and Blanchard in the mid-1970s. This theory assumes that there is no one style of leadership and that a leader’s actions are predicated on the situation in which the individual finds herself or himself. According to this theory, leaders are forged through situations, events and interactions with others (Sjoberg, 2009).

Many feminist scholars (Key, et al., 2012) have critiqued the mainstream scholarship on leadership and leader emergence theories. For instance, Black feminist scholars have pointed to the exclusion of Black women’s (and men’s) leadership experiences in the construction of these theories. Socialist feminists have criticized the conceptualization of individual leaders as it discounts the importance of participatory leadership through collectivist movements that challenge the social order (Code, 2000). In addition, some radical feminists have criticized leadership as a patriarchal and paternal construction and favour consensus based, egalitarian models of organizing for change (Sjoberg, 2009).

Feminist Perspectives on Leadership

Numerous feminists have argued for descriptive¹ representation for women among community leaders because women are a distinct group who share essential common

¹ Descriptive representation is the concept that individuals in positions of power within a society should represent the descriptive qualities of that society, for instance gender, class, ethnicity, culture.

experiences, insights, and concerns and therefore warrant decision-making influence (Godwin, 2010; Hunt, 2007; Mansbridge, 1999). In addition, they suggest that women are more likely to represent and advocate for the concerns of all women and open up the channels of power (Mansbridge, 1999; Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, & Wash, 2009). Clearly, one can easily criticize this viewpoint for its simplistic and essentialist generalization of women.

There is a hope among many feminists that female leaders will reject the traditional operationalization of leadership that is coupled with selfish ambition and instead embrace a definition of leadership that is consistent with a desire to create community (Fine, 2009, p. 199). In a study conducted by the Girl Scouts of America, girls identified leaders as individuals who want to help others, share their knowledge, and make the world a better place. In contrast, boys defined leadership as being their own boss, making more money and having more power (Schoenbert & Salmond, 2007). These findings demonstrate that even among children, there exists gendered conceptualizations of leadership which has significant implications on how leadership is explained and encouraged in children and adolescents. Girls may be reluctant to gravitate towards leadership positions if they are constructed in masculine terms of power and control.

There is an emerging argument in feminist literature that suggests many women who attain leadership positions do so by betraying their gender or “acting like men” and do not represent the concerns of women. A study of Canadian parliamentarians found that a Member of Parliament’s political ideology played a more important role than her gender in determining whether or not her actions in Parliament were favourable to women (Tremblay, 1998). This has led some feminist researchers to question whether simply promoting more women to leadership positions will improve conditions for women or, instead, just be used as a smokescreen to

distract feminists from more radical actions that lead to true social change (Tremblay, 1998; Tremblay & Pelletier, 2000). For instance, Wilson (2004) argues that women's individual leadership has the potential to overshadow the collective potential of women, "by placing the burden on the individual to change or shift dynamics for the realizations of her rights" (p.17).

Gendered Leadership Styles

In reviewing the literature, one common explanation for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is that women have a different leadership approach or style that is less valued within Western society than the stereotypical masculine 'command and control' approach to leadership (Berry & Franks, 2010; Zaslow & Schoenberg, 2012). Although men and women appear to have similar leadership characteristics such as intelligence, commitment, vision, and charisma, some of the literature suggests that they employ different leadership approaches (Rosener, 1997). Generally, studies have found that women's leadership style is more collaborative, relational, and focused on the future, qualities that are not appreciated in current leadership positions within our Western society (Carbert, 2003; Hertneky, 2012; Lambert, 2008). While some studies recognize that leadership styles may in fact be socially constructed, US Ambassador Swanee Hunt (2007) argues,

Advocates for women's leadership need to stop their handwringing over whether gender differences exist and appreciate the advantages women have over men's brawny style of governance, whether because of biology, social roles, or a cascading combination of the two. (p. 6)

The concept of gendered leadership styles has been critiqued by some feminist scholars for constructing a false dichotomy between the sexes. Meta-analyses of research on gendered leadership styles suggest that there are few behaviour differences between male and female

leaders (Kolb, 1999). Fine (2009) argues that studies on gendered leadership styles may be flawed as they set out to determine how women and men lead, which necessarily forces one to develop a set of binary characteristics that re-inscribe gender stereotypes. There is also an argument that the focus on women's distinct leadership abilities proscribes gender specific attributes and reinforces the gendering of women's potential within organizations (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Another critique of the concept of leadership styles has come from Black feminist scholars who have pointed out that these concepts do not speak to the experiences of Black women (Byrd, 2009; Key et al., 2012; McClellan, 2012). Black feminist scholars have highlighted the role of spirituality and the importance of female role models, primarily mothers, in the formation of Black women leaders (Key et al., 2012). They also note the commitment to walk alongside Black men in the struggle to dismantle the hierarchies of power that challenge equality (Byrd, 2009; McClellan, 2012).

Canadian Aboriginal scholars have also critiqued traditional concepts of leadership for not reflecting the aboriginal experience of 'circle leadership' (Julien, Wright, & Zinni, 2010). They have described Aboriginal leadership as a series of concentric rings, joining together in such a manner that each aspect of leadership is connected to all other aspects of leadership. Aboriginal leadership holistically recognizes the influence of spirituality and has an appreciation of how decisions will impact upon future generations (Julien, Wright, & Zinni, 2010).

Recently, research on leadership styles is moving beyond the binary of masculine and feminine styles to emphasize teamwork, community involvement, and social change. This new form of leadership is more about one's ability to bring people together around a set of values to take action, as opposed to occupying certain roles or positions (Zaslow & Schoenberg, 2012).

Both servant leadership and transformational leadership offer promising leadership models. Servant leadership, first proposed by Robert Greenleaf in 1970, is a model of leadership that focuses on the growth and wellbeing of others and the communities to which they belong. Those who practice servant leadership put the needs of others ahead of their own and help those around them develop to their fullest potential. Feminist scholars have deconstructed the paradoxical concept of servant leadership and have noted concerns with its proponents' lack of gender-based analysis with the terms servant and leader (Reynolds, K, 2011).

Transformational leadership is a form of leadership that aims to increase the motivation and morale of followers in order to improve on their performance. Transformational leaders encourage those they work with to take on increasing levels of responsibility for their work and develop their own sense of ownership (Bass, B.M. & Avolio, B.J, 1994). They take care to assign tasks with the goal of increasing their followers' personal capacities and strengths. This model of leadership is of particular interest for this study as it recognizes the importance of empowering others as a component of leadership.

Another recent formulation of leadership style is known as the ontological-phenomenological model of leadership (Erhard, Jenson, & Granger, 2012). The ontological-phenomenological model of leadership recognizes that leadership is practiced, not a set of specific skills or types of environments (Erhard, Jenson, & Granger, 2012). This model assumes that a leader's way of being and their actions are correlated with the way in which what they are dealing with occurs for them personally. This relates specifically to the leader's individual context of the incident or issue. The most promising aspect of this model to this current research study is the recognition that being a leader is about creating a future that fulfills the concerns of the 'relevant parties' that was not going to happen naturally. The 'relevant parties,' include those

led by the leader and those by whom the leader is led. The recognition that this possible future is not based on the ideas or priorities of the leader, but rather the concerns of the community, is of great interest for this study on women's journeys to community leadership as it thrusts the concept of leadership beyond the confines of the corporate or political spheres.

Barriers to Women's Leadership

Significant study has been undertaken to identify the numerous barriers to women's ability to attain community leadership positions. Researchers have cited family responsibilities, the wage gap, sexism, gender stereotypes, and socialized gender differences, commonly referred to as "the glass ceiling," that contribute to this underrepresentation (Berry & Franks, 2010; Bullough et al., 2012; Carbert, 2003; Fox & Lawless, 2004; Galambos & Hughes, 2000; Godwin, 2010; Heilman, 2001; Lambert, 2008; Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). For women with intersecting oppressed identities there may be additional barriers. Black women leaders, for example, identified racial discrimination as more prevalent in their positions than gender discrimination, whereas younger women identified higher incidents of sexual harassment (Key et al., 2012).

Within the literature, socialized gender differences stand out as the main barriers to women's leadership in Western countries where there have been advances in women's education, access to employment, and legal measures to recognize equality. As young children and throughout their lives, women are expected to take on characteristics traditionally associated with females, such as taking care of others, listening, maintaining relationships, and putting others' needs ahead of their own (Zaslow & Schoenberg, 2012). These expectations have made women less likely to be recognized, or to recognize within themselves, their leadership capacity. For instance, women at the pinnacle of their professions are less likely to deem themselves qualified for leadership positions compared to their male counterparts (Fox & Lawless, 2004;

Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009).

The aversion to the so-called “dirty game of politics” and to the internal politics of many community organizations has been noted by several scholars as a major deterrent for women (Carbert, 2003; Hunt, 2007; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009; Lambert, 2008). Community organizations often struggle with inadequate funding and some lack the capacity to achieve their mandates. Women cited corruption, patronage, conflict, nepotism, lip service, and coercion as being the reasons for their lack of participation in leadership positions (Carbert, 2003).

From an international perspective it appears women’s opportunities for formal leadership positions are hindered in societies that maintain a strong commitment to patriarchal or collectivist cultural practices and societies where business, societal, economic, technological, and political institutions are characterized as underdeveloped and plagued with widespread corruption (Bullough et al., 2012; Toh & Leonardelli, 2012). Although there have been some notable examples of female leaders within some of the societies characterized above, namely former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia of Bangladesh, their leadership did not necessarily bring about improvements in the lives of women within those countries (Richards, 2011). I assume that in societies with strong patriarchal cultural practices, coupled with widespread corruption it would be very difficult for women to maneuver through the bureaucratic maze of bribes, favouritism, and culturally accepted sexism. This would naturally result in an underrepresentation of women and members of other oppressed groups in formal leadership positions within these societies.

Women and Community Leadership

Although few studies have explored the journeys of female community leaders, a study by Bond et al. (2008) identified numerous similarities among seventeen female neighborhood

leaders' paths. Many of the study participants had been engaged in their communities as children, most often alongside members of their immediate family. The study found that the main catalyst for their adult involvement stemmed from a particular community issue or need. Interestingly, only a minority of the neighborhood leaders listed wanting to have decision-making influence as a primary reason for their involvement, although the majority were proud of their contribution to social change. The female community leaders were also quite reluctant to identify experiences of sexism among their journeys, to the point of emphasizing the absence of gender-based barriers (Bond et al., 2008). I find this perplexing, as many of the participants in my research study openly discussed experiences of discrimination. Two possible reasons may be because Bond et al.'s study was conducted in the United States and its participants had attained positions of leadership at the neighbourhood block level as opposed to the broader community level. As neighbourhood block leadership positions are confined to a small geographic area they likely pose a less recognized threat to patriarchy than higher profile community leadership positions and the participants in Bond et al.'s study may have experienced less overt backlashes related to their gender.

There have been two recent noteworthy contributions to the study of women's leadership, Stead & Elliot's *Women's Leadership* (2009) and Coleman's *Women at the top* (2011). Although not focused exclusively on female community leaders, their findings on women's experiences of leadership are relevant to this study. Stead & Elliot found that women's relationships to others in their sector and their participation in networks within their organizations were key factors to their leadership attainment. Coleman interviewed sixty senior professional women and found that women continue to face a number of systemic and personal obstacles to their development, mainly related to mothering and household responsibilities. She concluded with

recommendations for increased networking opportunities among women and mentoring programs.

A body of literature has begun to emerge on Indigenous women's community leadership (Portman & Garrett, 2005; Barkdull, 2009). Indigenous scholars suggest that Indigenous women's leadership can be broadly described as more concerned with one's responsibility to the community coupled with an emphasis on social problems. There appears to be a recognition of gender roles as 'complementary' wherein gender roles are proscribed, yet equally valued by the culture (Barkdull, 2009). Some major themes highlighted in the research on Indigenous women's community leadership include knowing oneself, significant turning points that led to leadership, service as a 'calling,' and walking in both the Indigenous and White worlds (Barkdull, 2009).

Relevance to Social Work Practice

Although social workers are ethically bound to promote social change throughout our practice, social workers rarely encourage clients to engage in the policy process or become politically active, mainly citing concerns of coercion due to power differences as well as workplace policy (Harris Rome, Hoechstetter, & Wolf-Branigin, 2010; Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, 2008). Becoming active within the community has been found to be empowering for a whole range of clients; however, a process on how to ethically empower our clients at the structural level is still lacking (Galambos & Hughes, 2000; Harris Rome et al., 2010; Lips & Hastings, 2012). By exploring how female community leaders have been motivated and supported throughout their journeys, we may be able to envision a process to encourage our clients to become active in the community and take on positions of leadership.

This area of research may also be of value for social workers because it is a profession made up of over 80% women who are often involved in their communities (Government of Canada, 2013). There are certainly many among our ranks who are either already community leaders or are interested in becoming one. I see community leadership as an extension of our identities as social workers and our leadership development should be actively and explicitly fostered during our course work and practicum placements. The findings from this research study offer a reconceptualization of community leadership that is consistent with our professional values and Code of Ethics. This model could serve as a guide for faculties and our professional associations to introduce the concept of community leadership to ethical social work practice.

Research Needs

My interest in this area was sparked earlier this year by a report from Ryerson University's Diversity Institute that measured the representation of women in leadership positions across seven sectors within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (Cukier, Bindhani, Amato, Smarz, & Saekang, 2012). The sectors included those in elected office, the corporate sector, the voluntary sector, the public sector, the legal sector, the education sector, and appointees to agencies, boards, and commissions. The study found that women made up less than a third of all of leaders within these sectors, despite representing over half of the population (Cukier et al., 2012). Visible minority women fared considerably worse, making up less than 3% of all leaders, even though they represent over a quarter of the GTA population (Cukier et al., 2012). The authors explored several barriers to women's attainment of leadership positions and concluded with a call for research on female leaders' experiences,

Furthermore, both visible and non-visible minority women who have managed to ascend to top management positions in spite of the barriers to advancement

are also, in and of themselves, interesting subjects for further research. Their experiences may shed light on how aspirations are shaped and the skills and attitudes needed to navigate the challenges, thereby informing our efforts to prepare the next generation of leaders. (Cukier et al., 2012, p. 23)

As illustrated in this literature review, the focus of scholars has been primarily on barriers to women's leadership and gendered leadership styles, with very little research focused on the process of how women maneuver along their paths to leadership. Bond et al. (2008) noted there is "a surprising absence of literature on how and why women become involved in their communities as activists and leaders in the first place" (p. 49). This absence in the literature, as well as the deficit-based orientation of the current scholarship on women's leadership, points to the need for further study exploring women's journeys to community leadership.

