EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN LEADERS IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN NORTHERN BC

by

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Abstract

This thesis explored the experiences of women leaders who work for nonprofit organizations in northern British Columbia, Canada. The study was guided by a central research question and used a qualitative paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenology methodology. The data collection process involved unstructured interview questions that were related to the central research question. Data analysis procedure involved reading the interview transcripts several times which led to the identification of the major themes of, *the nonprofit sector, a unique lived experience, a gendered unique lived experience, leadership style and philosophy, nonprofit organization leadership challenges*, and *leader identity*. To provide the women with a voice in the study, excerpts of the interview transcripts are cited. The conclusion of the thesis provides the study limitations, explains the major recommendations, identifies the need for further research, and shares my personal reflections on the study.

Keywords: women; leadership; nonprofit organizations; qualitative research; phenomenology

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Acknowledgements and Dedication

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Women leaders experience leadership differently than male leaders do. Women leadership practices include the use of more open communication, leading by example, motivating others to do their best, and being more willing to make mistakes (Cartwright, 2014). In addition, women leaders are also more sensitive to the needs of their followers or subordinates (Vasavada, 2012). Despite these strengths, women leaders face many challenges. Past studies have revealed that, due to a pervasive association between masculine characteristics and leadership, women leaders report the need to balance their feminine and masculine traits in order to be perceived as appropriate for a leadership role (Callahan, Hasler, & Tolson, 2005). Furthermore, male leaders progress into leadership roles/positions faster than female leaders do (Callahan et al., 2005). Once in a leadership position, women leaders are more likely to have gender influence their performance reviews and associated rewards when compared to male leaders (Lyons, 2007).

Leadership in the nonprofit sector has been found to encompass distinct elements when compared to leadership in the public and private sector including differences in compensation, opportunities for advancement, skill requirements, and organizational values (De Varo & Brookshire, 2006; Kearns, Livingston, Scherer, & McShane, 2015; Young-joo, 2014). Women constitute a higher percentage of the employees in nonprofit organizations than men but are underrepresented in leadership positions (Damman, Heyse, & Mills, 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). The authors' reports suggested that there are barriers to women participating in the nonprofit sector in a leadership capacity. Given the high employment rates of women in the nonprofit sector and relatively low participation of

women in leadership positions, it is important that researchers seek greater understanding of women in leadership of the nonprofit sector.

This research explored the lived experiences of women leaders in the nonprofit sector using a qualitative research paradigm and a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology. Understanding the experiences of women leaders is of benefit to nonprofit organizations so that they can better communicate with their personnel of all genders as well as plan more effectively for the recruitment, retention, and succession of their employees. Furthermore, the experiences of women leaders in the nonprofit sector is of interest to women employees in the nonprofit sector who are considering pursuing or aspiring to leadership positions.

Significance of the Study

This research highlights a unique experience that has not been given much attention or presented in the literature of organizational studies, gender studies, women studies, behavioural and psychological studies, or labour studies in economics and development. Hence, this thesis is significant as it contributes to the gap in literature in these disciplines. Furthermore, this study is of significance as the findings of the research may influence policy innovation, or revision of existing policies, and improve professional practices (Creswell, 2015) of women leaders. The research findings could provide insight to both nonprofit organizations, women leaders working with nonprofit organizations and women who are interested in working as leaders for nonprofit organizations.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to understand and present the experiences of women leaders in the nonprofit sector, with a focus on their lived experiences of personal leadership styles, leadership role challenges, and the construction of leadership identity. This

is of value to women who work in the nonprofit sector as well as women interested in pursuing leadership positions. Furthermore, understanding the experiences of women leaders is valuable to scholars interested in leadership differences between men and women and among the profit, nonprofit, and public sectors. The secondary purpose of the study addressed the gap in literature on the role of women leaders in nonprofit organizations, as well as inciting further studies in this area of gender differences in leadership of nonprofit organizations.

Research Question

To provide direction to this qualitative study, the following open research question that addressed the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015) was stated as the framework to the study.

- What are the experiences of five women leaders working for nonprofit organizations in northern BC?

Background of the Study

This research was inspired by my personal experience as a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization and my curiosity about what the experience is like for other women leaders in nonprofit organizations. I am currently employed as the Executive Director of the Aboriginal Business Development Centre, a small nonprofit organization located in Prince George, BC. I have also been involved in leadership positions as an elected representative of the undergraduate student society of the University of Northern British Columbia in the past. These leadership experiences and their challenges have further incited my personal curiosity on women's leadership experiences at the micro level of nonprofit organizations.

My leadership experiences have only been in the nonprofit and public sectors and I often wonder how my experience would have been different in the for-profit sector. Taken together, I decided to undertake research on the experiences of women leaders in the nonprofit sector. I see this research as valuable to expanding the understanding of leadership from a gender and sector perspective.

Researcher Context

I am currently the Executive Director of a small nonprofit organization and have occupied this position for the past year. I am interested in learning about the experiences of other women leaders working for nonprofit organizations. My personal experiences have resulted in a great deal of reflection and wondering about how women in nonprofit contexts experience leadership roles, what challenges they face, and how they construct their identities as leaders.

I have developed a great appreciation for qualitative research and its ability to capture meaning while honouring the experiences of participants. During a graduate qualitative methodology course, I became particularly interested in phenomenology as it seeks to capture the essence of everyday experiences (van Manen, 2014).

During my graduate qualitative methodology course, I undertook a pilot qualitative interview based on a phenomenological research question. This experience provided me with a low-risk social environment with my pilot participant. The course exercise motivated my choice of research design for this study to better understand the lived experiences of my women participants.

Conceptual Lens

The study conceptual lenses emerged from the data (van Manen, 2014). They include: leadership experiences, leadership challenges, leader identity, leadership styles, and mentorship of women leaders working for nonprofit organizations. Leadership theory served as a secondary conceptual lens for this study as this research explored the women leaders' leadership styles. The leadership lens of transformational and servant leadership styles , which enables growth and changes within organizations, and modify the emotions and perspectives of the followers (Northouse, 2016). To explore the concepts of the leadership experiences of the women participants, I engaged in thematic analysis of the interview data, which provided the conceptual lenses listed above.

This research did not seek to generalize and was interested in learning about the lived experiences of the study participants. In addition, even though the study was based on women's experiences in leadership/management positions, it did not utilize a theoretical feminist research framework, simply for the reason that, the 'stories' related to the participants' experiences were the ultimate goal of the study.

Summary

This chapter introduced the topic of women leaders in nonprofit organizations, discussed the background of the study, significance of the research and purpose of the study, outlined the central research question, and explained the conceptual lenses of the study. In addition, the researcher's position and relationship to the research are stated.

The next chapter of the thesis presents a review of literature based on themes of women leaders in nonprofit organizations, women leaders' leadership style, challenges to women leaders, and women leaders' construction of identities amongst others.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The nonprofit sector provides many important community and social services, yet there is limited literature on the sector, especially in regards to the characteristics or experiences of the nonprofit sector workforce (Young-joo, 2014). One known characteristic of the nonprofit sector is that it has a higher percentage of women employees as compared to the public or for-profit sectors. Despite this, women are still underrepresented in leadership positions (Damman et al., 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). This is a disturbing finding as women are reported to be very effective leaders (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). It is therefore to the detriment of both women and organizations when women are excluded from leadership positions.

This chapter's review of the literature is based on a qualitative thematic approach (Creswell, 2015), which selected themes from the literature that are related to the experiences of women leaders in the nonprofit sector. This review explores themes of women's lived experiences as leaders, women's leadership philosophies, gender and leadership identities, and the challenges confronting women practicing leadership amongst others.

Lived Experiences of Women Leaders

Little is known about the lived experiences of women leaders and even less is known about the experiences of women leaders who work for the nonprofit sector. The following section explores how leaders' experiences are influenced by gender, as well as how the nonprofit sector influences women leaders' experiences.

Influence of gender.

Women leaders face additional challenges in serving in leadership roles due to gendered divisions of labour and positions (Court, 1997). In the school organizations, male

and female teachers have different leadership opportunities, as more female teachers are employed in elementary schools with fewer opportunities to access leadership positions, while male teachers dominate the teaching labour force at the high school level as well as occupy more leadership positions in both elementary and secondary schools (Barman & Gleason, 2003).

Canadian authors reported how women are still responsible for the majority of house-hold chores and child-rearing roles which creates difficulty in establishing successful work-life balance (Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000; Smith, 1992). Beyond the additional workload, women leaders also experience tension between being career-motivated and wanting a family (Court, 1997). This tension can result in women feeling the need to choose between career and family which can lead to very unfortunate and potentially painful consequences of gendered decisions and choices (Parpart et al., 2000; Smith, 1992). Most research does not suggest that male leaders need to navigate these choices in the same way as women do, and the men rarely face the same degree of consequences (Court, 1997).

Women experience leadership differently than men, due to their limited numbers, and the very exercise of being in a leadership position causes them to stand out, therefore putting them at risk of increased scrutiny (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Women leader's appearances are often the focus of scrutiny (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). The authors further argued that women leaders are expected to demonstrate respectability through their dressing and mannerisms. In addition, women leaders are expected to dress modestly and behave in a subdued manner in order to be respected by their male peers (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). Women leaders face the additional challenge of needing to navigate the unspoken expectations around dress and self-presentation that are not as pervasive for male leaders. The authors further argued that

women struggle to balance the need to display respectability with being considered 'woman enough' (Mavin & Grandy, 2016). This notion of having to balance external expectations with one's 'woman-ness' is something that many researchers discuss in relation to the experience of being a woman leader (Catalyst, 2007; Callahan et al., 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Vasavada, 2012).

It is impossible to discuss the experiences of women leaders without discussing the impact of having children, taking parental leave, and maintaining work-life balance once the women decide to return to work (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016). Most developed countries that support generous parental leave and affordable daycare are more likely to see women participating in the workforce and moving into leadership positions (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016). The majority of the Nordic nations, especially Sweden, are seen as being leaders in regards to policy strategies that empower women to participate in the economy; Sweden encourages equal sharing of parenting responsibilities between the mother and father through the use of shared parental leave, and champions flexible work arrangements that support work-life balance for women employees (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016). These strategies have been successful as Sweden boasts an 80% rate of women participation in the workforce (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016). Similar policies to those employed by Sweden could go a long way towards supporting women's work-life balance and therefore participation in the workforce and leadership positions. On a more micro-scale, organizations can better support women to become leaders by generating policies and programs such as flexible work schedules that support women to participate in leadership without sacrificing the quantity or quality of their family time (Johnson & Tunheim, 2016). In Canada, labour laws and policies are in place to support women in the workforce, particularly women leaders in the public and

private sectors. With an increased focus on human rights and particularly the rights of women, equal treatment in the workplace is promoted, respected, and regulated by unions and the courts should there be any violations (Smith, 1992).

Influence of the nonprofit sector.

Nonprofit sector job opportunities differ from the for-profit or public sector in terms of pay, advancement opportunities, job security, intrinsic rewards, and skill requirements (Young-joo, 2014). Research reports of De Varo and Brookshire (2006) revealed that nonprofit organizations offer lower wages than other sectors and offer less opportunity for advancement, particularly for women leaders. Conversely, nonprofit organizations are considered to have greater opportunities for intrinsic rewards (Young-joo, 2014). Nonprofit organizations require a particular emphasis on interpersonal skills including communication and trust building (Kearns et al., 2015). Leaders of nonprofit organizations are required to be equipped with a broad range of skills due to being, on average, employed in smaller organizations (Kearns et al., 2015). Nonprofit organizations are also considered to be more family-friendly work environments due to the need to retain workers, as well as their ethics and values-based mandates (Young-joo, 2014).

Researchers studying populations from all over the globe have found consistent evidence that women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector (Damman et al., 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). Many different explanations have been posited as to why women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector. Firstly, the unique characteristics of the nonprofit sector influence who chooses to apply for positions in the sector. Individuals who perceive their skills and interests to be in alignment with the nonprofit sector are more likely to gravitate to positions in that sector (Young-joo, 2014). This desire for alignment between

one's personal goals and values and a career opportunity is referred to as utility maximization. Young-joo (2014) argued that this plays a large role in women's being overrepresented in the nonprofit sector as women are more likely to see alignment between their skills and intrinsic values and those required by the nonprofit sector. For example, women have been found to be more public-spirited than men, volunteering more, and attaching more importance to helping others (Themudo, 2009). Furthermore, the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) attempts to explain the mechanism by which people define and categorize themselves in relation to various social groups. SCT argues that people will assess themselves and will place themselves and others in certain social categories (Turner, 1999; Turner & Reynolds, 2010). SCT has been used to suggest that women may be more likely to work in the nonprofit sector as they see themselves as being caring and nurturing, and they may seek out opportunities to work with similar others in a compatible environment (Chou, 2011).

Furthermore, Young-joo (2014) also acknowledged the role that external factors can play in women's career choices. For example, the nonprofit sector tends to be focused on meeting community and social needs which results in many of the positions in the sector being more of the traditional "women's work" (Danmen et al., 2014; Young-joo, 2014). Due to the high volume of some types of positions in the nonprofit sector, women who are trained for those positons may end up in the nonprofit sector simply due to a lack of opportunities in the other sectors (Danmen et al., 2014; Young-joo, 2014).

