Women Leading Nonprofit Organizations in Appalachian Ohio:
A Qualitative Study in Leadership Experience

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by
Caroline W. Boone
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This thesis has been approved by

The Honors Tutorial College and the Department of Political Science

Dr. DeLysa Burnier
Professor, Political Science
Thesis Advisor

Dr. James Mosher
Honors Tutorial College
Director of Studies, Political Science

Dr. Jeremy Webster
Dean, Honors Tutorial College
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Author’s Note

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Preface

From where she sits behind a large desk, the changing autumn leaves paint the view outside her window swaths of orange, red, and gold; the colors blaze in the late afternoon sunlight. Her office is spacious with a bookshelf on one wall, and a round table with chairs in the corner across from the window. As she comes around the desk to greet me, I see she is dressed simply and professionally: brown slacks, blue sweater, classic low pumps. We sit at the table, each with our copy of the interview questions in front of us. I glance down at the recorder between us and can see that the red light is glowing. Good. I’ve already checked it two or three times but that little bit of anxiety-induced irrationality keeps me uncertain. There would be nothing worse than getting to the end of this interview without a recording. I make myself trust it and return my full attention to what she is saying.

She is accomplished. And smart. These qualities are immediately apparent in the way that she speaks. From my background research, I know about her organization, its mission, programs, and recent media attention it has received. But I know less about her, only how long she has been leading this organization. I try to learn as much of from our interaction as I can: her tone of voice, her posture and gestures. As she discusses her work, I am drawn in by her excitement. She speaks with conviction about their mission and with pride about her staff.
1. Introduction and Methodology

This thesis examines the experiences of women leaders of non-profit organizations operating in the Appalachian counties of Ohio. More specifically, the study focuses on the experiences, professional development, and approaches to leadership of women in non-profit organizations in order to examine how and in what ways they are influenced by gender, ideologies of leadership, and regional characteristics. Capturing the individual leadership narratives of these women will enhance our understanding of leadership in three specific ways. First, this thesis will contribute a gender-focused discussion of leadership in the Appalachian region. Second, it will examine the implications of the nonprofit sector on these women’s leadership experiences, styles, and approaches. Third, it will contribute region-specific research focused on effective non-profit leadership. Research specific to Appalachian Ohio is important for the continued development of a leadership infrastructure in a region that remains economically and socially disadvantaged.

This thesis explores the three-way intersection of Appalachian studies, non-profit leadership, and women’s leadership. Although individually there is a burgeoning literature in each of these areas, little research has been done to address all three by drawing from cases in the Appalachian region. It is important to fill this knowledge gap for the benefit of continuing development of leadership in Appalachia, most especially that of women’s leadership in the region.

The study of women’s leadership styles is a relatively new field of research and, while it is fast growing, there are many gaps in the formal literature. Gender-specific research is important for its practical applications to the ever-developing field of leadership and management. As more women hold positions of leadership, it becomes increasingly important that women’s leadership styles be examined and discussed in the
study of effective leadership. This project will contribute to the important topic of women and leadership by providing a qualitative analysis of the leadership styles of nine women and their organizational experiences in non-profit organizations in counties in Southeastern Ohio categorized as Appalachian.

There has been much research devoted to the analysis of potential gender difference in the leadership styles of men and women and this remains a significant point of debate. However, this thesis does not focus on the gender difference of women leaders as compared with their male counterparts. Rather it seeks to explore the life experiences of women who are leaders and to understand their own perceptions of the influence of gender on their positions and experiences.

Although there is some disagreement, in general research suggests that leadership in the nonprofit sector is disproportionately female (Dym & Huston, 2005). For this reason, this thesis focuses on leaders of non-profit organizations in particular. It is relevant to non-profit leadership and management for this study to focus on the reasons that women in particular have become leaders in this sector.

Furthermore, the non-profit sector seems to be particularly vibrant in this part of Appalachia. In an area that historically has struggled with economic, environmental, and political hardships, the development of a fruitful third sector has enormous potential benefits. The mission of many non-profit organizations in Southeastern Ohio is to foster economic development and social capital. In many cases, it is thanks to the work of non-profit organizations that economic, social, and political stimulation has been infused into a community.

Finally, this thesis will contribute an understanding of leadership development in Appalachia by highlighting examples of effective leadership in the region. Historically, leadership development has been difficult because many potential leaders leave the
While the women interviewed may not all exemplify proven styles of effective leadership, through the analysis of their experiences there are sure to be lessons and examples for future leaders in this region. This study will tell the story of several leaders in the region, thereby contributing to the body of research that focuses on Appalachian development.

**Methodology**

This research project focuses specifically on the development of these women as nonprofit leaders in the region. Currently, there are only a handful of studies which directly address women’s leadership issues in Appalachia (Smith & Reed, 2010). To the extent that gender in Appalachia has been studied, this research has addressed the intersection of gender, politics, and economics in Appalachia (see Anglin, 2002; Dean, Gulley, & McKinney, 2012; Harper, 2000; Latimer & Oberhauser, 2004; Oberhauser, 1995; Nank, 2011; Seitz, 1995).

**Research Questions**

Drawing from this existing research, this project is framed around four research questions. The first stems from the observation that women leaders remain underrepresented across the public and private sectors (Catalyst, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Wilson, 2007) yet, several prominent nonprofits in Southeastern Ohio are led by women. Thus, this thesis analyzes the paths by which these women arrived in their leadership positions and the leadership styles and approaches they have adopted.

Second, based on in-depth interviews with women leaders, this thesis examines whether and to what extent there are common leadership styles/approaches/experiences of women leading non-profit organizations in
Southeastern Ohio. Conversely, it attempts examine whether and to what extent there are differences among the women leaders.

The third is based on the observation that non-profit organizations are often associated with a collaborative, values-based leadership approach (Edwards, Yankey, & Altpeter, 1998; Herman, 2005; Nank, 2011). This thesis examines whether women nonprofit leaders in Appalachia Ohio follow this approach, how and in what ways, while also exploring whether they have developed their own approaches to nonprofit leadership.

Finally, this thesis examines the possible impact of the geographic and cultural location of Appalachia on these non-profit organizations and their leadership. Specifically, this thesis seeks to shed light on the extent to which the lack of a dense leadership infrastructure in the Appalachian region relates to and affects leadership styles and opportunities for women. The ultimate goal of the project is to understand how the personal and organizational experiences of particular women leaders fit within the larger context of gender relations in Appalachia and leadership development in the region.

**Method of Analysis**

This project uses a unique depth of perspective achieved through personal interviews to approach the answers to the research questions (Alexander, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Unlike a survey or other less personal methods, this thesis aims to explore the research questions through the personal narratives of relevant experiences told by women leaders themselves. The value of doing personal interviews is that they create in-depth, richly detailed portraits of leadership. Moreover, the interview method captures the actual language used by these women to speak about their leadership experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In other words, the interviews
reveal the language, metaphors, examples, and anecdotes that the women used to talk about their life experiences as leaders.

The process of depth-interviewing was the most practical and effective method of data collection for this project because its goal was to gain insight into the personal and professional life experiences of women leading non-profit organizations. Interviews allowed participants to talk about their experiences broadly and in detail, as they felt appropriate. This enabled the researcher to analyze interview statements for individual trends and piece together themes across interviews. A survey method would have been less effective because responses would provide data that was either fixed or limited in detail and depth. A survey would not have allowed respondents to tell their own stories in their own words.

The study was conducted using the qualitative method of depth-interviewing (Charmaz, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The goal of each interview was to establish in-depth understanding about the interviewees' experiences of leadership. Each interview was guided by a pre-established set of main questions which were based on the research questions. For each interview, these questions/the interview protocol served as the framework for the conversation. The interview questions were used flexibly so as to allow the researcher to be guided by the responses themselves of the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Follow-up questions and probing questions were used to fill in and explore the details of the experiences of the interviewee (Charmaz, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

After all nine interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed verbatim the conversations. These transcripts were then analyzed along several dimensions. First, whole answers to questions were analyzed at a pragmatic level to develop themes regarding the primary questions of inquiry. Next, further analysis and comparison
across interviews were made in order to identify trends and themes among all or some of the participants. Additional attention was given at a semantic level, analyzing sentences or word blocks for meaning and to assess trends in vocabulary choices across responses. The results of this analysis provide the foundation for the discussion of these trends and themes and their interaction with the current research surrounding gender and leadership, non-profit leadership, and development in Appalachia.

**Data Collection**

The subjects of this study are women in leadership positions in non-profit organizations operating in Southeastern Ohio. Participants were identified as executive leaders based on their title as “president,” “CEO,” or “Director” of a non-profit organization operating in counties in Southeastern Ohio identified as Appalachian. An initial list contained twelve potential interviewees whom the researcher approached through an email requesting their participation in the project (see Appendix B). Nine leaders responded to this request and were interviewed. These interviews took place over a period of two months, from mid-October to mid-December in 2013. Each interview was conducted in a location chosen by the interviewee; seven of the nine interviews took place in the interviewee’s office and the other two took place in a local coffee shop.

Each interview began by discussing the research consent form and clarifying any questions about the project or interview procedure for the interviewee. The interviews proceeded following the Interview Protocol established by the researcher (see Appendix C). Each interview covered these questions in their entirety, but the order varied. The interviews were varied further by the statements, stories, and interests of the interviewee to which the interviewer responded and probed according to their overall relevance to the research questions. Additional interview probes were used to explore
more deeply participants’ responses to each interview question. In this way, the
interviews developed as very different conversations; while each interviewee answered
the same primary questions, their responses and comments on the topics led to different
interactions with the interviewer. The interview questions were closely aligned with the
research questions. In this way, when compiled and analyzed, the interview responses
developed cumulative responses to each guiding question of this project.

The research questions were best answered through qualitative interviews
because, as an interpretive social science project, interviews allowed the researcher to
probe how these women have come to understand themselves as leaders. Interview
questions which asked interviewees to discuss how they arrived in their position, their
experiences as leaders, and how their approach to leadership evolved provided a
framework within which the interviewees both define and narrate their leadership
experiences. The conclusions and findings of this research, therefore, are gleaned
directly from the statements and experiences of the interviewees as they told them.

In sum, the nine interviewees represent leadership from a variety of nonprofit
organizations: two were foundations, two served youth and families, one worked in
economic development, one worked in social action, one worked in food, one did
fundraising, and one is social services agency. The leaders’ ages range from roughly
early 20s to early 60s. They have served in their current roles from sixteen months to
over ten years. Between these organizations, they serve approximately a ten county area
in Appalachian Ohio.

Study Limitations

This study had several notable limitations which should be taken into account
with its findings. While the interviewees and organizations captured in this study are
fairly representative of the region of Southeastern Ohio, one limitation of the study was that these interviewees lack racial or ethnic diversity.

Other limitations of the study are innate to its qualitative methodology. With qualitative data, it is difficult to generalize or extrapolate these findings to the experiences of other women, leaders, locations, or sectors. The interview methodology was appropriate for this study because it provided depth of perspective, rather than breadth representing a larger data population. Furthermore, the researcher who conducted these interviews in person is an undergraduate student, Caucasian, and female, all characteristics which may have influenced interviewees’ responses. The influence of the researcher in this way is an inherent limitation of interview based research. When possible, this limitation has been accounted for. Additionally, as this discussion is based on qualitative interview data, there is an inherent level of interpretation of these results on the part of the researcher.

Furthermore, as the participants of this study are elites, individuals not easily accessible to the researcher, only one round of interviews was conducted. This is a minor limitation of the study as these individuals were interviewed in their capacity as leaders and can be expected to speak in a way that is true to their experience and beliefs.

**Key Concepts**

Before going farther into the discussion of these topics, it is important to note the operational definitions of several key concepts. First, “gender” in this thesis is defined as “the social organization of sexual difference” (Scott, 1988). This definition was articulated by historian and gender scholar Joan Wallach Scott. She explains the definition of gender in this way:

“Gender...means knowledge about sexual difference. I use knowledge, following Michael Foucault, to mean understanding produced by cultures and societies of human relationships, in this case of those between men and women. ... Its uses and meanings become contested politically and are the means by which...”
relationships of power – of domination and subordination – are constructed. ... It follows that gender is the social organization of sexual difference. But this does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical differences between women and men; rather gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings of bodily differences.” (Scott, 1988)

As demonstrated here, gender is both socially and culturally constructed and reflective of one’s own understanding of sexuality. Sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway makes an important contribution to the definition of gender by incorporating the concept of social relations. In her recent work, *Framed by Gender*, she proposes, “the use of gender as a primary cultural frame for social relations as a general mechanism by which gender inequality is re-created in the face of transformations in the social and economic arrangements upon which that inequality seems, at any given point, to depend” (Ridgeway, 2011). Thus in the social context of these interviews gender is dichotomized as male or female, each bearing social meaning which influences perceptions of self and others. Each of the nine interviewees identify with female gender.

Another central concept of this thesis is “leadership approaches”. This refers to the leadership style, practices, and philosophy with which these individuals approach their role as the executive director, CEO, or president. Similarly, it is important to define the concept of the “leadership path”. This language is borrowed from Eagly and Carli’s *Through the Labyrinth* (2007), but also language commonly used throughout gender and leadership literature.

**Chapter Outline**

In Chapter Two, an overview of the literature surrounding gender and leadership provides the scholarly context which informed the development of these research questions. Additionally, some key works from the literature on nonprofit leadership are discussed providing context for the discussion of leadership in the nonprofit sector in chapter two. Following the literature review, Chapter Three provides a brief overview of
Appalachian history, focusing on the events most pertinent to the development of the nonprofit sector in the region.

The focus then turns to the analysis of the interview data in Chapters Five through Eight. The analysis begins by examining paths to leadership through the events and experiences which influenced the interviewees’ leadership development and leadership style. This chapter also includes an important discussion on mentorship and the role that it has played for these interviewees. The following chapter explores the interviewees’ leadership styles and approaches in depth, addressing commonalities and differences, as well as the way that they have changed over time. Chapter Six focuses specifically on the relationship of gender to leadership in the professional arena. Chapter Seven then transitions to the discussion of the leadership and the nonprofit sector, exploring the ways in which characteristics of the sector have impacted the leadership experiences of these women. The interview analysis concludes in Chapter Eight with the discussion of regional influence on leadership. It explores how characteristics of Appalachian Ohio are perceived to influence the experiences of these leaders. Lastly, the concluding chapter suggests lessons to be learned from this research and proposes topics for the continuation of this research.
2. Literature Review

Gender and Leadership

In the United States, there are few occupations (apart from the presidency) in which the “first female” has not reached the top of the career ladder, leaving a pile of shattered glass on the floor beneath her, and ending some small but important part of the male-dominated world in which she grew up. There may be few positions left for an American woman to claim as a “first,” but there are plenty where she can be the second.

While women are increasingly able to reach the top, the paths they take to become leaders remain riddled with gender-based challenges. Once a woman reaches a position of leadership, the literature and history suggest she will face greater demands and expectations because of her gender. For some, the glass ceiling was shattered years ago and women now have equal access to positions of power. Consequently, they see the dearth of women at the top of organizational structures as the result of women’s choices. Others believe that the gender disparity in leadership is evidence of a natural order, wherein men inherently and biologically are better suited to be leaders. Regardless, the reality is that substantial barriers and challenges remain that deter women from rising to positions of leadership in numbers equal to their male counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Wilson, 2004). There continues to be a mismatch between traditional leadership traits culturally constructed as masculine and those traits culturally constructed as feminine (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Carli 2007; Gilligan, 1982; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Rhode, 2003; Wilson, 2004). Thus the historical ideal of a “great man” leader still shapes expectations of leadership. In education, media, business, and the political arena women have different and more challenging experiences from men on the track to leadership.
Scholarship on women in leadership is a relatively young literature. In the past fifty years, there has been an enormous increase in the number of women holding leadership positions and a vast shift in the popular and scholarly understandings of effective leadership styles in general. While early scholarship encouraged women to conform to masculine norms of leadership, today leadership is often more understood as a function of personality than of gender (see Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gilligan, 1982). At the same time, it is widely recognized that a woman brings perspectives, styles, and skills to leadership that are equally valuable and effective as those that a man might bring.

Partially as a result of increasing numbers of women in managerial, administrative, and executive positions, our understanding of effective leadership looks much different today than it did fifty years ago. Traditional styles of command-and-control leadership and top-down organizational structures are no longer thought to be the only or most effective means of leadership. In fact, in many arenas command-and-control leadership has been criticized for its ineffectiveness as limiting and negatively impacting organizational performance. Rather models that stress open communication and care for others such as relational leadership and servant leadership (see Fletcher, 1999 and Greenleaf, 1970) are now viewed as effective strategies in the professional world.

Overview of Women and Leadership. For much of history, leadership has been defined and perceived as masculine; leadership roles were thought to necessitate command and control, strength and assertiveness, dominance in the organizational hierarchy and a firmly held bottom-line. These traits were equated with traditional socio-cultural expectations of masculinity, and thus leadership was designated as the realm of men. As a result, women’s entrance into the workforce and rise to positions of leadership has been tumultuous. Women who became leaders faced harsh skepticism
and resistance to their legitimacy as leaders (Jamieson, 1995). As a contemporary theorist of gender, Nancy Nicholas writes, "If the norm is male, women will always be the other, the deviant. Superior or inferior, she is not the same. She is caught in a catch-22. If she attacks the problem by trying to be male, she will be too aggressive. If she attacks the problem by trying to be female, she will be the ineffective other" (cited in Jamieson, 1995). The culturally constructed norms of masculinity and leadership created many barriers for women who, even when they did meet social expectations of leadership, were perceived negatively for being unfeminine. Early women leaders, as stated above, were perceived as exceptions, not representative of their gender, but rather outside the norms of gender and of leadership.