Feminist activists and scholars have called for increasing women's representation in community leadership positions to ensure that women's priorities are taken into consideration during the decision-making process. Numerous studies have explored the barriers and limitations women face to attaining leadership roles, such as family responsibilities, the wage gap, and socialized gender roles. However, this deficits-based approach to the issue of women's leadership does not account for the experiences of women who have attained leadership positions and, in essence, marginalizes their successes and excludes them from the conversation. The exploration of women's paths to positions of leadership within their communities will provide a significant contribution to this under-theorized body of research and offer a roadmap for other women along their journeys to leadership.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss this research study's methodology. I will begin by stating the research questions, followed by a discussion of intersectional feminist theory and constructivist grounded theory. I will then outline the qualitative research methods of this study, including the recruitment strategy, data collection and data analysis processes. The chapter concludes with a discussion on my role as researcher and the ethical considerations of this study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do female community leaders define leadership?
2. What have women experienced along their journeys to community leadership?
3. What sustaining factors support women along their journeys to community leadership?

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Intersectional Feminist Theory

I struggled with identifying a theoretical perspective to underpin this thesis. Strategically, I am uncomfortable with the trend to compartmentalize feminism. There are so few Canadians that identify openly as feminists and I have long felt that it is more important for us to focus on our common principles instead of narrowing in on our differences. In my daily life, I have not been challenged to dissect my own notions of feminism; however, as a scholar I do need to be explicit about what I mean when I say that I am a feminist.

As a white, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, Canadian feminist, I had initially assumed that gender was the primary component of one's identity. As a woman within many of the dominant identity characteristics within Western society, I was blind to my own privilege.

During this research study, I have had to confront my personal bias and reflect on how my privilege has influenced this perspective. Intersectional feminist theory has challenged my tendency to generalize the identity of women and led me to consider the intersecting characteristics that exist within those identities.

Intersectional feminist theory emerged in Canada and the United States in the 1980s as a response to the inadequacies of the mainstream feminist movement to address the issues, concerns and struggles of racialized women (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2006). Intersectional feminist theory was further broadened to include other dimensions of identity and relationships to power such as language, class, immigration status, and colonial history. Intersectional feminist theory moves us beyond the tradition within many streams of feminism to “add and stir” in other dimensions of identity, such as one’s sexuality or class. Intersectional feminist theorists (Frederick, 2013) argue that these forms of identity politics will not independently destroy underlying systems and structures of oppression, though empowering for some. Intersectional feminist theory works to challenge socially constructed identity categories and recognizes their reinforcing and referencing relationships to one another.

Intersectional feminist theory differs from gender-based analysis in that it does not prioritize gender identity and one’s position within patriarchy to the exclusion or competition of other identities, such as race or class. Intersectional feminist theory attempts to take a holistic approach in its study of women’s lives. Its core principles include using a multi-dimensional analysis, centering its studies on the lives of those most marginalized and refusing to accept simplistic, binary thinking that places women in competition with one another.

This theory values women’s particular experiences and appreciates that women are embedded in histories and traditions that give them unique perspectives, opportunities and

responsibilities (Wilson, 2004). Intersectional feminist theory recognizes that various groups of women are positioned differently in the hierarchies of power and influence (Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2006).

Intersectional feminist theorists argue that, under the guise of universality, the experiences and priorities of white, middle-class women have too often been taken as the norm for all women, and the experiences and consciousness of women of color in the United State and women outside of the Western world have largely remained unrecognized and unexamined (Frederick, 2013, p. 116).

In choosing to focus on female community leaders I am taking the position that gender and sex identities are central to one's journey to leadership, while recognizing that women are far from being a monolithic group. This study attempts to walk the fine line between generalizing women's experiences and being overwhelmed by the myriad of diversity among them.

Throughout the course of this research I have attempted to appreciate how characteristics of identity including class, ethnicity, gender, history, sexuality, ability, geographic location, age, and race combine and interlock to impact on the journeys of female community leaders. From the language used in my interview guide, the make-up of my participant sample, to the appreciation of nuances and differences during my analysis of the data, I have attempted to understand the many factors that combine with discriminatory social practices to influence women's journeys to community leadership.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

This research study used a constructivist grounded theory approach from a feminist perspective. Although there is no singular feminist epistemology, feminist research shares three core commitments: knowledge is grounded in women's experiences, research should benefit women, and the researcher must immerse herself or show empathy toward the populations being

studied (Harding, 1987). I fulfill these commitments in this research as I develop groups of factors that support and encourage emerging female leaders based on women's personal experiences. I also make attempts to legitimize female community leaders' own conceptualization of community leadership based on their own terms. Lastly, I am actively involved in the Waterloo community and have developed both personal and professional relationships with many of the study's participants.

This research reflects an epistemological assumption about how truth is known. In this research, I recognize women's experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge and significant indicators of reality (Krauss, 1993). My goal for this research is not to compare women's journeys to those of men, but instead to, "start our inquiries from a subordinate group's experience to uncover the limits of the dominant group's conceptual schemes," (Thompson, 1992, p. 8).

Feminist research is directed at not only personal empowerment, but also towards emancipation by transforming economic and social structures that are oppressive to women (Wuest, 1995). One of the founders of grounded theory, Glaser (1992), desired a similar goal for research, that "It gives a conceptual grasp by accounting for and interpreting substantive patterns of action which provide a sense of understanding and control, and access for action and modicum changes" (Glaser, 1992, p. 14). This research project is a political endeavour; first it provides a space for women to promote their accomplishments as leaders, something that is rarely encouraged within patriarchy. Secondly, it produces groups of factors that encourage and support women in the attainment of community leadership positions. Thirdly, this research proposes a reconceptualization of community leadership that recognizes the unique aspects of women's leadership experiences.

Grounded theory is a methodology that aims to develop a theory grounded in data that is gathered and analyzed in a systematic fashion (Oktay, 2012). I will use Charmaz's (2003) constructivist version of grounded theory that, "assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims towards interpretive understanding of subject's meanings" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 255). Symbolic interactionism is a central component of constructivist grounded theory that focuses on the meaning that people attribute to their experiences and interactions (Wuest, 1995). This component is congruent with feminist researchers' recognition that women's subjective understanding of their experiences produces valid data. This concept is commonly referred to in feminism as 'women being the experts of their own experiences' (Allen, 2011).

Grounded theory research is based on a multistage process that continuously moves back and forth between gathering data and analyzing that data. As themes emerge through this process additional data can be collected to explore them in more depth. Grounded theory is appropriate to use in areas where little theory has been developed or where existing theory is not related to the population at hand, as is the case with the existing theory related to women's journeys to leadership, which is limited to the corporate and political sectors. Grounded theory is also well suited for studying areas that involve mezzo interactions between individuals and their environments and the impact of these interactions on an individual's life journey.

RESEARCH METHODS

Qualitative Research

As this study attempts to explore and understand the research participants' paths to leadership, I have used a qualitative methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews

(Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Qualitative interviewing is most appropriate when the objective is to “understand human experiences from the perspective of those who experience them” (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2006, p. 21). Qualitative interviewing is also useful in studying process questions rather than attempts to determine causality, such as those in this research study (Oktay, 2012).

In reviewing the literature, the few studies that had similar objectives to mine also used qualitative interviewing (Barkdull, 2009; Bond et al., 2008). This was most likely due to the fact that there is little research on this topic and qualitative methods are most often used to induce a hypothesis or theory (Saini & Shlonsky, 2012) .

Recruitment

Participants were recruited based on two factors:

1. They held a position of leadership within the community OR they had been recognized as a community leader by an organization, the media, or local government
2. They lived within the geographic Region of Waterloo.

The Waterloo region is located in Southwestern Ontario, approximately an hour west of Toronto. For the purposes of this research study, it is defined as the Region of Waterloo and the surrounding communities of Wellington and Dufferin County. Within this geographic area there are numerous women who hold high profile leadership positions, including two mayors, numerous councilors, school trustees, Members of Provincial Parliament and a Member of Parliament, as well as directors of community, cultural and artistic organizations.

As I have used a grounded theory methodology, the participants were selected through theoretical sampling (Wuest, 1995). Theoretical sampling means that I have chosen my

participants based on the themes emerging from my data analysis. For instance, the first five participants were recruited because they represented a diversity of community leadership experiences and the data from their interviews therefore offered a richness and breadth from which I was able to determine emerging themes to influence the selection of subsequent participants. This theoretical sampling increased the scope and range of experiences so that I could explore multiple realities consistent with constructivist research (Rodwell, 1998, p. 35).

Grounded theory recognizes that diversity must be integrated to enrich rather than to disprove an emerging theory (Wuest, 1995). As I am influenced by intersectional feminist theory, I have also recruited participants purposely based on characteristics of their identity. For instance, some of the participants were recruited because of their ages, sexualities and ethnicities. Key informants were consulted in order to help recruit participants, especially those from underrepresented groups. These informants included my supervisor, community members, and fellow students.

Sample

A total of 21 women were invited to participate in this study, with 15 ultimately participating. Out of the six non-participants, four did not respond to the invitation, one did not attend the scheduled interview and could not be reached for follow up, and one lived outside the geographic area.

Each of the participants was making, what I considered to be, a positive contribution to the community. On reflection, I noticed that I did not select any participants that were involved in advancing conservative issues or politics. This was likely because I see my own journey to community leadership as being motivated by the desire to transform the world into a more

progressive, equitable and inclusive place. There are many female leaders in the community who have very different ideological perspectives; I have chosen not to include them within the sample.

The fifteen women who made up the sample of this study came from a wide range of backgrounds and represented a cross-section of community leadership experiences. Four of the participants were born outside of the country, three of whom were from racialized communities, one identified as Aboriginal, and three identified as lesbian or bisexual. The participants' average age was 48, with the youngest participant being 27 and the oldest being 61. The majority of the participants were in relationships and had children, while half had been divorced or separated at one time. Five of the participants were or had been lone parents. Half of the participants were directors of nonprofits, four were current or former elected municipal politicians, and three were well known community activists. I have included a chart on the following page that provides the demographic details of each of the participants.

Demographics of Research Participants

Pseudo-nym	Age Range	Current Position	Children	Relationship Status	Origin	Education
Marcella	44-50	Executive Director	2 teenagers	Divorced	Europe	Masters
Bridgette	55-60	Elected Politician	1 adult child	Divorced/ Remarried	Canada	Bachelor Courses
Christine	50-55	Director	2 adult children & a teenager	Married	Canada	College
Sandra	45-50	Elected Politician	2 teenage children	Married	Canada	Bachelor
Heather	25-30	Community Activist	No children	Long-term Partner	Canada	Masters
Irene	35-40	Director	2 children- one child, one teenager	Divorced and Engaged	South America	College
Lisa	60-65	Social Worker	3 adult children	Divorced	Caribbean	Masters
Laura	50-55	Executive Director	3 teenage children	Married	Canada	Masters/ Courses
Margaret	30-35	Aboriginal Student Coordinator	No children	Common- Law	Aboriginal Canada	Bachelor
Sara	50-55	Executive Director	4 adult children	Divorced	Africa	PhD. Candidate
Imogen	40-45	Professor/ Feminist Activist	1 teenage child	Common- Law	Canada	PhD.
Sally	45-50	Executive Director	No children	In transition	Canada	Bachelor
Janice	55-60	Executive Director/ Former politician	No children	Divorced	Canada	Bachelor
Mary	30-35	Community Organizer	No children	Common- Law	Canada	Masters
Tiffany	60-65	Retired business owner/ Former Politician	3 adult children	Married	Canada	Bachelor

Figure 1: Demographics of Research Participants

By studying women with diverse identities and social locations, this study aims to develop a reflective and nuanced theory to describe how women have emerged as community leaders. Through this qualitative study, women's voices and experiences will finally be taken into account in the development of theory to assist in the ongoing efforts to increase the representation of women in community leadership.

I recognize that women's access to leadership positions has been limited due to patriarchal constructs (Gringeri, Wahab, & Anderson-Nathe, 2010) and in highlighting the achievements of individual women, my intention is not to minimize the existence of these structural barriers. Rather, my intention is to shift the deficits-based discourse on women's leadership to one that focuses on women's strengths and capacities to lead. In her qualitative study on women's activism, Krauss (1993) explained, "I am looking at the partial views or situated knowledge that emerges in women's narratives, which helps me to see the *multifaceted* nature of women's reality" (p. 251).

Data Collection

The face-to-face interviews took place between January and March 2013 in the offices or homes of the participants. In three instances interviews took place in an office located at Wilfrid Laurier University. Each interview lasted between thirty and ninety minutes, with the average interview lasting fifty-five minutes.

The interviews were semi-structured and followed two interview guides found in Appendices C and D. I used two interview guides because I decided to modify the interview questions midway during the process based on the themes that were emerging from the data analysis that I was doing concurrently with my data collection. The questions were broad and

open-ended and included prompts in order to seek clarification and explore the participants' experiences in depth. The first interview guide and my interviewing technique were piloted at the beginning of the research process with two of the participants and small changes were made based on those experiences.

I audio recorded the interviews with voice recorder software on a password protected Blackberry Playbook tablet. I then uploaded the audio files onto my personal laptop (also password protected) to facilitate the transcription of the audio recordings. I deleted the files immediately from the Blackberry Playbook. I transcribed each of the interviews shortly after they were conducted and saved the files in a password protected folder on my laptop.

After each interview, I documented my reflections of the interview and the experience in a journal. The journal entries have added to the richness of the participants' narratives and serve as an audit trail to document any methodological and analytical decisions I made during the process. Audit trails are suggested as a measure to increase the transparency and trustworthiness of the analysis (Carcary, 2009). Some examples of journal entries included nonverbal communication between me and the participant; for instance one participant excitedly bounded up the stairs to her office while others appeared to be exhausted. The entries also describe any special features; for instance, one of the participants had over two dozen personalized thank you cards displayed throughout her office. The journal also documented the concurrent data analysis that was taking place and my decisions to modify the interview guide based on the emerging themes.

In both feminism and social work, we often make attempts to lessen the power differentials between ourselves and those we study. In this case, I was interviewing women who had significantly more power than I did as a Masters student. I had to sometimes make

arrangements via administrative assistants in order to schedule interviews with the participants and met with some of the participants in formal offices and boardrooms. During the interviews, I really felt that the participants were in control; however, upon reflection, I acknowledge the power I had in selecting the participants, choosing the questions, and ultimately in interpreting the participant's stories.