Women's empowerment has also been used as a reason why women are over-represented in nonprofit organizations. Themudo (2009) reported that, in countries where women are more empowered, the nonprofit sector of that country was larger. A variety of

explanations were posited for this positive association between nonprofit sector size and women's empowerment. It was suggested that increased women's participation in the labour market and the resulting economic growth provides a stronger tax base upon which the nonprofit sector can grow. In the opposite direction, it was also suggested that the nonprofit sector's role in fighting gender discrimination might have resulted in greater women's empowerment (Themudo, 2009). Interestingly, it has also been found that countries that are characterized as being feminine, as defined by an overlap or lack of distinction between gender roles, have more nonprofit organizations (Claus, Callahan, & Sandlin, 2013). This further supports the association between greater women's empowerment and the size of the nonprofit sector of that country.

Women are over-represented in the nonprofit sector but, despite this, they are still underrepresented in the leadership positions of nonprofit organizations (Damman et al., 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). Many explanations have been suggested as to why women are underrepresented in leadership positions. These explanations are rooted in theoretical perspectives. First, is the Human Capital Theory (HCT) which argues that the differences in employment outcomes can be attributed to individual skills and knowledge. Applied to the nonprofit sector, HCT asserts that the overrepresentation of women in the nonprofit sector is a result of women's having skills and training that make them ideal candidates for the nonprofit sector but perhaps not for the public or for-profit sectors (Damman et al., 2014). This is similar to the idea of utility maximization in that individuals assess their skills and seek out career opportunities that best match those skills (Young-joo, 2014). HCT is flawed in its explanation of why women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector though as women today often have equivalent education and skill levels to men but

still remain overrepresented in the nonprofit sector. In contrast, the Structural Theory (ST) suggests that women occupy fewer leadership roles because women are highly marginalized by the structures of society (Smith, 2002). In addition, gender segregation and discriminatory hiring may contribute to the under-representation of women in leadership positions in the nonprofit sector (Papart et al, 2000; Young-joo, 2014). This explanation is also limited in its explanatory ability as it only takes into account external factors for why women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector. Lastly, the Labour Donation Theory (LDT) argues that women may be drawn to working for nonprofit organizations as they provide an opportunity to make a positive contribution to society (Themudo, 2009). It is argued that this may compensate for the relative lower wages of nonprofit organizations (Themudo, 2009). It is my belief that women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector due to a multitude of factors, both internal and external, and only by better understanding women leaders' experiences in the nonprofit sector will enable further insight into this phenomenon.

Women's underrepresentation in leadership positions in the nonprofit sector is of great concern for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the fact that women are underrepresented in leadership positions, even in a sector in which women are overrepresented, demonstrates the degree of barriers that women face in obtaining leadership positions. Furthermore, it is troublesome that the nonprofit sector is not taking a more progressive approach to gender equality among their leaders given the nonprofit sector's concern for issues of social justice and human rights (Damman et al., 2014). It is also concerning that women are overrepresented in a sector that is known for having lower wages (Papart et al, 2000; Themudo, 2009). Despite the fact that women are underrepresented in leadership positions in the nonprofit sector, the nonprofit sector has been comparatively welcoming to women

leaders when compared to the public and private sectors. The nonprofit sector employs a greater percentage of women leaders than the public or private sector do (Claus et al., 2013; Young-joo, 2014).

In summary, women in nonprofit organizations are at a disadvantage when trying to obtain leadership positions, partly due to the systemic perception of the role of women in communities and society in general. In order to change this perception of women's role in society, policies that emphasize inclusion of women in the workplace and the review of labour laws that will accommodate women in organizations will need to be encouraged.

Leadership Philosophy

Various studies report that most women leaders tend to be transformational in their leadership style as opposed to men who tend to be more transactional (Eagly, 2007; Rohmann & Rowald, 2009). Transformational leadership style refers to leadership that changes the emotions, values, and goals of the followers (Northouse, 2016). Transformational leadership involves charisma which results in feelings of excitement in the followers (Callahan et al., 2005). Transformational leadership involves a leader's paying attention to and responding to a follower's emotions (Callahan et al., 2005). In contrast, transactional leadership involves a leader's exchanging rewards for specific behaviours of the followers, a more behaviourist approach of leadership (Northouse, 2016). The finding that women display more transformational leadership and that men display more transactional leadership has been explained in terms of differences between women and men's agentic and communal attributes (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Agentic attributes refer to characteristics such as independence, dominance, and competitiveness. Communal attributes include characteristics such as helpfulness, sympathy and sensitivity to others. Agentic

attributes are more typically associated with men and communal attributes are more typically associated with women (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Agentic attributes are most easily found in transactional leadership while communal attributes are most easily found in transformational leadership. It therefore follows that women would demonstrate, through their possession of more communal attributes, a more transformational leadership style (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Women leaders' use of transformational leadership has also been explained in terms of emotional intelligence (Callahan et al., 2005). Emotional intelligence refers to one's ability to recognize, understand, and respond to the emotional state of others (Nafukho, Muyia, Farnia, Kacirek, & Lynham, 2016). Transformational leadership utilizes emotions in order to generate inspiration and motivate behavioural change in followers (Callahan et al., 2005). This contributes in many cases to higher leadership and organizational effectiveness (Callahan et al., 2005). Women are often considered to be more highly emotionally expressive when compared to men and have been found to score higher on tests of emotional intelligence (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). Women have also been found to be more sensitive to the needs of their followers (Vasavada, 2012). This emotional intelligence may predispose women to using more transformational leadership styles that account for and address followers' emotions. Following this, it makes sense that women leaders use behaviours that are empathetic, intuitive, and organic (Chou, 2011). In comparison, organizations that are led by males frequently use behaviours that are productivity driven which is in alignment with a transactional leadership style (Chou, 2011).

The 2014 Ketchum Leadership Communication Monitor (Cartwright, 2014) reported that female leaders were ranked higher than men on the top-four most critical leadership

traits which are: using open and transparent communication, leading by example, motivating others to do their best, and being willing to make mistakes. Consistent with these findings, Rohmann and Rowald (2009) reported that women managers elicited more pride and respect from their followers, presented a more trustworthy role model, communicated a stronger vision, and showed more optimism and enthusiasm. The women managers were also perceived as being more open to alternative ways of approaching a problem. Women have been found to use more emotionally expressive language in their communication, whereas men are more assertive and aggressive in their communication. Women are therefore more effective at bringing others into their vision (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). This is in alignment with the finding that women are more likely to use a transformational leadership style as creating motivation and inspiration related to one's vision is a hallmark of transformational leadership (Callahan et al., 2005). Hence, women leaders can best be described as visionary and inclusive leaders.

Challenges Faced by Women Leaders

Women who are in leadership positions or are interested in leadership positions face challenges of obtaining or securing a leadership position, maintaining the position, and being respected in that position. Schein (2001) first coined the phrase "think manager, think male" when he discovered that, when individuals were asked to think about a manager, the individuals envisioned a male. This finding demonstrates the pervasive association that exists between masculine behaviour and leadership roles, a typical affiliation of leadership to the dominance of patriarchy in all societies. This association has been found cross-culturally. Typical masculine leadership characteristics include assertiveness, competitiveness, and aggressiveness (Vasavada, 2012). Women are often perceived as being weak for not

portraying these characteristics in place of more feminine, participatory approaches (Vasavada, 2012). This creates a dichotomy for women whereby they must balance their feminine traits with more masculine traits in order to be considered an appropriate fit for a leadership position (Callahan et al., 2005; Eagly & Johannes-Schmidt, 2001).

Women's advancement into leadership positions has been found to look drastically different than that of their male colleagues. Males have been observed to progress faster into leadership roles because there is no conflict between their characteristics and those associated with leadership (Callahan et al., 2005). Women face the unique challenge of trying to display certain masculine characteristics aligned with typical perceptions of leaders such as assertiveness and competitiveness, while also displaying enough feminine characteristics so that they are not perceived as being disingenuous (Vasavada, 2012). In addition, Stivers (2002) described these opposing forces as women's needing to "look like a woman but act like a man" in order to succeed in leadership positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) described this challenge as women leaders' needing to display both communal and agentic attributes. Women are therefore expected to balance kindness and helpfulness with assertiveness (Early & Carli, 2007). Women are also often perceived as allowing their emotions to cloud their judgements or decisions despite the finding that emotional intelligence can yield benefits for an organization (Vasavada, 2012). According to Catalyst (2007) this dichotomy between perceived masculine and feminine leadership characteristics is likely part of the reason why women leaders are often perceived as either likeable or competent, but not both. Similarly, it has been found that women in leadership positions are likely to be criticized as being either overemotional or not emotional enough by their male colleagues. This demonstrates the immense pressure that women leaders face to perfectly balance masculine and feminine

qualities so that they are perceived as being both competent but also women enough. Women in leadership positions report that achieving success required them to relinquish parts of their identities in order to conform to the masculine construction of leadership (Lyons, 2007).

Women face even greater discrimination based on their gender when they are seeking a leadership position in an industry that is not typically associated with femininity. This was demonstrated by Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) who found that female job candidates were rated as less desirable for a leadership position in all sectors but that this effect was strongest when the sector was typically male-dominated. This demonstrates the barriers that women face in attempting to secure positions that are not in alignment with what are typically considered to be feminine leadership characteristics.

Even when women are successful in obtaining leadership positions, they still face discrimination based on their gender. For example, gender has been found to influence performance evaluations (Lyons, 2007). A study conducted by Lyons (2007) found that comments relating to gender were 25 times more likely to come up during discussions evaluating the performance of women leaders then for men. Women in leadership positions are held to higher standards while receiving fewer rewards than their male counterparts (Catalyst, 2007).

Furthermore, women are often selected for precarious leadership positions that have a high risk of failure. This has been termed the glass cliff (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011). In another report, Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, and Bongiorno (2011) found that, in times of organizational crisis, organizations may be more likely to promote or hire a woman into a leadership position. The researchers argued that this may be due to an association between an unsuccessful organization and a woman leader. In contrast,

organizations that are performing well are more likely to hire a male due to an association between successful leadership performance and a male leader (Ryan et al., 2011). So even when women are appointed to leadership positions, it is possible that they are being placed their either intentionally or inadvertently to take the blame for an organizational failure (Ryan et al., 2011).

Women face many systemic challenges in their pursuit of leadership positions. Hierarchical social structures exist in organizations and because power and leadership are associated with masculinity, this creates invisible barriers to women's progression up the hierarchy (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This invisible barrier has been referred to as the glass ceiling, "a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy" (Morrison & von Glinow, 1990, p. 200). The terms *concrete wall* or *sticky floor* have been used to describe the even thicker barriers to progression that exist for minority women. The glass ceiling, concrete wall, or sticky floor effects have been explained by different factors including a strong association between senior leadership positions and males, and masculine corporate cultures that influence recruitment, retention and promotion practices (Weyer, 2007). The glass ceiling analogy suggests that women are able to move up the management hierarchy but are blocked from progressing past a certain level by the proverbial glass ceiling. Others argue that women face invisible barriers at all points along their career trajectory, not just once they hit the glass ceiling. It is important to note that this discussion of the challenges facing women leaders is limited as there is little research currently available that explores the leadership challenges that transgender individuals face.

Women's Development of Leader Identity

A leader identity refers to both how an individual sees themselves as a leader but also the individual's ideal version of themselves as a leader (Watson, 2008). One's leader identity is socially constructed through an ongoing process (Brown, 2015) that is context specific (Mollera, 2003). Research reports revealed that women experience a gendered construction of their leader identity (Simpson, 2014). Leader identity is important as women with both positive gender and leader identities experience reduced stress, enjoy increased life satisfaction, and see leadership roles as being more attractive (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014). Furthermore, having a leader identity that is well integrated into one's self-concept has been found to be important for leadership development.

As discussed above, women experience a longer and more complicated journey in their pursuit of leadership positions which was validated through interviews with women leaders about their leadership journeys (Bond, Holmes, Byrne & Babchuck, 2008). Through interviews, women leaders also described how participating in leadership led to positive change in their lives, including being more open-minded, experiencing a more positive self-image, developing relationships, and gaining new understanding and knowledge (Bond et al., 2008).

In interviewing women leaders about the construction of their leadership identities, themes emerged in regards to why the women became leaders, how the women led, and how the women expected their colleagues to behave (Fine, 2009). The women shared that their decision to lead involved an evaluation that they had the right characteristics for the job paired with a motivation to make a difference. The women also discussed the important role that mentors and role models had on their decision to lead (Fine, 2009). This emphasis on

important others is supported by other research (Hertneky, 2012; Kapasi, Sang & Sitko, 2016). In discussing their practice of leadership, the women emphasized open communication and the importance of working as a team (Fine, 2009). Lastly, the women leaders discussed situations in which they experienced being blindsided by colleagues. These experiences caused all of the women leaders to advise other women to be vigilant to such situations (Fine, 2009).

Similar themes emerge in regards to one's construction of a leader identity even for very high profile women leaders (Kapasi et al., 2016). Furthermore, Kapasi et al. (2016) conducted thematic analyses of the autobiographies of Sheryl Sandberg, Karren Brady, Hillary Clinton, and Julia Gillard. This analysis found that, similar to the other research of women's construction of their leadership identities, the women emphasized the importance of familial values and role models/mentors. The high profile women leaders also discussed in their autobiographies how their bodies had an influence on their leadership experiences.