By the 1950-60s, women were a permanent facet of the labor force and the dual-earner household was becoming the norm in middle-class America. Women's roles as professionals gradually expanded socially acceptable images of femininity to include professional responsibilities. However, women were still expected to make domestic responsibilities their greatest priority.

A shift began in the leadership conversation in the 1970s surrounding women's capacity as leaders. Operating under the assumption of male leadership dominance, women were advised to emulate traditionally masculine leadership styles. Then, in the 1982, Carol Gilligan's influential work in the field of psychology, In a Different Voice, proposed a female theory of development different, suggesting that women and men develop differently and establish different moral ethics. Her work inspired a new framework in which women were understood to possess different leadership qualities than men. Through the 1980s and early 1990s, there was widespread recognition of a "female" style of leadership. Women were thought of as having a style of leading unique to their femininity and characterized by such feminine qualities as nurturing and caring.
Furthermore, these feminine traits made female leaders as effective, if not more effective than male leaders.

Since the mid to late 1980s, the emphasis on female difference and feminine traits has tapered off. Today, it is understood that all women who are leaders do not practice leadership in the same way or possess the same qualities, nor do all men.

However, leadership and the path to leadership positions is not the same for men as it is for women. Women face a different set of challenges, demands, and choices because of their gender. Scholarship from the 1990s to now focuses on the demands for leadership imposed on women and examines the extent to which these are structurally or socially maintained, and considers how women and men can overcome them to maximize leadership potential.

**Leading Like a Man: The 1970s.** As late as the 1970s, effective leadership was defined in terms of prototypically-masculine qualities. During this time, women were for the first time rising to leadership positions of leadership in the private sector in greater numbers than ever before as a consequence of the women’s movement and equal opportunity laws and rules. It was thought that for these women to become effective leaders they should avoid culturally constructed feminine qualities that were perceived to be “soft” or “weak” and adopt a leadership style characterized by such culturally constructed masculine qualities as control and force. Effective female leaders, it was believed, should emulate traditional leadership qualities characterized by cultural expectations of masculinity. Early scholarly works on women’s leadership recommended that women adopt the leadership styles of their male counterparts in order to be effective in their positions.

In *The Managerial Woman*, Margaret Henning and Anne Jardim suggest that women who have gained leadership positions adopt an agentic, male-modeled style of
leadership in order to be successful (1977). As one of the earliest scholarly works to examine gender and leadership, it was important for introducing these topics to the discussion of leadership. Henning and Jardim examined managerial leadership in the private sector. They argue that in order for women to be effective leaders, they must adopt a leadership style that emulates the model successful male leadership, characterized by aggression, assertiveness, control, and competitiveness (Henning & Jardim, 1977).

In the same year, Betty Harragan published a similar work, *Games Mother Never Taught You: Corporate Gamesmanship for Women*, which advised women in leadership and management to "learn to play the game according to men's rules" (1977). If women were to succeed in the business world, she suggested, they would have to learn how to participate in the masculine culture of the organizations they work in. These writers recognized that the business world, and professional world overall, were often modeled around other than male-dominated realms, such as the military and team sports. Thus it was incumbent upon women to learn to play by these rules in order to become successful and effective leaders.

**Difference Feminism: The 1980-1990s.** The 1980s marked a significant shift in the popular and scholarly understanding of women's abilities as leaders. There was growing recognition of the particular value women brought to leadership. One of the most influential works in this era was Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, in which she challenged traditional notions of male superiority based on the argument that previous theories of psychological development were founded on research that favored males (1982). Gilligan suggested that women experience different psychological development and as a result develop a different moral approach. The focus of her work was on the significance of the various ways in which people make moral decisions and understand
themselves. She found that women tend to base decisions on an ethic of care, whereas men tend to have an ethic of justice, meaning essentially that women care more about establishing and maintaining relationships, whereas men care more about establishing what is “right” (Gilligan, 1982). As it pertains to organizational leadership, Gilligan found that, in social interactions, men care about establishing a hierarchy or pecking order, whereas women care about connecting with others (1982). Her work is significant as one of the first to present an analysis of psychological research which argued that women are not inferior, but rather have different perceptions of self, morality, conflict, and choice (1982).

However, Gilligan’s work sparked a large and ongoing debate. While many felt that it gave validity and legitimacy to the female experience, others have argued that Gilligan did not sufficiently contextualize female difference as contingent on social context and experience (see for example Weisstein, 1997). For example, as Kathleen Hall Jamieson noted, many were skeptical of Gilligan’s message because the “argument that women speak in a different moral voice seemed to offer some scientific support for the claim to difference” which could become grounds to discriminate against women in the workplace (Jamieson, 1995).

Drawing on Gilligan’s research, Sally Helgesen, Judy Rosener, and others continued to explore women’s leadership styles under the assumption of female difference, positing the benefit of culturally constructed feminine qualities in leadership settings. In 1990, Sally Helgesen captured the essence of this feminine leadership value in her book, *The Female Advantage*. Helgesen’s work was based on six diary studies of women who ran large organizations in both the private and non-profit sector. Operating under the assumption that women possess certain “feminine principles,” Helgesen sought to identify and evaluate these principles and to assess their impact in the
changing economy (1990). *The Female Advantage* describes an approach to organizational leadership in which the leader works from the center of the organizational structure, rather than the top of the hierarchy (1990). Helgesen found that this central, but less hierarchical position was preferred by prominent women leaders who viewed themselves at the center of a wheel rather than the top of a pyramid (1990). They viewed their role in the organization’s structure in this way, she found, because it encouraged communication and collaboration (Helgesen, 1990). Additionally, her work described female leaders as having better communication, more effective work styles, and more efficient time management (Helgesen, 1990).

This influential work started a shift towards defining a leadership style that emerges from women’s unique experiences as mothers and caretakers. Helgesen saw her work as filling a need for “a book about what business can learn from women. ... a book that would define and reaffirm the values that women recognize as a source of their strength – values that have for too long been dismissed as signs of weakness” (Helgesen, 1990). Helgesen’s work changed the argument for women’s effectiveness as leaders by focusing on the value that culturally constructed feminine attributes contributed to organizational, rather than the extent to which women measure up to traditional expectations of masculine leadership.

Similarly, Judy Rosener wrote an article published in the *Harvard Business Review* about women’s ways of leading in which she described the benefit of female attributes for leadership (1990). This work also contributed to the literature supporting gender differences in men and women’s leadership styles.

The argument as to whether men and women are more similar or more different continues today. The impact of scholarship in the 1980s which promoted gender difference and “female” advantages was to posit that women undergo different
socialization and cultural experiences, thus cultivating leadership qualities different from those of men. This represents an important shift in popularly accepted understanding of male and female leadership. It was widely recognized that women make valuable contributions as leaders without behaving in traditionally masculine ways. Furthermore, there were growing arguments that traditional leadership, characterized by culturally constructed expectations of masculinity, was not necessarily effective for all organizations.

In the late 1980s, Arlie Hochschild contributed a new theme to the discussion of women’s leadership experiences through her research on the division of domestic labor and work-family balance in American families (1989). Hochschild studied the work-family life balance of families, many of which were dual-earner households, in the 1980s (1989). Her work was influential for introducing the concept of the “second shift” referring to the domestic work expected of women despite having full time work in the professional arena (Hochschild, 1989). Social expectations, as well as their husband’s expectations, allocated work-family balance as women’s dilemma and women remained responsible for the domestic work load (Hochschild, 1989). Hochschild’s work brought greater attention to the challenges and barriers for women on the path to leadership outside of the professional arena by providing evidence of the implications for women and families due to the imbalanced division of labor in the domestic arena.

In the next generation of leadership literature, scholars have challenged the assumption that all female leaders operate in culturally constructed feminine ways. Moreover, they focus on the structural barriers that women face to leadership because of their gender and the schema through which society views these barriers, suggesting both culturally constructed masculine and feminine qualities contribute to effective leadership.
The Complexities of Leadership: The 1990s to Present. Female advantage literature emphasized the ways that relational characteristics, those traditionally constructed as female, were needed in business and organizational leadership. In the 1990s, Joyce Fletcher and other feminist scholars questioned the extent to which this perspective on women’s capacities for leadership reinforces gender stereotypes. In Disappearing Acts: Gender, Power, and Relational Practice at Work, Fletcher suggests an alternative perspective by discussing the invisibility of relational work in the workplace. She discusses the extent to which this relational practice is seen as “women’s work” and how the disappearance of this work is related to gender and its function in the workplace. She argues both for the importance of relational work and for recognition of the gender bias that is historically responsible for devaluing relational work.

Her work is important to the gender and leadership literature because it demonstrates that effective organizations recognize the importance of relational work and integrate relational practices into the norms of the workplace. Importantly, when relational practices become normalized, visible, and valued in the organization, they are no longer assigned as expectations of the women in the organization.

Most recently, gender and leadership literature has focused on the realities of women’s experiences as leaders and the substantial barriers which remain to equal leadership opportunities for men and women. Beginning in the mid-1980s, the barriers women faced to leadership were discussed through the metaphor of the “glass ceiling.”

The metaphor was originally introduced by journalist Carol Hymowitz in 1986. In 2004, as part of a special section published in the Wall Street Journal, Hymowitz described the success of fifty, high-executive women; the article declared that the glass ceiling was broken (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In 1987, Ann Morrison and Randall White published a book titled Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America’s
Largest Corporations? The authors presented the results of a groundbreaking study, the first ever, of women executives in Fortune 100-sized companies (Morrison, White & Velsor, 1987). For many people, this work and other such sources presented evidence that the glass ceiling was a thing of the past and that gender disparities in leadership across all sectors were not caused by barriers to access. It was not until 1995 that the Glass Ceiling Commission, established by Congress to investigate gender discrimination in the workplace, released its reports (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Alice Eagly & Linda Carli are important gender leadership scholars from the field of psychology. In 2003, they published an article in *Leadership Quarterly*, titled “The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence” in which they conducted a meta-analysis of several studies about gender and leadership. In the article, they demonstrated that women have some advantages in typical leadership style but face disadvantages from prejudices regarding their competence as leaders, particularly in masculine dominated organizational contexts (Eagly & Carli, 2003). They found that, stereotypically, women are associated with communal traits, such as ..., while men are associated with agentic traits, such as ... (Eagly & Carli, 2003). When women in leadership capacities express agentic traits they are penalized by negative social reactions for not conforming to the stereotypes of communal femininity. Thus, “a female leader can be rejected because people perceive her to lack agentic qualities associated with effective leadership or because she possess too many of them” (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Women leaders are caught between expectations of femininity and leadership qualities creating persistent barriers.

By contrast, Eagly and Carli found that when men in leadership demonstrate communal traits, the reaction is positive (2003). Just as when men demonstrate traditional, agentic leadership qualities, they meet the cultural ideal of a leader (Eagly &
Carli, 2003). Essentially, male leaders are much more readily accepted and presumed to be effective leaders based on cultural biases which favor male leader.

However, Eagly and Carli also found that despite lingering prejudice against woman as leaders, women continue to rise in positions of leadership across organizational type (Eagly & Carli, 2003). The authors argue that the appointment of women to key leadership positions would benefit any organization interested in moving towards modernity (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Eagly and Carli continued this research and, several years later, published a book which has become an essential piece of the leadership and gender literature. In their work, Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders, the authors address questions of male-female difference in leadership. While they draw significantly from the field of psychology, the authors also incorporate evidence from the fields of political science, sociology, and economics and others in order to discuss trends in leadership, education, business and politics which influence men and women in positions of leadership.

The authors’ primary purpose is to challenge and delegitimize the assertion that gender differences make women less suited for leadership positions than men. While this assumption of inherent difference has been a traditional ground for denying leadership positions to women, Eagly and Carli present psychological research which illuminates the similarities and differences by gender in personality traits associated with leadership. The results show “small sex differences in some of the traits that are relevant to good leadership – for example, assertiveness, gregariousness, risk taking, and moral integrity. These findings imply female advantage at least as often as male advantage” (Eagly & Carli, 2007).
In light of these findings, Eagly and Carli (2007) offer alternative explanations for the lack of female leadership. The authors argue for a new framework for understanding the challenges women face to leadership. They argue that the “glass ceiling” is no longer an accurate metaphor for understanding the barriers women face because it implies challenges only occur once a woman reaches a certain level in an organization. The glass ceiling is more suggestive of workplace discrimination by which women are kept out of leadership by limited opportunities for advancement. However, as Eagly and Carli argue, in reality women face barriers to becoming leaders throughout the career path. From the dilemmas of work-family balance, to expectations of domestic responsibilities, to stereotypes about female competence, there is a ‘labyrinth’ of challenges and barriers confronting women’s assent to leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Through the Labyrinth shows that “women are still excluded more frequently than men, but the processes underlying this result are varied and not necessarily as obvious as they were in the past” (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In addition to these external factors, Eagly and Carli note the powerful effects of gender socialization and gender roles on behavior and personality, “No one should be surprised by the continuing existence of some psychological sex differences as long as men and women continue to divide important life tasks (for example, child care) by sex” (2007). The evidence Eagly and Carli present in conjunction with their description of the labyrinth is a substantial and important contribution to the contemporary discussion of gender and leadership.

Today’s psychological and neurological research on innate male-female difference does not draw definitive conclusions. In Delusions of Gender, Cordelia Fine examines the research from the field of neuropsychology and psychology about gender differences (2010). She debunks the myth that men and women’s brains have hardwired differences and concludes that instead our minds are continuously influenced by cultural
assumptions about gender. This constant socialization leads to apparent gender differences, but in fact there is nothing about empathy or logic that is inherently gender-biased. Fine’s work contributes to the literature on women’s leadership by emphasizing the social and cultural constructions of gender. Her research demonstrates the extent to which gender socialization is deeply ingrained and shapes our perceptions of self and others.

In her 1995 publication *Beyond the Double Bind: Women and Leadership*, communications scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson explores the barriers posed by the demands of femininity and of professionalism, but she also examines the ways that many women have overcome them. Jamieson writes from a perspective of optimism that she feels is needed in response to more pessimistic accounts that were popular at the time. Jamieson argues that,

“Women’s progress has been thwarted by double-binds that, when surmounted, have in fact been replaced by other double-binds, as I will show here. But as women have conquered the no-win situations confronting them, they have marshaled resources and refined aptitudes that have made them more and more capable of facing the next challenge, the next opportunity. At the same time, they have systematically exposed the fallacious constructs traditionally used against them, and change and enlarged the frame through which women are viewed. Although the result is not a steady move toward equitable treatment of women, it is a world in which progress is certainly sufficient to justify optimism.” (Jamieson, 1995)

Jamieson organizes her book around five double-binds that women seeking leadership face. She defines double binds as a function of stereotypes whereby preconceived ideas about correct female behavior and actions have formed dichotomously creating a catch twenty-two that is nearly unavoidable.

The first double bind is the womb versus brain bind by which women are assumed to be only able to utilize one at a time: either they can use their womb and raise children or they can use their brain and have a career. Secondly, is the bind of silence
versus shame which addresses the challenges women face in making their voices heard. If a woman is too outspoken, she risks being shamed for her verbosity. Yet, not speaking out enough is a threat to women’s potential, ideas, and aspirations. Third, Jamieson includes the sameness versus difference argument which occupies a large portion of literature of fields from neuroscience to management. The question of whether women and men have the same capacities to lead or whether there are distinct gendered leadership characteristics remains a point of debate. The next double bind Jamieson addresses is the bind of femininity versus competence. Characteristics historically associated with femininity, such as being easily influenced and emotional, are in direct contrast to characteristics which express competence and maturity, such as being direct and logical (Jamieson, 1995). Finally, Jamieson discusses the problem of the aging versus invisibility double bind by which women must either face the negative cultural stereotypes associated with aging, or become ‘invisible’ by stepping back from their career once they reach the ages at which these stereotypes become relevant (1995).

Jamieson’s book was published nearly two decades ago, and despite her optimism these double binds still persist. The double-binds she presents are still present in American society and politics today. While there have been shifts and progress made in some areas, these are challenges that women in leadership positions still face. For example, while women still face negative social reactions for behaving in an assertive way, the rising number of women in leadership has moved the line on this assumption somewhat to the extent that assertive female leadership does not result in social shaming to the same extent.

In more recent leadership literature, these are recurring issues as women rising to leadership face a labyrinth of choices and double binds which they must balance in
order to succeed. Today, many of these decisions revolve around the balance of work and career with family and life outside of work.

Many of Jamieson’s double-binds reappear in Sheryl Sandberg’s best-selling personal reflections on leadership, *Lean In*. Sandberg is the chief operating officer of Facebook and a Harvard Business School graduate. Her book brings together current research and personal anecdotes in her discussion of challenges women face regarding leadership. The book generated enormous attention, stimulating the conversation around women’s leadership experiences by raising current challenges and issues. As a result, the establishment of Lean In Circles, groups of professional women meeting to discuss these topics, across the country has continued this conversation on a national scale. Her discussion focuses particularly on confidence and other internal barriers which Sandberg believes are obstacles which receive too little attention in many conversations about overcoming barriers to gender parity in leadership (2013).