The participants were seemingly very open and forthcoming in sharing their experiences as community leaders. Many commented that they had shared their story publicly in the past and showed no signs of distress with any of the interview questions.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory sets out a systematic process for qualitative data analysis that involves theoretical sampling, multi-stage coding processes, constant comparison, and theoretical saturation (Oktay, 2012). I conducted the data analysis while continuing to interview the study's participants. I transcribed the audio recordings of the first five interviews and proscribed a code to each segment of the interviews based on its thematic content; this is known in grounded theory as open coding (Glaser, 1992). I then compared the codes from each of the transcribed interviews to one another in order to identify any shared conceptual or thematic categories as well as any notable differences; this is known as constant comparison (Allen, 2011).

The initial open coding identified twelve common themes among the five participants' interviews. I followed up with two of the original participants and invited them to be part of a focus group in order to confirm the initial codes and to identify the most significant themes. The two participants agreed to participate in the focus group which was held in front of a class on Women and Leadership at Wilfrid Laurier University. Based on the results of the focus group,

the interview guide was modified to further explore the identified themes.

The second round of coding took place after the eleventh participant was interviewed. At this stage 28 codes and sub-codes were identified and formed into six conceptual categories. A further four participants were selected to saturate as well as to provide variation to these conceptual categories. During this process two of the conceptual categories or themes merged and the data analysis concluded with 36 codes and sub-codes and five conceptual categories illustrating women's journeys to community leadership (Oktay, 2012). These five themes will be explored in the following chapter.

I constructed the groups of related factors after I had finished all of the data collection and analysis. I mapped out the codes and themes and their connections to each of the research questions. This process was followed by a review of any related feminist or leadership scholarship to strengthen my initial mapping. I concluded this process by checking the groups of related factors with three of the study's participants and asking for their thoughts and feedback.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument within this qualitative study (Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). I chose the participants, designed the interview guides, conducted the interviews, transcribed the interviews, conducted various levels of coding of the transcript data, and provided an analysis of the participants' experiences. Throughout this process I have been reflexive about the storytelling power that I have as the researcher. I have attempted to move forward with humility and openness, acknowledging that women themselves are the experts of their own experiences and continuously checking back with the participants to ensure that my analysis was congruent with their experiences (Ellingson, 2011). I recognize that my experiences and viewpoints were likely different from some of my participants and I

remained vigilant against my predisposition to focus more closely on the stories that most resonated with my own.

It is also my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that the participants did not share their stories in vain. In recognizing the potential implications of the research findings, both to social work and societally, it is my responsibility to also ensure that the findings are available for the public, academics, as well as policy makers and that my findings have been written in a form and language that is easily understood.

Ethical Considerations

This research project received Research Ethics Board approval at Wilfrid Laurier University prior to any data being collected. Ensuring confidentiality was the primary ethical concern for this research study. The participants were influential community leaders and they could be harmed if any of their personal information, strategies, or private views were made public. To reduce this risk I provided each of the participants with a document containing all of the content from the thesis that related to them prior to my submission. The participants had an opportunity to review the document and make modifications or deletions to the material if they had any concerns that the material may identify them. Interestingly, the majority of the participants indicated they were comfortable with their real names being used in the write up, however I chose to use pseudonyms in order to comply with the Research Ethics Board's criteria.

Accurately representing the participants' experiences was another ongoing ethical challenge throughout this research process. Although many of the participants socially located similarly to me, as white, middle-class, educated, heterosexual women, there were some participants who socially located quite differently. I know that I have a tendency to focus and

emphasize the stories that relate most closely with my own. Throughout the research process I attempted to recognize and attend to this bias to ensure that my analysis reflected the experiences of all of the study participants and not just those whose social locations are similar to me. I also used member checking with some of the participants throughout the process to ensure the accuracy of my portrayal and analysis (Allen, 2011).

Chapter 4: Themes

In this chapter I will provide evidence for each of the five broad themes related to women's journeys to community leadership that emerged during this research. The theme "The Road to Independence" will explore the participants' experiences as girls and young women developing their sense of self and independence. The theme "The Road Less Travelled" will share the participants' unplanned journeys to community leadership. This theme will be followed by "Discoveries of Power and Personal Privilege Along the Way," that demonstrates how the participants began to recognize power in society, their personal privilege and their motivations to respond to social injustice and make a lasting difference. The following theme, "Supports Along a Bumpy Road," speaks not only to the challenges, but also to the supports female community leaders have had along their journeys. The last theme, "Setting Her Own Path," highlights the discomfort many of the participants had with the traditional concept of leadership, followed by their personal definitions of community leadership. In each of the themes I will highlight not only the most common experiences, but also the nuances and differences that existed among the participants. The figure on the following page illustrates each of the themes with their corresponding codes listed below.

Themes and Related Codes

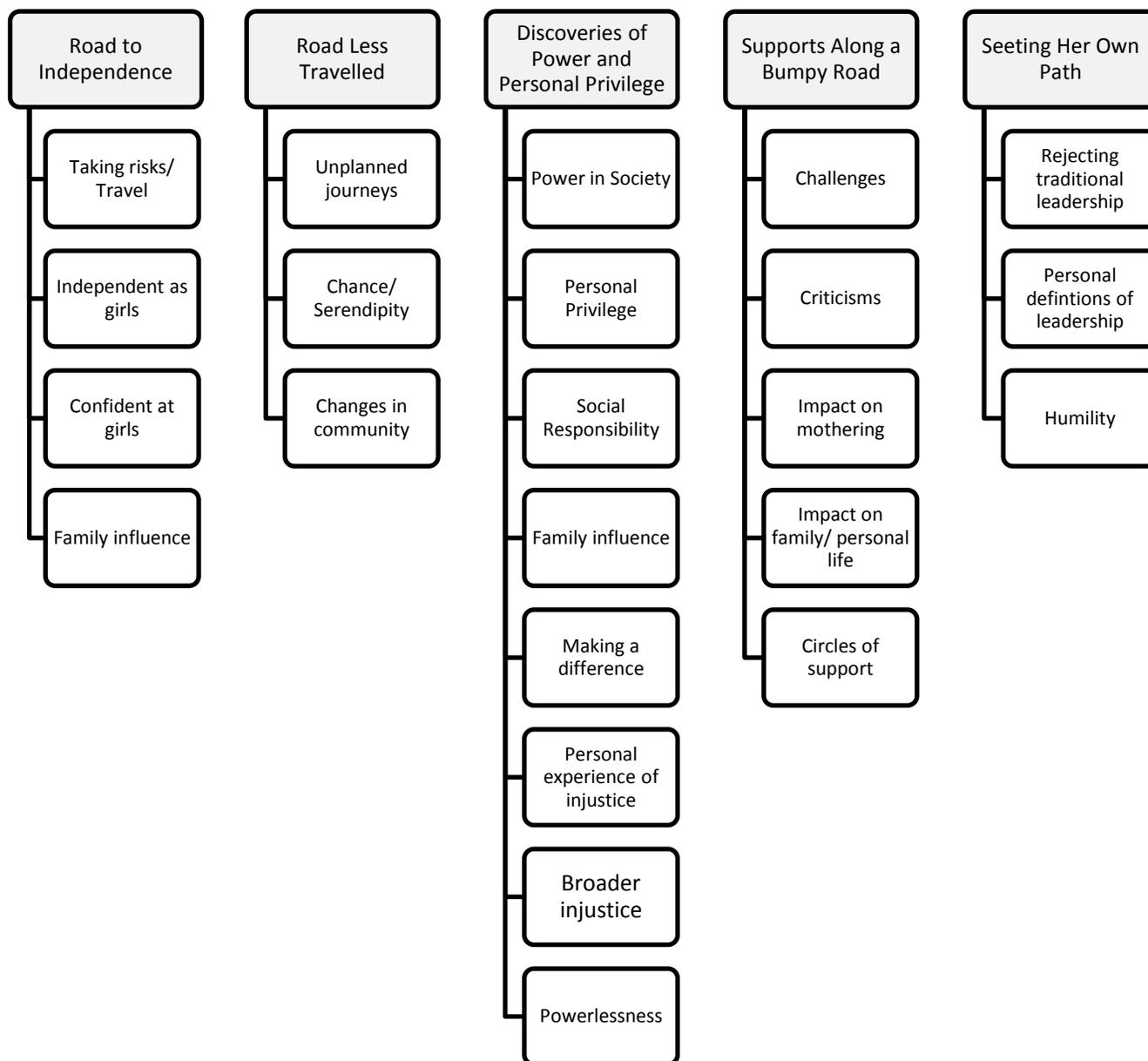


Figure 2: Themes and Related Codes

THEME 1: THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

There were a number of similarities that emerged as women recounted their childhoods and adolescence. Of particular interest was how women described their sense of independence and confidence. Most of the women described themselves as very independent in childhood and emphasized their parent(s) role in encouraging them to be confident in their own abilities. Laura, whose family moved from Canada to Europe when she was child, said:

I was fiercely independent... The message from my parents was, you can handle it. We know you can handle it, you'll make good choices. In eleventh grade, I spent two months travelling around Europe. By 17, I was living alone in Canada. There was this expectation and I could handle it, they were right. That's not to say it didn't pose challenges, but I could handle it. It's a huge piece and it's something I reflect on with my own children as well.

Janice, whose mother divorced her father in the 1950s when she was just an infant, credited her mother for her independence. She remarked that her mother chose to raise her with members of her extended family full of love rather than be dependent on her father who had addictions to gambling and alcohol.

Mary, an organizer in the LGBTQ community, described her sense of independence as being different from other girls:

Yes, I would say that I was independent. I think to the point that I even felt separate from other people I've always had to do things my own way, always very stubborn. In fact that has never really changed. In the past, I even felt like to do it in a group meant that I had to water down my vision. I remember saying things like that. As a kid I also had a certain level of charisma, I don't know if I still do. I noticed a lot of times that people listened to me when I talked, particularly adults. I remember thinking to myself that this had to do with this independent, free spiritedness that I somehow was a part of, even though at the same time I was really quite timid, afraid of judgment, and

struggled with these feelings of shame and self-hatred. So there was a bit of ambivalent self-perception in my youth.

Tiffany, who grew up in the 1960s, shared a few examples of how she was independent throughout her upbringing:

I got my first part time job when I was 16 and after that my parents cut off my allowance. I was so offended; I thought that they were supposed to pay me because I was their kid. My father said, but you're making your own money, why should I give you a dollar a week. I was really upset, but I never turned to them again for assistance because I figured it's not going to happen.

I can remember even as a kid up north at the cottage I would say, see that rock in the middle of the bay? I'm going to go swim to that rock and my mother would say, well you can't do that and I would say what do you mean I can't? Whatever it was - I had two older brothers who flunked out of university first year because they were goofing around like a lot of first year students do. When I wanted to go to university my parents wouldn't pay for it because they said well your brothers couldn't do it, how could you do it? So I paid for it myself. Don't tell me that I can't do something if I think that it is the thing that needs to be done. That's just how I've always been.

Having experiences that fostered independence and the development of confidence appears to be a precursor for the development of leadership potential in the participants. Although the women had differing levels of self-esteem, each of them spoke of feeling independent as girls and young women. Most of the participants in this study grew up in upper class or wealthy families that likely afforded them increased access to experiences that developed independence, such as travelling and student exchanges. For participants who grew up in working class or poor families, the experiences that developed independence were mostly related to having a part-time job or taking on household responsibilities.

THEME 2: THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

One of the most common themes that emerged from the participants' interviews was their unplanned, random paths to leadership. The participants indicated that early in their careers they did not aspire to be in the positions they are in today. The participants did not take direct routes to their current positions and many had entirely contradictory plans for themselves. There was widespread agreement among the participants that leadership is not contained to a singular issue or task. It was recognized that community leadership is a process and a journey and the end result may be very different than the initial grand vision. What was similar among the participants was their ability to create opportunities out of obstacles and to tenaciously move forward. None of the participants planned to be in their positions or even took deliberate steps to become community leaders. Interestingly, the one participant with the most powerful leadership position within the sample, Bridgette, took no conscious steps to prepare herself for her current role. She is in her position because of how she responded to a series of events outside of her control:

I had never been politically involved, never been a school board trustee, I never did any of the things that you are supposed to do to become [a municipal politician]. I just said that I was going to do it and when I signed on the nomination forms I knew that I was going to win. I just knew it. A lot of people said that I was wasting my time, they doubted me. I had people spend time trying to convince me that I was not good, not smart enough, that I wasn't going to win and was wasting my time. But I believed in myself and I knew that I was going to win

Christine, who grew up in a wealthy family, spoke of her own disbelief that she has chosen to spend her life as an advocate for people experiencing homelessness:

I was not sure where I wanted to land. I really wasn't sure what I wanted. I

never planned to be in this kind of position at all - ever. Not in a million years. Back then if you had told me that I would spend almost my entire lifetime working with people experiencing homelessness, I would have thought that was crazy. That was certainly never my intention.

Sandra, like many of the participants, credited her success to serendipity:

I heard a great definition of serendipity, it was, serendipity occurs when opportunity meets preparedness and I think there's a lot of truth in that. If you are prepared to seize opportunity when it comes along then you're going to be able to do things that you hadn't planned on.

Margaret similarly explained her journey as being at the right place at the right time:

It was sort of a long, meandering road. It happened to me, it's not like I ever said that I wanted to do this kind of work. There was no real plan, but I was inspired by a wonderful community leader [name omitted]. It was not planned at all and it just happened. I really attribute the fact that I am in my position to being in the right place at the right time and meeting the right people. I just love what I do.

Irene, who immigrated to Waterloo Region in the early 1990's spoke of how her journey to leadership was tied to the community's journey to multiculturalism:

I came to be a facilitator without really setting my eyes on that job. It's not like I said to myself, I'm going to be this. I have come to where I am today, forced by nature in a way. The different transitions that have happened with the multiculturalism stages in this community and the context. When I came, and where it is now and sort of brought me to where I am. Coming to Kitchener Waterloo in [the early 90's], was a bit of a culture shock because there was no talk of diversity.

This theme contradicts the traditional concept of leadership as innate. Within Western society, leadership is often mystified as a 'je ne sais quoi' attribute that leaders are born with or a position they are destined to. This theme suggests that paths to leadership are not straight or

direct; there are detours, false starts and wrong turns. The participants often bounced from position to position, sector to sector, increasing their breadth and enhancing their leadership capacity.