Research on how women university presidents constructed their leader identities also highlighted the importance of physical presentation (Hertneky, 2012). Interviews with the women university presidents revealed the following additional themes: perceptions of the women as leaders, ability to assess one's effectiveness, key relationships including role models and their team, and the love of learning/teaching (Hertneky, 2012). The women university presidents also discussed the paradox of needing to work closely with others while having an elevated level of responsibility that distances them from the rest of their team (Hertneky, 2012). Supporting the finding that women leaders often utilize more transformational leadership styles, the women university presidents discussed their leadership styles as being consensus and team-oriented, with power rarely mentioned (Hertneky, 2012).

Similarly, the presidents emphasized the importance of developing relationships within the senior leadership team as well as with external stakeholders (Hertneky, 2012). They also acknowledged the role that mentors had in their leadership development and emphasized the importance of assessing their abilities while also being able to tolerate and accept their own imperfections (Hertneky, 2012). Finally, the women university presidents naturally placed a high degree of importance on being life-long learners (Hertneky, 2012). While universities are a very unique context, I believe that the themes of key relationships, an ability to assess one's effectiveness, and a commitment to life-long learning all have parallels to what women leaders in the nonprofit sector experience.

Lastly, leader identity construction research was conducted with a group of women principals (Mollera, 2003). This research found that the women principals struggle to balance their private and leadership lives, partially due to belonging to both the social categories of 'woman' and 'school principal'. This led to the woman principals' needing to negotiate the obligations of both social categories. Furthermore, the women discussed their career paths, coping strategies, and how they position themselves as women. Many of the women principals described their path to a leadership position as involving a high degree of luck with someone identifying their potential as leaders (Mollera, 2003). The women principals also shared stories about their leadership styles and discussed their experiences and perceptions of being in a position of power. All of the above groups of women leaders revealed a gendered perspective of leadership; the women's identity as women had a clear impact on their careers and leadership (Hertneky, 2012; Kapasi et al., 2016; Mollera, 2003).

Summary

This thematic literature review summarized the unique experiences involved in being women leaders. Women leaders face additional challenges to achieving work-life balance as a result of being responsible for the majority of the house-hold and child-rearing chores. Women leaders also face the challenge of being more highly scrutinized in terms of appearance and demeanour. Women leaders need to display 'respectability' through modest dress and the performance of typical masculine leadership traits while also appearing 'woman enough' to be seen as being authentic.

The unique effects of the nonprofit sector on women's leadership experiences were also explored. Women have been found to be overrepresented in the nonprofit sector but are still underrepresented in leadership positions. Many different explanations have been posited for this persistent underrepresentation. Explanations include factors such as skill and education level, intrinsic motivation, and cultural and structural barriers.

An exploration of women's' leadership philosophies revealed that women tend to utilize a more transformational leadership style whereas male leaders tend to use a more transactional leadership style. While emotional intelligence is not always appreciated for its value, women leaders tend to have and employ more emotional intelligence in their work. Women leaders' use of a transformational leadership style can be more effective for organizations as it is more successful in generating inspiration and excitement for the vision within the followers.

Women leaders face many challenges in obtaining, maintaining, and being successful in leadership positions. Women often encounter a glass ceiling in their pursuit of leadership positions. The term glass ceiling refers to an invisible barrier that prevents women from

moving beyond a particular point in the management hierarchy. Once in leadership positions, women continue to face unique challenges in comparison to their male counterparts. In particular, women face the unique challenge of needing to display enough of the typical 'masculine' leadership characteristics and balance this with displaying enough feminine characteristics to be considered genuine. Women also receive poorer performance evaluations during which gender is more of a salient factor than during performance evaluations for men.

One's identity as a leader is developed in an ongoing, socially constructed way. Women experience a gendered version of leader identity development. In interviews with women leaders about the development of their leader identity, women leaders discuss how self-assessment about whether or not they had the right skills for the job played an important role in deciding whether or not to take on a leadership position. The women leaders also shared how mentors and other key individuals helped to shape them into the leaders that they are today. Lastly, the women leaders often mentioned the role that their appearance plays in their experience of being a leader.

The above literature review explored what unique experiences women leaders face in their pursuit and practice of leadership roles. Taken together, the literature does support the assumption made by this research that there is a unique experience to being a woman leader and that this experience is made even more unique by exploring this within the nonprofit sector context.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The thematic literature review presented in Chapter 2, combined with my lived experience, contributed to my belief that there is a unique lived experience that results from being a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization. For this reason, I chose to use qualitative paradigm and methodology for my inquiry. Qualitative research orientation provides an in-depth understanding of an experience that is contextual and subjective rather than generalizable and objective (Sloan & Bowe, 2013; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Additionally, the qualitative research orientation recognizes that reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing (Finlay, 2009; Pascal, Johnson, Dore, & Trainor, 2010). It acknowledges that the phenomenon that is being explored is culturally, historically, and socially embedded, and that this context is important to the research of the phenomenon.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research provides a much-needed alternative to quantitative research as quantitative research seeks to identify the ultimate "truth" that can be generalized across a population or situation (Whittemore et al., 2001). In contrast, qualitative research asserts that knowledge is interpretative rather than an external reality (Pascal et al., 2010). Qualitative research orientation does not seek generalizability of findings, but rather trustworthiness, the measure of goodness for qualitative research (Morrow, 2005).

Qualitative research seeks complexity and uses more emergent research designs that are flexible and conducive to the natural settings of the participants and the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to acknowledge assumptions, reflections, and his or her co-constructed role in the research process (Pascal et al., 2010).

Qualitative research was a more appropriate fit for my research question as I sought to identify a complex experience that I believed to be embedded within the participant's particular context and professional history. Furthermore, as I am a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization, I believed that it was more appropriate to utilize a research methodology that required me to state my assumptions and to be reflexive throughout the research process as I have my own biases and assumptions that may have unduly influenced the research process. It is possible that my personal experience with the research topic may have helped with establishing a collaborative relationship with the participants that might have influenced and strengthened the research findings. My personal experiences also assisted in creating deeper scope of my interview content, as I had a better sense of what questions to follow up on. Given that I had such a personal connection with my research question and I was in search of deep, subjective, and meaningful findings, I chose to use qualitative methodology.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology Design

Phenomenology is a family of qualitative methods with roots in twentieth century philosophy. It was founded by Austrian/German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (Moran & Cohen, 2012; Natanson, 1973). Phenomenological philosophy is the study of the structures of experiences and consciousness (Moran & Cohen, 2012). Phenomenology seeks to capture the essence of a given experience or phenomenon (Higginbottom, 2004). Phenomenology is interested in the subjective experiences of individuals as the experience or phenomenon presents itself to an individual's consciousness (Higginbottom, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology asserts that people are active "meaning-makers" in their lives and focuses on people's perceptions of the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

Phenomenology allows researchers and practitioners to better understand the experiences of individuals, especially those experiences that cannot easily be measured (Jones, Rodger, Ziviani, & Boyd, 2012). For example, phenomenology is often used to explore the experience of a particular "unspoken" experience of individuals or groups within a community or organization (Higginbottom, 2004).

Phenomenological research involves four facets: a focus on lived experience, an attempt to look at the phenomenon with fresh eyes and wonder, a goal of rich description, and the involvement of a relational research process that impacts both participants and the researcher (Finlay, 2009). Phenomenology's unique strength as a research method is that it captures richness of meaning as well as the ambiguity of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009).

The research design involves a constructivist approach in that it claims that there is no one external reality, but rather truth is dependent on an individual's perspective that is formed by their cultural, social, and historical experiences (Jones et al., 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Phenomenology also involves a critical realist approach as it strives to capture shared meaning while also acknowledges that there is a wide variety of possible perceptions about the phenomenon (Jones et al., 2012).

Phenomenology involves deep, unstructured interviews in which the interviewer and the interviewee both participate, creating co-constructed knowledge (Higginbottom, 2004; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Questions are designed to uncover meaning and sample sizes are kept small due to the in-depth nature of the interviews (Higginbottom, 2004). Phenomenology requires a thorough examination of the text of the participants, deep reflection on the meaning of the text, and an ability to rewrite the themes from the text with an emphasis on the meaning of the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). In addition, the design requires an

ability to identify what conditions of an experience allow an experience to be identified despite differences in context (Jones et al., 2012). This is then summarized as the essence of the experience (Jones et al., 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). The findings of phenomenological research are presented using interpretative statements, summaries of themes, and a final composite of the essence of the experience being explored (Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

There are two main branches of phenomenology: descriptive and interpretative. Edmund Husserl developed descriptive phenomenology, also referred to as transcendental phenomenology. Martin Heidegger developed interpretative phenomenology, also referred to as hermeneutic phenomenology. Husserl's approach to phenomenology involved attempting to clarify how objects present themselves to human consciousness. Husserl believed that generic, objective explanations of the essences of experiences could be obtained. This approach was modified by Heidegger who believed that objective descriptions of experiences could not be obtained as the researcher could never fully remove themselves from the process of identifying and describing the essence of the experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). This research was influenced by hermeneutic phenomenology as it focused on the lived experience of women leaders of nonprofit organizations and attempted to provide a rich description of the experience using a co-constructed interview approach (Finlay, 2009).

Hermeneutic phenomenology refers to "a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence" (van Manen, 2014, p. 26). To deconstruct the definition, van Manen (2014) describes phenomenology as a way of approaching a phenomenon that involves reflecting on the experience while avoiding theoretical constraints and presuppositions. The word hermeneutic refers to the important

role of text and language (with lived experience being mediated through language) in the quest for the essence of an experience (Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenology begins with wonder about a given experience or phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). A key difference between hermeneutic phenomenology and descriptive phenomenology is intentionality, which refers to how individuals are attached to the world and can therefore never view the world from an objective point of view (van Manen, 2014).

Another key component to hermeneutic phenomenology is reflection which involves an exploration of our lived experiences through the lens of our presumptions and suppositions (van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology requires a special reflective method referred to as reduction which allows us to access the meaning of a lived experience after the experience has occurred (van Manen, 2014). This special form of reflection is necessary, as hermeneutic phenomenology requires participants to describe experiences as if they were happening. I ensured that the women participants in this research reflected on their leadership experiences during the process of data collection. This posed a unique challenge, though, as the act of describing the experience after the fact changes the original perception of the experience. Phenomenology attempts to capture the meaning of the lived experience even before it is assigned language or themes. This is achieved through the use of retrospection, reduction, and rich language (van Manen, 2014). I encouraged the participants to use rich descriptions while describing their experiences of being women leaders working for a nonprofit organization (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). I also encouraged reduction by starting with the broad research question and then moving to more specific interview

questions which more clearly and fully captured the participant's experiences of the phenomenon (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Hermeneutic phenomenology believes that experiences are linked to social, cultural, and political contexts and that the essence of an experience requires an exploration of the parts-to-the-whole. Hermeneutic phenomenology requires that the researcher explicate their assumptions and pre-assumptions before beginning the research process, a practice that aids the researcher to bracket their biases. As a leader of a nonprofit organization, I recognized that I held pre-assumptions and attempted to bracket my assumptions and biases prior to and during the course of gathering my data with the participants. In addition, the research design aims for a rich description of an experience as it is lived. This therefore includes emotions, feelings, moods, memories, fantasies, daydreams, the inclusion of specific events, etc. In hermeneutic phenomenology, specific events are included as anecdotes, which are stories that are told as they happened in experiential terms (van Manen, 2014). This was experienced in the course of my data collection as participants recalled and narrated stories of their workplace, particularly relating to the central research question of my study.

An emphasis on human experience is the primary paradigm of epistemological and ontological approaches in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2014). The design and method does not involve the utilization of theory as it is concerned with human experience over theoretical or objective descriptions (van Manen, 2014). Rather than contributing to the development of theory, hermeneutic phenomenology offers insights about phenomena that bring the researcher and reader closer to the experience rather than further away (van Manen, 2014). To this effect, my research did not have any theoretical framework, but rather generated concepts from the participants' narratives of their experiences from the interview

data. Furthermore, the literature reiterates the design as a valuable research method as it can improve ethical sensitivities and approach to professional activities and relationships (van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology may provide meaning structures that help to explain the importance of a given experience (van Manen, 2014).

This research utilized a qualitative research paradigm that was heavily influenced and inspired by hermeneutic phenomenology. This was the most appropriate methodology for my research question as I was interested in the subjective experiences of women leaders who work for nonprofit organizations and I sought to capture the essence of this experience. Given my personal experience as a women leader working for a nonprofit organization, I did consider using autoethnography to explore my perceptions and experiences of belonging to the culture of women leaders who work for a nonprofit organization. I ultimately decided against using this methodology though because I was more interested in seeking out the essence of the experience of being a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization and wanted to do so in a way that incorporated a variety of perspectives.

Ethical Concerns

I observed all ethical guidelines of Tri-Council in the course of conducting my research with all my participants.

An ethical consideration for this study was that, as a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization, I fit the participant criteria and therefore may have unduly influenced the research process by inclusion of my bias or personal experience that I brought to my role as a researcher. This concern was addressed through a reflexive practice of documenting my known biases and beliefs prior to initiating any participant interviews. The reflexive journaling process involved a deep reflection on the research methodology being utilized,

how this was impacting myself as the researcher as well as the participants, and how this ultimately would influence the findings. My approach to reflexive journaling involved careful consideration of how my thoughts, perspectives, and actions were impacting the research process and vice versa.