In the early 2000s, there was a summit on women’s leadership co-sponsored by the President’s Office of the American Bar Association, the Association’s Commission on Women in the Profession, and the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University. Debora Rhode’s paper for the conference, titled “The Difference ‘Difference’ Makes,” captured the scope of many dynamics of the discussion of gender and leadership for the 21st century. Primarily, Rhode’s paper focuses on the debate over gender difference in leadership, and whether or not it makes a significant difference. While there is widespread agreement that gender makes a difference in “virtually all aspects of the social experience,” its particular impact in the context of leadership is unclear. Rather than argue the extent of this difference, Rhode’s purpose is to direct attention to some major reasons the impact of gender is so great, and so problematic, for leadership opportunity (2003).
Rhode addresses "certain persistent and pervasive patterns" in the research on causes of gender disparities in leadership: traditional gender stereotypes, inadequate access to mentors and support networks, and inflexible workplace structures and policies (2003). She then turns to apparent gender differences in leadership styles and priorities, again describing those that are pervasive in the research. The evidence on gender differences in leadership suggest that difference is much weaker than normally believed – for both positive and negative stereotypical assumptions, “the factual basis for such assumptions is thin” (Rhodes, 2003). In many cases, “Women who have achieved leadership positions generally have been selected and socialized to conform to accepted organizational norms” and at the same time, it is not surprising “that some studies find superior performance by women leaders, given the hurdles that they have had to surmount to reach upper-level positions and the pressures that they have faced to exceed expectations” (Rhode, 2003). Rhode explains that differences in priorities in leadership that seem to be tied to gender are logical progressions of gender-related differences in personal experiences and commitment, personal rewards and risks, and personal influence and self-confidence. Finally, Rhode offers organizational and individual strategies for change to eliminate the barriers that exist to equality in leadership opportunities. Her paper, along with others compiled from the women’s leadership summit, are important for their updated account of the challenges and strategies for change which are currently at play in the arena of leadership.

A few years later in 2007, Barbara Kellerman and Debora Rhode’s collaborated on Women and Leadership: The State of Play. A more in-depth work than Rhode’s paper for the summit, the authors highlight the major themes current in the conversation on women in leadership (2007). The authors summarize the problems presented by gender stereotypes, gender bias in evaluation and mentoring, gender differences in family
responsibilities, and inadequate workplace structures and policies. An important component is their discussion of women’s choices:

"Yet what is too often missed or marginalized in the discussions of women's 'different choices' is the extent to which the choices are socially constructed and constrained. ... Equally noticeable for their absence are the choices that men make, as spouses, policy leaders, and employers that limit the choices available to women. ...explanations focusing solely on women's preferences understate the subtle, often unconscious, biases that both shape the priorities of those who opt out and limit the opportunities for those who opt in.” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007)

The authors then argue that in order to continue to make progress women need practical and accurate information about how to overcome stereotypes and bias, rather than the extreme and superficial advice offered in much of the popular literature on female leadership. In conclusion, Kellerman and Rhode emphasize the point that greater numbers of women are needed in leadership not because of a particular women's leadership style, “but rather that gender differences do make some difference that needs to be registered in positions of power” (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007).

**Moving Forward.** Scholars and leaders alike continue to struggle with questions of gender difference as it impacts leadership. While these are important questions in the pursuit of effective models of leadership, we must work to overcome assumptions of masculine superiority in order to allow both men and women to lead with all of their strengths, including those that are “soft” and “feminine”. Women, and some men, have demonstrated the leadership value of these traits. But while traditional, masculine leadership norms persist, the full potential for innovative and dynamic new approaches to leadership is stifled. As Marie Wilson notes in her book, many women in leadership fear that “acknowledgment of difference will come to mean acceptance of inequality. A fear that ‘different from’ will morph into ‘less than’” (2007). As women continue their work as leaders, changing and shaping policy, education, science, philanthropy, and
every sector of our economy, their success and effectiveness will increasingly impact strategies and definitions of leaders.

Nonprofit Literature: Women and Leadership in the Sector

Brief History of the Nonprofit Sector. The nonprofit sector fosters space for “participation, engagement, collective action, and affiliation” all of which are essential for an effective American civil society (Nank, 2011). Robert Putnam argues that it is necessary for “a vibrant civil society” to have such a space where voluntary actions and social engagement come together to create social capital (1995). Social capital, according to Putnam, is the essence of human relationships in communities. Today, the nonprofit sector has an expanded role as a space where many service are provided, but it continues to connect and mobilize social action.

The Great Depression all but halted the development of the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors because, in the years prior to 1932, nonprofits at the state and local levels had exhausted their resources in efforts to alleviate need before New Deal programs began. Nonprofit sector growth continued slowly through the 1940s (Nank, 2011). However, the commitment by Industrial Era philanthropists, World War I, and the growth of the research university laid the foundation for philanthropy’s rise as a compliment to business and government (Nank, 2011). Thus, as the American economy recovered, philanthropy and the nonprofit sector continued to develop as facets of American social, political, and economic life.

Many of the organizations that have existed since the early twentieth century, such as the YMCA, Girl Scouts, and the United Way, were not responsible for providing goods or services to the extent that nonprofit organizations do today. Before the 1980s, the nonprofit sector was not a major segment of the economy. In the early 1980s, attitudes towards the nonprofit sector began to shift among citizens and elected officials.
Previously, the nonprofit sector was considered the “voluntary sector,” which was primarily characterized by hospitals, social organizations, and long standing service organizations.

In 1980, the Regan administration in part encouraged a series of changes in the way that both the public and policy makers viewed the nonprofit sector. This “third sector” became responsible for delivering many goods and services that previously had been delivered by public agencies. The Reagan Administration encouraged privatization, public-private partnerships, and collaboration with the nonprofit sector. Many governors and mayors followed this lead. Reagan-era policy brought about privatization and an emphasis on meeting social needs through the nonprofit sector, rather than the expansion of government. These policies were based on the assumption that local organizations which are closer to the communities they serve, were better suited to deliver services. Moreover, entrusting provision for social needs to local organizations was thought to be more cost-effective; rather than raising taxes for state-run programs, this money would remain with the taxpayers, giving them greater opportunity to make charitable gifts to organizations which benefited their communities. Beyond these perceived cost benefits, it was believed that local organizations would be staffed with people who were passionate and dedicated to their communities, thus ensuring better service delivery than would be provided through a government agency. Thus, society became more dependent on this sector and the sector expanded its repertoire, diversifying and becoming more vibrant.

**Brief History of the Sector in Appalachia.** In the Appalachian region, the nonprofit sector has played an increasingly important role, providing goods and services, stimulating economic development, and influencing policy. As will be discussed in greater depth Chapter Three, Appalachia as a region has been economically
disadvantaged by extractive industries and a lack of development. The Appalachian counties of Southeastern Ohio that the organizations in this study serve are often some of the poorest counties in the state with high poverty and unemployment rates. These and other nonprofit organizations, alongside local and county government agencies, have had a positive impact on the region. Women nonprofit leaders have been part of the vision and direction shaping this impact.

Historically, corporate and major donor philanthropy has not been significant in the region. This is partially because there are few corporations are based in the region. Yet, the region has built success for many corporations over decades of resource extraction and other business ventures. Thus while there have been opportunities to make philanthropic investment in the region, few efforts have been made by the private sector to give back to the region and its residents. Instead, the Appalachian nonprofit sector has been fueled by local, grassroots organizations. The region’s nonprofit sector is an example of diverse and active social service, arts and cultural, environmental, and religious organizations. However, as is noted in this research, the track record of philanthropy in the region is beginning to change as foundation and fundraising organizations increasing cultivate major donors and corporate philanthropy. Three of the interviewees in this study are engaged in philanthropic efforts and are working to create a culture or philanthropy throughout the region they serve.

**Nonprofit Leadership.** As the non-profit sector continues to grow and develop, many scholars and practitioners are dedicating more energy to the study of non-profit leadership. As a segment of the leadership literature overall, non-profit leadership is a relatively new addition, but it is fast growing (see Gies, Ott, & Shafritz, 1990; Borst & Montana, 1977 for early nonprofit scholarship). Non-profit organizations are often associated with a collaborative, values-based leadership approach (Edwards, Yankey, &
Altpeter, 1998; Herman, 2005). Interestingly, these same characteristics are often the same as those associated with female styles of leadership (Banducci, 2005; Fletcher, 1999; Gilligan, 1982).

**Brief History of Women and the Nonprofit Sector.** Women have played key roles shaping the nonprofit sector through their employment, leadership, and volunteerism since the beginnings of the republic (Katz, 1986; Burbridge, 1994; Pynes, 2000; Nank, 2011). In its earliest stages, women were integral to the American nonprofit sector for their paid and unpaid work. Wealthy women further contributed by making substantial philanthropic gifts. They founded some of the first charities, settlement houses, and philanthropic efforts (Burbridge, 1994). Such women as Jane Addams who founded Chicago's Hull House was one such social innovator who introduced free services to help alleviate poverty in the slums. Scholars have made a strong case that women's work was critical role in the inception of the nonprofit sector, particularly related to “charity work, social welfare programs, and advocacy for the poor” (Katz, 1986; Burbridge, 1994). Furthermore, women’s participation in the nonprofit sector, as Renee Nank suggests, has "allowed women to increase their numbers in all sectors of the workforce and imbue them with greater influence in the political sphere" (2011). In sum, women's leadership in the nonprofit sector has provided a pathway into leadership in the public and private spheres.

The relationship of women to the nonprofit sector has been a noted dynamic in nonprofit scholarship for much of the development of this field of work. In the early 1990s, Teresa Odendahl and Michael O’Neill edited a compilation of research titled *Women & Power in the Nonprofit Sector* which explored the relative power of women in and through the nonprofit sector compared to their statistical representation in

“[Contributors of the book] argue that the nonprofit sector is ‘gendered female’: a large female work force is under the control of an elite male power structure; within the sector, occupations are distributed according to gender (doctors are male, nurses are female; men are financial offices, women are teachers; and so forth); the symbols, images, values, and typical activities of the sector are ‘female’ and ‘soft’ – providing service, being concerned with morality and ethics,... helping people.” (O’Neill, 1994)

The extent to which, twenty years later, gender dynamics in the nonprofit sector have not changed is surprising. In some ways, there remains “an elite male power structure” maintained by the gender disparity in leadership of the largest nonprofit organizations. In many parts of the sector, there is still a ‘traditional’ division of gender in which women are employees and lower-level managers while executives are men. The women interviewed for this research and the nonprofit sector in Appalachian Ohio are notable exceptions in this trend.

O’Neill concludes, “In the simplest terms, this book argues that the experience of 5 million women employees and 50 million women volunteers cannot be ignored. The nonprofit sector plays a major role in the lives of American women, and they play a major role in and through the nonprofit sector” (O’Neill, 1994). These numbers have increased over time, increasing women’s role in the sector. Today, there are many more women in nonprofit leadership positions, further increasing their influence. The work discusses many dynamics of women’s interaction with the nonprofit sector, including employment, wages, and organizational structure. Interestingly, these topics continue to be important aspects of women’s relationship to the nonprofit sector today. This thesis will examine such characteristics of the nonprofit sector as they impact the leadership experiences of the women interviewed for this study.
**Women as Leaders in the Nonprofit Sector.** The number of women-led nonprofit organizations grew substantially in the 1960s and 1970s, including such notable examples as the National Organization for Women and the nation’s first battered women’s shelter (Nank, 2011). The percentage of organizations run by women has been steadily increasing ever since (Dym & Hutson, 2005; Guidestar, 2013).

However, there is a persistent gender leadership gap in nonprofit organizations with larger staff and budgets. As noted by Nank, “Although research shows increased representation of women in leadership roles, gender disparity remains in terms of the size and types of nonprofit organizations where women hold executive positions” (2011). This trend was evident throughout the interviews conducted for this study. Several leaders cited the dearth of women leading larger agencies within their umbrella organization. However, since the organizations in rural Southeastern Ohio tend to be smaller than organizations in more urban areas of the state, this concentration of male leadership at the top is less evident in the Appalachian region. Furthermore, in a recent report on employment in the nonprofit sector, Guidestar reported that since 2001, the percentage of female CEOs has increased for organizations of all sizes (2013).

Additionally, the relationship of women to the nonprofit sector is important as an arena for the development of leadership knowledge. Women leading in this sector contribute to changing ideals of leadership practice, such as more collaborative and team-based approaches. Nonprofit scholars as well as many scholars of gender and leadership have cited that women leaders often have a more relational style of leadership, characterized by “knowing one another by values, vision, and commitment; connection...being ‘other’ or ‘we’ focused; a mutuality partnership model” (Banducci, 2005; see also Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fletcher, 1999; Gilligan, 1982).
However, because the dominant, executive culture has been male, female nonprofit executives have been discouraged from practicing relational styles of leadership and pressured to conform with ‘traditionally masculine models of management’ (Nank, 2011; Banducci, 2005). As is consistent with literature across sectors on women and leadership, “Women in executive-level positions in nonprofit organizations must balance multiple tensions with regard to their leadership and management styles” (Nank, 2011). Women face double-binds created by expectations of traditional, masculine models of leadership which are incongruent with culturally constructed ideals of femininity and even social expectations of femininity. In her article discussing women and the nonprofit sector, Renee Nank highlighted this issue, explaining that,

“Approaches to nonprofit management that center on professionalization and business practices emphasize hierarchy, achievement, and result. Management behaviors that are participatory, inclusive, and empathetic are often acknowledged as important to organizational success, and yet professional education, funder expectations, and board priorities are often incongruent with these values.” (Nank, 2011)

These pressures to be ‘business-like’ and emphasize professionalism were evident at various points throughout the interviews conducted for this study. Nank further noted that, “The tension here is exacerbated by the fact that graduate schools, nonprofit boards, and funders place a premium on values that focus on creating more business-like nonprofits by emphasizing entrepreneurship, the bottom line, and professionalization” (Nank, 2011).

This thesis helps to address this key issue in nonprofit leadership by demonstrating the effectiveness and success of women leaders who practice leadership styles that are collaborative and team-based. As the nonprofit sector develops and occupies an increasingly important space in our society, this is an important time for
research which contributes to the understanding of effective and impactful leadership in the sector.

With the framework of gender leadership and nonprofit leadership literature as a backdrop, this analysis of this research should be considered with the context of themes highlighted here. In addition to these bodies of literature, it is important to understand the historical context which informs the contemporary discussion of the geographic and cultural influences of Appalachia on these interviewees.
3. Background: A Brief History of Appalachia

The region of the United States that has come to be known as Appalachia is defined by the federal government as a 205,000 square mile geographic area following the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013b). Surprisingly, beyond the federal government’s designation, there is little else which ties this region together. “Appalachia” as the government defines it is a widely diverse region, encompassing economies, politics, and people that are as varied as the rest of the nation. Throughout history, Appalachia has been characterized as “other”; a region of the country in which the people, politics, and socio-economic problems were thought of as different and separate from the rest of the United States (Harrington, 1981; Eller, 2008). Only in the last 50 years has there been a shift in the academic and political understanding of Appalachia to one that recognizes the challenges faced in Appalachia as the challenges we face as a nation (Eller, 2008).

The changes that have taken place in Appalachia in the past five decades are largely positive, both for the people who live in the region and the nation. Education, health care, infrastructure, business enterprise, environment and food security have all received significant investment from the public and non-profit sectors through efforts ranging from policy initiatives at the federal level to grassroots volunteer mobilization. The landscape of Appalachia reflects these efforts; revitalization, stability and prosperity are evident in many parts of the region. Yet, many parts of the region, particularly small towns and rural areas, still lag national averages in health, education, housing stability, income, and employment (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013).

These economic and social indicators have had a significant impact on the people and culture of the region. For example, extractive industries, controlled by outside
actors, that stripped the land of resources and wealth left local economies without the natural capital needed to renew production and regional wealth (Harper, 2000). Beyond handicapping local economic development, the ramifications of resource extraction on the social and cultural development of the region were equally great. The impact of industry on the people and environment of the region is an important component of the cultural history and development of Appalachia. As Harper writes,

“Unable to solve structural deficits in the economy, often men and women assumed personal failure as the cause of their poverty. Viewed as a culture of poverty, the perception of Appalachians is that of socially dysfunctional and economically dependent people with values that are counterproductive to social mobility. This perspective blames the victim and ignores the regional context and subculture values.” (Harper, 2000)

Thus, while personal hardship continues to influence the lives of many men and women in the region today, they are also influence by stereotypes and outside assumptions about the region’s culture and capacity for development. Some authors suggest that Appalachian culture has developed “strong familial boundaries and kinship systems” in order to insulate and protect against external prejudice and hardship which have historically been imposed by externally managed companies and industries, and poverty (Harper, 2000).

As is relevant to the particular focus of this thesis on women’s experiences in the region, there has been some research which explored the cultural and social experiences of women who live in Appalachia. Recent literature notes that as the region diversifies, “Many differences exist among women in the region creating broad social diversity that further divides the sisterhood of women in Appalachia” (Harper, 2000). The author references the theme of insider/outsider relations which was apparent through the experiences of the interviewees in this study. Harper’s discussion of women’s experiences continues, as she notes the need for “changes in the traditional
discriminatory practices toward women in the workplace and in attitudes toward women's economic value in general” in rural American, and particularly conservative Appalachian America (Harper, 2000). The empowerment of women is important to maximize social, economic, and political potential in the region. Authors who have explored women’s experiences in Appalachia conclude that further research is needed into the lives, experiences, and expectations surrounding these women in order to more fully understand the region and opportunities for empowerment (Harper, 2000; see also Smith, 1998).