THEME 3: DISCOVERIES OF POWER AND PERSONAL PRIVILEGE ALONG THE WAY

Participants grew up in traditional two-parent families, adoptive families, with divorced parents, and in blended families. Most grew up in very privileged circumstances, but even those who grew up poor had a point in their lives where they recognized power and personal privilege and developed a social consciousness that has guided their journeys to leadership. Most of the women credited this increased consciousness of power in society and their own personal privilege as a key motivation for embarking on their journeys to leadership. It appears that this recognition has created a sense of social responsibility among the women and has been a primary impetus for action. It also appears that this awareness has sustained many of the community leaders and has provided encouragement during challenging times.

Irene recalled her childhood struggles and shared that she remembers her privilege when she feels discouraged:

I have this trick, I have a good memory. I remember being hungry and I remember the difficult things we went through during the dictatorship so whenever I'm feeling overwhelmed and I cannot take it anymore I go to a place in my head, it goes by itself, it's like a trigger. I remember my mom and I getting up at 5am to go to the market to sell things together. I was 6 or 7 years old selling bags. I remember my mom and I always trying to make a buck. I remember when we had the least to eat she would always set the table the nicest and she always played the music in the house. She was always whistling or singing some Elvis Presley song.

So I have this in my head when I think that I can't cope anymore. I remember where I came from. I look at my house, not too bad, I look at my kids and they

are well fed, clothed and they go to a good school. I look at everything else that I have in my life and I feel damn lucky. I look at all of the stuff my mother had to go through with an alcoholic and abusive husband, she raised 4 kids who are all professionals and then I realize- what am I complaining about? Somehow that does the trick.

All of the participants pointed to their desire to make a difference as a motivation for their community leadership. Whether they were influential politicians or anarchist activists, they each, in their own way, had a desire to build a better world. For many of the participants, this social responsibility was instilled in them as children, as a family value.

Lisa, who grew up in an affluent family in the Caribbean, spoke at length of her mother's role in the community:

My mom really belonged to the community. She helped to formalize the basic school of education in Jamaica. Where my mom is from we own the bakery, the two supermarkets, the hardware store, and , her sister was the nurse and midwife -- the family really had a responsibility to the community.

Sara spoke of her father's humble beginnings and how it inscribed in her values of social responsibility:

If you look at my father, he was an orphan and he lost his parents at age 10. He came by himself to the City from the rural areas and he raised himself. He reminded us all of the time that we are very lucky and that the reality is that a lot of people had the same background as my father. He said not to forget those people. You have privilege, but don't forget the responsibility. You must pay back those people too. He used to say that we are all equal in life; the only difference is the opportunities. So some people get higher opportunities, but some people didn't get those opportunities because of human rights issues. So he said don't forget, wherever you are, pay back. You have to give. Even if you cannot give money back, you can give with your energy, your wisdom, your intellect, whatever you can do to support.

Irene, who grew up in South America under a dictatorship, spoke of her mother who, at great risk to herself, helped others who were less fortunate:

My mom was a jack of all trades. I think a lot of who I am today has to do with who she was back then. During the dictatorship, she was fearless in so many ways. She would go to the poor neighbourhoods with the Red Cross and shampoo the people's hair when they had lice for instance. She taught women how to sew their own sheets. She went to some of the really rough neighbourhoods where people were hopeless. I remember going everywhere with my mom. She would bake cakes and bring them to the elderly, she would celebrate their birthdays. I also worked with my mom in the market since I was 6 years old. My mom actually gave me ten cents-on-the-dollar for everything that I sold. The market is where real life happens. We were constantly engaged in the community.

Sandra, who served as a municipal politician, remembered her parents' deep commitment to community service:

My mom and dad were big volunteers in the community. They both volunteered at service clubs when I was growing up, the Lions Club and Lioness. They got me involved in some of the activities they were participating in. My dad has gone on to really continue to be a leader. He won a Queen's Jubilee Medal for his community service. My mom in a quieter way continued to volunteer in the women's auxiliary, through the hospital and that kind of thing. So, I think that I always had that piece growing up around being a part of your community and volunteering.

Bridgette, who served as a municipal politician, connected her sense of community responsibility to her own experience of being in need:

I had gone through some difficult times personally and the community was there to help me so I felt that when I can, I need to give back. I feel very strongly about that. The community itself is here to support people and take care of people in need. When you need it, it's here, but when you're done and you're on your feet and okay, you really should step up and give back. That's what I've lived by and that's what I've done. I've had wonderful experiences working in the community and doing my bit to help everybody out.

Responding to injustice

Each of the participants had, as part of her journey, responded to injustice, either from a personal or broader experience. In describing these experiences the participants often made connections to discussions of societal power, their personal privilege, and sense of social responsibility. Bridgette described how as a single mother working three jobs she was motivated by an experience of injustice to become a community activist, an experience that ultimately led her to become a municipal politician:

I found out about two years after I purchased my home that it had been built on a contaminated landfill site and I became one of the community activists to fight City Hall. During that experience it taught me a lot and it showed me that people's voices are lost within government. Someone like me, a single mom working three jobs should be treated with respect. Should have their concerns acknowledged and should be helped instead of being treated with disdain and told to go away and that we weren't valuable. At that time it was more of a blue collar area for working families, people who were just working hard and I thought that we shouldn't be treated like this. It really went against my values as a citizen and as a person. I really felt strongly that I needed to fight for my rights, my home, and my child. There were people dying of cancer and we were treated so disdainfully by the system, by all levels of the system.

That had a profound effect on me and it didn't sit well. At that time I decided that when I could get involved, because I had fought the system for years, I would get in the system and change it for people so that nobody would ever have to be treated the way I was.

Sandra shared that as a young mother she was affected by the lack of childcare options in the community. She and a group of three other community members banded together and opened a non-profit childcare centre. Through that success, Sandra recognized the need to get more involved and sought election as a municipal politician.

When I was a young mother I was really upset by the lack of childcare here in

Waterloo Region. The Region was only meeting 10% of the need for licensed childcare. I had my children in daycare and I was astounded with the number of friends who came to me asking me to talk to the daycare on their behalf because they really needed a spot. But you can't help someone get in, the waiting lists are ridiculous. I realized that something needed to be done. I thought to myself, as citizens we just have a lack of willingness to recognize just how much power that we give to politicians. We don't show a high level of due diligence on whom we wish to have serve in those capacities for us. That was overwhelming for me. I thought to myself, and I'm not someone who is a complainer, I'm not willing to say this person or that person shouldn't be at the table. But what I did say was if I actually think I bring value to the conversation then the process for me is to put my name on the ballot.

Lisa reflected on her experience as a new immigrant to Canada. Lisa had been a successful business woman in her home country of Jamaica. Upon her arrival to Canada, she was placed at a hog processing facility where her job was to count hog tags.

I became more interested in sociology and social aspects of this society as opposed to business within the Canadian context so that thought, I will never forget counting those hog tags and feeling the pieces of flesh and seeing how many I had to count, but I do not want to do this. However, the experience means I am able to relate to new immigrants when they come. I remember even when I was at Laurier, the janitor who mopped the floor, had been a doctor in his home country.

Mary discussed her experience coming out as a lesbian in a small community and her response to a lack of services for LGBTQ youth:

I came out when I was 15 in high school. I grew up in a small town of only about 13,000 people. I pretty quickly found out there really was nothing for gay youth in the area, so I was stubborn and said well that sucks and why don't we just create something. So a friend of mine and I started a peer support group for LGBTQ youth, which was really just a "hey on Thursday's let's all go to Matt's place and watch movies." That's pretty much all that it was, but it was something...It was really empowering for me to have an opportunity to try and make changes for myself and for the community. It was that process of seeing what was missing and then visioning where we want to be and how we can get

there.

Irene, who grew up in a South American country, described the role of one of her teachers in encouraging her to become a leader:

I think that teacher, he was a man, he was pivotal to my growing up. Not only because he showed me, but 7 other kids. He recognized in a class of 42, 7 who he thought were leaders, innate leaders. He took us not only to see the play, but he took all 7 to several parts of the city. He took us to see our first face to face encounter with deep poverty in a childcare centre where the parents were all unemployed. And [the dictator] because the neighbourhood had been traditionally leftist, he took all of the support from the daycare so the kids were hungry. So the teacher took us there to show us what real poverty looked like and he gave us an assignment to do something about it. So we started campaigns for rice, campaigns for milk, and that sort of tradition of helping out. He was very, very important, I think later on when I joined the drama troupe, then there were other people, and other teachers, and other students, but I think he was the first person.

Sara discussed how her loss of identity upon immigrating to Canada was the impetus to her community action:

Now we are not Somalian, or Kenyan, we are labeled as Black. I'm a woman, I'm a Black woman, I'm a Muslim woman, I'm a mom of 4 children. So a lot of things have changed from when I was home. When I was home I was only Sara and people knew my father. They named the hospital after him. I didn't need to say my last name, people knew who I was. Then it changed when I came here.

People have to look at what they can change. My husband and I founded a homework club with other parents to help our children. We ran it out of the community centre and those who had completed high school came back and volunteered with the program. The program has been going for 18 years. That's what we need, we have to leave a footprint. It's not just about doing it for yourself, that's not right. Now we are doing a program on celebrating diversity because a lot of people like to talk about diversity, it's only a niche. They are not unpacking what diversity is. When you unpack it you see the core of what you need. Diversity is a lot of things and effects different sectors differently. So

we need to see how we can be more inclusive and hear peoples' voices.

Some of the women spoke more generally of their responses to social injustice. Marcella, who has worked as an Executive Director for a community nonprofit organizations shared:

For me it has always been that I cannot physically, and it's a very visceral feeling I have, I cannot handle injustice and seeing it. It makes me physically ill. I need to do something about it. If something is broken in front of you, you fix it; you don't walk around it, you don't ignore it. That's always just been something that I've just done.

Heather, the youngest among the participants, who shared early in the interview that she had been somewhat distant with her mother during her childhood, spoke of her mother's influence in her activism:

I think having a mother who always advocated for recognizing structural oppression or all oppression when they were happening. My mother and I didn't spend a lot of time together, but when we did we were usually talking about oppression.

Sally, an Executive Director of a multiservice women's organization, provided a summary of the values she and many of the other participants in this study share:

I believe in the greater good. I believe in everyone being accountable. I believe that we should all be voices for the marginalized, especially when it's hard. I believe in not having oppressive practices or beliefs. I believe in the potential of all people. I believe that through education and awareness we can all learn, and change and grow. I believe in the philosophy of sharing. It's not good if I have this much and you have nothing. That doesn't help me, it doesn't help anybody. I believe in the core principles of advocacy. You need to be an advocate for not only the sector that you represent, but for all people. I think in this kind of work you need to have a lot of personal and professional integrity. Those are hard things. For me this is a calling. People always say, go somewhere else you have so much talent, but I can't find anything that motivates me as much as this, and it has to. Because that's when I'm at my best.

This theme illustrates one of the key differences between female community leaders and leaders in the corporate sector. Community leaders, in contrast with corporate sector leaders, have a sense of personal responsibility to respond to injustice, whether personal or societal. As opposed to financial gain or assuming greater power, taking action against injustice appears to be their common motivation.

Making a lasting impact

Each of the participants spoke of their desire to make a lasting impact. This appeared to be a main goal for most of the women. Laura described it as “filling her cup.” Marcella, who spoke at length about the challenges she has experienced as a community leader, shared what motivates her to continue in this work:

For me the biggest thing is knowing that I am leading a useful life. I can look at it and I can go, I am doing something that is contributing rather than taking away. I think that’s really important. I would like my kids to be able to look back and, not necessarily say that I made a difference, but that I worked towards making a difference. Because you never know if you’ve made a difference or not. So that to me is the biggest thing.

Margaret, who works as an aboriginal student coordinator, echoed the sentiment:

I love to get out of bed in the morning and see the students. See them grow, seeing the ones in first year who are struggling and making a difference for them. I can't tell you how many times I have seen real, measurable change.

Sally summed up the sentiment nicely:

At the end of the day when I leave this world, and hopefully it's not soon, I will have felt like I made a big difference. Not only to an individual family that I work with, perhaps to the families that walk through this agency, perhaps to the women of this province and even this country. That's pretty big. I feel pretty good about that. I think that when you have privileged however that looks like

you have a responsibility to help. Period.

Sara, who grew up in an African country and is a grassroots leader in the community, spoke of the desire to leave a legacy:

Having a lasting impact is important because if you did not have a lasting impact I think that it will be just short cut. We want to be able to record the stories. We are not saying that we will be here for 200 years, on this planet you are lucky if you can live for 80 years. Where I came from people die at the age of 47. I have now exceeded that. I need a legacy, I put a lot of time in this. If I look at over the twenty years how much of my time, my money, my car, my house, my family it's more than millions of dollars. It's uncountable. I need to know that whatever I did made a difference.

Imogen, an academic and community activist, described her three motivations for taking on a leadership role within the community:

Probably a combination of naive optimism, guilt and rage. (laughs) When I think about why I ever do anything that might fall under that leadership category, it's either because I get my hopes up and think this time it may actually work, so that's where the naive optimism comes in. Other times when I go out and do those things it's because I think, oh my god I've got to do it or I'll let so and so down or I'll make so and so look bad or I'll look bad, or it's not fair that they have to go and I don't, so guilt motivates me. And sometimes I do those things because someone has seriously pissed me off and my response to being pissed is to attend a demonstration or go off and give a rousing talk or organize a demo. So three different motivations interact in interesting ways.

THEME 4: SUPPORTS ALONG A BUMPY ROAD

Some of the women were comfortable enough to share with me the challenges they have faced as community leaders. At the outset of this research project my intention was not to focus on the challenges faced by women in community leadership positions; however, I felt that it was important not to minimize the common difficulties the participants had experienced. It was

interesting that even when describing the challenges they faced, most of the participants were quick to express how grateful they were to be in their positions, despite the difficulties.

Marcella was the most articulate in describing the challenges of her position and mentioned them many times throughout her interview; she shared:

It's hard, it's really, really hard. It's lonely. It's debilitating. Your worldview changes. My worldview changed when I started working with street youth. I lost all of my friends because they couldn't grasp my new worldview, which was a lot darker. And then you've always got to contend with that. You always have to contend with that darkness from that point forward. You can't turn it off. It's there. So think twice before you do it, because it's ugly.

Bridgette spoke to the sacrifice and criticism she has experienced as an elected municipal politician and how difficult it has been for her personally:

It's been hard for my daughter because since I became [a municipal politician] my family has not probably seen me more than 5 minutes. That's the biggest sacrifice. The loss of your family time and it's a big sacrifice. She was 17 and there were times when I missed things. With my mom I've had to miss part of her world, and my husband, god love him.