I had a collegial relationship with some of the research participants as, through my work for a nonprofit organization, I occasionally work with staff members from other nonprofit organizations. This dual relationship may have resulted in participants sharing more information than they may have with a different researcher. This was mitigated by emphasising the voluntary nature of the research and assuring confidentiality for the participants of the study. Conversely, my dual role with some participants may have contributed to the development of trust and rapport (Quinney, Dwyer, & Chapman, 2016). To minimize any discomfort for the participants during data collection, I established a collaborative relationship with participants by approaching the interview as a two-way communication process. I also monitored the emotional readiness of the participants before conducting an interview session. Through the selective sharing of my experiences as a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization, I minimized the hierarchical relationship that might have existed between me as the interviewer and the interviewee (Clarke, 2006).

The interview resulted in participants' becoming more aware of their negative and positive experiences of being women leaders working for a nonprofit organization. The consequences of a possible shift in perception are highly subjective but could have been distressing to participants. This potential social-emotional risk was mitigated by including a question at the end of the interview that addressed the participants' experience with the

research process and, if anything distressing was mentioned, I referred the participant to appropriate support services.

There was a potential low risk that participants could have been perceived negatively by their employer or by their colleagues for participating in the research. These risks were mitigated by protecting the identifying information of all of the participants and by focusing on the essence of being women leaders working for nonprofit organizations when presenting the research findings.

Lastly, there was a low risk that participants might have disclosed unlawful activities that I would have been obligated to report. This risk was mitigated by informing the participants of my obligation to report in the information and consent forms. There were no physical risks involved with the study.

The participants that were involved in this research were not a vulnerable population and therefore required no additional protection above and beyond normal ethical research procedures.

Participants Benefits of the Study

As part of the benefits of participating in the study, all my participants expressed a sense of satisfaction from knowing that they contributed to the generation of new knowledge in the study. Furthermore, participants benefited from the research, as their experiences are now represented in the thesis, which contributes to literature and provides them with a voice (Creswell, 2015). This has the potential to influence further research, practice, and policy. Furthermore, the participants also benefit from the study through the process of member checking procedures of the transcribed data. Lastly, the participants' recommendations that

may improve or change their challenges as women leaders were incorporated as part of the thesis recommendations in chapter five of the thesis.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure anonymity all participant identities were concealed by using pseudonyms on the audio recordings and transcripts and reporting the theses (Creswell, 2015). The key that linked the themes to the participants' identities was stored electronically on a separate encrypted device from the rest of the research data. All physical files were in my home office in a locked filing cabinet. All electronic files are stored on an encrypted device that will remain in my property as the researcher. This will ensure the safety and security of the research data for five years after which it will be destroyed.

Location of the Study

The research was conducted within the city limits of Prince George, B.C. All of the women leaders that were interviewed work for agencies that reside within the city of Prince George, B.C.

Sampling Procedures

Recruitment of participants. All participants were recruited through purposeful sampling procedures, which were based on the criteria of being self-identified women leaders working for a nonprofit organization.

For the purposes of this research, only women leaders who are employed with a nonprofit organization in Prince George were selected. The list of research participants was generated based on my knowledge of the nonprofit organizations that exist in Prince George, thereby making the sample a convenience sample (Creswell, 2015). Women who serve on Boards of

Directors for nonprofit organizations were not selected. I selected five (5) women leaders from five (5) nonprofit organizations in Prince George. All women leader participants conducted a review of the Information Letter and Consent Form and then proceeded with the interviews. The recruitment process of the participants through e-mails was not only flexible and reachable, but with no cost accrued to the participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2015)

The community agencies that the participants are currently employed with have not been explicitly named in the reporting of the research findings so as to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants. In addition, the research was not interested in exploring organizational structures/systems the women leaders work for, but the specific personal experiences of the women as leaders in the organizations

Consent. As described above, I contacted participants via email to provide the Information Letter and to determine whether or not they were interested in participating. Once a participant had confirmed their interest and availability, I set-up an in-person meeting at a location of the participant's choosing. During this meeting, I reviewed the Information Letter and presented the participant with the individual consent form that was adopted from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board that overviewed the research process including possible ethical concerns and risks. I reviewed the consent form with the participants and answered any questions they had about the research. Individual participants that decided to take part in the study signed the consent form and completed an interview.

Data Collection Process

  Interviews. This research involved the completion of unstructured interviews based on the standards of hermeneutic phenomenology (Higginbottom, 2004), and guided by the research question: what is the experience of women leaders working for nonprofit organizations? Interviews were concerned with uncovering meaning and individual experience (Higginbottom, 2004; Quinney et al., 2016; Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Participants' interviews began with a broad question that was followed up with specific and unscripted questions to deepen understanding (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Prompts were used to clarify understanding (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Interviews represented a collaborative relationship in which both interviewer and interviewee participated in a dialogue (Higginbottom, 2004).

  Interviews occurred at a location chosen by the participants, with the duration of between one and one and a half hours, with periodic breaks so as to prevent fatigue and allow participants to refresh their thoughts.

  As a token of gratitude for participating in the study, participants were provided with a $10 gift card upon completion of the interview.

  Transcription of the interviews was conducted by the researcher and participants were provided with a physical copy of the transcript to review and approve before data analysis began.

Data Analysis

  Data analysis was completed using a thematic analysis approach. The thematic analysis process began with a holistic reading approach of each interview transcript to develop an understanding of the experiences (Jones et al., 2012; van Manen, 2014). I then

completed a selective reading approach to identify particularly meaningful statements (Jones et al., 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2014). Each meaningful statement was then reinterpreted and generated as themes to capture the meaning of the statement (Jones et al., 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2013; van Manen, 2014). Data analysis was done with care to present an exhaustive description of the experience that articulated discrepancies in the data (Jones et al., 2012). Themes were then compared across transcripts to assess what components of the experience were true for all participants, creating the composite analysis (Jones et al., 2012; Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

Evaluation of the Study

Validity. The process in qualitative research emphasises trustworthiness of findings (Creswell, 2015). Trustworthiness was obtained by providing the results (data transcripts) of the research back to the participants to ensure resonance. Validity in phenomenological research requires explicitness, vividness, and thoroughness (Whittemore et al., 2001). Explicitness demands that a phenomenological researcher state their biases and presumptions before beginning the research. I demonstrated explicitness by documenting what I expected to find in the research and what I believed to be my biases that I hold, prior to initiating the research.

Vividness and thoroughness both describe capturing rich, deep detail about the experience being explored. This was achieved through the use of unstructured interviews.

This research was also held accountable to other validity criteria for qualitative research including credibility, authenticity, integrity, auditability, reflexivity, and sensitivity (Whittemore et al., 2001).

Reflexivity. It refers to demonstrating one's awareness of how the research influences the researcher and vice versa (Clarke, 2006). It involves recognizing and stating how the researcher's values, assumptions, and role in the research process may impact the findings (Clarke, 2006). Reflexivity involves the researcher's reflecting on how their chosen methods, positioning, personal agenda, etc. might impact how knowledge about the research question is constructed (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). Reflexivity can therefore be a very helpful tool during the data analysis process (Sloan & Bowe, 2013).

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the duration of the research by keeping a research journal. This helped me to evaluate how my values, attitudes, and personal experiences may have entered into the research process. The research journal helped me to deconstruct the research experience while also providing a decision trail. I documented all of my known expectations and biases before initiating any research interviews and continued to revisit these throughout the research process.

Credibility. Credibility refers to how well the research results accurately reflect the experience being explored (Whittemore et al., 2001). Ensuring credibility requires the researcher to make sure that the data are interpreted in a way that is an accurate and contextually appropriate representation of the experience. Credibility was protected by presenting direct participant quotations in the presentation of the results so as to showcase the original text from which the interpretations were gleaned. Credibility was assured through member checking. Bringing the transcripts and research results back to the participants for verification ensured that my interpretation of the experience was reflective of reality (Crowther, Ironside, Spence, & Smythe, 2017).

Authenticity. Authenticity is very similar to creditability in that it requires the research to reflect the real lived experience of participants (Whittemore et al., 2001). Authenticity can be encouraged by seeking out unique and different voices and perspectives in the data. Authenticity also requires the researcher to be highly aware of their perspectives in regards to the experience so as to keep these separate from the experiences of the participants. I worked to ensure authenticity by making my pre-conceived assumptions and biases explicit through reflexive journaling at the beginning of the research as well as throughout the process.

Integrity. In qualitative research it is evaluated based on how well the methods used support the accurate capturing and interpretation of the experience that is being explored (Levitt, Motulsky, Wetrz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2016). Integrity requires that the research design and procedures support what the research has set out to discover. Integrity was protected in this research as qualitative research paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology to capture the essence and lived experience of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization. Integrity also requires the researcher to be transparent about how their experiences might influence the collection and interpretation of the data (Levitt et al., 2016). As discussed previously, I maintained a reflexive journal in order to document my experiences and reflect on how they might have influenced me as a researcher. In order to support integrity during the data analysis process, I was cognisant of the context in which the participants live and work as well as differences in perspectives that emerged from the data. I further explored any differences in experience that emerged and discussed these in relation to the primary research question.

Auditability. Refers to a reviewer's ability to follow the researcher's decision-making throughout the entire research process (Johnston, Wallis, Florin, & Gray, 2016). Auditability is important as it helps to demonstrate an absence of researcher bias (Johnston et al., 2016). A reader should be clear as to why the researcher chose a particular research question, methodology, participant criteria, sample size, etc. (Whittemore et al., 2001). This extends into the data analysis process as a reader must be able to logically follow how the researcher moved from the data transcript to the themes or composite analysis (Whittemore et al., 2001). I integrated auditability into the research by documenting my rationale, as supported by the literature for each step in the research design process. I also ensured auditability of the data analysis by being transparent about the process used and also by presenting direct participant quotes in the presentation of the results so that the reader or audience can see how I moved from data to the interpreted meaning stage.

Sensitivity. Qualitative researchers are required to conduct their research in a way that is sensitive to the cultural and social context in which the participants live their lives and experience the phenomenon being explored (Whittemore et al., 2001). Sensitivity was respected during the research process by paying attention to and honouring the diversity of experiences that are presented by the participants. In addition, sensitivity was encouraged by keeping the participants at the focus of the research process and remembering that all research activities should be done for their purpose and ultimate benefit. As the researcher, I was sensitive to their mood changes during interview sessions, so as to gauge their readiness and active participation. I was also prepared to respect their decision at any time they felt like suspending the interview session due to experiencing low morale.

Summary

This chapter explains the research orientation and design for the study, as well as the justification of using the selected research design. Details on sampling procedures of recruiting the five women leader participants from five different nonprofit organizations in Prince George were highlighted. Furthermore, the process of data collection using interview techniques was stated and ethical procedures such as obtaining voluntary consent of the participants as required by the UNBC Research Ethics Board were explained. Lastly, the process of evaluating the data in accordance with phenomenological design including how validity, often assessed as credibility, integrity, sensitivity, etc., was explained and how each criterion was repositioned in the study was highlighted.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This chapter provides the results of my qualitative interview data with my sample of five women leaders of nonprofit organizations. The interview data were analyzed using the phenomenological steps prescribed by van Manen (2014).

Results

My analysis involved the phenomenological process of reading the transcripts several times which made me closer to the data and immersed with the data (van Manen, 2014). This process led to my identified major ideas, which are identified as the six major primary themes. These include the following: the nonprofit sector, a unique lived experience, a gendered unique lived experience, leadership style and philosophy, nonprofit organization leadership challenges, and leader identity. Of these themes, the unexpected themes were the nonprofit sector and a gendered unique lived experience. These unexpected themes emerged as a result of conversations with the participants about how their leadership experiences in the nonprofit sector differed from their experiences in the public or for-profit sector, and how their leadership experience likely differs from that of their male counterparts, respectively.

Due to the small sample size and the limited number of women nonprofit leaders in Prince George, BC, pseudonyms are used on the transcripts and in the discussion of the findings to protect the identities of the participants, as well as to observe confidentiality and anonymity of participants (Creswell, 2015). The pseudonyms used are: Samantha, Rebecca, Jessica, Rachel, and Chantel. In the description of the themes that emerged, quotes from interview transcripts are cited to highlight the experiences and voices of the participants (Creswell, 2015). Quotes were chosen with care in order to protect any identifying information.

The research concepts of this study included lived experiences of the women leaders, their leadership philosophy, challenges experienced, and development of the women's identities as leaders. The interview questions explicitly asked the women about these topics which closely mirrored the themes that emerged.