**Overview of Appalachian History**

Appalachian studies scholar, Eller observes,

“Appalachia endures as a paradox in American society in part because it plays a critical role in the discourse of national identity but also because the region’s struggle with modernity reflects a deeper American failure to define progress in the first place. For more than a century, Appalachia has provided a challenge to modern conceptions of the American dream.” (Eller, 2008)

Appalachia was not always publicized and politicized as a venue for social and economic policy. Rather the mountainous region was largely ignored by federal and state government, leaving corporate power in the region unregulated and un-taxed while public entities were underfunded, where they existed at all. Over time, national attention has turned to the region and gradually more resources have been directed to solving the region’s challenges and fostering development. These efforts have not always been successful or designed with the interests of Appalachians at heart. In fact, historically, policies served to maintain the political status quo and increase economic disparities. Even when Congress and the federal government turned its attention to Appalachia’s particular problems, initially funding passed into the hands of local political machines and did little to alleviate destitution. Eller writes,

“Programs such as the War on Poverty and the ARDA reflect broadly held attitudes about progress within and outside the region, attitudes that are
grounded in the received assumptions about development that have limited the dialogue and potential for alternative paths and outcomes.” (Eller, 2008)

He exemplifies by explaining that the expansion of mining produced short-term employment, but when unregulated, caused environmental damage (Eller, 2008). As organizations such as community action agencies spread throughout the region, there was a push from outside the sector for low-income people to be involved in the development of anti-poverty initiatives. Gradually, a shift was made toward more grassroots and locally based services and strategies. Today, efforts are increasing to build policy from the ground up, relinquishing control to community-level organizations, and encouraging representation of the interests of all members of the community.

**Appalachian History Pre-1960s: From Settlement to Reinvestment**

The history of the region has been characterized by struggle and perseverance.

From the settlement of the region to the 1960s, the people who live in the region have had a close relationship with the land on which they live. Characteristics of the land have shaped the population, their values, and their economy.

In the late 1700s, the early settlers of the Appalachian region were primarily English and Scottish peasants. Unlike the settlers of the New England territories who came to the New World by choice as ideological pilgrims, many of these backcountry settlers came through forcible kidnaping, indentureship, or obligation to repay their debts (Caudill, 1963). In order to escape brutal plantation work, many forged their way into the backcountry, away from the coast to the hilly interior lands. Thus the Appalachian frontier was settled first by the descendants of impoverished laborers, sentenced by the Crown to labor under wealth-hungering planters, who sought out the isolation of the woods for the prospect of an independent life (Caudill, 1963). Living miles apart from their nearest neighbors, some families of these original “Southern mountaineers” lived for generations off of the plentiful game and fertile soil even before
expeditions like those of Daniel Boone led to the establishment of formal community settlements (Caudill, 1963). After the Revolutionary War, there was an influx of settlers to the region as the Continental Congress offered free land as payment to soldiers for their service (Caudill, 1963).

The economy of Appalachia began as little more than rural farms clustered in valleys. The first inhabitants of the Appalachian mountain valleys did not implement growing practices that were intended to raise commercial crops. Instead, there was a culture of subsistence. Farms were kept to raise just enough to feed a family, and hunting and fishing were important parts of mountain life. There was a culture of living off the land that became deeply rooted in Appalachian families (O’Brien, 2001).

Appalachian scholar, Ronald Eller, describes the relationship of the land and culture:

“Rural mountain residents have always been close to the land, although that closeness was reflected more in strong ties to family and place than to any ethic to preserve the land. Hard work and large families were important not only to survival on the land but to shaping a way of life around it” (Eller, 2008).

Civil War Period in Appalachia. The outbreak of Civil War brought turmoil to the region as counties and families divided and joined warring armies. The mountain region’s residents fought on both sides: some were slave owners themselves and fought to defend their livelihood, others were too poor to own slaves and were resentful of the success of their slave-owning neighbors, still others fought for reasons of morality to end human bondage (Caudill, 1963, p38). West Virginia was admitted as a state to the Union as fifty counties in northwestern Virginia seceded from the Confederate state to join the Union (West Virginia Division of Culture and History). The new state was a key border state during the war. In fact, much of the region experienced multiple battles as Confederate and Union forces struggled to control the area, destroying many mountain communities. The war had a particularly severe impact on the mountain region. Nearly
the entire population was impacted by the war as heavy losses on both sides took lives from most families. Many family networks were torn after having fought and lost family members on opposing sides. The economic ramifications of the conflict were particularly devastating as well. Because there was little accumulated wealth to begin, the war caused such heavy losses in lives and property that virtually the entire population was impoverished (Caudill, 1963).

However, rural communities in Appalachia recovered quickly in the decades after the Civil War. From 1865 to 1885, the region, and particularly the southern Appalachians, had some of the most prosperous farming in the country (O’Brien, 2001). Livestock and agriculture were shipped out to feed cities like Richmond, Baltimore and Washington (O’Brien, 2001). By 1860, railroads were slowly beginning to make cuts into the mountain region making it possible to transport goods to industrializing cities in the South and New England. The arrival of the railroads was a significant change in the relationship of the Appalachian mountain region with the outside country. No longer was the hilly backcountry a little-noticed wilderness. Rather the territory’s natural resource wealth drew the attention of many who saw the opportunity for economic gain.

**The 1910s to 1930s.** In the years following the Civil War, the United States was swept up in a wave of industrialization. The coming of industry to the Appalachian region began gradually, but rapidly grew and spread, bringing unprecedented change and growth to the region. Over the course of the next fifty years, Appalachia would experience the boom of industry, as well as harsh economic downturns. But despite the wealth that came from the region’s resources, almost none of the economic gains would benefit the region or be sustained after industry declined.

Timber was the first major regional export. Mountain residents had been logging in small quantities for decades, but these local operations were swallowed up by larger
companies as the railroads created access to the mountain hardwood forests. The price of timber was low, driving loggers to cut more trees, faster as time went on, destroying innumerable acres of forest.

The turn of the century marked a significant shift in the industry of Appalachia. The mineral wealth of the region had been known as far back as George Washington’s mapping expeditions of the Ohio Valley, but it was not until the early 1900s that mining began. Once the rich deposits of coal were accessible through modernized/mechanized techniques, the industry attracted fortune-seekers from around the country. What started as small mining operations were soon absorbed into corporate conglomerates, run by men who were outsiders to the region.

The greed of these coal kings was insatiable; their only goal was to increase profits through low production costs. The harsh working conditions of the coal mines did not deter thousands of men, both natives, outsiders, and recent immigrants from flocking to the coal towns for work. The living conditions of company mining towns were substandard; work in the mines was hazardous. But there were no other jobs in the region and wages were so low that miners could not make enough to leave the region.

When the 1929 stock market crash rocked the national economy and spiraled into depression, Appalachia was dealt a staggering blow. The coal mining industry, already weakened after World War I, continued to decline. Coal mines shut down and thousands of miners were left unemployed. Poverty in Appalachia during the Great Depression was extreme. According to Eller, “Federal relief programs of one kind or another supported almost half of the mountain population in the 1930s, but the deepening economic crisis of the 1950s further expanded welfare rolls and altered the fundamental character of dependence” (2008). When the United States joined World
War II, the economy was revitalized through war-time mobilization and manufacturing. The war created a demand for coal that brought the industry back to life. It also led to many employment opportunities outside of the region, causing many young people to leave the Appalachian region for work in urban centers (Eller, 2008).

Although wartime mobilization helped pull the nation out of depression, it did not have the same rejuvenating impact in Appalachia as in other parts of the country. Because coal dominated the region, “a single industry economy frustrated the diversification of local enterprises,” and “resources continued to be owned by outside corporations and non-resident interests” (Eller, 2008, p15). Thus, in the 1940s, the Appalachian mountain region experienced “growth without development” (Eller, 2008, p11). The region experienced a rapid increase in jobs and in the capacity to extract natural resources, but this growth came without the “capacity to sustain prosperity” (Eller, 2008). As a result of this economic boom and bust, between 1940 and 1970, over 3 million people left Appalachia seeking economic refuge in Midwestern cities (Eller, 2008).

This period of industrial development was a transformative moment in Appalachian history. The industrialization of the regional economy, without regional gain, stunted any growth that may have been possible. Because the workforce was absorbed by one industry, there was no diversification, and when that industry failed – for laborers and then altogether – the region was left with no alternative sources of income. The rise of the coal industry in Appalachia bound itself to the future of the region. As John O’Brien, a West Virginia native, explains in his reflections on the region’s past, “Both coal and timber operations ravaged enormous portions of the mountain landscape as well as subsistence cultures that had survived peacefully for more than a hundred years” (O’Brien, 2001, 63). Throughout Appalachia’s history, exploitation at the
hands of outside interests has been a major theme. As the region moved into the second half of the twentieth century, there was growing recognition of the impact of these extractive and absentee industries and an increasing demand for targeted relief for the region.

**Poverty and Appalachia: 1960s to 1980s**

**The 1960s: Rising awareness about the state of Appalachia.** In the 1960s, poverty became a focal issue in American politics. In particular, the extreme poverty of Appalachian attracted national attention. Through the works of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* and Henry Caudill’s *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, the realities and tragedies of the mountain region were vividly described (Ziliak, 2012). These portrayals of Appalachian poverty were a call to action for many in the region.

Political leadership throughout the region recognized the opportunity to make their case on the national level. State governors in the region formed an Appalachian coalition in order to collectively pursue support for the interests of their region. For the governors, inadequate funding and bureaucratic barriers had frustrated previous attempts to address the problems of poverty. The coalition of governors was “convinced that special federal assistance was necessary to accomplish their goals for the region” (Eller, 2008). They argued that the Appalachian region faced problems that were severe and unique to the area (Eller, 2008); the region’s problems were now beyond the capacity of local communities and state governments to address.

The Conference of Regional Governors was officially established in 1960 and consisted of eight state governors. The goal of the Conference was to effectively address the pervasive economic and social problems of the region (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013a) by petitioning the federal government for targeted regional support. The next year, the Governors’ Conference took their case to Washington
In newly-elected President Kennedy, Appalachia found an ally. During campaign trips to West Virginia, Kennedy had been deeply moved by the poverty he saw in West Virginia (ARC, 2013). The president was open to the proposals of the Governor's Conference and encouraged them to develop a formal proposal for a regional development plan. In 1963, under the President's direction, a federal-state committee was formed known as the President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC). The commission was to draw up "a comprehensive program for the economic development of the Appalachian Region" (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013a). After President Kennedy's assassination, the future of PARC fell to President Johnson. Fortunately for the future of Appalachia, Johnson took up the issue and established his own plan for.

**Politics of Poverty.** In the mid-1960s, the state of the economy and education in Appalachia combined to create destitute conditions and a cycle of poverty in which trapped families for generations. According to the Appalachia Regional Commission (ARC), one in every three Appalachians lived in poverty (2013). High unemployment and harsh living conditions had, in the 1950s, forced more than 2 million Appalachians to leave their homes and seek work in other regions (ARC, 2013). Per capita income was 23 percent lower than the U.S. average (ARC, 2013). Particularly in the Central Appalachian region, per capita income in these counties lagged not only the nation as a whole, but even neighboring Northern Appalachian counties by $2,800 per person. Part of the reason for the deep poverty of Central Appalachia was due to high school completion rates, which were about 17 percent in 1960 (this was 20 percent lower than the rest of the country) (Ziliak, 2012). In this socio-economic environment President Johnson and the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) began efforts at the federal level to alleviate these hardships.
Johnson used the PARC report as the basis to develop legislation. With bipartisan support, the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA) was submitted to Congress in 1964. The act passed early the next year by a broad bipartisan coalition thus establishing the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The initial congressional appropriation to ARC was about $1.1 billion and about three-fourths of this amount was dedicated to highway construction (Ziliak, 2012). This initial investment seemed to be a small effort compared to the high levels of poverty in the region, but President Johnson and Congress were simultaneously enacting other human development programs that were intended to expand the social safety net (Ziliak, 2012). In 1964, the president launched his War on Poverty initiative and introduced food stamps, Medicaid, Medicare, Head Start, and other targeted programs for low-income populations that greatly changed the landscape of governmental support available to states, communities, and individuals.

While the War on Poverty was a nationwide initiative, the Appalachian region received special focus as a particularly vulnerable and destitute region. The region was perceived as “backward” and in need of significant investment in order to catch up to the standards of the rest of the nation. Johnson made several trips to Appalachia to meet with the Governors’ Conference and promote the “war on poverty” policies. But during these trips he also saw the poverty of the region first-hand and was energized in his own commitment to the region’s development.

While the intentions of anti-poverty initiatives like those implemented during the Johnson administration were somewhat effective in infusing impoverished areas with resources, these policies did not alleviate need to the intended extent. The War on Poverty certainly increased the amount of funding available to states and communities, but the programs they funded did not necessarily meet the needs of low-income people.
in Appalachian communities. This disconnect was rooted both in flaws in the policy approaches themselves and in their implementation (Eller, 2008).

The War on Poverty’s policies reflected two popular strains of thought in the post-Cold War era: economic growth theory and human capital theory (Eller, 2008). Johnson’s anti-poverty strategy focused on economic development and creating job opportunities. In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), a pillar of War on Poverty policy. The Act emphasized the need for education as the means to end the cycle of poverty, and it established community action agencies to coordinate community services to combat poverty at the local level (Eller, 2008). As President Johnson said at the time, the Act was meant to offer a “hand up” instead of “hand outs” (Eller, 2008). For some, this ideology did not translate into assistance that was direct enough to create real impact on the circumstances of low income people. Appalachian scholar Ronald Eller describes Appalachia’s relationship with Johnson-era politics as “a pawn in a great national experiment that sought to eradicate poverty without confronting the specific institutional and economic structures that abused the region in the first place” (2008). For others, the legislation was an exciting opportunity for grassroots community development.

The creation of community action agencies was determined on a state-by-state basis and in some states, such as West Virginia, there was to be an agency in every county so that the federal monies that flowed through the state would be distributed to every community. Federal funding for antipoverty programs was eagerly received by the network of organizations of “missionaries, academics, social workers, philanthropists, and college students” that had come to the region as volunteers, eager to bring social justice to the region. This network of people already in the region provided
a ready vehicle for launching antipoverty initiatives in communities and institutions throughout Appalachia (Eller, 2008).

At first, the well-intended legislation did not fall into the hands of a well-intended volunteer network, but rather federal funding was channeled through the existing state and local level political machines. These political leaders had no objections to more money for services being flowed through them, as long as the existing institutions and organizations they controlled maintained their power. Essentially, the impact of increased funding was neutralized because there was no institutional or organizational change at the local level. Eventually, there was a shift in federal administration and outside volunteers began to pressure community action agencies to include poor people on their boards and directly fund grassroots initiatives. This shift finally enabled local people “to question the service delivery approach and to challenge assumptions on which it was based” about how best to provide assistance to low-income individuals and families (Eller, 2008).

The socio-economic and political changes which took place in Appalachia were largely driven by grassroots organizations. Although federal funding and policies were the catalyst for these changes, ultimately local organizers were responsible for engaging communities and propelling development efforts. These organizations “were more likely to challenge the local political and economic system by establishing cooperative businesses, creating community-based housing and health care programs, and questioning the decisions of school boards and county governments” (Eller, 2008, 109). By 1972, the War on Poverty was waning, but many of the programs which it produced have remained permanent features of the federal, state and local service structure.

While President Johnson’s War on Poverty initiatives were struggling at the state and local levels, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was embarking on its
mission to establish stability and economic development in the region. At its core, the ARC existed to “address the persistent poverty and growing economic despair of the Appalachian region” (ARC, 2013). Based on the PARC report and the ARDA, the ARC would set about fulfilling this mission with four primary goals: increasing job opportunities and per capita income in Appalachia; strengthening the capacity of the people of Appalachia to compete in the global economy; developing and improving Appalachia’s infrastructure to make the Region economically competitive; and building the Appalachian Development Highway System to reduce Appalachia’s isolation (ARC, 2013).

Critics of the ARC believe that the agency was just a bureaucracy, dictating policy from outside the region and complicating community-specific programs. Eller describes the ARC as “conceived of idealism and compromise ... a mixture of popular ideas wrapped in the vagaries of the national politics and intellectual trends of their day” (Eller, 2008). However, there is some agreement in the region agree that the ARC has made positive and desperately needed investment in the region.

The 1970s to 1990s. As anti-poverty initiatives gained momentum moving into the 1970s, Appalachia again became a focal point of industry in the United States when the 1973 energy crisis caused explosive growth in the coal industry. The oil export embargo by many of the major Mid-Eastern oil-producing nations as a response to American support of Israel caused coal to resurge as the demand for energy skyrocketed. But just as before, the extractive industry left Appalachia worse than before, creating jobs for a period of time, but simultaneously taking the resources and their profits out of the region for the benefit of outside corporations. When the energy market stabilized and oil prices returned to lower prices, coal corporations once again pulled out of the
region, leaving jobless people and a ravaged environment behind. The Appalachian economy slumped and poverty levels increased.

In 1980, the election of President Reagan signified a downsizing across the federal government. The ARC was in danger of being eliminated entirely (Eller, 2008). Recognizing the political transition as a threat to the agency and to the region, the Governor’s Conference petitioned Congress and the new president to maintain the office, or to at least allow for a period of reduced funding to “phase-out” current programs operating in the region (Eller, 2008). The Governors were somewhat successful; as budget cuts came down, the ARC’s funding was cut severely, but the agency was able to phase out some programs and able to fund others, primarily the Appalachian Development Highway System, to completion. The agency continued to try to carry out its initiatives with the limited funding it now received from the federal government. But as the ARC and state governments looked for funding from other sources, resources were limited across the federal government for housing, health care, and other community infrastructure programs.