It's heartbreak sometimes. I have to travel for this job and out of the past six birthdays, four of them I have been alone in either an airport or in a hotel by myself away from my family. Then I get criticized when I travel or try to do things, I'm being interviewed by a reporter in about an hour criticizing me for travelling too much. I'm on a plane for 14 hours in economy, when I get off the plane my legs are so swollen I can't walk and I go to a meeting and represent the City and be sharp. To be criticized, trying to find jobs and businesses to come here. To be criticized is very tough because it goes against my values.

I work so hard and now I have some young woman reporter being able to write an article criticizing me for that, when I'm away from my family, my mother, my husband, my daughter, all of the people I love. I'm alone in some god forsaken hotel room. It's hard to balance that. The criticism that comes with this when I don't do anything wrong. I'm supposed to travel, that's in my job

description. It's hard. Dealing with this type of negativity is hard. You know that they are going to write something about you that you have no control over that attacks my personal values and ethics of hard work.

Irene, who came to Canada as a young woman and directed a small artistic organization, spoke to how overwhelming her work can be:

Even before I got in this I knew that it wasn't going to be easy and there were going to be times when I felt like giving up. Somehow I get injected again; something moves me until I get to the point where I feel good about the work again. Sometimes I can't keep up; I have over 400 unopened emails right now. I can just scan them, when I get up, in the bathroom, when I'm at appointments. I just scan them all the time and answering yes or no. For every success that people perceive you have, you also have lots of failures. For every one grant that you get, you get 10 denied. You open one door and three others are shut in your face. Becoming a community activist or leader tends to be rather difficult. You are not popular with everybody.

Margaret, a coordinator for aboriginal students, lamented on the emotional weight of her work:

Before taking on this position I used to do more volunteer work in the community that uplifted me, I don't get that anymore. Now when I do the same activities it feels like work. I don't participate as myself in the community, I participate as my position. It is my identity... When your work is your identity and you are working at it all day long, and when you see the legacy of colonization embedded in people every day and they don't even realize what's going on. We deal with pretty heavy things sometimes. Our student's families have members that have committed suicide. I work with diabetes issues, funding cuts, on and on. Discrimination. When that's all wrapped up in your identity, it can make for a very draining day.

Sara spoke to the personal responsibility and guilt she felt in the early years of her community organizing:

It wasn't easy, it was a lot of time. I remember sometimes where I spent 70 to

80 hours a week. I was raising my young boys at the time and I felt like I was neglecting my boys. I had to go to meeting from meeting to meeting and it was difficult because people who look like me were not at meetings. So if I missed then the course of that wouldn't be represented or on the table so sometimes I thought to myself that I needed to be there.

Impact on mothering

Each of the participants, whether mothers or not, spoke to the impact the decision to have children has had on their journeys as community leaders. Although many of the women spoke of the strength and motivation their children have given them in their work, the majority of the discussions focused on the struggles of being a mother and a community leader. Not surprisingly, this was most pronounced for participants who had been lone mothers.

Marcella shared that she had no intention of being a mother, but due to the laws of nature, became one. She is a lone mother of two teenage children and works four jobs, one as the Executive Director of a community-based non-profit. She shared:

I would love to have been able to have spent more time with my kids, but I manage to keep the weekends free. They are also 14 and 12 and they don't really want to hang out with me, so that's okay too. For instance, [daughter] broke the washing machine, it's that kind of work, because now the repairmen are coming today. They don't take anything but cash. I have to make sure my brother's going to be there, because I can't be there. Then the car, and the well and the ... I need a wife to handle all of those things. I mean in the stereotypical sense of what a wife is supposed to be to handle all of that stuff.

It impacts on my ability, because I find that you are either thinking about work while you're mothering or when you are at work you are thinking of your mothering. So you are never fully present in what you are doing. If you look at a lot of the people that make a difference I think that you will see that women of child bearing age aren't there, it's either after or before, or they are and they've got a partner. Single parenting is really not so fun. Not fun at all.

Irene, whose children were born in Canada, spoke about the constant need to prove herself to her children:

When I had my kids I felt a sense of urgency to do something, to be professional at it, to make them proud. Because whenever you are born in a different country and your kids are born here your children speak perfectly in English, they don't have an accent, they think that they know everything so you are constantly have to prove yourself to your kids. It's not just me, a lot people I know are constantly making their kids proud because naturally they think they are above and they know. So that also had something to do with it.

Making my parents proud because when I left I felt a huge commitment to them to come to Canada and not make my life irrelevant or redundant. I wanted to know that the sacrifice of being away from home was balanced with doing something important.

Bridgette shared a poignant example of the guilt each of the participants with children expressed around mothering and being a community leader:

I've always been involved in the community. At one time after I had separated from my daughter's father I went and volunteered at a women's shelter. I was working with children there and she was only 3 years old and I remember getting ready to go one night and she said to me, "Mommy why are you leaving me to be with other children?" It was profound, this little child saying that. I realized that I had to re-focus.

Sandra, a municipal politician, was married with two children. She spoke to backlash she faced as a politician raising two children:

I know that a lot of people think that because they have had a willingness to question me on it, that I chose to commit time to things outside of my family and not spend time with my family. I know that people think that. What they don't know is like on a day like today I will take a working lunch and then I'm picking my son up at 2 pm so that we can go and get his BlackBerry activated. The importance of that to my son is immeasurable. They don't know that his BlackBerry gave him the white screen of death so I picked him up at school

and we drove out to the BlackBerry repair centre in Cambridge, dropped the phone off, had lunch together, fixed the phone up completely repaired and his life was back in order. Or that yesterday over lunch hour I sat at the dentist with my youngest son while he got his teeth clean.

You hear the conversations, wow she mustn't want to spend time with her kids if she is going to put her name on the ballot. A lot of people feel that you are making a choice not to spend time with your children when you put your name on the ballot which is such bunk.

Laura, the director of a large community agency, shared how she placed her career on hold to attend to her child with special needs. She is married and has three teenage children:

I'd say all of the women feel that parenting trumps work. And striking that balance between those two, of course is the challenge of women who are leaders. I would certainly say that parenting had a profound effect on how I led, when I led. My first born has developmental delays, when she was 2 1/2 she began to have seizures around the clock, hundreds a day at first. With meds we brought it down to about 18 a day but she was completely disabled by them. That had a huge effect on when I decided to go into a director position. I really felt I had to stay in a holding pattern for years. It was a solid decade and then she had epilepsy surgery when she was 11, when they found a localization and she hasn't had a seizure since.

Now, she's still developmentally delayed, but we're not living in a perpetual medical crisis. Of course as much as my husband was supportive in all that, I was the default position, like so many women. And also by nature I was better at navigating systems, so I became the expert in keeping things a float for my daughter and that was simply impossible.

You couldn't do that and this job, it's out of the question. It's hard enough managing a daughter with developmental delays and special needs, plus two adolescents and do this job. There are certainly those huge pressures. I can imagine that most women wouldn't bother, it's just too much. That's why many women quit and leave the workforce. In some ways I stayed in it because it made me feel so confident, in juxtaposition with taking care of a child who was as challenging. To have a few hours a week with grown-ups was good. Having children has really impacted my journey and the trajectory and still does.

Margaret, an aboriginal student coordinator who did not have children, spoke about weighing the decision to start a family:

We don't have kids yet and sometimes I wonder how I would be able to balance kids in this role. I'm 32 and I want to have kids someday. I'm not married and I would like to be married before I have children. I've been with my partner for 8 years. I also want to do my Masters, but I haven't found exactly what I want to do yet. I thought about being a social worker, or a M Ed. and because I had been a student while working full time, I really needed a break. I have goals, I want to have children and get my Masters. When that happens I'm not sure what will happen. I think it's possible, but it probably won't happen for another couple of years.

Imogen works as an academic and volunteers as a community activist and shared how she and her teenage daughter have adapted their relationship because of how busy she is in the community:

I'm probably busier than I ought to be. I have got way too much on the go, so I'm more distracted than I would like to be with my kid and less available than I would like to be. On the other hand we now have this relationship that has a lot to do with feminism and justice and activism and principles. I'm happy about that. I see a lot of parent-kid relationships that don't have that kind of core. I'm very happy about the core between us. So the time that we do spend together is often orbiting around that centre and that's really good time and a good centre for our relationship. It makes me happy to see my daughter taking on these values and to know that even though she gets that I'm busy and distracted, she respects her mother and the kinds of values that I have been guided by. A lot of kids don't respect their mothers.

Impact on personal life

Being a community leader has been a sacrifice for many of the participants and their families. I did not spend a lot of time on this subject during the interview, but for some of the participants it became one of the main discussion points. For instance, Marcella shared:

I have no social life. I have been single for 10 years and I will be single. It's just done because there is no space, there is absolutely no space. I am so busy; I am single parenting two kids, two dogs, an old house and four jobs.

Irene spoke of how societal gender roles and expectations have impacted her work as a community leader:

Self-care is not in my dictionary. The way I was raised, women were not to take care of themselves. It was like, what kind of stupid idea is that? You take care of everybody else and you work. You have to please and be very obedient. The idea when I was growing up and my grandmother was an expert on this was to tell you what a lady was. A lady doesn't complain, even if you have the worst cramps in the world, you are to be there with crossed legs looking pretty. A lady doesn't ask for more, doesn't demand. We were told these things over and over again, which was the opposite of what my mother was. My mom was very feisty and thank god she was like that. Many time she got beat up because of it. But everything that she was told she had to be, she allowed me not to be. It's taken me years to get out of that mindset.

Bridgette, a municipal politician spoke to the impact her position has had on her husband and daughter:

You sacrifice your family. My family has had to make that huge adjustment of me missing from their lives, especially my daughter and husband. I'm missing from their lives. When I come home at 10 pm I say hi to my husband and I'm exhausted-I'm missing from his life.

Mary, a leader in the LGBTQ community, indicated that her partner was her main support. Her partner provides emotional support, looks after practicalities such as housework, repairs, shopping and transportation, and overall ensures Mary takes care of herself. Mary shared a story that illustrated the sacrifice her partner has made for her:

The truth is, the funny thing is I accepted an award recently for my work with the LGBTQ community and the announcer said, "and thanks to Mary's partner who never gets to see her. Maybe someday you should come to a meeting of

ours so that you can have some quality time with Mary.” We were all laughing, but it was kind of true actually. It's something we've been working on in the past couple of years.

Obviously, entire theses could (and deserve to) be written on the impact of women's leadership on their experiences of mothering and their personal lives. They are some of the most notable obstacles for women's attainment of leadership positions. They are also important supports and serve as inspiration for many female community leaders. Although this theme merely skimmed the surface of this topic, I hope that it encourages further study on the important relationship between mothering, personal life and women's experiences of leadership.

Circle of support

Most of the participants attributed their longevity to possessing a strong circle of supportive friends and colleagues. These support circles were characterized as other women (only one participant's circle included men) who shared the same values and oftentimes worked in similar fields. When participants spoke of these circles of support they often spoke with great fondness and gratitude. Lisa, who is involved in an organization that supports Afro-Caribbean youth, spoke of how her network of friends has supported her in her work:

I find that the women on the committee and I really talk a lot, especially the President, who saw the problem in schools and thought, how can we help with this. I find that through these cultural organizations you are in touch with the whole community. In the work that I do, I am able to call somebody when I have a kid who runs away and we needed to buy her clothes. This one will buy her clothes and this one will buy her the shoes, another one the coat. It's just using that same village concept, which makes me very comfortable. I find it very supportive. There are pillars of support in the community that I find very supportive.

Imogen, an academic and community activist, spoke of the importance of having a circle of support that shares values and humour:

There are three colleagues in particular who are all senior to me. We are all about the same age, but they are at a higher rank because they didn't spend 9 years waiting tables. All three of them, like me, are communitarian, value supporting the community over individual ambition. All three are highly committed to service. They probably spend about half of their time on community service. So we share that value and maybe that imbalance. All three of them are progressive, socially and politically. Very smart. All feminist, two of them are men though, one is a woman. All have, I don't know if this is relevant or not, but they all have a sense of humour. We are able to speak truth to power together and then afterwards debrief with humour and a little bit of profanity and that is helpful too. It's good to be able to let your guard down with them

Janice spoke at great length during her interview of the importance of her group of friends to sustaining her drive and passion. She provided moving examples of instances when members of her circle of support have relied on one another through illness and personal challenges:

Everyone that I am surrounded with, now, that I choose to be surrounded with, is involved in volunteer work. They are passionate with what they are involved with, be it volunteer work, music, design. I think if you don't follow your passion you are missing out on something in your life. Life is not to be just going through the motions. You're meant to smell the coffee and see the colours. My friends and I share similar values.

There's huge burnout in the community. When you look at the not for profits, most of them do have women EDs in the small ones at least. The burnout rate is huge – 5 years is good, 8 years is phenomenal. I've been going for 11 years; my friend has also been going for 11 years, another friend for the past 8 years- we are all friends. We are on each other's speed dials. I think we are able to do what we do because we have so much respect for each other and what we do. We are there to support each other when something goes down.

Tiffany, a former elected politician, was a founding member of a women's book club almost 20 years ago made up of women that have supported her along her journey:

I have a book club that has a lot of community leaders in it. We started that in 1994. At the time we would meet every other month, but as more people retired they started meeting every month and if you can come every month great- if you can't then you're still part of the group. We discuss books, but we've seen each other through divorces, illness, through grandchildren, through marriage break-ups through all kinds of things. They're really good supports. Of that group, 4 of us out of 12 have been in politics. One still is. I can remember one meeting when one of the women, I was out of politics at that point, but the one woman came in and she just seemed really flustered. We asked her what was wrong and she stood there and she said the name of another politician, a guy who drove all of us crazy. We all just started laughing, she didn't need to explain it. We just handed her a drink.

Heather, a young community activist, highlighted at the end of her interview the importance of women supporting one another:

Women need to remove as much as possible the discourse about women we get from the media. Women add to one another, we don't take away from one another- actually always. I have never had competition with other women benefit me and I've never had collaboration with other women not propel me really far forward. Believe in your own power, because you've got it. I don't know a woman who isn't resilient, strong, intelligent and capable. I've never met one that isn't that.

Only two of the women indicated that they did not have a circle of support that contributed to their work. One of them, Irene, described her longing for more support:

Here I wish that I had more support, but I feel that I have created this image, sometimes that doesn't serve a good purpose, that I have no concerns. That I go around my life always happy because I always smile, even when I'm having a bad day, and I've had lots of them lately, I'm so used to not telling anybody that people think I don't have any problems. That I am successful and they also think that I make a lot of money, but I have made this image. I don't know how

to be more vulnerable without exposing myself. I want to be more vulnerable so that I can get more help and peer support. I am one of the only female artistic directors in the region and it's very lonely. You don't have someone that you can talk to who feels your pain. And guys who are in the artistic director levels they are very egotistical. They are not interested in partnerships, they are more interested in keeping their job. Women are much more generous.