The Nonprofit Sector

The nonprofit sector is quite unique when compared to the public or private sector. The nonprofit sector is known to differ in terms of organizational values, compensation, opportunity for advancement, and skill requirements of employees (De Varo & Brookshire, 2006; Kearns et al., 2015; Young-joo, 2014). All of the women leaders spoke to the uniqueness of the sector and many had experiences in the public or private sector upon which to make comparisons. In discussing what makes the nonprofit sector unique, three of the five women leaders shared that they believe that remaining connected to the front line of the organization is particularly important. This referred to being in regular contact with clients of the organization as well as with other staff members. One participant, Jessica, also suggested that this approach was more likely to be adopted by women leaders in the nonprofit sector. Jessica stated that,

> I have a number of my own clients. So I have a client load. And I have always, we
>
> have always thought that was important and I suspect that a male leader 30 years ago
>
> or 20 years ago wouldn't have done that. There would have been more of a hierarchy.
>
> (Transcript # 3)

Being connected to clients and other community stakeholders was mentioned as being particularly important to leaders in the nonprofit sector, as nonprofit organizations ultimately

should be taking direction from the individuals that they serve (servant leadership) and the broader community. This sentiment was supported by Rebecca who shared that,

> I've had so many varied experiences doing all of the different roles which I think is really important as well because I draw from that and I can feel it, it is a heartfelt sense of understanding sometimes about what is going on on the front lines and how challenging it can be and how frustrating it can be. (Transcript #2)

A unique aspect of the nonprofit sector is greater flexibility on how organizations pursue their mandate as compared to the public and private sectors. Chantel described this as being able to respond: "If you see that a certain area of a social problem seems to be more prevalent than another one, you can focus your time and energy on that" (Transcript #5). Given this flexibility and the typically smaller size of nonprofit organizations, it was mentioned that the leader of a nonprofit organization is highly influential on how an organization works towards achieving its mandate. Chantel voiced this by sharing that "So within that mandate, I bring my own philosophy, my own judgments, my own perspective on what that means. So I use my experience to follow through on that mandate" (Transcript #5). Chantel also shared that someone with a different education, background, or number of years of experience would approach the mandate of the organization in a very different way and the flexibility of the nonprofit sector would support that.

Samantha and Jessica both expressed that they have observed the nonprofit sector to be dominated by women and, in some cases, organizations may struggle to recruit any male employees. In discussing the possible reasons for this over-representation, Samantha posited that, in her experience, women tend to put a higher emphasis on job satisfaction and may

therefore be willing to work in a position that pays less or has less opportunities for advancement.

Jessica shared that, throughout her years of nonprofit leadership, she has seen the nonprofit sector become more professional, accountable, and competitive with the public and private sectors. She added that "the whole of the nonprofit sector is much more professional with a capital P than it used to be. So, really, it used to be dominated by a bunch of do-gooder women who were just in there to help people" (Transcript #3). Jessica did not argue that this change was a bad thing and in fact she argued that it was probably exactly what the sector needed. The consequences of the professionalization of the sector, however, are that people looking to take on leadership roles may need to have more initial skills and formal education at the outset where nonprofit organizations used to be places where leaders could learn on the job.

Scope of leadership role. In order to get a sense of the women leaders' responsibilities, they were all asked to describe their roles. This question revealed that, in the nonprofit sector, leaders are expected to be generalists and, depending on the size of the organization, may have varied levels of administrative support. Jessica summarized this experience well by sharing that "My duties really encompass knowing a bit about everything and so therefore able to trouble-shoot in any department at any time" (Transcript #3).

All five of the women leaders mentioned that they supervise staff. Other common responsibilities of the nonprofit leaders included ensuring the financial viability and sustainability of the organization, developing relationships with community stakeholders, managing the relationship with the Board of Directors of the organization, and crisis management. Three of the women leaders shared that crisis management often impacted their

plans for the day; Rachel described this as "I walk in the door and if there is a crisis happening as soon as I walk in, it doesn't matter what's on your list to-do. You get caught up in those things" (Transcript #4).

Other responsibilities mentioned by one or more of the women leaders included contract management, asset management, program planning and development, strategic planning, and fundraising. This conversation about job responsibilities and duties was useful in illustrating all of the different roles that a leader of a nonprofit organization must occupy in a particular day or week.

A Unique Lived Experience

In discussing their leadership experiences, all of the participants commented on ways in which their experiences had changed over time as they grew into their leadership positions/roles. This growth was mentioned as being partially the result of having a stronger knowledge base, expanded connections in the community, participation in professional development activities, and a developed personal and professional maturity. Chantel mentioned that she actively improved her leadership skills "based on jobs that I actively sought out in the past that would challenge my skills and my ability to do a really good job" (Transcript #5).

Rachel described her experience of growing into her position: "as it turns out, I was just trying to grow into my role and I think all people do that but perhaps that transition and that journey looks different" (Transcript #4). Rachel also added that:

….and so that is a challenge because you have got to find your way through that, and you've got to find a balance, and you've got to almost create that space for yourself in

terms of how you want to be a leader. For me, that took a long time. When I first

became the … it probably took me two years or something like that before I got to the

point where I felt some comfort in who I was and what I was bringing to this role

(Transcript #4).

Samantha described her experience of growing into her role as being slow and painful but

also discussed how,

through experience and learning you shape your values and beliefs and who you are

and with every experience, good and bad, you need to be able to reflect on how does

this make me a different person from who I may have been before the experience?

(Transcript #1).

Initial insecurity. Four of the five women leaders interviewed revealed that they

went through an initial period of feeling insecure in their role. This was described by a few of

the women leaders as feeling like they didn't belong in the same room as their peers.

Samantha agreed with this experience and stated that she has observed other women leaders

discuss this feeling as well,

There is often also the perception more so of women, of whether they are or not, for

lack of better words, worthy of doing that role. So they feel that often when they walk

into a room they are more scrutinized than the male counterpart whether they have the

skills and knowledge, the capacity and all of that (Transcript #1).

A similar experience was described by Jessica,

there was the initial period of discovery when I ended up just going to meetings and,

you know, finding myself in places where I felt completely out of my depth and I

often still feel out of my depth because I haven't become comfortable in my own skin completely (Transcript #3).

Like Jessica, Samantha also still occasionally experiences those feelings of self-doubt even though this has improved substantially over time:

I think one of the ones that has shifted and been developed over time is that sense of self-confidence. Have I shaken it totally? No, like almost any woman leader that I have ever talked to, yeah, I've walked into rooms going, do I deserve to be here? (Transcript #1)

Rachel also expressed that in the initial few years of her leadership experience she often did not feel confident in her role:

I felt so many times that I just couldn't do the job, that people weren't taking me seriously – all of those kinds of things. And I think as women we internalize those things and we think it's us and it's my fault (Transcript #4).

Rebecca added that she is consistently assessing her performance as a leader and will often do this through a critical lens. In particular, Rebecca will question whether or not she is doing all that she can do for the organization. Samantha also revealed that she sometimes feels the need to ensure that something is 100% accurate before bringing it forward: "I think that is probably one of the challenges is that piece around the second guessing – did I analyse everything 150% correctly?" (Transcript #1). In discussing feelings of insecurity, Samantha discussed how, in some cases, a bit of insecurity or discomfort can be beneficial as it can motivate you to be at the top of your game.

The women leaders also mentioned that any feelings of insecurity can be tempered by talking to other women leaders about the feelings so as to feel less alone in the experience. Samantha shared that "without having an open discussion with your colleagues or your peers then you would naturally presume you are the only one that is experiencing this feeling" (Transcript #1). This is potentially a powerful point as sharing one's insecurities can help women leaders realize that self-doubt is a common feeling which can help make that self-doubt seem less real. Rebecca had a very interesting perspective on this issue and added that she often did not feel comfortable sharing her insecurities as "people want to see strength. They want to look at you and feel like you're in control" (Transcript #2). This suggests that there is a delicate balance required when deciding when to share feelings of insecurity and to whom. Women leaders would therefore benefit from having trusted mentors or small support groups for debriefing about their leadership experiences and feelings of insecurity or self-doubt.

Confidence found. Over time, the women leaders grew into their roles and developed a sense of comfort and confidence. For Jessica, this involved making mistakes and observing others make mistakes and noticing that her worst fears did not come true and, in fact, things continued on as normal: "I discovered that I really, I could really mess up wildly and people didn't hate me and that you just have to carry on to the next step." She described this as finding "that liberty in making mistakes" (Transcript #3).

Rebecca explained that her greatest area of growth was around insight and foresight and over time, she has been able to develop a better ability to see where things might go wrong which allows her to decide where to put her energy for the best results.

Chantel's growth over time has allowed her to set higher standards for her staff and the organization. Similarly, she now takes the approach of empowering her staff by giving them increasing responsibility over programs.

Rachel states that higher self-awareness and an ability to be less reactive are ways that she has grown into her role. She believes that "so I think I've really evolved and matured in those kinds of ways and I think as a result of that I'm less likely to take no for an answer" (Transcript #4).

Although the women leaders all describe the results of their growth in different ways, they were all able to successfully develop the confidence and the skills required by their roles to be highly successful leaders.

A Gendered Unique Lived Experience

In discussing their experiences as women leaders in the nonprofit sector, the participants revealed that they perceive their experiences to be distinctly different from those of male leaders. A few of the women leaders expressed how it can be difficult to articulate the differences that they perceive. Rebecca expressed her perception that, as a woman leader, she is often taken less seriously than her male counterparts. However, she was not sure if this was reflective of reality or just her perception. Rachel attempted to capture the nuance of the gendered lived experience of being a woman leader thus: "I think that our ability to get into some doors is really challenged by being a female" (Transcript #4). Two of the women leaders brought up the notion of the 'Old Boy's Club' and, although this was thought to be less pervasive today, it was something that the women leaders had previously needed to navigate. Two of the women leaders discussed the gender pay gap during their interview and

stated that they monitor their own compensation to ensure that they are being compensated fairly.

Rachel described how she balances her natural leadership instincts that include being nurturing to others with the requirements of the job that have historically been seen as more masculine tasks, such as negotiating contracts. Rachel explained how being a woman leader allows her to balance both the 'feminine' and the 'masculine' elements of leadership:

> I think that there are some things that are different between the approaches of males and females but I think that there are situations where perhaps there is less of a gap in terms of our leadership abilities and styles because you are still expected to go out there and to negotiate and to lobby and advocate for the dollars, and to advocate for the programs, and to have those hard-nosed conversations. That might be seen as more male-oriented maybe but I think that there is those differences and I think that, as women, that because of our natural characteristics perhaps that we tend to look at things in a more balanced kind of way (Transcript #4).

Rachel commented that she believes that part of her balanced approach to leadership comes from the roles that she has played throughout her life including being a care-giver and her lived experiences. Rachel further emphasized the importance of finding balance and a leadership approach that is a fit for who you are as a person,

> I think that, as women, we tend to be nurturers, we tend to be people that take care of people, we tend to be people that want to fix things, right. That's kind of, sort of characteristic of women. So to be in these leadership roles and to be seen in ways where you're negotiating hard-core, you are seen at the table as doing that, but by the

same token, you are doing that in a way that really is a fit for you and who you are. (Transcript #4)

Jessica had a unique perspective in that she thought being a woman leader in the nonprofit sector was actually an advantage and argued that a male leader would have a more difficult time being accepted in the role. Jessica elaborated on this thought by narrating that women are often seen as being kinder, softer, and more approachable which can make them appear to be a better fit to lead an organization that is designed to serve the needs of a particular group of individuals,

> People expect it, it's a soft kind of – oh yes, she's so good, she's so kind – so no, I don't think being female is a problem in this area. I think that it would be harder for a male, in fact, I think to be accepted as a leader in this area. (Transcript #3)

This perspective may be more applicable to nonprofit organizations that are highly involved in the delivery of social services as opposed to being true for all of the various nonprofit organizations that exist.

Although she did not agree with Jessica's perspective that being a woman leader is an advantage in the nonprofit sector, Rachel believed that, as a woman leader, she is seen as being more approachable:

> …before I became the … it was a male that was in this role so lots of staff over time have commented on how my approachability and my ability to reach out and to nurture and that people feel more safe and feel more comfortable and they are more apt to come and talk to me about things that are happening with them. (Transcript #3)

When asked for possible explanations for why there is a different experience involved in being a woman leader as compared to being a male leader, Samantha offered the following explanation:

Women have only really been in leadership roles of this nature for maybe forty-ish years max and even forty years ago there weren't a lot of women in these types of roles. I think that we are still struggling with that identity whereas men have always historically been publically the leaders in society, in euro-society anyway. (Transcript #1)

Jessica offered a different perspective in regards to why women leaders experience leadership differently than male leaders do and argued that it has to do with how society categorizes and views male and female skills. As mentioned above, leadership is often associated with masculinity and women leaders are therefore perceived differently, and often less positively, when in leadership roles. This effect is further influenced by the nonprofit sector where, as Jessica posits, women leaders are more easily accepted as the nonprofit sector tends to be considered more feminine in its approach and values therefore tempering the expectation for a 'masculine' leadership approach.

Leadership Style and Philosophy

This study was interested in learning about how the women leaders described their leadership style or philosophies. The women answered a direct question about this but also shared elements of their leadership styles and philosophies through their answers to many of the other interview questions as well. Each of the women leaders had a unique leadership style and philosophy due to their personal perspectives and experiences. For example, in defining her leadership philosophy, Samantha emphasized that her leadership practice is

grounded in her particular values, beliefs, principles, and ethics and that staying true to these elements and being her authentic self is paramount:

> I really believe that leadership components are your values, ethics and principles. You need to be your genuine self no matter where you are. And if you are not, people are going to recognize that and see right through it. So I am a firm believer that you should walk your talk and, if not, then you really shouldn't be a leader. Also, I am a firm believer that, as a leader, I should never ask my team to do anything that I wouldn't do. So, for me, it is really about being that authentic, genuine person through and through, no matter where you are at. (Transcript #1)

Jessica emphasized her change theory when describing her leadership style and philosophy. Jessica narrated that "change is something that happens whether you plan it or not and so, we've always tried to be ahead of the curve rather than waiting for change. I have always believed in creating the change that you want" (Transcript #3). Jessica believes that approaching change in this way helps her employees to be flexible and adaptable so that they are best able to respond to the needs of the organization's clients as well as the needs of other staff members and the overall organization.