As a result of these funding cuts, the ARC made the completion of the Appalachian Development Highway System its first priority, leaving other programs to seek funding from other sources (Eller, 2008). However, state governments were also affected in their ability to provide services as a result of the federal budget reductions; their ability “to respond to the needs of mountain communities well” was curtailed. In this dire funding situation, the ARC and the Governors’ of Appalachia approached Congress with a plan to establish an endowment or foundation for Appalachia. They believed that there were corporations in the region who would support an endowment fund in order to give back to communities they had so grossly exploited in the past (Eller, 2008). Through the endowment, the governors hoped to permanently sustain the work
of the ARC on foundation dollars rather than federal monies. Congress accepted the plan and an office in Washington was established. However, the new Appalachian Development Foundation failed to raise any corporate support. As summarized by Henry Caudill, the Foundation failed to raise a "tittle of corporate responsibility" (Eller, 2008). The companies that had so badly scared the face of the mountains did not budge to invest in the region's improvement.

For the remainder of the decade, coal mining continued to decline and then all but disappear. As the industry was increasingly mechanized, there was a decline in union membership and a loss of jobs. The 1990s were a period of economic growth across the nation. In Appalachian, as in the rest of the country, the gap between the rich and the poor grew substantially. New job opportunities in the trade and services sectors were often far away and paid lower wages than union jobs. Thus as families replaced unemployment with lower paying service jobs, the poverty level rose. Furthermore, the new service economy was more female than the fading industrial economy as women moved into the workforce to earn some of the income no longer being brought into the household by their husbands (Eller, 2008). Although some women certainly went to work for other reasons, many joined the workforce out of necessity. This shift in breadwinner relations caused a shift in gender relations. For some women, working outside of the home led to conflict inside the home as unemployed spouses were resentful or unsupportive (Latimer & Oberhauser, 2004; Oberhauser, 1995; Seitz, 1995). Underneath a widening economic and social gap, grassroots and nonprofit organizations continued to do their work in the region.

Modern Appalachia: 2000s to Today

Since the turn of the millennium, a “new Appalachia” has emerged as a result of the efforts of the past 30-40 years. The region is more connected to the rest of the
country than ever before because of transportation infrastructure, access to technology, and the global economy. The quality of life has improved for many in the region through access to hospitals and clinics, colleges and technical schools, and jobs in the service sector economy. Many of these improvements have been funded by the ARC and are a testament to the agency’s regional impact (Eller, 2008). As a result, there has been improvement across the region in measures of socio-economic performance.

Undoubtedly, these are positive changes. However, the region now faces a growing division between the “new Appalachia” and the “old Appalachia.” There are new concerns about the gap “between the mountain middle-class and working class people, between rural places and suburban communities, and between local families and neo-Appalachians” (Eller, 2008). The politics of place and identity are in flux as stability and development in some areas collides with extreme poverty and scarcity in others. As evidence, the region “still lags the rest of the country in measures of income, health, education, and job security” (Eller, 2008). These disparities are an agenda for economic and political action. However, they also are areas in which local organizations and agencies, largely from the nonprofit sector, have focused their attention, seeking local level solutions to these issues in their communities.

Nationally, Appalachia is “no longer...defined primarily by poverty and cultural backwardness; [it has] become a symbol of the larger dilemma of people’s relationship to the land and responsibilities to each other” (Eller, 2008). The author expresses the trend of the importance of such issues as environmental awareness and renewable energy in Appalachia as the platform for the national discussion of these issues.

**Appalachian Ohio**

Appalachian Ohio shares in the narrative of the broader Appalachian region. There are 32 counties in Ohio designated by the ARC as Appalachian. These counties are
concentrated in the Southeastern portion of the state, following the Ohio River from the outskirts of Cincinnati all the way north to Lake Erie. The Appalachian region of Ohio faces many of the same challenges as are characteristic throughout the region. The southeastern part of the state faces higher levels of unemployment and poverty, as well as lower levels of education. The historical narrative of the Appalachian region at large is very much true for Appalachian Ohio as well.

In 1986, the Ohio legislator recognized the need for a central organization to coordinate economic and community development initiatives and partnerships, and to advocate for the region’s interests. The Governor’s Office of Appalachia was established to play a role much like that of the ARC at the federal level, to coordinate partnerships for economic and community development to improve the lives of those living in the region (Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, 2013). The office works to execute the Appalachian Regional Commission’s four goals in Ohio (Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, 2013).

The Governor’s Office of Appalachia established Local Development Districts throughout the region to coordinate the efforts of local organizations and agencies. In each district, the Office provides advice to communities about possible funding sources and methods to address regional challenges, acting as a liaison to connect people and resources. The Office also distributes federal funding from the ARC and state funding earmarked for the region. The goal of the work of the Office is to “strengthen and prepare local communities for job growth through strategic investments in infrastructure and public facilities and to support programs that position the region for business attraction, retention, and expansion” (Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, 2013).
Much of the work of the Office of Appalachia has an economic development focus. However, in many cases, economic development strategies are difficult to implement because basic components of infrastructure, such as water, electricity, highway transportation and internet access, are lacking or underdeveloped. It is important that the agenda for regional development be set by the interests of residents of the region, and not by state or federal interests that are not principally focused on improving the standards of living for the population. In many parts of the region, organizations such as community action agencies and other locally-based development organizations are successfully implementing programs that meet the needs of food, housing, education, and access to health care, as well as working to create job opportunities in the region.

Where We Are Now

Today, Appalachia continues to develop – in a way that is unique to the region. Activists, politicians, organizers, and legislators have discovered that solutions that work best in Appalachia come from the ground, up. This does not always mean that policy is crafted or implemented in this way, but the role of Appalachian residents in Appalachian development has increased.

From the federal level, the ARC continues to work for sustainable communities and economic development in the region in order to improve the lives of residents. In recent years, ARC projects have focused on business development, telecommunications and technology infrastructure and use, educational attainment, access to health care, tourism development, and the construction of development highways and basic water and waste management facilities (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013b). Similar projects have been completed in Ohio by the state agency, improving access to education, health, and jobs in many communities.
But despite progress, Appalachia still does not enjoy the same economic vitality as the rest of the nation; Appalachian Ohio remains the poorest region in the state. Pockets of high poverty, unemployment, poor health, and severe educational disparities are concentrated in isolated communities where access to resources remains scarce (Appalachian Regional Commission, 2013b). For the future, these rural communities, where the old Appalachia still exists, need the attention and energy of their neighbors. Organizations and leaders of communities where revitalization has been successful, need to connect impoverished neighboring areas to resources and opportunities for collaboration so that the disparities of wealth, education, health, and opportunity to do continue to widen, unchecked by community efforts. Even today, “residents of Appalachia ... suffer from deficits in human capital and health capital” (Ziliak, 2012).

Data from the American Community Survey collected from 2007 to 2011 demonstrates the disparities which still exist between Appalachian regions and other parts of the country. In Appalachia, 16.5 percent of the people have less than a high school diploma which is 2 percent higher than the nation overall (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). In “rural” Appalachian counties, those not adjacent to a metro area, 24 percent of people do not have a high school diploma (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). This demonstrates that rural communities face particularly severe problems related to poverty.

In Appalachian counties of Ohio, 15.3 percent of the population has less than a high school diploma, showing that graduation rates are slightly better in Ohio’s Appalachian region than parts of the region in other states (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). However, in Appalachian Ohio 61.9 percent of the population has a high school diploma, but no post-secondary degree, whereas in the state as a whole is 55.8 percent of the population does not have a post-secondary degree (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013).
Indicators of income and poverty level also show some disparity between Appalachian counties and counties outside the region. For example, the Median Household Income (MHI) for the United States was $9,408 more than the MHI in Appalachia (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). The difference was slightly less, about $6,144, when comparing Ohio to Appalachian counties of Ohio (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). In Appalachian Ohio, 16.7 percent of people live below the poverty level which is about 2 percent more than the portion of people below the poverty level in the state as a whole (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). However, the portion of people living below the poverty line is concentrated at a much higher percentage in some counties of southeastern Ohio. Over the 2007 to 2011 period, about one in six Appalachian residents lived below the poverty level, meaning their income was below $22,811 for a family of four. Poverty levels in Appalachia are higher than they were in the 2000 Census, likely incomes in the post-recession recovery period have not yet fully return to pre-recession levels (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013).

The economy of Appalachia continues to change. Regional infrastructure has developed allowing easier flow of goods and services throughout the region. As a result, the region's population has access to resources for healthcare, education, as well as the spectrum of consumer products and services. The regional economy has become globalized and is much more connected to the mainstream national economy. Southeastern Ohio has become an incubator of environmental, technological, agricultural, and small business economies which have sprouted in pockets of the rural region.

From this background of the region, it is evident that Appalachia as a geographic and cultural location is undergoing many changes. Shifts are occurring in economic growth, environmental policies, and social dynamics. It is within this historical context
and contemporary circumstances that the nonprofit leaders interviewed in this study operate and lead. Many of the regional challenges and opportunities discussed here have a direct impact on the daily work of these leaders in their communities. Moving into the analysis of the interviews, it is important to have this background as the framework in which the experiences of these leaders is understood.
4. Becoming a Leader: Paths to Leadership

Although women leaders remain underrepresented across the public and private sectors (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Catalyst, 2013) in Appalachian Ohio the picture looks differently. Here, several prominent nonprofits in Southeastern Ohio are led by women. In the nonprofit sector overall, women represent a large portion of executive directors (Guidestar, 2013; Nank; 2011). Through these interviews, we gain perspective into the lives of these women as they have become and have developed as leaders. This perspective allows for comparison of the events and experiences that led to leadership which are similar among the interviewees. In addition, certain individual experiences among the interviewees stand out as significant to the overall understanding of how one becomes a leader in the nonprofit sector and Appalachian region.

The leadership experiences of these women nonprofit leaders contribute to the discussion of gender and leadership as well as nonprofit leadership. There is a great amount of literature in each of these individual fields of research, but not nearly as much work explores the intersection of the two, how gender influences nonprofit leadership (see Nank, 2011; Banducci, 2005; Pynes, 2000). The literature review in Chapter Two provides an overview of each of these bodies of work. In particular, it highlights writing that deals with both gender and nonprofit leadership. By analyzing the nine leadership interviews, this work contributes to the conversation about gender and nonprofit leadership and the extent to which these factors influence individual leaders.

Leadership Paths

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the interviewees’ pathways to leadership, the events and experiences leading up to their current position as directors/executives. It will address the similarities and differences among the interviews in order to show the extent to which commonalities seem to contribute to the development of leaders in the
nonprofit sector of the Appalachian region. With these women as examples, this thesis contributes a new layer of detail to the understanding of how women have become leaders in the region. The next chapter will discuss how the interviewees’ approaches to leadership and will look with greater detail at their leadership practices, beliefs and frameworks.

This thesis is interested in probing how these women arrived in their leadership positions and what kinds of approaches to leadership have they taken. This chapter will focus on the path to becoming a leader, exploring the events and experiences which allowed these interviewees to assume positions of leadership. From the evidence presented in the interviews, this chapter examines whether and to what extent there are common experiences of women leading non-profit organizations in Southeastern Ohio. Conversely, it examines whether and to what extent there are differences among the women leaders. These questions will be addressed across the different sections of this chapter.

This research question evolved out of contemporary scholarship on gender and leadership which has increasingly focused on the pathways through which individuals become leaders. Recent literature which explores causes of gender disparity in leadership focuses on the obstacles for women throughout their careers, rather than focusing on only challenges blocking them from the highest ranks (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Jamieson, 1995; Kellerman & Rhodes, 2007; Ridgeway, 2011; Sandberg, 2013; Wilson, 2007).

There was a shift in the gender and leadership scholarship around 1990 to 2000 from focusing on structural barriers to women’s advancement to barriers on the path to leadership, such as the socialization of gender and demands of maternity. Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s work on double-binds (1995) focuses on dichotomous barriers which
surround all professional women; barriers do not solely exist at the upper echelons of organizations. These dilemmas created by socially constructed expectations of women face them at many turns along the route to leadership. In this chapter, several double-binds evidenced in the interviews will frame the analysis, primarily the binds of femininity/competence and aging/invisibility. Jamieson’s binds are described fully in the literature review (see Chapter Two).

Eagly and Carli’s *Through the Labyrinth* contributed substantially to the literature’s focus on barriers along the path to leadership. The purpose of their work was to change the conversation by providing a new metaphor and psychological research on the barriers women face on the path to leadership: from the glass ceiling to the labyrinth of challenges that women face to assuming a position of leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Through the labyrinth metaphor, women are able to conceptualize their experiences and the barriers they have faced in a way that is representative of current career paths, which are not straight up a hierarchy ladder, and of current barriers, which begin from childhood gender socialization and persist even when a woman has achieved success.

Also in 2007, Barbara Kellerman and Debora Rhodes provided an update on the most recent research surrounding barriers to gender equity in leadership. They found that traditional gender stereotypes and inadequate access to mentors and support networks, both pathway-related problems, along with inflexible workplace structures and policies, which make it difficult to establish work-life balance, were the most significant barriers women face to leadership. The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that these barriers are true to the experiences of these interviewees.

Most recently, Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In* provided a current look at the route to leadership for women (2013). The book served as both a narrative of her personal
experiences and the impetus for a renewed nation-wide conversation about gender-related challenges along the path to leadership today. She discusses the challenges women face in achieving a work-life balance and the role of workplace policies in that balance (Sandberg, 2013). Additionally, she emphasizes the internal barriers that many women face, such a lack of confidence, and the social shifts needed to change women’s personal expectations and social expectations of women (Sandberg, 2013). Notably, Sandberg’s work was mentioned several times by interviewees. At least two of them have read the book, and another mentioned the social reaction it has created. Among these leaders, the work is an impetus for reflection on one’s own experiences.

Relatedly, in her article about changing gender dynamics in Appalachia, Karen Harper expresses that women’s self-images are becoming more empowered and the process of this emergence (2000). She writes, “Self-images of Appalachian women are as numerous as the women themselves. Yet, there is limited understanding of the influences and experiences in the lives of Appalachian women that open pathways for new understanding of ‘self’ to emerge” (Harper, 2000). The number of women leading in the nonprofit sector exemplify how empowered understandings of ‘self’ have emerged. From the nonprofit sector, lessons can be learned which can be applied to other sectors. This interview analysis will explore the life and career experiences of women who have become leaders in the Appalachian region.

The nine individuals represented here have each traveled their own paths to their current leadership position; to a great extent, no two are the same. However, there are certain similarities and themes which occur frequently across the interviews. These themes structure this chapter, beginning with the discussion of education and prior work experiences that consequently shaped their career choices. Many interviewees came to discover a particular passion through epiphany moments during these early
career experiences. Mentor relationships were other formative experiences. Interestingly, both positive and negative mentorship experiences offered the interviewees unique opportunities for leadership growth. However, the perceived importance of gender in mentorship relationships varies among the interviewees. Two themes stand out from the interviews: female mentors provide role models for younger women to look up to and see themselves. However, a strictly female-to-female mentorship network is dangerous because it limits the expectations for men and women of the kind of roles and leadership styles they could feel. Gender should never be an exclusive factor for mentorship.

The chapter then transitions to the discussion of the interaction between gender and leadership in the public and private spheres, the latter being discussed in the following chapter on approaches and styles of leadership. Private sphere influences on leadership include significant life events, such as marriage and having children, as well as the continual process of balancing work and life outside of work. The impact of these experiences on leadership is examined through the lens of gender.

Common Experiences Shaping Leadership Development

This section will begin by discussing common experiences among the interviewees on the path to leadership. These are events and experiences along the career path that prepared these women for leadership roles. Presented below are career path experiences that over half (at least five) of the interviewees have shared. During the interviews, some of these events and experiences were talked about as important to achieving their current leadership position while others seem to merely be similarities among these women.

**Education and Work Experience.** Among the interviewees, there were several commonly shared education and work experiences. Seven of the interviewees earned
their bachelor degrees from Ohio University, a large state university in Athens County. Two of these interviewees were raised in the region, the other five came to the region to attend the university. Additionally, seven interviewees hold a Master’s degree (two women have two) from Ohio University. From this data, it seems that education is important for cultivating leaders and opening doors to opportunities for leaders.

Another commonality exists between interviewee’s work experience prior to their current position. Five interviewees served as the executive director of at least one other organization prior to holding their current position. There is some evidence from the interviewees that having been an executive director before caused them to want to be a director again. One woman remarked, “I think that did become clearer to me when I was in Baltimore that I wanted to be an exec director, run an organization (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

Perhaps even more important on the path to their current leadership position are the internship and volunteer experiences of these women that have inspired them to follow become leaders. Seven of the nine women interviewed connect their current position directly to an internship or volunteer position that they had which inspired their interest in the work they are doing today.

For five of these women, this internship or volunteer experience was a critical moment in their understanding of themselves and the career path they would follow. Sociologist Norman Denzin defines such moments as epiphany moments: “Epiphanies are interactional moments and experiences which leave marks on people’s lives. In them, personal character is manifested...They alter the fundamental meaning structures in a person's life” (Denzin, 1989). In talking about these experiences, the interviews demonstrate the importance of these inspirational moments and how they have helped
shape the careers of these individuals. Often, epiphany moments are significant because they lead to the discovery of a particular passion.

The leader of the youth organization shares how a volunteer experience in college shaped her career goals by helping her to discover the passion that she has for working with youth.