I don't need people who give me things, I just need people to talk that understand. My mother passed away at the end of September and that was a huge blow for me. Not only did I lose my mother, but I lost the one person that would never judge me when I was feeling down or was screwing up. Or whenever I had an idea for something to do and everybody else thought that it was an idiotic idea. I could talk to her about anything and there are very few people in my life that I can talk to that I won't feel judged.

Leadership can be an isolating endeavor. There was a clear difference in the sense of exasperation and frustration between the participants who did not belong to circles of support and those who did. Burnout is high in the community sector; belonging to support circles may be the secret to these participants' resiliency and sustainability over decades of community service.

THEME 5: SETTING HER OWN PATH

After asking the participants about their childhoods, early careers, challenges and supports, I concluded the interviews by asking the participants if they considered themselves to be community leaders. All but three responded with a definitive no. The three participants that did identify strongly with this label were white, Canadian-born women in their fifties in the highest leadership position within very large organizations. They may have more closely identified with the traditional concept of leader because of their privileged relationship to power due to their race, citizenship status, and their positions within powerful organizations. The remaining twelve participants' responses ranged from discomfort to an outright rejection of the identity of leader.

I probed with a few follow-up questions to isolate the possible reasons for why so many of the participants were uncomfortable with identifying themselves as leaders. There were two possible explanations for this. First, it appeared that some of the participants were being modest. As Frederick (2013) notes in her study on American women's paths to public office, "gender norms call women to present themselves with selflessness and humility" (p.113). Further, women in Western society are impacted by cultural expectations that they should be modest, unassuming, and exhibit selfless devotion to their families (p. 132). These participants indicated that they would be comfortable with other people identifying them as community leaders and were comfortable with community recognition. For instance Marcella shared:

If somebody were to say, "Marcella, I think that you are a community leader," that's one thing. But for me to say, "I'm a community leader," that's another thing. I don't think that it is a designation you give yourself without that hubris and that "look at me" and I could name some people in this town who are like that. But there are some people that I would look at and yeah, I consider them a community leader, but I don't know if they would consider themselves a community leader.

Irene, on the other hand, spoke of not fitting into the traditional concept of a leader and shared her misgivings about the term:

I struggle with the word leadership because I believe that people who are leaders know where they are going. Most of the time I'm just flying by the seat of my pants. I have stumbled upon that people somehow feel that what I have done is significant. I have lots of dreams, and those dreams turn into goals and those goals make me work very hard towards something I want to achieve.

Another possible explanation of why most of the participants did not personally identify as a community leader may have been due to a discomfort or outright rejection of the traditional concept of leader. In our society, leadership has been constructed in masculine terms, for

instance being in control, individual supremacy, physical toughness, and not thinking emotionally. Some female community leaders may not identify or associate with this traditional conceptualization of leadership and it is not surprising that so many of them would reject it.

Heather, an anarchist activist, completely rejected the leader identity:

This might be a connotation thing, but I think of gatekeepers. I don't really like them. I think that gatekeeper is a big part of it and I think of 90s business rhetoric. Haircuts and suits. Maybe not what actual community leaders are. There are women I view as leaders but I would never use that language to describe them. I see them as community drivers. I wouldn't use the word leader. There is almost no one I would use the word leader with. To me it is almost a disparaging term. The way I view leader is indirectly tangled up in problematic notions of masculinity: Ego-driven, gate keeper, power holder as opposed to power sharer. When I visualize the people I have met like that most of them have been men and the women have basically been masculine male power.

Lisa addressed her reluctance with the term and countered with her strategy of working under the radar:

I have been an Executive Director at a few agencies, but I do my best work under the radar. Because when you are under the radar you are able to solve problems quietly, which works better than if you have a huge profile. The cost of solving problems, is less costly personally when you are quieter, so I like that. I say that because I have had cases where I have had to take on politicians, fighting for funding and there is a cost to that. It's easier when there is less profile, so I like that. I mean, it's good to be recognized, but I don't mind not being recognized because I am able to do the work that I want to do. The idea that you have made a difference is far more satisfying. And to be honest in [my home country] they say "the higher the monkey climbs the more he is exposed." The higher, the more profile you have, the less you can work one on one and negotiate. It's good to have the profile for the network, but the cost is that if you make an enemy, you can pay dearly for it.

I don't mind if the community thinks of me as one of the leaders in the

community, it's not a big thing. It's just a label; it's not a big thing. You can't get caught up in it, it doesn't make any sense. You are human and you will make mistakes, you just try to do the best you can. That is something I want my kids to do, the best that they can. Nobody is perfect!

As many of the participants do not consider themselves to be community leaders, it is important to re-conceptualize leadership to include their experiences. Many of the participants have had their contributions minimized or ignored by the mainstream culture in our community. These participants have worked tirelessly and, in many cases, selflessly to effect change in our community; they deserve to be recognized as the leaders they are.

Redefining community leadership

The women offered their own conceptualizations of what it means to be a community leader based on their personal experiences. The women used common terms, like connecting, sharing, and empowering, when describing their definitions of community leadership. Although the participants are diverse in not only the characteristics of their identities but also in their experiences of community leadership, they each provided very similar conceptualizations of community leadership.

Bridgette, a municipal politician, described her version of leadership as:

It means that I can set a path that I believe in and people feel confident to follow me in that path because it aligns to what they believe in and their values. To me a community leader looks at a community from 20,000 feet and sees the pockets of needs and sees where the great things are and where the needs are. You know that the great things don't need you that much, they are doing really well, but people who are homeless, children who are hungry, areas of poverty, new Canadians, they are the ones who need my attention more. It's important that I know that is going on in my community at all times. I can bring resources here, I can go out and connect people. I see a community leader's job as making big connections.

Sally shared a similar vision of community leadership:

For me community leadership is about seeing what's best for the entire community as a whole and not just my little portion of it. I'd like to think that I'm a connector, I'm a builder, a visionary in terms of trying to help, I chair a lot of community committees, but I don't do it just from singular point of view.

Margaret, who works with aboriginal students, shared her personal view of aboriginal community leadership:

For me, I look at circle teachings, in a circle every person has gifts that they bring, no one sits higher than anyone else, we all have equal voice. We are very non-hierarchical, egalitarian, patient, empathetic and understanding. I really think about the circle, I think about being community driven, community minded. Thinking about not just how decisions will impact us, but all around us and thinking into the future. Leadership is about empowering and lifting up. It's not about me, it's not top down. It's about how we can get together to raise you up. That's what I do.

Many of the participants shared a non-hierarchical, participatory model of community leadership. Mary spoke to her non-hierarchical concept of community leadership:

But that concept that I'm not at the front of a triangle pulling people along, it's more like I'm behind putting people other people up in front of the spotlight. We are all leaders. That's how I think about things. So the fact that leadership implies a hierarchy is what I don't like. The other thing about leadership is that I don't really know what it means to be a community leader. I feel like if you have to call yourself a community leader, are you really? Is that the right thing to focus on? Or should I just focus on doing good work and helping other people do good work? It's that social worker in me - "we do things collaboratively, we do things together."

The participants' experience of leadership is quite unique from the common narrative of 'command and control' leadership abundant in the literature. Instead of domination, they speak of empowerment of others; instead of individual power, they speak of making connections. This form of leadership has been overshadowed by louder, more aggressive forms of leadership which

has turned many women off from pursuing power in society. If we can promote a vision of leadership based on the participants' experience we may be able to attract more women to positions of leadership in their communities.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed several compelling themes related to women's journeys to community leadership as well as their personal concepts of leadership. The participants highlighted the importance of fostering independence and developing social consciousness as girls and young women. They spoke of their desire to respond to injustice and make a lasting difference. They described the impact of being a leader in the community on their mothering (and vice versa) as well as on their personal relationships. They explained the key sustaining factors of family and peer support, as well as the role of formal and personal recognition. Finally, they shared their discomfort and rejection of traditional models of leadership and redefined community leadership on their own terms.

In the following chapter, I will propose three groups of related factors constructed from the mapping of the relationships among these themes. These groups of related factors aim to assist those who want to encourage, support and recognize community leadership in women.

Chapter 5: Addressing the Research Questions

In this chapter I will propose three groups of related factors based on my analysis of the themes that emerged from this research study. These groups of related factors aim to address the three questions that were the impetus of this research study:

1. How do female community leaders define leadership?
2. What have women experienced along their journeys to community leadership?
3. What sustaining factors support women along their journeys to community leadership?

These groups of related factors are in the early stages of development and serve as a first step in the creation of more substantial, integrated theoretical frameworks on women's journeys to community leadership. The first group of related factors re-conceptualizes community leadership based on the experiences of the participants. The second group of related factors addresses the precursors that foster the emergence of community leadership capacity in girls and young women. The third group of related factors addresses the main sustaining factors for female community leaders. As noted throughout this thesis, the scholarship on women's journeys to community leadership is grossly under-theorized and neglected. In proposing these groups of related factors, my hope is to initiate a dialogue on how best to encourage, support and recognize women's community leadership.

As this study is influenced by constructivist grounded theory, these groups of related factors have been constructed based on my experiences, feminist identity, and interactions with the participants. I am comforted by Glasser and Strauss (1967, p.32) characterization of theory as, "...a process; that is theory as an ever developing entity, not as a perfected product." I have

proposed these three groups of related factors in the hopes of sparking interest and increased discourse on women's experiences of community leadership.

FACTORS RELATED TO THE EXPERIENCES AND MEANINGS OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

With this first group of related factors I am proposing a reconceptualization of community leadership based on the experiences of the participants. Even the few participants that did identify as being a leader offered descriptions of their leadership that were incongruent with the more traditional 'command and control' model.

Leadership redefined

Much has been written about the different leadership styles of men and women and I am reluctant to add to that growing body of literature. My concern is that this discourse adds to the construction of a false dichotomy between the traits and styles of men and women and compounds the stereotypes and misleading impressions that may limit or pigeon-hole women in their attainment of leadership positions. This discourse also tends to essentialize gender, ignoring the intersecting experiences of class, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, and colonial history (Due Billings & Alvesson, 2000). Therefore, I have decided to focus on redefining the concept of community leadership based on the experiences shared with me by the participants during their interviews.

Although most of the participants preferred non-hierarchical, consensus based, communal leadership, there was a reluctant acceptance that within the context of our community, in order to affect change, there needs to be a recognized figurehead or spokesperson. Participants were clear that change does not happen with just one person, but there needs to be a leader at the forefront.

With this in mind, I am proposing a reconceptualization of community leadership consisting of four main factors: values-driven action, the positive use of power and privilege, empowering community members, and facilitating connections for change as illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Community Leadership

Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected on their values: sharing, helping others, being an advocate, having empathy, and integrity. Participants described their leadership role as being central to their identity and not just a profession or hobby. Their work as community leaders was an operationalization of their core values.

Empowering community members was a way for the participants to share their power and provide opportunities for community members to recognize their own power. The

participants shared examples of reducing hierarchies, sharing decision-making power, encouraging others to take the lead, delegating responsibilities, and mentoring emerging leaders as ways of empowering community members. Participants spoke about the need to grow movements of empowered people in order to affect change.

The participants shared stories of how they were able to make connections between individuals, groups and resources and saw this as one of their primary roles as community leaders. In fact, connecting was one of the most common words used when the participants described their work as community leaders. The participants were able to leverage these connections and combine resources to influence and affect change in their communities.

A theme throughout this research has been power and privilege. When the participants spoke of recognizing power, they discussed power in terms of being able to influence or make decisions that impact on the broader community. When the participants spoke of their personal privilege they discussed their own access to power in relation to other people or groups within the community. Recognizing power and their personal positions of privilege appears to have been one of the main preconditions for the participants to becoming community leaders. Using power in a positive way appears to be a signature of their style of leadership. Participants focused their energies on leveraging their power and privilege in the community to bring about positive change for groups that are oppressed or issues that are marginalized.

Personal Reflections

I have searched for models and examples of leadership throughout my own journey. I copied the mannerisms and mantras of corporate leaders. I memorized Robert's Rules of Order, styled my hair and bought a suit; all in the hopes of becoming a leader. Through this research I

have begun to recognize that leadership manifests itself at different times during your life and is more of a process than an identity.

What I find most significant among the factors outlined above is the understanding that power can be used to promote positive social change. As a social worker, I have always had a hesitant and uncomfortable relationship with power. In speaking with the participants about their accomplishments in the community, I have become more comfortable with claiming and using power in the community to affect change.

Implications

The current leadership discourse is dominated by the influences and experiences of male leaders and female corporate and political leaders. The experiences of female community leaders have been neglected by the scholarship. The factors of community leadership highlighted above rightfully distinguish between community and corporate forms of leadership and recognize that community leadership is a field of study that deserves its own theories. Providing a new theory informed by the experiences of female community leaders legitimizes their unique models of leadership. This reconceptualization of community leadership can serve as a model for emerging female leaders as well as a tool to legitimize and formally recognize women in our community who are leaders but are often not recognized for the valuable role that they play.

FACTORS RELATED TO THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITY LEADERS

In this second group of related factors I propose that becoming independent and developing a social conscious promotes community leadership capacity in girls and young women. This group of related factors addresses the first research question that dealt with the women's experiences along their journeys to community leadership. The interview questions

related to this theme focused on the participants' childhoods and adolescences, as well as their early careers. It appears that the participants in this study shared two formative experiences. First, the participants had opportunities to develop their independence as girls and adolescents. Second, the participants recognized power and personal privilege early in their lives which led them to respond to injustice. These two common precursors are illustrated in Figure 4.