Rachel's approach to her leadership philosophy involves building people and valuing a sense of family and community within an organization and focusing on assisting their clients to move forward in their lives in some way:

> So people is a really, really big part of my job and has a lot of meaning for me. It's very rewarding when we can help facilitate growth for people and help them to walk

their journey in a way that might make it easier for them and more meaningful. (Transcript #4)

Rachel also believes in an egalitarian approach to leadership that involves honouring others for their work. Rachel describes her leadership style and philosophy as being solution-focused and honours the diversity in the organization and in the broader community.

Three of the five women leaders discussed their relative leadership strengths and weaknesses. This suggests that the women actively assess their leadership abilities on an ongoing basis. Rebecca shared that:

That's my leadership style I guess, I really like to know, and in time this happens, but you just really get to know the strengths and the weaknesses of the people that you are working with. We all have them, myself included, so how can we sort of make the most out of what we have and if there are gaps what do we need to fill it with. (Transcript #2)

This activity of self-assessing one's leadership skills may assist the women as they seek out training, trusted advisors, or additional assistance in areas that they consider to be a weakness.

Two of the women leaders revealed stories in which they used teachings from their mothers as part of their leadership philosophies. These teachings reminded the women of where they came from and involved reminders to be kind and patient and to remember those who helped them to get to where they are.

A common element of the women leaders' leadership styles or philosophies was the importance of being open and transparent, both internally and externally to the organization.

This was noted as being important to four of the five woman leaders. "What I found to be the best practice was just plain simple honesty, straight-forwardness, and being transparent. And being consistent; if you say something, follow through on it".

Another common theme discussed by many of the woman leader participants of my study was the importance of staying humble in their leadership role and empowering others in the organization to be leaders as well. Rachel explained that:

> I'm not a big fan of being called the "boss" of the organization because I see myself as a member of the team and that we all have a common goal within the organization and that's really about being of service to our people (Transcript #4).

Samantha also placed less emphasis on maintaining the hierarchy of the organization and stated that, "everyone on my team is a leader in some way, shape or form. I am often the follower; that is part of my leadership is to be a follower when it is time to be a follower" (Transcript #1).

As part of empowering other employees of the organization to be leaders in their own way, many of the women leaders also discussed how, as the top of the hierarchy, it is their role to make sure that the other employees have the tools and resources they need to do the job. Chantel specifically mentioned how she encourages her staff to exercise creativity in their roles and to take some ownership over their work and the outcomes of the organization:

> I believe in allowing staff members to do their job; that's why they are hired. I do not believe in micro-managing. I like the staff members to take ownership for their positions, to be creative, to think out of the box, and as long as they are following the

overall policies and the guidelines and the mission statement of the agency, I

encourage that thinking and support that thinking. (Transcript #5)

Ultimately, the women leaders explained how their passion for the clients that they serve and

the mission of the organization is at the heart of their leadership.

Nonprofit Organization Leadership Challenges

In order to further understand the experiences of being women leaders for nonprofit

organizations, the women leaders were asked about any challenges that they have faced or

face in their roles. Rachel expressed that, "it can be really, really hard work because the

expectations are high and the lives of many people depend on you" (Transcript #4). She also

discussed how, as a leader of a nonprofit organization, you never truly step away from the

role and this follows you into the community. In addition, Rachel revealed that she is often

asked to take on additional responsibilities outside of her role with her nonprofit organization

because she is seen as being a leader in the community:

I think just the other thing that really sometimes creates angst for me is just around

the additional responsibilities we have as …. It's not enough that we are really, really

busy in our jobs that we are at but people wanting you to be on a committee, or could

you do this, or could you do that. (Transcript #4)

Rebecca discussed how managing the relationship with the Board of Directors is a

challenge that she has experienced in the nonprofit sector. Rebecca added that this

relationship can be challenging to navigate as the Board of Directors is technically the 'boss'

of all of the paid staff including herself but yet it is not always clear who is in the primary

leadership role.

Chantel explained that "I think just the challenges of being … developing those partnerships in the community that can make those programs succeed because I don't think one society can do it all by themselves. I think it requires partnerships" (Transcript #5).

The primary challenge that Samantha mentioned was managing the public scrutiny that comes along with being a leader for an organization that receives funding from the government:

> You really want to be representing your organization at a high standard and really demonstrating to the community, not just even your own skills, knowledge, and capabilities, you are really demonstrating the organization and how publically, how solid and reputable of an organization you are (Transcript #1).

Similarly, Jessica discussed how the nonprofit sector is becoming increasingly bureaucratic in order to be properly accountable for tax payer dollars. This increased accountability was not considered to be a bad thing but nonetheless posed a new and increasing administrative burden on the nonprofit organizations.

Rachel mentioned that she believes that being the leader of a nonprofit organization can be a lonely job as one often does not have anyone to turn to for advice or support,

> Sometimes you just need to vent. You just need to be able to talk through and brainstorm about things that are going on for you as you walk through some of the roles that you walk through. Because when you are in this role sometimes it feels like you need to be everything to everybody and you don't have those connections – I mean you can't really do that with your staff because you have to be a leader to your staff. And you can't really do that to your Board who are a governing Board; they

don't necessarily have a whole lot of insight and input into the operations of the organization. And you don't want to do that outside of the organization because that could, you could be having a bad day and how you come across could be like airing dirty laundry. (Transcript #4)

Rachel describes being at a level that is above the rest of the staff members but that is below and subordinate to the Board of Directors. This unique position can result in nonprofit leaders' feeling like they are alone in their struggles. This has led to the organizing of meetings where leaders of nonprofit organizations can get together to debrief about their successes and challenges in a safe environment.

Funding was naturally cited as being a challenge to some of the nonprofit leaders. Funding arrangements that needed to be applied for or renewed on an annual basis were brought up as being particularly challenging to the nonprofit organizations,

We still have about 10% of our contracts that are annualized funding and responding with proposals and sometimes you don't find out in time and you are putting staff on notice and all of those kinds of things. So that, to me, is a real challenge because, to me, it is not respectful of our people and sometimes you lose those good staff because you may not find out in time about the funding and they are already looking for another position. (Transcript #4)

Not only does a lack of consistent funding impact a nonprofit organization's ability to retain qualified staff, it also impacts the ability of the organization to plan for the future:

…not having that core base of funding necessarily is really a big challenge and it really impacts the decisions that you make in terms of your infrastructure and what is

your long-term plan because what things look like today might not look that way 5 years from now. (Transcript #4)

Leader Identity

This study was interested in learning about how the women leaders came to identify as being a leader, if they ever did. Of the five women leaders, four fully accepted the identity of leader while the fifth woman leader was not sure if she identified as a leader as she was still wrestling with the definition of 'leader'. From this group, Rachel identified as a leader even at a young age:

I think that my identity as a leader and being committed to help people has always been there from a really, really young age. And it has evolved as I've matured because when you are younger you don't necessarily have the same skills. (Transcript #4)

Interestingly, Rachel was the eldest in her family whereas Samantha was the youngest in her family and did not identify as being a leader when she was younger. She explained that this was largely because she was never in a position in her family to exercise leadership or step into a leadership role. This changed once she entered the workforce and she now considers herself to be a leader. This comparison suggests that one's place in the family may play a role in the development of one's leadership identity.

In describing how she developed her identity as a leader, Chantel shared a powerful story about accepting the title of leader and actively moving into leadership roles so that she could influence change,

Because I didn't like some of the things that were happening, I realized that if I

didn't like it, I couldn't just sit there and complain about it, I had to become

somebody who would encourage change and be a leader. (Transcript #5)

Sharing the Experience

In addition to the themes discussed above, the women leaders expressed their love for

the work that they do, shared advice to other women who might be considering a leadership

role in a nonprofit organization, and expressed their excitement about the upcoming

generation of women leaders of nonprofit organizations. Their comments on these three

subjects are shared below.

A love for the work. As mentioned, the women leaders' passion for their clients and

for the missions of their respective organizations is at the heart of their work and their

leadership. The women leaders' love for their jobs was clear throughout the entire interview

process and it is my honour to be able to share some of their comments in regards to how

joyful leading in the nonprofit sector can be. Rachel commented that:

I really, really love my job. I just feel that our role in this community is, and the work

that we do, is about people and that has lots and lots of meaning for me. I believe very

strongly in being accessible and responsive to people, and that's a part of the work

that I really enjoy. (Transcript #4)

Samantha further added, "it's fun once you get the opportunity. It's really a great

experience getting to work with so many wonderful people and to learn from other leaders

and to be able to watch others grow their experiences as well" (Transcript #1).

Advice to other leaders. One of the goals of this research was to highlight and present the experiences of being women leaders for nonprofit organizations in order to provide other women considering leadership roles in the nonprofit sector with a rich description of their experiences. I therefore asked the women leaders what advice they would offer to other women considering leadership in the nonprofit sector, and the following advice/wisdom was offered:

From Rachel,

> Well one of my pieces of advice would be to another woman leader is to align yourself with another woman leader. I think it's a lonely job being a …, being in a leadership role, but it's even more lonely when you are trying to do it by yourself. (Transcript #4)

The importance of mentorship was also mentioned by Samantha and Rebecca.

From Chantel, "I tell my staff this all the time – stand up for yourself, stand up for your beliefs, stand up for your clients – if they can't speak their mind, you speak it for them" (Transcript #5).

Self-care was also mentioned as being important to leaders in the nonprofit sector due to the demanding and challenging nature of the work: "The roles that we are in as leaders are really exhausting and you need to have that time to rest and to regenerate and all those kinds of things" (Transcript #4). Lastly, the women leaders emphasized believing in yourself, a comment that advises aspiring women leaders to affirm their self-confidence and nurture their skills and potentials as future leaders.

The next generation. Three of the women leaders expressed their excitement that young women are continuing to take up leadership positions in the nonprofit sector. Chantel commented that, "So I think for young women today just going for it and saying "yeah, I am going to take it on." I think that is wonderful" (Transcript #5). Similarly, Jessica expressed her excitement for the next generation of women leaders in the nonprofit sector: "I've seen some young women leaders nowadays that just blow me away. They are educated and yet still kind and good. So I am really excited by the new female leadership that is happening" (Transcript #3). Lastly, Rachel shared her thoughts on how women leaders are paving a new path of leadership:

> I think that things are changing and leaders in, female leaders in our roles are coming into their own and they're making their own way, and they are making their own space for who they are and how they choose to be in their roles and how they choose to be in community as well. (Transcript #4)

Discussion

The discussion of the results that follows is guided by the primary research question, what are the experiences of women leaders working for nonprofit organizations in northern BC? The research question was responded to through the process of qualitative interviews, which were analyzed and that resulted in the themes of the nonprofit sector, a unique lived experience, a gendered unique lived experience, leadership style and philosophy, nonprofit organization leadership challenges, and leader identity. These themes are also in agreement with the conceptual framework of the study identified in chapter one.

The discussion of the themes that follows is resituated with selected literature to discuss the women leader participants' expressed experiences. The thematic discussional approach (Creswell, 2015; van Manen, 2014) is used to discuss the results of the findings.

Nonprofit sector. The nonprofit sector has been found to employ a high percentage of women (Damman et al., 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). This trend was also observed and noted by Samantha and Jessica. This overrepresentation has been explained by researchers as being the result of the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT). SCT posits that women tend to work for the nonprofit sector as they see themselves as being in alignment with the caring and nurturing values of the nonprofit sector (Chou, 2011; Young-joo, 2014). This argument was supported by Samantha who believes that more women work in the nonprofit sector as they are more motivated by job satisfaction than they are by compensation. The literature also suggests that women may be overrepresented in the nonprofit sector due to there being an abundance of certain career types in the sector that are frequently filled by women (Danmen et al., 2014; Young-joo, 2014). This explanation was not mentioned by the nonprofit women leaders. In addition, the nonprofit women leaders did not mention women's empowerment as being a contributor to the overrepresentation of women in the nonprofit sector (Themudo, 2009).

Despite the overrepresentation of women as employees in the nonprofit sector, the literature states that women are still underrepresented in leadership positions (Damman et al., 2014; Themudo, 2009; Young-joo, 2014). This was not something that the women leaders explicitly mentioned or observed and, alternatively, Rachel expressed that she has observed a majority of women leaders in her line of work.

Participants of this study also supported the argument that leaders in the nonprofit sector are required to be generalists due to the typically smaller size of the organizations (Kearns et al., 2015). This was thoroughly documented when discussing the women leaders' responsibilities which ranged from human resources, to external relations, to financial management, to program development, and everything in between. Jessica described this phenomenon as, "my duties really encompass knowing a bit about everything and so therefore able to trouble-shoot in any department at any time".