"I had basically zero volunteer experience before my senior year of college and I saw an ad in the [student newspaper] and I applied and was accepted to be a [youth] leader at [a local nonprofit]. And I really think that that is why I am where I am right now. ... I had no idea what I wanted to do. ... And didn't have anything that I was contributing to ... And then I started doing [this] and I was like, 'This is where I come alive and this gives me a sense of purpose and the work that I find valuable.' So that's what led me to AmeriCorps and I just got more involved in the nonprofit sector and that's...why I decided to get my Master's in Public Administration." (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She describes this experience with excitement expressing its importance to her. For this leader, the volunteer experience was a moment of clarity in which she understood herself better and found that she was truly passionate about working with youth. Each educational and career opportunity that she has pursued since that moment has been motivated by that passion. Similarly, the leader of a social services organization shares how a college volunteer experience redirected her career goals and has motivated her work ever since.

"[As a sophomore in college] I went to the volunteer fair and there was a table for [the organization that she currently directs]. I went through the volunteer training and it was just really eye-opening for me as someone from suburban Dayton. ... So I did that volunteer orientation and then I did a 4-hour-a-week volunteer shift for about a year and then they asked me to apply to be [an] aide. That experience lead me to...[transfer] to a psychology major. ... Then I moved to Seattle. [...] I worked with homeless women. We were there for 3 years and that whole experience just really kind of solidified that I wanted to work with [women]. So that's kind of what led me back to getting my MSW and then on from there." (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)
She volunteered in college with the organization where she is now director. As she made clear above, the volunteer experience uncovered a passion for the kind of career she wanted to pursue.

The health and wellness organization leader explains that her first job with that organization was just an entry level position that she took in order to make a living as a recent college graduate. Through the entry level position she realized that she was passionate about working in this field. She has worked for branches of the same organization since that time:

“I ended up heading up to New Hampshire for about 8 years, with some college friends, for an adventure in my 20s, stumbled upon a [health and wellness organization] job up there, became full time, worked with kids, worked with camps, worked my way up into a higher level leadership position. [...] Probably three or four or five years into it is when I decided [that] career is what I wanted.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

The grassroots organizing leader had her first experience with organizing as a college student. The exposure to this work sparked her interest in pursuing organizing. She explained,

“I learned that I had organizing potential when I was on student Senate. [...] That was a really eye opener, that you can listen to people, hear their concerns, but you can also make suggestions and lead them towards a consensus to make a change. And I had a lot of fun doing that, it was good experience.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

While it was a fun, extracurricular activity for her at the time, the experience doing organizing within the student body was, as she notes, “eye opening” with regard to the skills that she had and the kind of work that she enjoyed doing. This was an epiphany moment in her educational experience because it changed her career trajectory and it taught her something about herself.

For both of the women who were raised in Appalachia and are now leaders in the region, there were epiphany moments during internships that put them on the path to leadership. The regional foundation leader first learned about philanthropy through an
internship. This internship was with the organization which she now leads. She remarked, “It started with a simple...internship! And it opened up a real passion for me. [...] This was my dream job from the time I was an intern” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). The economic development leader discussed how she discovered the work that she wanted to be a part of through internship opportunities as a college student. She recalled,

“During undergrad, Dr. B and others made sure that we took advantage of opportunities to work for nonprofit organizations, do internships, that kind of thing, so that led me to basic knowledge of what I wanted to be, what I wanted to do, and that was I wanted to focus on perfecting this place that I’m from.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

Through the narratives of both of these women, we see that they are committed to bettering the region. These interviewees who have lived their whole lives in the region spoke about their work in a broad way, discussing the improvement of the community as a whole, rather than simply the area in which their organization worked. Moreover, these interviewees each described the work of their organization as what they believed to be the most effective way of creating change in their community; for one this was philanthropy, for the other this was economic development. In this way, it is evident that being a regional ‘insider,’ someone who is from the region, influences leadership through the perspective of belonging to the community in which one works.

**Discovering a Passion.** Each of these leaders has a clear passion for the work that they are doing to further the mission of their organization. In these examples, these serendipitous internship and volunteer positions have shaped, and often redirected, the careers of these individuals. They become leaders in these organizations or fields in part because they are motivated by a passion for the mission of the organization. Often, leaders trace the discovery of this passion to a specific, epiphany moment in their lives. While not all of the interviewees lead because they are dedicated to the specific mission
of their organization, many expressed that they are ultimately in their role because they have a genuine passion for their work. This supports the idea that nonprofit leadership is values-based.

The foodbank leader is motivated by a deep empathy for the mission of the organization as someone who experienced hunger when she was growing up. Her personal experience motivates her to provide relief and support to others who are also known food insecurity.

“Part of the reason I was drawn to all of it was ... early on when my parents were married we were fairly poor, we were on food stamps different times even though we were working. And then when my parents divorced my mom was raising me and my sister on her own and trying to work and ... I can remember yelling at my mom and saying ‘Why isn’t there any food in the house? You’re working, why is there no food?’ ... So I think that really drives the mission for me much more because I know what that’s like. I can remember going to school hungry even in high school, but I could also see ways out of it. So for me, if I can help show somebody else that way out or help them in short term.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Furthermore, Leader H went on to describe,

“I love this because I can understand where people are coming from. And even though there’s more of it here [in Appalachia], I think there’s a lot of people that don’t see the poverty, don’t see the issues, don’t understand. So for me to be able to advocate and be that voice, somebody’s got to stand up for them because a lot of them don’t have the self-esteem or the skills or the knowledge or whatever to be able to do that. ... So it’s funny how it kind of translates into leadership a little bit. So I get paid to argue that people get food.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

The grassroots organizing leader is motivated by her belief that local mobilization works to improve communities. She explains why she is passionate about engaging and empowering local people through the work of community development.

“I have sort of a critical analysis of people in power and I think that we live in this representational democracy and how much people are really in charge of their own destiny and what they can control and there’s just a lot of alienation out there. A lot of people feel like they don’t have gifts to share and they don’t have a role and ... it’s such a strongly market-based capitalist society, if you’re not engaged in the marketplace, what value do you have? And that’s just like a bad way of thinking about humans and communities. ... This is my passion in my work.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)
She feels strongly that empowering and uplifting people and communities matters, stemming from her personal beliefs about how people should be treated. Her position gives her an opportunity to act on what she believes. The regional foundation leader, similarly, believes that philanthropic work is the most effective way to create the change that is needed in Appalachian communities. She describes how she came to find her passion for this work,

“When I found philanthropy, I started to see that over time, by building resources for the people that are helping others, we really can make permanent change. And it just seemed like such a smart, strategic approach. Was not a fix all, overnight kind of thing. So I just fell in love with it.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She adds that working at something you care about, “That’s when it’s perfect, when it feels like play, you shouldn’t work a day in your life, right? I mean seriously” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). The leader of the social service agency spoke similarly about enjoying her work. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to do her job, “I love my job, I love the people I work with. I really feel very blessed with, again, the opportunity to be in the position” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). In each of these examples, the leader is motivated by a passion that is both personal and community based.

**Mentorship: Formative Relationships for Leadership**

Mentor relationships are critical moments in the leadership narratives of these interviewees. The evidence presented here suggests that mentorship relationships have a special quality which sets them apart from other professional relationships and makes them highly influential on the path to leadership. Beyond being kind or offering advice, mentors have invested in the careers of these women at a personal level. Several interviews spoke about the unique nature of these relationships.
To the community foundation leader, “It’s kind of like a marriage – you have to be a good match” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). Similarly, the regional foundation leader added, “I think you kind of have to find that magical fit and you kind of have to be right – I feel like you learn both ways” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013).

Based on her experiences, the economic development leader believes that mentorship is essential for career and leadership development. She stated, “Mentorship is critical. ...When I was talking about the importance of having someone at everyone that these doors get opened for you. It’s critical, not only for women, for anyone, to develop a mentor relationship with someone. [...] All of the mentors that I’ve had in my life have just been so significant. And I’m surprised at the number of mentors that I’ve had. It’s a lot of people” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Reflecting on her mentorship experiences, the regional foundation leader notes the significant amount of time and energy that these individuals invested in her. She remarked that, “They sat down for a very long chat ... Looking back on how he afforded to give me the time he did, I don’t know” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Her experience is exemplary of the investments of time and energy of which these women have been beneficiaries. Through personal investment, mentors created opportunities for these women to acquire particular skills and knowledge.

For many of the leaders, their mentor was connected to an internship and volunteer opportunity that became a quintessential career experience. Others had their most significant mentor relationships later in their career. Five women spoke specifically about an important mentor during an early internship or volunteer experience. For these interviewees, mentorship was not only important for helping
them to succeed professionally, but fundamentally shaped their perception of their own leadership potential.

The fundraising organization leader shared the impact that female mentors have had on her career. In college, she had internship experiences with female leaders in politics. She stated,

“It kind of starts with internships that I was able to have when I was in school. They were female elected officials ... And they were both very strong, opinionated, bright women, who gave me faith to be that way, I guess. To be opinionated and know what I wanted and they helped me get other jobs, ... not directly, but because of that influence I was able to get the internship and the state level and since I knew them and their experience I think that helped me come back here to the [first organization where she was the executive director]. So all along having those females role models who were encouraging and also connected helped a lot.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

For her, these early mentor relationships opened doors for her professionally and encouraged her personally. By exemplifying successful female leadership, these mentor relationships gave her an image to strive towards.

The youth agency leader lists the leader of the nonprofit organization where she volunteered in college as someone who was a mentor to her then and continues to be a role model for leadership.

“I got to know him just volunteering at [the organization] and was able to have conversations with him throughout my life and have gone through some personal things that he was really supportive of and think from him I learned that...you really can build something from nothing. [...] [Despite just being a student volunteer] he took time out of his very busy schedule to check in and see how I was doing and to offer me advice and insight and I think on a number of different occasions saying that he respects me and the work that I do and thinks that I have a lot of talent and a lot to offer, coming from someone that you really admire that means a great deal and you think ‘Yea, I could do that.’” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

This mentor relationship made her feel like a valuable contributor to the work of the organization. It also empowered her by giving her confidence in her skills and capabilities. This mentor was also impactful for the example he set of being caring as a leader and intentionally reaching out to young volunteers. The economic development
organization leader also experienced the significant impact of a mentor who encouraged her to be confident.

“Dr. B put me on the right path for things. ... As an Appalachian...that didn’t have a lot of money, she gave me...a lot of confidence. You ... have those people in your life that put you in positions where you can take opportunities. So everything single thing that I mentioned to you is because somebody opened a door for me.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

Similarly, the community foundation leader reflects on the mentors that she has had saying, “I've been fortunate in every job I've had I've had somebody who I just learned so much from. So that's been helpful” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013).

When discussing an important mentor experience the regional foundation leader described the relationship as one in which another women ‘invested' in her. This relationship was very significant to her and shaped her development as a leader.

“I had a woman invest in me very early, first off my mentor, [...] Through the internship is how I came to know her. [...] I did not know a woman could do the kinds of things she did. I mean she was bold and she had been in the 70s involved going around picketing when they wouldn’t let women take construction jobs in the Deep South. So she was from kind of that women’s rights movement, and she was the first person like her I had really met. And I was just mesmerized. And I was amazed by the way she would convene these groups and get these things going and she was just so bold and visionary.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

This seminal mentorship relationship shaped her understanding of female leadership. Her mentor exemplified a leadership style that was outside of traditional socially constructed expectations of femininity. Thus for the interviewee, this relationship led her to redefine her perception of how a woman could lead.

The social services leader describes the influence of an important mentor for the example that she gave and the support she continues to provide.

“I had wonderful leadership there and that was really a pivotal thing too, is that I saw wonderful management there. The woman who was the head of our team at the agency I worked at in Seattle, we still talk regularly and that was 10 years ago. She was just really influential in a lot of ways, but specifically career-wise.
She kind of showed me how that could be done. Leading people, being sensitive to people’s sensitive stuff while still having boundaries. She was just a great manager and that was a big thing. This is the first time I’ve really been in like a ‘management’ role.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

She tries to emulate the balance of care and professionalism practiced by her mentor:

“I’ve kind of started this thing where every Christmas I make everybody a big thing of granola and write them a very personal card. And it’s a really nice exercise in just thinking about that person and thinking about why I appreciate them and, again, just to mention again my supervisor in Seattle. That’s all from her. She wasn’t afraid to show affection, in a very professional way. It just so affected my work there, how I felt about being there. That was very influential.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

The grassroots organizing leader shares the way a very influential mentor learned alongside her while guiding and encouraging her when was first hired. This mentor was instrumental in grooming her for leadership. She explained,

“I also…was impacted by a mentor, by a woman who really showed me some of the kind of core texts, and theories and practices of community organizing and there were a number of community leaders in this town that in various situations took me under their wing. […] [She] is the woman who hired me on at [this organization] …very intellectual woman. And so I think what I know about this stuff was through [her] and then the journey that we shared with our members and trying to understand, how do you do really good sustainable development in Appalachia? How do you take on environmental issues and social issues and economic issues in this region in ways that are authentic for the grassroots community? So we did a lot of learning and learned a lot of tools and techniques when I was here initially.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

As evidenced by the interviews, mentors often portrayed a leadership style which the mentee admired and sought to emulate in their own career. Sometimes this identity is gender related while other times it is a shared interest or organization.

As exemplified by these experiences, mentorship has a significant role in the development of leaders. These relationships often translate into crucial moments on the pathway to leadership, although this sometimes does not become apparent until later in the leader’s career. These leaders identify the mentors they had early in their career (or before it began) as significant because they encouraged them to think of themselves as
potential leaders, inspired them through their own examples of leadership, and taught them important lessons about leading.

Cases of “Evil Mentors.” Some women were influenced by a negative example of leadership, or a negative mentor, which motivated them to adopt different leadership practices. Three interviewees described professional relationships they had that were negative mentoring relationships. Their experiences working under these individuals taught them a lot about leadership by showing them how not to act or behave towards others. As one interviewee labeled it, these ‘evil mentors’ demonstrated leadership practices that were ineffective and did not create a positive workplace atmosphere.

The community foundation leader reflected on a mentor that she had at a job early in her career. She recalled,

“At that job I had what I call my “evil mentor” … she was involved in the arts and I was in the arts and she was a powerful, powerful, smart woman. ... She would help me, help me, help me and then cut me off at the knees. ‘Cause our organizations were kind of competitive. But I learned so much from her. ... She was so smart.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

Although she admired many of this woman’s qualities, the way that she used them to manipulate or damage the work of others was a challenging experience for the foundation leader. The health and wellness leader also learned from leaders who were negative role models. She discussed,

“Unfortunately, before being a CEO I don’t feel like the people – I don’t feel like the CEOs that I reported to were mentors to me. I don’t feel like they demonstrated the leadership style and skills that I felt were necessary for the position, or that I needed. So I kind of learned a little bit of what not to do in working with them. [...] Making changes, but maybe more so – just being more aware of how I was being perceived by the people that I supervised, because I didn’t want to be perceived in that way.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Similarly, the youth agency leader recalled the behavior of a previous director as an example of how not to lead. She told a story of a particular incident:
“It kind of I think shaped how I try to be as a leader – but I distinctly remember working with one of these directors and we were wrapping gifts for the kids for the holidays and it’s the coolest thing ever, [...] I’m working on just wrapping CD after CD and [...] we’re sitting there for an hour, and as I’m sitting on the ground trying to wrap all of these gifts, he didn’t wrap one single gift. And I remember just thinking ‘You’re not above this and this wasn’t in my job description either to be sitting here for hours wrapping these gifts,’ but it just was something that had to be done.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

For each of these three interviewees, these negative mentorship experiences shaped the way that they approach leadership. Based on the negative aspects of these experiences, the interviewees identified alternative, positive leadership practices and how they wanted to be perceived as leaders.

**Gender and Mentorship.** It is important to note that most of these women primarily had other women as mentors. Some interviewees perceived the role of gender in mentoring relationships to be more significant than others: some thought that it did influence who and how they were impacted by the relationship, others did not perceive gender to have an influence. As exemplified by the community foundation leader’s experience, mentorship has been very influential in the professional lives of each interviewee, and most often, these mentors have been women. She explained,

“I think that I have been so fortunate, I mean, every place I’ve been there have been women who have gone out of their way to help. ... I can’t think of many men that have gone out of their way to help. Or maybe I just didn’t perceive it. But...there are still women that I call to talk things through with. ...that’s how I learned really ...through mentorships.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

For the fundraising organization’s leader, gender was significant to her mentorship experience because female role models demonstrated to her women can be strong leaders. She noted that,

“It was a female elected official I was working for and I guess that just relates to again I had really good female mentors who made it seem not so strange to be a woman in leadership.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)
One interviewee held a different perspective, that a person’s gender identity in mentorship is not always most important. She noted that women should not be exclusive in who they mentor or look to as role models. She cautions against gender-exclusive mentoring because it limits the range of possible leadership networks:

“I don’t think it has to be a woman... Sometimes a woman might focus too much on gender issues ... I hope it doesn’t become a woman-to-woman kind of network, it becomes a leader-to-leader network. ... I don’t know if it is or not, [if gender is specifically important to mentorship]. I think one of the weaknesses of – specifically – I have been told by many people, ‘You need to hire more men!’ We do have one finally. That’s something that I think kind of goes both ways if we want to make some changes in the nonprofit sector then maybe as women we need to be mentoring some young men into service. So I don’t think that I think about it as a gender thing.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She recognized that the nonprofit sector, particularly its smaller organizations, is female dominated. However, she hopes that perceptions of nonprofit leadership will not become socially and culturally associated with femininity to the extent that it is taboo for men to lead all but the largest and most influential of nonprofit organizations. She posited that efforts to strengthen leadership networks in the nonprofit sector should focus somewhat on the cultivation of male leaders, particularly in leadership of smaller organizations. As she says, women in the nonprofit sector should mentor more “young men into service” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). This effort should be made in order to combat traditional gender division of leadership roles in which the most influential roles at the largest organizations are expected to be held by men while smaller, more grassroots work is expected to be done by women. Currently, this trend persists in the nonprofit sector, as is evidenced by the interviews (see Chapter Seven). Mentorship in the nonprofit sector should avoid being gender-exclusive in order to shift assumptions of gender with regard to eligibility as a potential leader. Men and masculinity are equally suited to small-scale nonprofit leadership as are women and femininity to influential, global nonprofit leadership.
In several instances, interviewees had excellent mentors of both genders. The fundraising organization leader describes her mentorship experiences in this way:

“I've also had mentors who were very successful in their careers and absolutely encouraged me to do whatever I wanted and that I would be able to do it. And I've had men do the same thing. I had a male reach out and say... 'You should really go back and take these classes to enhance your skills at what you're doing now,' so I've had some real good leadership from both genders, but those odd things stick out.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

In many cases, however, gender has played a role in mentor relationships for these interviewees. The regional foundation leader goes on to discuss the importance that mentorship holds for women. She observed that,

“As we think about attracting women into leadership position and saying you're a leader, and I'm going to invest in you to be a leader, I'm going to train you with everything you need to know, and I'm going to give you this other group of supporters. That was a formative experience for me [JoAnne Davidson’s Leadership Institute].” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

To her, mentorship often has a particular importance for women because they are socialized to tend to be less self-confident. She continued,

“Because I think as women, you’ve probably read Lean In, we often doubt ourselves more maybe than men might, and so if you have somebody say, you know, but when you have someone like [these women] really stop, invest, coach, mentor you, I think that’s really important.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

For this leader, mentors were particularly important for instilling the confidence she needed in order to pursue leadership. These women, as with others’ mentors, served as role models, coaches, and guides, providing important knowledge and examples for the interviewees to emulate. Notably, Leader I spoke about the ‘investment’ mentors made in her. This was an important theme throughout the interviews of the investment that mentorship makes in the next generation of leaders. Making these investments is significant to the development of the region’s leadership network.