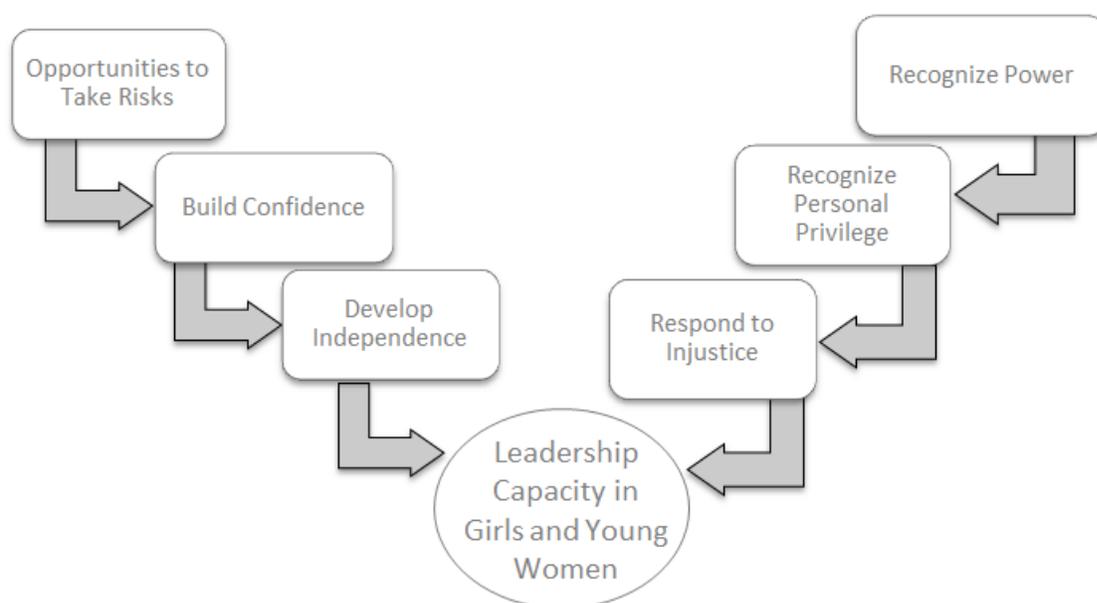


Figure 4: Precursors for Community Leadership

Independent as girls

When asked about their experiences growing up, each of the participants shared examples of independence and a strong sense of self. Research has shown that girls' self-esteem tends to diminish greatly as they reach adolescence (Stills, 1994). It is interesting then that many of the participants had examples of independence and strong self-confidence as young women. The participants, as girls and young women, succeeded in taking risks, learned from their mistakes,

built self-confidence, and developed their independence. For instance, over half of the participants had left their home countries as young women, one as young as 15, to explore new opportunities on their own. This included both participants who immigrated to Canada and Canadian-born participants who, on their own, took extended trips abroad. The participants in this study left their families and home countries without cell phones or internet access to keep in constant touch. This is remarkable considering the trend within our community not to allow children to even walk to school or take public transit on their own.

The participants also shared more accessible examples of taking risks and developing independence. Some of the participants had taken on leadership positions within their student councils, Girl Guide troupes, and sport teams. Some of them had part time jobs or took on household and childcare responsibilities as teenagers. What was common among their stories was the confidence they gained from these experiences. These women had adventures and took risks; this built confidence in their capacity to become community leaders.

Developing Social Consciousness

It appears that for the participants within this study, their journeys to community leadership began when they recognized power and their personal positions of privilege, encountered injustice and chose to respond. The participants came from all walks of life and had experienced various levels of personal privilege. Interestingly, most of the participants who moved to Canada as adults had experienced significant levels of wealth and privilege in their home countries; however, their power quickly diminished upon their arrival to Canada. Many of these participants who immigrated to Canada shared stories of losing their identity, not having their skills recognized, and living in poverty. The participants reflected that these experiences

had transformed their outlook and either enhanced or developed in them a social consciousness. New Canadians provided the richest reflections on this topic, although the Canadian-born participants also shared their own experiences of consciousness raising. Through these experiences the participants began to recognize power within society and their personal positions of privilege. This has created a deep desire among the participants to respond to injustice, whether personally or within the community.

Personal Reflection

As a young woman, I also was encouraged to explore the world around me and take risks. My parents and teachers always encouraged me to take on leadership roles at school and in the community. I spent the summers on my own from the age of 14, working two jobs, buying my own groceries and making my own meals. Although I was not popular in school and did not have many friends, I had a strong sense of self-confidence and relatively high self-esteem. I got a lot of satisfaction from my volunteer work and received significant community recognition for it. Upon reflection, these experiences have built my resiliency and have given me the confidence to take risks in my career that have led to leadership opportunities.

I began developing my social consciousness during my first year of university. I participated in consciousness raising activities with other women and I started recognizing the effects of patriarchy and oppression on me. When I heard the stories of women who were single mothers or living on social benefits, I started to recognize my own position of personal privilege and the power I had within the hierarchy of our society. This ever developing social consciousness has been my key motivation to attend the endless meetings, stuff the thousands of envelopes, and to keep going defeat after defeat with the hopes of affecting change.

Implications

This group of related factors offers a roadmap for those who wish to assist girls and young women in developing leadership capacity. This includes parents, teachers, social workers, community members and policy makers. As fostering independence in girls appears to be a precursor to their development as community leaders, special attention should be given to the opportunities for risk taking we allow for girls and young women. As family members, educators and members of the community, we can all play a role in not stifling girls' opportunities to take risks and test their independence under the guise of protection and nurturance. Simple things like navigating public transit, going away to summer camp, or becoming an exchange student may have profound impacts on a woman's capacity to lead later in life.

It is also important to offer opportunities for young people to learn about power, personal privilege and injustice as a way to motivate young people to become involved in their communities. Programs such as the Miss G-Project² in high schools could create an environment where young people recognize power and personal privilege and are confronted with their responsibility as community members to respond to injustice. Consciousness raising activities in high schools and universities could help students foster a sense of community responsibility and break down barriers between groups.

Beyond personal interventions by community members, a cultural shift needs to take place regarding the tendency to be overprotective of girls and young women. Our society is hypersensitive to any threat to their safety. These threats are often overstated and have the effect

² The Miss G Project for Equity in Education is a grassroots feminist organization in Ontario working to combat all forms of oppression in and through the introduction of gender studies within the high school curriculum. themissgproject.wix.com

of stifling young women's opportunities to take risks and therefore build the confidence required to develop leadership capacity. This paternalistic reaction needs to be challenged so that girls no longer face limits on their opportunities to grow and develop. Changing aspects of a culture requires a multi-pronged, sustained approach. Some strategies could include public awareness campaigns, portrayals of strong, independent girls in the popular media, and modifications to primary and secondary school curriculums. Also, those who have girls in their lives, parents, teachers, extended family members, and helping professionals, can consciously make an effort to not limit girls' opportunities to take risks.

FACTORS THAT SUSTAIN COMMUNITY LEADERS

This third group of related factors outlines the key factors that sustain female community leaders. Although participants inevitably spoke of the barriers and challenges they have endured, I have chosen to focus here on what has supported and sustained the participants, as the challenges and barriers have been documented and discussed at length within the existing literature and were highlighted in the previous chapter. The common sustaining factors identified within this research were support from family, belonging to a circle of support, and recognition for making a lasting impact as illustrated in Figure 5. It appears that these sustaining factors are mutually reinforcing and participants who had access to all three tended to describe their work as community leaders in more positive terms.

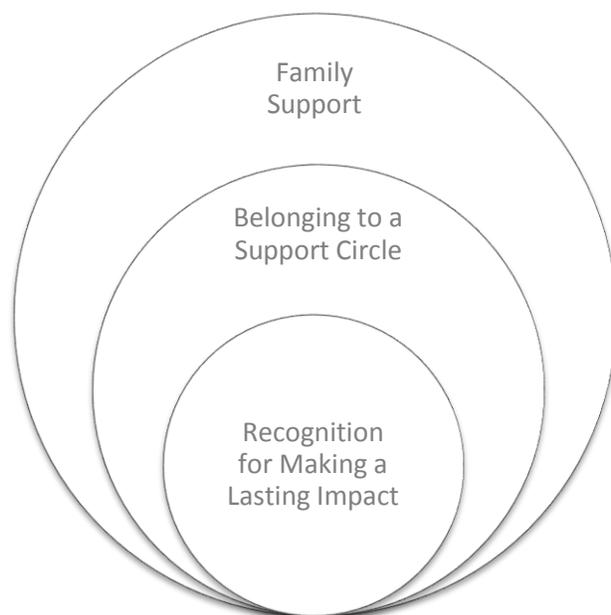


Figure 5: Sustaining Factors for Community Leaders

Family Support

Most of the participants did not spontaneously make note of their families' support of their community leadership; however, when asked specifically about support from their families, most participants credited their families for being able to do the work that they do. Participants who did not have children spoke of their partners being primarily responsible for many of the household duties (meal preparation, cleaning, finances). Interestingly, this was not true for women with children who tended to be primarily responsible for these duties within their households. I am not sure why this is, but when I asked one of the participants she responded that she was better than her partner at managing the household duties. She shared that when her partner made attempts to make meals or tend to the children, she felt that she could do it better and would end up intervening.

Participants with children tended to emphasize their children over their other family members as providing the most support for the work they do. They often claimed that their

children were their main source of motivation and a major factor that propelled them to keep going when faced with setbacks. Participants spoke of wanting to make their children proud and creating a better world for their children.

Recognition for Making a Lasting Difference

The participants appeared to share a common desire to make a lasting difference. Each of them, in their own way, spoke to wanting to be able to look back on their lives and see the changes that they had been a part of. When asked, the participants were able to quickly point to specific examples within their work that made a lasting difference in someone's life or within the community as a whole. Many of the participants kept mementos, such as thank you cards and newspaper articles, in their offices as symbols of the impact of their work. Ten of the participants mentioned receiving awards within the community for their leadership and this appeared to be a sustaining factor because it made them feel that they, and the work that they do, were valued.

Belonging to a Support Circle

Support from circles of individuals who share similar values was a key sustaining factor for the participants. Most of the participants belonged to formal or informal networks or groups of support within their sector. These support circles bridge the gap between professional and personal spheres. Some of the support circles go on trips together or support one another during fundraising campaigns. Women spoke of their reliance on these support circles when they were experiencing challenges in both their professional and personal lives. They also spoke of how they had supported others through these support circles. Many of the women spoke to members of their support circles on a weekly basis and some participants shared that they had support circle members' phone numbers on speed dial.

There were only two participants within this study that did not belong to a support circle. One of the participants explained that she felt that the people that would best be able to support her were too busy. The other participant indicated that she presents an image that she has it all together and that may prevent others from offering support. They both shared a deep desire to have more supportive people in their lives that understand and appreciate their work and said that they planned to reach out in attempts to build their own circles of support.

Personal Reflections

Similar to these two participants, I do not belong to a circle of support and have very few friends or colleagues that I can confide in. I tend to be very guarded and strategic in my relationships with others. Throughout the process of this research study I have reflected on this shortcoming and have started to reach out to acquaintances in the hopes of forming my own circle of support. I started a book club with colleagues and have taken advantage of networking and mentoring opportunities at work.

I have also begun to reach out to former teachers, professors, and personal mentors to let them know the impact they have had on me. I think that this is important because many of these women in my life may only realize the contributions they have made on an abstract level. When I spoke with the participants in this study, those who had tangible examples or mementos of the changes they had impacted appeared to be far more resilient and at peace.

Implications

This group of related factors lays out the key sustaining factors of female community leaders. There is broad consensus within the literature that women are underrepresented in leadership positions across all sectors of our society (Bullough, et al, 2012; Bindhani, Amato,

Smarz, & Saekang, 2012; Godwin, 2010, & Cukier,). For the women that have emerged as leaders within our community, despite considerable societal and institutional barriers, there are ways that we can contribute positively to their resiliency and longevity.

The role that families play in supporting female community leaders deserves to be recognized by the community. As noted by many of the participants, family members do not share in the spotlight and quietly sacrifice aspects of their relationships with their mothers, wives, and partners for the betterment of the community. As a community, it is important to recognize the valuable role that spouses and children of community leaders play and make special efforts to appreciate their contributions.

In my review of the scholarship I was unable to locate any studies related to female community leader's access to social supports. However, the "Lean in" movement started by Facebook Chief Executive Officer Sheryl Sandberg (2013) appears to promote and assist in the organization of these support circles. Although Sandberg has been criticized for blaming women for not attaining leadership positions instead of recognizing systemic and structural barriers as well as for her lack of intersectional analysis on her own position of privilege, her concept of lean in support circles offers a promising model for women who do not have access to informal support circles. Lean in circles exist in communities across North America, are free and meet monthly. Women come together to share their successes and support one another through challenges. Although more artificial than informal support circles, these lean in groups may have the potential to address the need of female community leaders for support.

Lastly, it is important that we recognize, both formally and informally, the contributions of female community leaders. On a personal level, we need to let female community leaders

know the impact they have had on us and on our community at large. Many of the participants had small tokens of gratitude displayed throughout their offices, homemade cards or hand written notes of thanks. They proudly showed off each one of these items and shared how much it meant to them that they have been appreciated.

Societally, it is important that we support organizations which provide formal recognition for the work of leaders in the community. There are numerous organizations within the Waterloo Region that give out awards recognizing female community leaders. These awards play an important role in sustaining female community leaders and should continue to be featured prominently in the media and supported broadly by the community.

In this chapter I have outlined three new groups of related factors that encourage, support and recognize female community leadership. These new theories serve as a first step in establishing theory related to women's journeys to community leadership and serve to legitimize the varied experiences of female community leaders. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of the research findings for social work pedagogy and practice and I will provide suggestions for future social work research related to women's journeys to community leadership.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In this chapter I will discuss the limitations of this research and offer suggestions for future research in this area. I will then outline the implications of this research on social work pedagogy and practice. This will be followed by a review of my overall conclusions of the research project.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study serve as an initial step in the development of an understanding of how and why women become community leaders. As so little research has been conducted on women's journeys to community leadership, the interviews were limited to broad, general themes with the hope that common threads would emerge from which further study could be conducted. Much more research in this area needs to be conducted in order to develop mature, well thought out theories related to women's community leadership.

The scope of this research study and depth of analysis were limited due to the time constraints within the Advanced Standing ten month program at the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. Due to this constraint, I was unable to meet with the participants a second time to ask specifically about the early coding results. I attempted to mitigate this by holding a focus group with two of the participants to review the initial themes. Based on their feedback I modified the interview guide to focus on the themes that appeared to be most significant.

The size, narrow geographical location, and the limited representativeness of the participant sample pose a significant limitation to this study. First, the study consisted of merely fifteen community leaders. It is impossible within a sample that size to capture the breadth and

diversity of experiences that exist among female community leaders. For instance, there were no senior women, women living in poverty, neither women who had not attained a post-secondary education nor women with visible disabilities within the sample. Second, the sample was confined to the geographic location of the Waterloo Region, a large urban centre located with an hour's drive of Toronto. The experience of female community leaders in this location may differ significantly from that of female community leaders in more rural settings or in other provinces or countries. Third, the study's sampling technique was admittedly biased in that the women were ideologically progressive and were known by my advisor, my colleagues, or me. There are many female community leaders that were not sought out to participate because they were not well known in my limited circle of support.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge that although this study was underpinned by intersectional feminist theory, there are occasions where my analysis has fallen short. I am painfully aware that my analysis has fallen short and that further analysis beyond the scope of this thesis is required in order to fully understand and honour the voices which have informed this scholarship. I recognize that there are instances of differences among the participants' experiences that have been glossed over or erased. Becoming intersectional in my analysis has been a challenging process and I recognize that I still have much to learn.