Lived experience. There is very little literature that specifically explores the lived experiences of women leaders who work for nonprofit organizations. The literature that does exist describes the experiences of women leaders in regards to balancing household chores and child-rearing roles (Parpart et al., 2000; Smith, 1992). These topics were not brought up by the participants in discussing their experiences as women leaders and nothing was mentioned by any of the participants in regards to division of labour in the home. Furthermore, if a participant mentioned their child-rearing experiences in relation to their leadership, they did so in order to explain how being a mother or a grandmother strengthened and added depth to their leadership practice and helped them to become an even more nurturing and balanced leader.

An additional experience discussed in the literature but not by the women leader participants is the requirement to manage one's appearance in order to avoid scrutiny and be seen as respectable (Mavin & Grandy, 2016).

Leadership style and philosophy. Research has found that women tend to be more transformational in their leadership style whereas men tend to be more transactional (Eagly, 2007; Rohmann & Rowald, 2009). Although the women leaders did not use the term

transformational, they emphasized an egalitarian, transparent, and inclusive approach to leadership which is more in alignment with a transformational leadership style than it is with a transactional approach.

Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) posited that women display more transformational leadership as a result of their possession of more communal attributes. The communal attributes are those characteristics that involve taking care of others, being sympathetic, and responding to the emotional needs of others. Agentic attributes are the opposite of communal attributes and include competitiveness, aggression, and independence. Leadership has historically been associated with agentic attributes (Eagley & Johannsen-Schimdt, 2001). Many of the women leaders referenced communal attributes when describing their leadership style/philosophy and some even indirectly made the connection between the typical definition of leadership and agentic attributes. Rachel described how she balances her communal attributes with the job's requirement for agentic attributes,

> I think that, as women, we tend to be nurturers, we tend to be people that take care of people, we tend to be people that want to fix things, right. That's kind of, sort of characteristic of women. So to be in these leadership roles and to be seen in ways where you're negotiating hard-core, you are seen at the table as doing that, but by the same token, you are doing that in a way that really is a fit for you and who you are.

The women also described their leadership styles in ways that suggest that the leaders also employ a servant leadership approach (Crippen, 2005). Servant leadership involves placing the needs of the followers above the needs of the leader for the growth and development of the followers as well as the organization (Northouse, 2016). For example, Samantha shared that, "everyone on my team is a leader in some way, shape or form. I am

often the follower, that is part of my leadership is to be a follower when it is time to be a follower". Similarly, many of the women leaders discussed how a key element of their leadership responsibility is to make sure that all of the employees of the organization have the tools, resources, and supports they need to execute the organization's mission.

Challenges. The nonprofit women leaders shared the challenges that they face in exercising their leadership roles and described how being a leader for a nonprofit organization can be a lonely job. This experience was also mentioned by the women university presidents (Hertneky, 2012). The women leaders interviewed for this study and the women university presidents both described how their unique position in the hierarchy, above other team members but below the Board of Directors, creates a sense of loneliness and isolation.

A challenge that is referenced by the literature but not mentioned by the nonprofit women leader participants is the additional difficulty that women leaders who seek leadership position in a typically male-dominated industry face in pursuing those positions. This finding is illustrated by the observation that women job candidates receive less favourable ratings during the job search process when the industry that the women are applying for is typically male-dominated (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). This finding was indirectly mentioned by Jessica when she mentioned that she believes women leaders are more easily accepted in the nonprofit sector due to the caring values of the sector. This comment is in alignment with the findings of Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) in the sense that, during hiring processes, both women and men are evaluated based on the assumed values and characteristics of the industry and are more likely to be hired if there is a perceived match. While this may not sound problematic, this assumption about the gendered

values of both individuals and certain industries prevents equal hiring practices. This effect is even more troublesome due to the fact that it happens on a primarily subconscious level (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006).

The notion of women leaders' facing a "glass ceiling" in their pursuit of leadership positions is something that has been extensively researched (Weyer, 2007). The 'glass ceiling' is a term that has been used to describe the phenomenon where women leaders are able to progress up the hierarchy to a certain level but are prevented from moving into the most senior positions by invisible barriers. This term was not used by any of the women leaders but the women leaders did discuss how male leaders seem to have a different experience and that this difference is difficult to describe or articulate, perhaps alluding to the 'invisible' nature of the barriers that women leaders face. For example, Rachel shared that, "I think that our ability to get into some doors is really challenged by being female".

Leader identity. One's leader identity refers to whether or not one describes themselves as a leader and, if so, what characteristics and attributes do they use to do so (Watson, 2008). There is also an evaluative element to one's leader identity. How one perceives themselves in regards to their effectiveness and suitability as a leader also forms part of their leader identity. The nonprofit women leaders shared that they conduct evaluations of themselves in terms of the effectiveness and suitability of their leadership abilities and that this served as motivation for them to accept a leadership role and is also something that they do to monitor their ongoing leadership success. This finding was supported by Fine (2009) who, in interviewing women leaders about their leader identities, found that the participants discussed why they became leaders and how they chose to lead. More specifically, the women leaders interviewed by Fine (2009) shared that their initial motivation to pursue a

leadership role and accept their identity as a leader was the result of their evaluation of their leadership skill and readiness paired with their motivation to make a change. Chantel also expressed how the acceptance of her leader identity was motivated by a desire to make a change and stated that:

> Because I didn't like some of the things that were happening, I realized that if I didn't like it, I couldn't just sit there and complain about it, I had to become somebody who would encourage change and be a leader. (Transcript #5)

Lastly, the women interviewed by Fine (2009) emphasized the importance of mentorship in the development of one's leader identity. This was further reinforced by three of the nonprofit women leaders. Rachel specifically encouraged that, "Well one of my pieces of advice would be to another woman leader is to align yourself with another woman leader".

A component of leader identity that is referenced in the literature but that was not mentioned by the nonprofit women leaders was the importance of one's physical appearance.

Summary

This chapter provided a summary and discussion of the themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews with the women leaders of nonprofit organizations. The women leaders who participated in this study shared their experiences of being a leader for a nonprofit organization and indicated that this experience is thought to be different from the experience of a male leader. The women leaders also explained their leadership styles and philosophies and discussed the challenges that they face in exercising their leadership. The leaders also discussed whether or not they identified as leaders and, if so, how they developed that identity. Lastly, the women leaders naturally shared their love for the work that they do and

expressed their excitement for other women who are taking on the challenge of leading a nonprofit organization. They also offered their advice to other women considering taking on a nonprofit leadership role. The following chapter will posit recommendations and considerations for future practice and research. Lastly, chapter five will include my personal reflections on the research findings and process.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the experiences of women leaders in a sample of nonprofit organizations in northern BC. In summary, Chapter 1 provided the purpose of the study, the central research question, and the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter 2 reviewed pertinent literature based on themes that are related to the experiences of women leaders in nonprofit organizations such as women leaders' leadership philosophies, the challenges that women leaders face, and how women leaders develop their leader identities. Chapter 3 explained the research methodology for the study which was based on a qualitative orientation and influenced by a hermeneutic phenomenological design. In this chapter, the process of data collection through interviews and the sampling procedures were explained. In addition, chapter three discussed the ethical issues of anonymity and participant confidentiality. This chapter also explained the processes that evaluated the credibility of the data, which was carried out through the use of member checking and reflexivity procedures. Chapter 4 explained the research findings from the analyzed interview data. The results identified the primary themes of: a unique lived experience, leadership style and philosophy, nonprofit organization leadership challenges, and leader identity; as well as the unexpected themes of: the nonprofit sector, and a gendered unique lived experience. Excerpts of the interview transcripts were cited to provide a rich description of the participants to the reader and to provide the participants with a voice in the study. Generally, in describing their experiences, the nonprofit women leaders discussed the influence of the nonprofit sector, their lived experiences and how the women leaders perceived their experiences to be different from the lived experiences of male leaders, the leadership challenges they faced, and how the women developed their identities as leaders.

The conclusion of this study, Chapter 5, provides the limitations of the study, future considerations and recommendations that can be made, and possibilities for future research. Finally, I will share some personal reflections based on my lived experiences as a woman leader of a nonprofit organization and the primary researcher for this study.

Limitations of the Study

As is the case for all qualitative research, this study was limited and influenced by my personal biases as a researcher. My personal experiences as a woman leader for a nonprofit organization may have influenced the questions that I asked, the trains of thought I followed up on, and how I conducted data analysis. Another common limitation in qualitative research that applies to this study is the inability to generalize the findings. Given the small sample size and the limited geography of the study, the themes that emerged cannot be considered to be representative for all women leaders of nonprofit organizations.

This research might have also been affected by my dual role as a researcher and colleague. I had a pre-existing professional relationship with four of the five participants and this may have influenced how much and what information the participants chose to share. It is possible that my collegial relationship with the participants encouraged more comfort with sharing, but it might have also caused participants to share less about their experiences due to the knowledge that the participant would very likely work with me again in the future.

This study was also limited by its lack of inclusion of the experiences of transgender individuals who identify as women. This perspective and experience was absent in the literature that I reviewed and is also not presented as part of this research. Similarly, this research did not explore cultural differences in leadership or make any cross-cultural comparisons. Finally, this research did not utilize any feminist theoretical frameworks, even

though feminist literature was cited in the Chapter 2 and in the course of my discussion, as the research was focused on the lived experiences of the participants.

Considerations and Recommendations

This research yielded many possible considerations and recommendations that would benefit women leaders as well as the nonprofit sector. First of all, it would be valuable for women leaders to have access to mentorship groups comprised of other women leaders so that the women have a safe outlet in which to express their challenges and struggles in regards to their leadership practices. The findings of this research would support the notion that this would be of particular value to nonprofit women leaders as, in the nonprofit sector, a leader is often separate from the rest of the staff of the organization as well as from the Board of Directors. Furthermore, this mentorship support would be particularly valuable during the first two years of the women's leadership role as this time was noted to be especially challenging and when the women leaders were most likely to experience feelings of insecurity. Providing women leaders with an opportunity to discuss their feelings of insecurity may help the women to identify the inaccuracies of the feelings of insecurity.

In addition to mentorship support once in the role, it would be useful to establish mentorship programs that allow young women in the nonprofit sector to learn from a current nonprofit women leader in order to expose them to the scope of the role and to start to build their leadership skills. Such a mentorship program would hopefully encourage more women leaders to get involved in nonprofit leadership and would also be a solution to the succession needs of nonprofit organizations.

There is a considerable number of additional tasks that are asked of women leaders. These tasks include being asked to sit on committees, being asked to serve on a Board of

Directors, or being asked to review or contribute to a project proposal for another organization. These tasks are outside of a woman leader's technical job description, but rather are an extension of their duties and responsibilities. These additional and extra responsibilities can become extensive and it would be beneficial for nonprofit women leaders to be empowered and supported by their Board of Directors to set explicit boundaries around these sorts of additional tasks and roles or be prepared to compensate the nonprofit leader for the additional contributions that they are making.

A common theme that emerged from both the literature and this research is the association between leadership and masculine-oriented characteristics including aggression and competition. This association was something that the nonprofit women leaders struggled to balance with their own natural leadership styles that involved the communal attributes of caring for others and being nurturing. It would serve women leaders in all sectors if the description of leadership could be shifted away from those historical, masculine-oriented definitions.

The nonprofit women leaders discussed how they are required to be generalists in their roles. It would therefore be useful for nonprofit leaders to have access to condensed and easily digestible resources related to any of the various roles that a nonprofit leader may be required to serve. For example, nonprofit leaders may benefit from resources related to human resources, strategic planning, asset management, program development, or any other number of topics.

Lastly, in regards to supporting the nonprofit sector, it would be favourable for all levels of government to recognize the value and contributions of the sector and make appropriate investments that would relieve the nonprofit sector from the administrative

burden of having to seek annual funding. Without multi-year funding arrangements, a nonprofit organization is at risk of losing qualified and dedicated staff and also has very little ability to plan for the future. In addition, all levels of government should evaluate the administrative and reporting burdens that they are placing on nonprofit organizations and, if such a level of administration/reporting is deemed necessary, then nonprofit organizations should be provided with the resources to achieve that.

Future Research

Building on the considerations and recommendations that resulted from this research, there are also many ways that this research could be extended. Firstly, it would be interesting to further explore the relationship between one's place in their family and the influence that this may have on one's adoption of a leader identity later in life. This research observed that a woman leader who was the youngest in her family did not initially see herself as a leader whereas a woman leader who was the eldest in her family accepted her leader identity from a very early age. It would be interesting to see if this phenomenon would be reproduced in a larger sample.

Secondly, the nonprofit women leaders interviewed for this research shared that they believe that there is a unique and gendered lived experience involved in being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization. A natural extension of this finding is to conduct similar research that includes male leaders of nonprofit organizations so as to be able to make direct comparisons.

Thirdly, the literature stated that, as a woman leader, one's appearance is something that is heavily scrutinized and therefore serves as a component of one's leader identity. I posited that this might be partially due to the fact that the research literature from which this

findings referenced involved populations that are in highly visible positions of women leaders. Further research exploring the role of the public visibility of a leader on the emphasis that is placed on the leader's appearance would be valuable. Also, considering this study's limited geographic scope, it would be interesting to extend this study to women leaders in cosmopolitan areas of BC and throughout Canada as future research.