**Mentoring Staff, Volunteers, and the Next Generation of Leaders.** Having benefited from the impact of mentors on their careers, these leaders often take
opportunities to mentor their staff or volunteers. Among the interviewees, mentorship is approached along a “continuum,” as one woman described it; some have a more formal approach, while others have mentored on a project-based basis. However, there was a theme among the interviews that leaders do not feel that they are able to mentor as formally or as many people as they would like. For example, the regional foundation leader discussed,

“I feel like I’m able to mentor with some of the staff that we have here. I don’t think there’s anything more formal that I’m really doing at this point in a sustained long-term way. But it’s certainly something I hope to do in the future. [...] And maybe I’ve been too formal about how I’ve thought about mentoring.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

Two other interviewees explained difficulties they have encountered with mentoring. Their concerns represent challenges to leadership cultivation. One interviewee expressed her concern that the power dynamics involved in a mentor-mentee relationship could taint the relationship. Leader D stated,

“That whole personal interface with mentoring and friendships is very – it’s very touchy... And the personal is really hard for me. I just haven’t figured out how to make that work because the power dynamic always felt so uneven.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

Another interviewee expressed the difficulty posed when mentoring becomes too time consuming. As Leader E explained: “Now, there’s formal and informal mentoring. Most mentoring is informal. When it gets formal sometimes it gets too difficult” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Despite these concerns, the interviewees feel that mentoring is a positive investment that they hope to make in future leaders.

During the interviewees, several shared the reasons that they believe it is important for leaders to mentor. The foodbank leader hopes that she can use her leadership experience to provide practical advice. She remarked, “I think it’s important because there’s definitely textbook and theory, but it’s really relative and real world stuff is sometimes a whole different thing. It’s good in theory, but does not work in
practice – trying to help people understand” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). The economic development leader feels strongly about mentoring because she benefited so greatly from the opportunities her mentors gave her. She articulated, "That’s why I feel really tied to what I’m saying about how I manage staff. It’s that I’m opening a door for you. You can go through that door and you can show me how excellent you are, or you can close the door and then we have to do things differently. I like to give other people opportunities” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). She gave an example of one mentee in whom she invested greatly:

“One person in particular that I mentored I am extremely proud of, ...because she was going to give up on following her dream...and I held her to it and I didn’t let her. I said no way ... We’ve worked too hard on you ... [Now] she has confidence in herself that she never had before. ...people need to hear that they are valuable and that they can do it.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

She added further that mentorship is an opportunity to invest in the next generation.

Leader E noted,

“I am amazed at the creativity of people that are under 30 years old. The creativity is amazing, the ability to solve problems is fairly amazing. If you balance that with an understanding that there’s also some history behind it – the creativity that you can pull out of people, you have to foster that. It’s really important. So then I try to always kind of do that.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

Ultimately, mentor relationships shape the potential development of leaders.

Across the interviews, mentors were influential for the encouragement, coaching, and support they provided for the interviewees which created opportunities for the leaders to learn and develop. The significance of these relationships often continues throughout the leader’s career after the mentoring period has ended. While nearly all interviewees primarily described positive mentor relationships, there were some instances in which negative role models shaped the leadership pathways of interviewees. From both experiences, each of the leaders interviewed gained knowledge of their potential for leadership. As summarized by one interviewee, the ultimate goal of mentorship is for
the mentee to grow into their own leadership style, not necessarily to duplicate the mentor’s style. She says, “I’ve grown into...being my own style of professional and leader and it’s definitely different than [my mentor’s]. But complementary” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). In sum, mentoring has played a significant role in the development of these Appalachian leaders. Mentorship is an essential in the development of leadership networks in Southeastern Ohio.

**Gender and Leadership in the Domestic Arena**

The social expectations that surround cultural constructions of femininity continue to pose challenges for women who aspire to leadership, both internally, by their personal expectations (Sandberg, 2013; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), and externally, by social and cultural pressure (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fletcher, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Rhode, 2007; Sandberg, 2013; Wilson, 2007). Women face pressure to conform to stereotypes of traditional culturally constructed understandings of femininity throughout their entire lives. This deep socialization of gender roles manifests in such expectations as marriage, attractiveness, and nurturing. These expectations are reinforced both internally and externally as women often expect these things of themselves and feel guilty when their role as leaders does not conform to the cultural ideals of women. Gender socialization and the pressure to meet culturally constructed ideals of femininity are substantial barriers for women in leadership, evidenced by the perceptions and experiences of these interviewees.

For the purpose of this discussion, gender in the professional and domestic arenas will be dealt with separately. However, in actuality, these arenas are not dichotomous – in fact, they are not separate issues at all but rather constantly interact and influence each other. The lives and experiences of leaders cannot be neatly partitioned between work and life outside of work, they are equally influential on
leadership style and equally impact the experience of the leader in her professional and private roles.

This chapter will focus on the influence that gender experiences in the domestic arena have on leadership. This includes the impact of life events, such as marriage and having a child, and experiences, such as spousal relationships. In addition, the experiences of these female leaders contribute to the discussion of domestic arena influence on the professional arena of leadership. Conversely, it explores the way that career and leadership position impact aspects of personal life. Gender’s influence in the professional arena will be discussed in the next chapter along with other concepts of the public presentation of one’s identity in leadership.

Influence of Family and Personal Relationships. To begin, this section explores the familial and personal relationships that were influenced early in the interviewees’ perceptions of leadership. Three of the interviewees identified familial relationships as formative influences of their perceptions of women as leaders. They were encouraged through these relationships to strive to achieve in their future careers. These relationships seem to have routed stereotypes about leadership and gender as exemplified here; leaders who were taught from a young age that women could lead as well as men did not have difficulty envisioning themselves as a leader. For example, the regional foundation leader described her mother as a particular influence on her understanding of her own potential for leadership. She explained,

“In the culture and the dynamics – that I grew up, and remember, my mom was very supportive, she from the beginning said ‘you were a natural born leader,’ that was her little phrase – and I think that helped too to think ‘Okay, I am, so therefor I will be.’ Because I think really how we think about ourselves is how we are. If you think you can, you’re probably right. If you think you can’t, - seriously, I think there’s so much truth to that. So she helped a lot.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)
She referenced Sandberg’s work (2013) and expressed the way that she identifies with the internal barriers women face on the path to leadership as a result of gender socialization. For this leader, her mother’s encouragement was important in the development of her perceptions of gender – as a girl, she was encouraged to lead.

The fundraising organization leader also discussed the role of family expectations in forming her perceptions of female leadership. She grew up in a family environment where she was taught that women could have any job that they wanted, including positions of leadership. This has influenced her perceptions of herself as a leader.

“Not in my family. It was always understood that women could do those sorts of things. Although I had certainly seen, my great aunt who would’ve been born in the nineteen teens would’ve loved to have been a pastor in her church and was not allowed to. I remember growing up with that, but I knew that that didn’t apply to me. I could do whatever I wanted. That’s how I felt anyway.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

She does not feel that gender was a significant barrier to becoming a leader; she has never felt held back by social expectations surrounding gender. Rather, she has had many relationships that have reinforced her understanding of women as leaders in equal or greater capacity to men, referencing her mentors as well as her family.

**Work-Life Balance**

A major theme within the leadership literature is work-life balance. This is one way of talking about the relationship between the professional and domestic arenas. Early research on this theme was conducted by Arlie Hochschild who studied the work-family life balance of families in late 1980s and early 1990s. Hochschild introduced the concept of the “second shift” referring to the domestic work load that many American women bear despite working full time in the professional arena (1989). At the time Hochschild was conducting her research in the 1980s, work-family balance was largely seen as women’s dilemma and women remained responsible for the domestic work load
(1989). She predicted that this imbalanced division of labor would be a "transitional phase in American family life" (Hochschild, 1989). However, research shows that work-life balance for nonprofit executives is more difficult for women to establish than for men (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011). One study found, "Men report burnout at half the rate of women and are significantly more likely to report having the work-life balance that’s right for them" (Cornelius, Moyers, & Bell, 2011). The struggle to establish a comfortable work-life balance persists in the experience of women in leadership positions across sectors.

As seen across the interviews, leaders face many choices about how they divide their time and energy between work and life outside of work. Often, life experiences are significant because they necessitate a recalibration of the work-life balance. In the examples that follow, these leaders discuss their beliefs regarding work-life balance, as well as difficulties and successes they have had in aligning the allocation their time and energy to these beliefs.

Establishing the balance between work and personal life is something that all leaders face, and across the interviews this balance has been achieved along a spectrum. For some, the balance has been established more easily and less intentionally than for others. Work-life balance is dependent on many variables including the personal relationships of the leader and the flexibility of their workplace. This research found that interviewees with less flexible work situations have struggled more to achieve a work-life balance that feels comfortable for them and does not make them feel like they are causing one party to suffer.

The evidence presented here suggests that work-life balance can be established along a spectrum. What is important is that it is comfortable for the leader and their family; it is not a source of stress or relational strain. When a comfortable balance is
achieved it allows the leader to feel that they are being effective in their role in the organization and at home.

From the perspective of one interviewee who is unmarried and does not have children, the expectations that women have about their role in the family influences their career plans even before these roles exist. As a young leader, she looks to the future and sees that she may have to make changes in the balance in her current leadership style. She stated,

“I am not married yet I don’t have kids yet so it’s not to the point where... some other part of my life is really being hindered by this job. I know that there will have to be changes when I do have kids, for example. My priorities personally I am sure will shift... there are some tasks that someone else could do. But I struggle with delegating so I tend to like to work on a lot of things myself and I like things a certain way. So I think that I would just really have to push some control if it came to a point where the people that I cared about and loved were somehow being neglected because of this job.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

This perspective harkens to Sanderberg’s work in which she warns young women not to “lean back” from their work too early (2007). This interviewee currently is fully invested, "leaning in" to her position as executive director. She feels that her personal and professional lives are blended, and this is something that she admires in other leaders as well (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Her work-life balance is a comfortable blend of both, while for other interviewees, stark separation of work and life outside of work is their preferred balance.

Children and Marriage. For nearly all of the leaders profiled in this thesis, marriage and/or children have been significant life events which have impacted their professional decisions. The familial structures of the interviewees vary: seven leaders are married, two are unmarried, three do not have children, four have two children, and two have one child. The focus of this analysis is the impact of children and spouses on
career decisions. It will canvas the challenges interviewees have encountered in achieving work-life balance as well as the solutions they have found.

Women face social, family, and personal expectations to have children. From the perspective a leader who does not have children, this pressure has been particularly apparent. She says, “There’s also a lot of societal pressure for women – or for families – but mostly for women. ... I get asked this all the time... ‘When are you going to have baby?’...it’s none of your business” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). While combating this societal pressure can be somewhat challenging, from her perspective, female leaders who do have children face much greater pressure, “I cannot imagine the pressure that a woman with children would face [as a leader]” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

The evidence from the interviews suggests that marriage and children always have some impact on a woman’s leadership path. For some women, the impact of these relationships is as simple as affecting the geographic mobility of an individual as discussed by the fundraising leader. Leader A explained:

“I moved back to Athens from Columbus because of a relationship that I was in ... I got a great job I was successful at that, but without that personal relationship I would have done something else. And now I’ve been married for 16 years and we’re not moving. So that certainly influences my decision too and not in a bad way again but it just means I’m not looking for a job in Utah or in California or anything like that.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

Her comments about the impact of marriage on her career choices were matter-of-fact and direct. She references aspects of the domestic arena which are probably true of the experiences of other leaders who are married as well. Similarly, she discusses the impact of having a child on career mobility:

“I went through this having a child phase at a late stage of my life and so [the fundraising organization] was perfect for that because I could work kind of part time and now I’m just thinking about the next stage. [...] Starting a family...certainly influenced my decision because I think at that time might have been the time that I made a different move to a different organization that maybe
had more challenge and more – I don’t want to say more influence in the community – but that might have been more of a challenge. But I was focused on just being able to work part time and maintain work but still have this child and so I do think that that probably impacted where I am now, because now ideally I’d rather be someplace else more challenging.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

She is very conscious of the impact that having a family has had on her career. She continued saying, “I think it’s certainly limited my choices. There’s a lot of nonprofit and government things going on in Athens but it’s sort of limited my professional choices” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013). While this leader was able to choose to work part time after she had a child, this is not always possible or the decision that is best for a career. Another leader was at a place in her career where she felt she needed to take an opportunity for a new position. The organizing agency leader had the opportunity to take an executive director position for the first time shortly after having a child. These circumstances made it challenging to establish a healthy balance between work and her family. She described this experience:

“The first time I was an executive director I took the job and I think my daughter was only 6 or 8 weeks old. [...] Not a good idea. The job came up, I wanted to do the job, and felt like I could have it all. And I ended up in counseling to kind of manage my anger, and it was the anger I was bringing home.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

Her experience strikes at the center of the struggle for work-life balance. She found herself in a position where her professional aspirations and demands of motherhood were both crucial. The struggle to balance these demands was overwhelming as evidenced by the anger and emotional stress she experienced. Having gone through this difficult period and maintained a leadership role, she discussed the way that she learned to manage these competing demands:

“I learned at that time that if I was not clear and direct at the office that I would bring it home. I don’t bring it home. Like if I’m upset about something, people need to hear ... but really not bringing that frustration home. Because my role at that home is too important to let that get in the way.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)
Women leaders also face pressure from the social expectation that mothers will provide most of the child care when a couple does choose to have children. The implications for leadership demand that women respond and determine how they will either meet or challenge this expectation. One interviewee compared the difference of this pressure on men and women, demonstrating that women still face greater expectations of child care and domestic labor. She described an interaction with a male co-worker:

“I’ll say ‘Oh it’s terrible you’re on the road so much your sons must really miss you’ and he looked...at me, and he goes, ‘I’m not the Mommy.’ And I’m like ‘That’s right, you’re not.’ So it doesn’t impact him in the way that it has [impacted me].” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

**Balancing child care and domestic work with spouse.** For the four interviewed leaders who are married and have school-age children, there is shared responsibility of child care with their spouse. This division is different for each family. These interviews demonstrate that it helps for married leaders to be supported by their spouse and that flexible work-place policies make establishing the work-life balance easier for leaders and their families.

For the grassroots organizing leader and her spouse, domestic labor and child care are shared. However, she maintains primary responsibility in the domestic arena. She observed that she felt obligated internally to fulfill traditional expectations of motherhood, despite having more full-time job responsibilities than her husband. She noted,

“At home we do our best to split up responsibilities, but there is no question I am also kind of the leader at home. [...] I mean, what the kids need, the grades, ...it’s not that he wouldn’t be, I just...really fret about this stuff, ...I want to be at the parent-teacher conference, I want to be there when the braces get put on, I want to be at the doctors, so I tend to absorb more of that.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)
While she is still the ‘leader at home,’ the interviewee also feels that her husband supports her work. She says, “But he has never once in 6 years for all the times I’ve had to go out of town ever said “Oh no, not again” ... he does understand that this is my passion” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). As her partner, the interviewee’s husband is supportive by sharing responsibility so that she can pursue her passion.

The foodbank leader has been the director for only a year and she and her husband are still figuring out how to best share responsibilities for child care and domestic labor.

“Yea, and luckily my husband’s job is a little more flexible because it’s [her job] not only more hours but I’m commuting further. I work in Logan so it’s a 30 minute commute each way, so it’s an extra hour that I’m gone. And I’m too far away that if the kids have a doctor’s appointment, I can’t just run from work take them and then go back to work. So that has taken a little time to transition to get my husband used to being the one that does all of that stuff in general.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Similar to the grassroots organizing leader’s husband, he is a supportive spouse. The foodbank leader describes his response to the shift in household responsibility saying, “he’s...flexible and not so traditional in roles and that kind of thing he’s pretty good with it” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). It is notable however, that she assumes traditional gender roles to be the norm, and that her husband taking on more of the responsibilities of caring for their children is seen as “flexibility”.