Suggestions for Future Social Work Research

As there is a large gap within the literature on women's experiences of leadership, there are many opportunities to conduct future research in this field. From the information shared by the participants, there were many topics that proved interesting for future research, but unfortunately were too specific for the scope of this study. For instance, one might explore which

risk taking activities lead to the development of independence in young women. Many of the participants spoke of travelling on their own; however, there may be less costly activities that provide for similar results. It would be useful for those who wish to increase the number of female community leaders to develop a study to examine which risk taking activities lead to the development of leadership capacity among girls and young women. There are likely key factors that could be replicated by schools and other institutions.

Further research that looks at how young people begin to recognize power and their personal privilege and what experiences contribute to this process may be beneficial for educators as well as parents. An evaluation of existing programs that have this aim may also serve to bolster their effectiveness and reach.

As noted in my discussion of the study's limitations, women that had not attained a post-secondary education were not included in this research study. Women over the age of 65 or living with a visible disability were also not represented within this sample. Their experiences likely include different facets that could contribute to the theories outlined in this study. Future research should make concerted efforts to ensure their participation.

There may also be differences between the journeys of women with conservative ideologies to leadership in comparison to those of women who espouse more progressive views. Their experiences are not at all captured in this research study and their experiences may offer unique and valuable insight to this area of study.

Another area neglected within this study is the role and impact of spirituality on women's journeys to community leadership. Spirituality as a factor within women's journeys to leadership

was discussed in only one of the interviews I conducted. I did not ask any explicit questions on this subject. Spirituality may serve as a motivation or sustaining factor for female community leaders and this area warrants further study.

Biographical or life history research would also be of interest in order to explore more deeply individual women's journeys to community leadership. Each of the participants had complex journeys to leadership that could not be fully illuminated in this research project. A more in depth study with fewer participants would most assuredly uncover numerous other themes related to women's journeys to leadership.

There is also a great need to study the experience of mothers who are community leaders. This was a recurring theme that was not anticipated within this research and therefore was not adequately explored. Participants spoke of the complex impact that having children had on their work. Future research could study how having children both enhances and detracts from the work of female community leaders.

Lastly, it would be interesting to compare the findings of this study with a similar study of male community leaders to identify any overlapping or contrasting themes. The findings of a study such as this could help those interested in creating a broader understanding of community leadership.

Implications for Social Work Pedagogy and Practice

The findings of this research study have implications for both social work pedagogy and practice. Developing and promoting leadership is valuable for both social workers and for those we work with. In direct practice, social work students and practitioners often work with

individuals who are struggling with self-agency. Social workers can find themselves in positions where they can easily make choices on behalf of clients and ignore their clients' rights to self-determination, especially when working with young people. The findings of this study suggest that when we, as social workers, take decision-making and risk taking opportunities out of the hands of our clients, we are essentially robbing them of opportunities to build confidence, independence and develop leadership capacity. Therefore it is important to remind ourselves as workers and to instill in social work students the critical importance of checking paternalism at the door and provide our clients with as much choice and self-determination as possible. This is in line with social work values of self-determination and empowerment and could be incorporated within the current direct practice and Use of Self curriculums as well as highlighted during the practicum placements.

The concept of leadership is rarely highlighted within the current Canadian social work curriculum. In my experience as a social work student at two very different faculties of social work in Canada, social work students are not encouraged to consider themselves as leaders within the community and are often taught to be uncomfortable with their power within society. This resistance to claim power, in my experience, has become overemphasized within the social work curriculum, to the detriment of the profession. Social work students are graduating without any concept of how to ethically leverage their power in society to promote social change. Social workers should play a significant leadership role in their communities and in politics, but many are hesitant to claim power. I am calling for a re-framing of power within the social work curriculum; a frame that promotes an ethical model leadership.

Throughout my education there has been no memorable mention of leadership at the community level or even the role of social workers as leaders in the community. This lack of focus on social workers as community leaders has been a disservice to the profession and has ill prepared workers for the heavy responsibilities, complex challenges, and ethical considerations they face in such muddled roles.

As social workers, many of us are involved in the community in leadership roles, either through our paid employment or as volunteers. I argue that these activities are an extension of our identities as social workers and our leadership development should be actively and explicitly fostered during our course work and practicum placements. This would require the embedding of leadership development within the social work curriculum as well as recognition of the leadership responsibilities of social workers within the Code of Ethics.

The reconceptualization of leadership that I have theorized based on the experiences of female community leaders provides a model of leadership that is consistent with social work values and ethics (Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, 2008). This new model of community leadership could make a valuable contribution to the pedagogy of social work and lead to the recognition of the leadership role of social workers' within the community.

I am calling for increased discussion within the curriculum and professional associations on the role of community leadership within ethical social work practice. As social workers we are uniquely positioned and relatively well regarded within society; we do have privilege in society's hierarchy of power. We have an ethical responsibility to use our power to advance our

professional values of equality, fairness, social justice and empowerment within the community and to challenge the dominant discourse of individualism, competition, and inequality.

It is crucial that social work scholars participate in the ongoing discussions on leadership and leadership development within academia. These discussions are currently dominated by business and political science disciplines, disciplines that often do not appreciate the importance of community leadership or the unique experiences of female leaders. Our involvement in these discussions can help to ensure that leadership discourses reflect a broader and more diverse understanding of leadership experiences.

Lastly, I believe it is important that as social workers we reexamine our role in society as we are increasingly challenged by the current neoliberal agenda. We have unique expertise and perspectives on social and economic issues and our insights are excluded from the decision-making process. As our work continues to be devalued and threatened by the political class under the guise of austerity, it is important that those of us within the field of social work assume leadership positions within the community to defend and advocate for the services we provide and for the interests of those with whom we work.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore women's journeys to community leadership. There were three main research questions attempting to determine how female leaders define their leadership, the precursors for women to become community leaders, and the factors that sustain community leaders. Fifteen women who had been recognized as leaders within the community were interviewed about their personal journeys to community leadership. Grounded theory was used to analyze the responses of the participants. Based on the themes that emerged

from the data analysis I have proposed three groups of related factors that encourage, support and recognize women's community leadership.

In the first group of related factors I proposed a reconceptualization of leadership based on the experiences of female community leaders. This new model of leadership is based on values-driven action, empowering community members, facilitating connections for change and the positive use of power and privilege. In the second group of related factors, I theorized that two key formative experiences, developing independence and a social consciousness, lead to the development of community leadership capacity within girls and young women. In the third group of related factors I outlined the three key sustaining factors of family support, belonging to circles of support, and personal and community recognition, for female community leadership.

As the researcher of this study, I have grown and developed tremendously during this process. I feel so fortunate to have had this opportunity to meet and spend time with the community leaders who participated in this study. This study has helped to validate many aspects of my own journey to leadership, the obstacles I have overcome and the challenges I continue to face. It has taught me the importance of building and belonging to a circle of support within my own journey. Finally, this research process has offered me a model of community leadership that fits with both my personal and professional values.

The results of this study contribute to the limited research on female community leaders and offers factors that can encourage, support, and recognize the increasing number of women attaining positions of leadership within their communities. It is hoped that this research will encourage further widespread study that will lead to increased knowledge of how and why women become community leaders and how best to support them along their journeys.

Appendix A

Interview Recruitment Script

Hello,

My name is Lyndsey Butcher and I am a Masters of Social Work student working under the supervision of Dr. Ginette Lafrenière at Wilfrid Laurier University. I am conducting a study on female community leaders in the Waterloo Region for my thesis. My main focus is on the experiences or influences in women's lives that have led them to become leaders in the community. This research will contribute to the limited scholarship on female community leader's experiences and the findings will assist in the ongoing efforts to encourage more women to attain leadership positions within their communities.

Participation in this study involves participating in a semi-structured interview. The interviews can take place either at your office or in a private office located at the Faculty of Social Work in Kitchener. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed by myself for analysis.

Throughout the project you will be provided with copies of your transcript, the initial analysis, and the final thesis and have the opportunity to provide feedback and note any concerns.

Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to answer any questions or end the interview at any time. There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. All information you provide will be considered confidential and your data will only be accessible by my supervisor and I. The data collected will be kept in a secure location and disposed of in the fall of 2013.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board, and you may contact the Chair of the REB if you have any questions about the ethics of the project.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me at butc4090@mylaurier.ca or 226-749-2580 and I can provide you with further information concerning the study.

Sincerely,

Lyndsey Butcher

Appendix B

Interview Consent Form

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY -INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Research Study: Women's Journeys to Leadership

Principal Investigator: Lyndsey Butcher

Advisor: Dr. Ginette Lafrenière

INFORMATION

You are invited to be part of a research study that is collecting information about women and their journeys to becoming community leaders. The purpose of this study is to look at these experiences in order to determine any common motivations, strategies, or themes among women's journeys to leadership. As a participant, you will be asked to discuss the formative experiences you have had on your path to leadership. This research study is being done by Lyndsey Butcher, a Masters of Social Work student at the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University, Kitchener and is under the direction of Dr. Ginette Lafrenière.

This will be a qualitative study involving 15 to 20 community women leaders, consisting of semi-structured interviews that will be audio taped then written out word for word by Lyndsey Butcher. The length of the time of the interview is about 60 to 90 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of your interview will be kept confidential and you will not be identified in any publication or discussion. Your name, organization, political affiliation, specific position, and any other names that you mention, will be changed or withheld so that you cannot be easily known. The tapes, transcripts and the notes from the interview will be kept in a locked cabinet and a password protected encrypted flash drive. Lyndsey Butcher and her supervisor Ginette Lafrenière will be the only persons who will have access to them.

Throughout the research process there will be opportunities for you to review the ongoing analysis and provide your feedback or note any concerns. The researcher will likely use quotations from the tapes in a final report and any publication of the material. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview as well as a draft of the thesis prior to submission and can request any identifying information be removed.

RISK

There are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study.

BENEFITS

You will be provided with an opportunity to reflect on your journey and personal accomplishments as community leader and contribute to a framework to assist emerging female community leaders. This research will contribute to the limited scholarship on female community leader's experiences. The findings from this research will assist in the efforts to encourage more women to attain leadership positions within their communities.

PARTICIPATION

You have the right to have all of your questions about the study answered by the researcher in detail so that you clearly understand the answer. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate at any time. If you withdraw from the study, all of your data will be destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s) you choose.

If you have any questions about the research, the procedure used, your rights or any other research related concern you may contact the researcher or her supervisor, Ginette Lafrenière.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The information that you provide in the interview will appear in the thesis which will be completed in the fall of 2013. It is possible that the findings from this study will be provided, published, or presented to other bodies. You will be notified by email if the findings will be provided, published, or presented to other bodies.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study, you may contact the researcher, Lyndsey Butcher, at 806- 225 Harvard Place, Waterloo, ON, N2J 4H4 or by phone at 226-749-2580 or by email at butc4090@wlu.ca. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel that you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca.

If you have any questions or wish to withdraw your consent you can contact:

Lyndsey Butcher
MSW Student, Faculty of Social Work
Email: butc4090@wlu.ca
226-749-2580

or

Dr. Ginette Lafrenière
Professor, Faculty of Social Work
Lyle S. Hallman School of Social Work
(519) 884-0710 ext. 5237

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study. I agree to have my interview being tape recorded. I agree to have quotations from my interview used.

Participant`s Name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview Guide – First Round

Interview Questions

Main Questions	Probing Questions
1. Can you tell me about what it was like growing up in your family and community?	a) Where did you grow up b) What was your family like?
2. Can you tell me a little bit about your current position?	a) How long have you been in your position? b) What type of work did you do prior to becoming x?
3. What got you first involved in the community?	a) Were there particular people, events, issues that pushed you to get involved? b) As a child did you ever getting involved in the community? c) Were your parents or other adults in your life involved in the community?
4. How has your involvement in the community changed over time?	a) What has led to these changes? b) Do you remember any messages you received along the way
5. Who are the people in your personal and professional life that you count on for support?	a) Family members? b) Work colleagues?
6. Do you consider yourself a community leader?	a) What does being a leader mean to you?
7. What are the biggest rewards or satisfactions of being a community leader?	a) Have these changed over time?
8. What do you see as the biggest obstacles or challenges to becoming a community leader?	a) Have these challenges changed over time?
9. What advice would you give up and coming leaders?	
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?	

After the interview, if the participant has not discussed her demographic information, some of the following questions will be asked.

Demographic Questions

To begin, I'd like to ask you some basic information about you.

1. Can you tell me the year you were born?
2. Can you tell me your relationship status? (married, divorced, separated, single, widowed, common-law, dating relationship)
3. Do you have any children?, How old are your children?
4. What is the highest level of education you have received? (high school, community college, university, other training)
5. How long have you lived in the Waterloo Region?, Where did you live previously?
6. How do you identify your sexuality? (heterosexual, trans, lesbian, bisexual, queer)

Appendix D

Interview Guide- Second Round

1. Can you tell me about your current position?
 - a) Why did you pursue this position?
 - b) How long have you been in the positions?
 - c) What did you do previously?
2. When looking back at your childhood, were there any family or community members that you remember that may have influenced you in working in this area?
 - a) Do you remember any events that may have influenced you?
 - b) Do you remember if you had a strong self-esteem as a child? Why or why not?
 - c) Do you remember if you were independent as a child? Why or why not?
3. Who are the people in your personal life that support you in the work that you do?
 - a) In what ways do they support you?
 - b) Are they also involved in the community?
 - c) Were there people in your life that you have cut out because they were not supportive of you?
4. Who are the people in your professional life that have supported the work that you do?
5. Do you consider yourself a community leader?
 - a) What does the term community leader mean to you?
6. How has doing this kind of work affected you as a mother (if applicable)?

Demographic Questions

To begin, I'd like to ask you some basic information about you.

7. Can you tell me the year you were born?
8. Can you tell me your relationship status? (married, divorced, separated, single, widowed, common-law, dating relationship)
9. Do you have any children?, How old are your children?
10. What is the highest level of education you have received? (high school, community college, university, other training)
11. How long have you lived in the Waterloo Region?, Where did you live previously?
12. How do you identify your sexuality? (heterosexual, trans, lesbian, bisexual, queer)

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