Lastly, for cultural inclusion, further studies on transgender women leaders of nonprofit and public organization experiences needs to be investigated. This will not only add to the gap in literature but will provide inclusivity in the workplace experiences for all.

Personal Reflections

The exercise of planning this research, conducting the analysis, and writing up the results has been an incredible journey and has resulted in great reflection about my own lived experience of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization. As I met the participant criteria, I naturally was closer to the research topic and I engaged with the topics explored throughout the process using reflexive journaling. I undertook the exercise of answering all of the research questions myself and found a great deal of resonance with the comments and contributions of the participants. In particular, I was reassured by the participants' comments about how they eventually found their own unique way to serve in a leadership role and that this looked very differently than how their predecessors served in the role. This conversation relates to me as I had experienced my own struggle in trying to find and accept my own leadership style, especially when following in the footsteps of a much-respected male leader.

Given my closeness and integration with the research topic, I took great care to acknowledge my perspectives, expectations, and biases about the research but endeavoured

to keep my experiences separate from those of the participants as it was their stories that I wanted to prioritize and present.

The most challenging part of conducting this research was completing the analysis. I found it incredibly difficult at first to generate the themes and stayed immersed in the data for a few weeks before I felt comfortable with the particular iteration of themes that I eventually present in this thesis. I believe that this stage of the process was so difficult for me as I did not want to lose any of the insight that the participants had shared with me. I also found completing the analysis to be difficult as I had chosen to use a thematic analysis approach and therefore did not have detailed steps to follow. The analysis process that I chose allowed for a great deal of flexibility which at times was daunting. Furthermore, I was deeply concerned about misconstruing or misrepresenting the meaning behind the participants' words. Ultimately, I found joy in the analysis process and feel quite content with the themes that have been presented.

An additional challenge that I faced in the completion of this research was in defining when something was "complete". As someone with perfectionistic tendencies, it was difficult to step away from each component of the thesis, thereby calling it complete. This always felt uncomfortable to me as there was always the potential of more literature to be read, more depth to the data, or more to be said. This is something that, even to this moment, I still struggle with and will likely be something that I wrestle with as I continue my academic and professional journey.

Lastly, I reflect on this experience as being one that stretched me in ways I didn't expect to be stretched. While certainly challenging at times, this research experience has helped me to grow as a researcher, as a professional, and as a person. I now have new ways

of approaching questions, new skills in finding, reviewing, and evaluating literature, improved interview abilities, and a slightly more refined writing style. Most importantly, I credit this process with providing me with an opportunity to consider my epistemology and worldview which I believe will serve me well as I move forward to consider new questions, new challenges, and hopefully continue my research journey.

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<center>**Appendix A: Information Letter**</center>

UNBC | UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

<center>**Information Letter**</center>

December 11, 2017

Project Title: Experiences of Woman Leaders in Nonprofit Organizations in Northern BC

Project Lead: *Kallie Smith*

       University of Northern British Columbia

       Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

       Ksmith7@unbc.ca and/or *(250) 552-8204*

Purpose of Project

You are being invited to participate in a study that will explore the experiences of woman leaders who work for nonprofit organizations in northern British Columbia. The reason for conducting this study is to better understand the experiences of woman leaders who work in the nonprofit sector.

This study is being run by Kallie Smith, A Master of Education student at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George.

The information collected by this study will be used for Kallie's Master's thesis, shared with research participants, and possibly printed in papers or shared at events where research results are presented.

What will happen during the Project?

If you agree to voluntary participate in the above described research, you will be asked to:

- Complete an interview that will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours where we will discuss your experience as a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization. At any time during the interview you may ask questions, ask for the digital recorder to be turned off, take a break, or withdraw from the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the interview, information you provided up to that point will be withdrawn.

- After the interview has been completed, I will follow-up with you to ask you to review the transcript from the interview to ensure that the interview was transcribed and appropriately captured. You will be able to request that any information be added or removed from the transcript at this time. Reviewing your transcript will take approximately 1 hour.

- Lastly, Kallie will follow-up with you upon completion of data analysis and development of themes to ensure that the essence of the experience of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization was properly captured by the themes. Reviewing the draft themes will take approximately 1 hour.

- The total time commitment required for participation in this research is approximately 3.5 hours including interview time, transcript review, and review of the draft themes.

Risks or Benefits to Participating in the Project:

There may be little potential risk involved in participating in this research and you can withdraw your participation at any time. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected.

Possible benefits of participation include enjoyment that results from sharing one's experiences as well as contributing to a greater understanding about the experiences of woman leaders who work for nonprofit organizations.

If your participation in this research creates any uncomfortable or distressing emotions, the following support services/counselling services are available in the community:

Organization	Support Type & Cost	Cost	Contact Information
UNBC Community Counselling Centre	Personal counselling to Prince George community members	$10/session, on a sliding scale	(250) 960-6457 CCC@northernhealth.ca
Brazzoni & Associates	Employee & Family Assistance Program and Private-pay counselling	Call for fee schedule	(250) 614-2261
Walmsley & Associates	Employee & Family Assistance Program and Counselling services for fee	$108.00/session	(250) 564-1000

	paying clients		
Wellspring Counselling Services	Counselling services including phone & skype appointments	$80.00/session, sliding scale available	(250) 561-0410

Confidentiality, Anonymity, and Data Storage:

If you agree to participate in this research, the interview will be recorded. The recording will then be typed word for word as an interview transcript.

In all written materials, you will be left anonymous or called by a fake name if necessary.-All documents will be identified only by code number after participants have had an opportunity to review their transcripts. The master key linking the codes to each participant will only be kept as a physical file and will be stored in a separate, locked location from the other research documents.

If any information is shared during the interview that describes unlawful or unsafe activities, this will be reported to the proper parties.

Only Kallie, and her supervisor, Dr. Lantana Usman, will have access to the data. Data includes the audio recordings, transcripts, themes, composite analysis, and consent forms. Physical files will be kept in a locked cabinet in Kallie's personal home office. Digital files will be held on Kallie's password protected computer and will be encrypted. The data will be held for 5 years after which point it will be destroyed by permanent electronic deletion or manual shredder.

Compensation:

I will offer you a gift card in appreciation of your participation at the completion of this study.

Study Results:

My completed thesis will fulfill a partial requirement for my Masters of Education (MEd.) Multidisciplinary Leadership degree at the University of Northern British Columbia. The information collected by this study will be shared with you the research participants, and possibly published in academic papers or shared at conferences and workshops on leadership and management, or NGOs and gender issues, and other events where research results are presented.

Question or Concerns about the Project:

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Primary Researcher:	**Supervisor:**
Kallie Smith	Dr. Lantana Usman
Master of Education student	School of Education
Email: ksmith7@unbc.ca	Email: lantana.usman@unbc.ca
Phone: (250) 552-8204	Phone: (250) 960 5304]

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

- You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected.

- If you withdraw from the study all interview recordings and analysis of your participation will be destroyed and will not be directly or indirectly mentioned in the final report of the thesis.

- You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this research kindly contact me, Kallie Smith, at ksmith7@unbc.ca or (250) 552-8204

Appendix B: Consent Form

UNBC UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Consent Form

November 12, 2017

Experience of Woman Leaders Working for Nonprofit Organizations in northern BC

Project Lead: *Kallie Smith*

> University of Northern British Columbia

> Prince George, BC V2N 4Z9

> *Ksmith7@unbc.ca* and/or *(250) 552-8204*

Purpose of Project

You are invited to participate in a study that will explore the experiences of woman leaders who work for nonprofit organizations in northern British Columbia. The reason for conducting this study is to better understand the experiences of woman leaders who work in the nonprofit sector.

This study is being run by Kallie Smith, A Master of Education student at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George.

The information collected by this study will be used for Kallie's Master's thesis, shared with research participants, and possibly printed in papers or shared at events where research results are presented.

What will happen during the project?

If you agree to voluntary participate in the above described research, you will be asked to:

- Complete an interview that will last approximately 1 to 1.5 hours where we will discuss your experience as a woman leader working for a nonprofit organization. At any time during the interview you may ask questions, ask for the digital recorder to be turned off, take a break, or withdraw from the interview. If you choose to withdraw from the interview, information you provided up to that point will be withdrawn.

- After the interview has been completed, I will follow-up with you to ask you to review the transcript from the interview to ensure that the interview was transcribed

and appropriately captured. You will be able to request that any information be added or removed from the transcript at this time. Reviewing your transcript will take approximately 1 hour.

- Lastly, Kallie will follow-up with you upon completion of data analysis and development of themes to ensure that the essence of the experience of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization was properly captured by the themes. Reviewing the draft themes will take approximately 1 hour.

- The total time commitment required for participation in this research is approximately 3.5 hours including interview time, transcript review, and review of the draft themes.

Risks or benefits to participating in the project

There may be little potential risk involved in participating in this research and you can withdraw your participation at any time. Some of the interview questions might upset you. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected.

Possible benefits of participation include enjoyment that results from sharing one's experiences as well as contributing to a greater understanding about the experiences of woman leaders who work for nonprofit organizations.

If your participation in this research creates any uncomfortable or distressing emotions, the following support services/counselling services are available in the community:

Organization	Support Type & Cost	Cost	Contact Information
UNBC Community Counselling Centre	Personal counselling to Prince George community members	$10/session, on a sliding	(250) 960-6457 CCC@northernhealth.ca
Brazzoni & Associates	Employee & Family Assistance Program and Private-pay counselling	Call for fee schedule	(250) 614-2261
Walmsley & Associates	Employee & Family Assistance Program and Counselling services for fee paying clients	$108.00/session	(250) 564-1000
Wellspring	Counselling services	$80.00/session,	(250) 561-0410

Counselling Services	including phone & skype appointments	sliding scale available	

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Data Storage

If you agree to participate in this research, the interview will be recorded. The recording will then be typed word for word as an interview transcript.

In all written materials, you will be left anonymous or called by a fake name if necessary, unless you say during the consent process that you want your first name to be used. All documents will be identified only by code number after participants have had an opportunity to review their transcripts. The master key linking the codes to each participant will be stored on Kallie's password protected computer using a password protection document format.

If any information is shared during the interview that describes unlawful or unsafe activities, this will be reported to the proper parties.

Only Kallie, and her supervisor, Dr. Lantana M. Usman, will have access to the data. Data includes the consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts, themes, and composite analysis. Physical files will be kept in a locked cabinet in Kallie's personal home office. Digital files will be held on Kallie's password protected computer and will be saved in a password protected format. The data will be held by Kallie for 5 years after which point it will be destroyed by permanent electronic deletion or manual shredder.

Compensation

We will offer you a $10 gift card in appreciation for completing this study.

Study Results

My completed thesis will fulfill a partial requirement for my Masters of Education (MEd.) Multidisciplinary Leadership degree at the University of Northern British Columbia. The information collected by this study will be shared with you the research participants, and possibly printed in papers or shared at conferences and workshops on leadership and management, or NGOs and gender issues, and other events where research results are presented.

Questions or Concerns about the project

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

Primary Researcher:	**Supervisor:**
Kallie Smith	Dr. Lantana Usman – Associate Professor
Master of Education student	School of Education
Email: ksmith7@unbc.ca	Email: lantana.usman@unbc.ca
Phone: (250) 552-8204	Phone: (250) 960-5304

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the UNBC Office of Research at 250-960-6735 or by e-mail at reb@unbc.ca.

Participant Consent and Withdrawal

- You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. If at any point during the interview you feel uncomfortable or upset and wish to end your participation, please notify the researcher immediately and your wishes will be respected.

- If you withdraw from the study all interview recordings and analysis of your participation will be destroyed and will not be directly or indirectly mentioned in the final report of the thesis.

- You may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this research kindly contact me, Kallie Smith, at ksmith7@unbc.ca or (250) 552-8204

Participant Consent and Signature Page:

I have read or been described the information presented in the information letter about the project:

YES   NO

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this project and to receive additional details I requested:

YES   NO

I understand that if I agree to participate in this project, I may withdraw from the project at any time up until the report completion, with no consequences of any kind:

YES   NO

I have been given a copy of this form:

YES   NO

I agree to have my interview recorded:

YES   NO

Follow-up information can be sent to me at the following email address:

_____

YES   NO

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature: _____

Participant Name (Printed): _____

                    Date: _____

Appendix C: Sample of Interview Questions

- What is your job title?

- How long have you worked for your organization?

- What can you tell me about your experiences of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization?

- What leadership responsibilities are involved with your position?

- Describe your job duties and responsibilities?

- To what extent has your experience of being a woman leader for a nonprofit organization changed over time?

- Do you believe that there is a unique experience involved in being a woman leader as compared to your knowledge of male leaders? If so, what can you tell me about this?

- In the past, did you work and lead in a public organization? If yes, how do you compare your present and past leadership experiences?

- In the past, did you work and lead in a private organization? If yes, how do you compare your present and past leadership experiences?

- Describe your leadership philosophy. For instance, your leadership philosophy might include how you relate to your followers/staff and how you work towards shared goals, etc.

- What challenges do you face as a woman leader of a nonprofit organization? Outline your top three challenges and how you have dealt with them.

- Describe how you developed your identity as a woman leader. For instance, did you always consider yourself a leader? If not, what contributed to you defining yourself as a leader?

- If you could give advice to another colleague related to some of the issues that we have discussed, what would it be?

- What would you add that we have not discussed?