For the leader of the social service agency, dividing childcare and domestic responsibilities is not difficult because both she and her husband have flexible work schedules.

“I feel very, very grateful for how flexible my position is. Sometimes I leave to pick-up our first grader...And stuff like that is pretty huge, just being able to see her through the day and we have a three year old, too. We just kind of pass her back and forth. I’m home sometimes during the day and go back. My husband...has his own business, so his schedule is flexible, too. But flexibility is a huge deal to me and I try to extend that to people who work for” [the
organization]. There’s a lot of moms. It’s not just about being a parent, I want people to feel like they acknowledge that everyone has a life and that work is just work, really.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

The social service agency leader’s personal experience of benefiting from a flexible work schedule motivates her to provide the same opportunity to her staff. She leads with empathy in the expectations she has of her staff regarding work-life balance. For the social service leader and the health and wellness leader, the experiences of having a family did not as severely impact their career paths, but they have each been fortunate to lead agencies that allow substantial flexibility. These events and circumstances have paralleled their career paths without conflicting to a great extent.

For an unmarried and single leader with children, organizational flexibility is essential for leadership opportunities as well as to establishing work-life balance. The leader of the health and wellness agency has been able to raise her daughter as a single parent while serving as the executive director of several branches of the organization. The values the organization represents are expressed in this way.

“I liked what the [organization] stands for, I like what [it] offers for the community. Personally, it’s worked for me especially, I mean, I’m a single mom raising her all on my own and [this organization] has allowed me to be the mom I need to be for her. And have her with me or involved with me too, [...] it’s allowed her to be involved in some aspects of what I do. So I think that the family welcome-ness and flexibility, I think being in this position especially as a single mom – there’s been times that she’s had long days or had to go over to a friend’s house because I had to work ‘til 8:00. Or I had an out of town meeting or something. So I think there’s been the balancing of that.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

The organization’s flexibility as been integral to allowing her to be a leader and a single parent. She is personally invested in the organization’s mission and values because of the way that it has allowed her to balance work and being a parent. She recognized her organization as unique in its value for workplace flexibility and family. She remarked,

“It’s very demanding at times and there are weeks with a lot of hours, but then there’s the flexibility too that I can go and pick my daughter up from school or she can come here after school. Not a lot of places that you can work in town that
your daughter can just walk into your office after school and be here and go hang out in the gym while I'm finishing up. So I think the [organization] has really allowed that and made me be successful in my job because of allowing that.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

While greater flexibility makes it easier to establish balance between professional and personal responsibilities, it is a continuous process to maintain this balance. For the health and wellness leader, achieving balance in leadership and parenting were reflected in the same proud moments, “I look at success of how this [organization] has impacted my daughter’s life. And I’ll tell people, ‘She is who she is today because of [this organization]’ and she’s a pretty darn good kid” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

Establishing balance involves the support of others. For married leaders, it is important that their spouse agree with the way they spend their time. Without the support of their spouse, these relationships would suffer. The leader of the economic development organization is firm in her belief in the importance of listening and compromising with her spouse in order to establish a balance that works for both of them.

“My husband has a different view on – a good view, it’s not a bad view it’s a different view – on the amount of time and the level of responsibility, he does an amazing job with his work. But I’ve had to be in these leadership positions where I’m the responsible one in those organizations and so we had to work through that in our marriage... How to balance our time together ... But I have been blessed with an incredible husband who has been nothing but supportive, but that took a while for us to get completely to that place” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

She explains that in order to reconcile their perspectives she had to change some of her behaviors outside of work.

“Because it was annoying to him, you know, go to a party and I’m talking work...and so I had to change and take a look at what’s truly important, and leaders lose sight of that sometimes ...you do have to take stock of what’s the most important thing?” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)
The economic development leader made the decision to change the way she divided her time based on her values. For her, this was the way that she needed to establish the balance between work and life outside of work in order to be effective in her role as a leader.

“If you don’t have a balanced life, everything else you do – nothing is going to work. If you don’t balance your relationships with your work – and to also remember not to take the problems out that you might be frustrated with at work, not to take it home and take it out on somebody that has nothing to do with the problem.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

The relationships of these three women demonstrate that support between spouses is essential for balance between personal and professional demands and for them be effective in their leadership role. However, these balanced and supportive spousal relationships often must be worked out and negotiate, evolving over time. This is reflective of many aspects of the work-life balance in that it shifts and develops over time to meet the needs of the leader, their family, and the organization.

Children and spouses shape the private, domestic arena experience of leaders. Becoming married, establishes a personal relationship that, for most of these interviewees, is a source of support in their professional role. When a leader has children, leadership responsibilities are added to parental responsibilities. The event of having a child is significant along the career path of a female leader because it necessitates a revaluation of spousal responsibilities and resources allocation. The evidence present by these interviews suggests that support from their spouse and flexible work-place policies are two things that made establishing a comfortable work-life balance easier for leaders and their families. The following section discusses the sources of self-care and the support networks on which these leaders depend.
Maintaining Work-Life Balance: Support Networks and Down-time

Maintaining work-life balance requires down-time for the leader and relational support networks. Another dynamic of the private sphere in the lives of these interviewees is its function as the source of much of their care and support networks. Throughout the interviews, comments were made about the way that leaders ensure that they have the care and support they need in order to be effective in their positions. Making the professional-domestic balance work entails finding time for themselves. The leader of the social service agency feels refreshed by the time she spends outside of work with her family. She explained,

“I have a great family. A fantastic husband and two great kids and I’ve just always had this ability to just shove work off on my walk home and just be done with it. ... For whatever reason I’ve always just been able to leave it there, I never do work at home. I would never think about doing work at home. I would never have a job where I do work at home. I just really, really enjoy my life outside of work.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

This separation of work and life outside of works helps her to be fresh and prepared to do her job and to support her staff. Because this is something she values, she wants others to have this same balance between work and their personal lives. This translates into the way she leads the organization.

The youth agency leader feels refreshed by getting out of town on weekends when she doesn’t have commitments. She says, “A lot of weekends it’s works stuff but on the weekends that I don’t have work stuff I try to go away so that I am not roped in to doing other stuff” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She creates physical distance for herself between work and this allows her to disconnect for a short time.

One leader exemplified the support and care her husband provides her by telling about the experience of caring for her father before he passed away. The difficulty of that time both professionally, having to be away from work, and personally was
alleviated by the support of her husband. "My husband was right there with me caring for my dad" (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Relaxation and down-time can also be individual activities. Several leaders made note of the practices they have for achieving calm and alleviating stress. They believe that these are important leadership practices in order to do their best work. The community foundation leader articulated,

"[Something] that I support very strongly when I’m working with young people, you know my daughters – I tell them all the time – you have to take care of yourself, you know. You can’t be effective in any situation if you’re not taking time for yourself. And if you’re not taking time to be reflective,...to read, to think, to learn, to not always be on the wheel producing, to keep yourself healthy, to get enough sleep, to be inspired by something then you’re not going to be a good leader. ... You have to be grounded, you have to know who you are, you have to give time to this kind of reflection or...you’re not going to last and you’re not going to be effective in what you do." (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

The regional foundation leader agreed and detailed her individual practice for resting and being mentally prepared. She opined, "I think leadership space is mental too, and trying to figure out how you can really be in a place [is important]" (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She exemplified how she might do this:

"You might take your watch and say for two minutes I’m just going to follow my breath and that sounds really crazy, and I’m not saying I do this all the time, I wish I did it more. But just enough to kind of I’m doing, doing, doing, doing, doing. And now I’ve got to be just for a minute. A human being...just be. And then you can go right back, but you go back with so much more energy and clarity.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She concluded, “To me the mental preparation for the leader is probably the most important thing and it just takes discipline to kind of stop and think. ...and also to not beat yourself up,... tomorrow is a new day.’ You’ve got to learn to affirm yourself” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). As articulated by these interviewees, a leader’s mental preparation, which occurs in both the domestic and professional arenas, is substantially important for their performance as a leader on a
daily basis and in general. As demonstrated here, leaders depend on both internal and relational sources for the relaxation and down-time needed to be a healthy person so that they can perform effectively in their public sphere leadership role.

**Support Networks.** In addition to mentors and role models, the leaders interviewed in this project emphasized the importance of their support networks, those people on whom they depend for emotional, relational, personal, and professional support. Support networks look different across the interviews: some include family, some are friendships; others are professional relationships that blend into friendship. The leader of the social services organization describes her support network as a small number of people she is very close to. She explained,

“I’m very much an introvert and have always had just one or two people who I really rely on for support. My closest friend here, I told her, she’s part of my mental health support system. ... I really rely on her and on my husband to support me and they do and I feel very grateful to have people close to me who can help me think through stuff.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

The health and wellness organization leader describes her support network as being both friends and other professionals. She has people that she can depend on for support for various needs and challenges that she may face as a leader.

“Personally I think that is extremely important. And I have a support network of people all over the country. I’ve got people from college that are my best friends that support me, I’ve got people from my people from my past [jobs] that I’ll call when I’m having a rough day or something and talk to or just a question. [...] Identifying who...you need for what kind of support. So depending on what I’m looking to get out of it, I’ve got different people here that I’ll call to ask to have lunch with. [...] to me, that’s critical, and I’m very aware.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

When asked about personal support, she said “I’ve had people tell me I need to spend more time on the personal [me] time and less time on the [organization] time and [my daughter] time” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013). She recognizes
the need for sources of personal support, but feels that these relationships take more time to cultivate.

The leader of the grassroots organizing agency describes her support network as including both personal and professional support. Notably, she also expresses the difficulty of establishing personal relationships of support because she feels she does not have the time.

“I definitely have people that I rely on, both internally and outside of the organization. I'm too busy to develop a network of friends, so it tends to be my family and a few close people that I know a lot of whom don't...live around here anymore. But I've also done executive coaching and gone through leadership programs and...I like executive coaches a lot.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

Dependable support networks and sources of self-care in the private sphere are essential to effective leadership. For these interviewees, their role as a leader is motivated by their passion for the work of the organization. Without these networks of support to provide professional guidance and personal care, leaders would be more likely to burn out by over-committing to the organization.

**The Significance of Leadership Paths**

The discussion of pathways to leadership is complicated because each leader has had unique life experiences which shape their professional development. In order to better understand the experiences women leading nonprofit organizations in Appalachian Ohio, the steps and experiences along the path leadership inform questions of how and why these individuals have become leaders. From the evidence gathered in these interviews, we see several particular experiences highlighted across the interviews. In their professional development, these women were greatly influenced by internship and volunteer experiences. Nearly all of the interviewees, named these early experiences as formative moments in their progression towards leadership. Additionally, the interviewees connected these experiences to individuals who became
their mentors. The impact of mentors cannot be understated – on multiple occasions, interviewees credit mentors with their advancement into positions of leadership.

Equally important along the leadership path are the domestic arena responsibilities, and the extent to which they are able to establish a comfortable work-life balance. In establishing work-life balance, spousal relationships must be supportive in order for the leader to remain effective in their position of leadership. Finally, leaders need relationships of support in order to receive personal care. Support networks that include both personal and professional relationships are necessary for adequate support. Moreover, the interviewees emphasized the importance of practices which promote relaxation and down-time for the mental preparation for leadership.

Having examined the ways in which these women have become leaders, the analysis will now turn to the discussion of the leadership approaches and styles practiced by these interviewees. It is important to note the connection between the events and experiences discussed here as they have shaped the interviewees’ leadership approaches discussed in the following chapter.
5. Leadership Approaches & Styles

Having examined how these leaders have arrived in their current leadership positions in the previous chapter, this chapter centers on their overall approach to leadership, specifically examining the practices, and beliefs that constitute their approach. The chapters following will delve more specifically into the influences of the nonprofit sector and of the Appalachian region on the leadership experiences and approaches of the interviewees.

This chapter is framed by a discussion of whether and to what extent there are common leadership styles and approaches among women leading non-profit organizations in Southeastern Ohio. Conversely, it examines whether and to what extent there are differences among the women leaders. This discussion is broken into four main sections: the leader's role, leadership and organizational structure, leadership approaches and styles, and changes in the leadership style over time.

This analysis is framed by the leadership literature, discussed in Chapter Two, which focuses on the intersection of leadership and gender. In accordance with the goal of this thesis, the focus is specifically on the extent to which women do or do not approach leadership in ways that are influenced or shaped by their gender.

A great deal of research has been devoted to the analysis of potential gender difference in the leadership styles of men and women and whether women do or do not lead differently remains a significant point of debate. However, this thesis does not focus on the gender difference of women leaders as compared with their male counterparts, but rather seeks to explore the life experiences of women who are leaders and to understand their own perceptions of the influence of gender on their positions and experiences. The research questions and interview questionnaire which guided this
study were established from an overview of the literature on women in leadership, discussed in Chapter Two.

**Leadership: Embodying the Mission**

Across the interviews, ideas of leadership vary widely. Despite similar geographic and cultural locations, the organizations are each driven by a particular mission and directed by diverse leadership. By comparing the leadership roles described by the interviewees, it is evident that there are similar tasks required of nonprofit leaders, yet each determines her own method for fulfilling them. This research finds that nonprofit leaders feel that an especially important role they play in the organization is guiding strategy and aligning it to the organization’s vision.

Additionally, these interviews probe the leaders’ self-described position within the organization’s structure and examine the implications for leadership. This research finds there is a particular emphasis among female nonprofit leaders in Southeastern Ohio on non-hierarchical and “hands-off” leadership.

Moreover, the evidence presented here suggests that nonprofit leadership is a manifestation of the organization’s mission and values. The nine interviewees’ approaches to leadership are foremost tailored to meet the mission of the organization and the needs of its staff and are then blended with personal styles of each individual leader. In the previous chapter, evidence was presented which demonstrates the importance of the leader’s personal commitment to the mission of the organization. Here, evidence shows that the mission of the organization influences the particular approach and style of the interviewees. This chapter suggests that, in addition, leadership style must balance the needs of the staff with the strengths of the leader; the leadership styles of these nine interviewees seem to be most effective when the
approach each woman takes effectively guides and supports staff in performing their roles.

**Leadership Roles**

The interviewees were first asked to describe their perception of the responsibilities and role that they play in the organization as related to the mission, board of directors, staff, and community. Across all nine interviews there were certain tasks and responsibilities that each of the interviewees described as allocated to the leader's role. Based on the evidence gathered through the interviews, these are some of the most typical responsibilities of a nonprofit leader.

First, the leader of a nonprofit organization runs the day-to-day operations of the organization. This entails different tasks depending on the size and mission of the organization; different organizations have staff that focus on different organizational needs. The executive director’s role depends on the strengths and skills of the organization’s staff. For example, the leader of the health and wellness organization manages a staff of about sixty employees. While this is a relatively large nonprofit staff, she has responsibilities that other leaders do not have. She explained,

“Where we don’t have the depth is with the administrative staff, so when it comes to any type of HR, staff development, marketing, that either falls under me or I work with their staff as well to do that. […] I think basically I’m responsible for everything that goes on here.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

For the leader of an organization with a much smaller staff, responsibility for day-to-day operation entails doing regular office tasks as well as executive leadership. She expressed, as a leader, “You wear multiple hats. People say ‘Oh, what a big title’ and I say, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m taking out the trash on Wednesdays!’ so you know, everyday can vary” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). From these examples, it is clear that leaders have all-encompassing responsibility for daily operation of the
organization, but the particular tasks involved in day-to-day leadership vary with the nonprofit.

For organizations operating with a small staff, as most nonprofits in the Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio do, the organizational network includes many volunteers and other partnerships. The regional foundation leader shared her perspective, "As a foundation you don’t want to go too admin heavy. So a lot of the work gets done through networks. [...] For a CEO of a smaller nonprofit is the volunteer management piece. So the networks are pretty large" (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Throughout the interviews, several leaders mentioned the importance of volunteers in the work of their organization. One aspect, then, of nonprofit leadership entails substantial network management as there are many individuals, from volunteers to Board members. All of these relationships are important to the nonprofit and maintained over time.

Another substantial role of the leader is strategic planning and maintaining vision. Throughout many of the interviews, leaders described themselves as responsible for guiding the strategy and vision for the organization. There are different manifestations of this role, for some this involves managing the organizations visibility in the community. The social services organization leader described it as, “thinking big picture of – I’m always thinking of how can we get the word out about what we do” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). The leader of the community foundation described it as, “my role is to kind of be the face of the foundation [in the community]” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). Several other leaders spoke about the “strategic” aspect of their role in the organization. For example, Leader E listed “setting strategic direction” as one of her primary responsibilities as director (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013) while Leader F
described it as “strategy development” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Similarly, Leader D noted that in relationship to her Board, “I try to nudge them in the directions that I think we need to be going” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). Being responsible for strategy, in the words of the regional foundation leader, “is to make sure that the vision is really clear and that the resources are lined up to the vision” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Thus, these leaders feel that their role is to guide and direct the overall direction of the organization and to ensure that the organization is moving towards its mission and vision.

A final theme from the interviews regarding leadership role are the inherent responsibilities of all nonprofit leaders, particularly fundraising and Board management. These responsibilities exist for all nonprofit leaders, and yet are aspects of leadership unique to the third sector. The relationships of the leaders with their Board of Directors varied across the interviews; some appeared to be more positive aspects of the leader’s role in comparison to others. For two of the interviewees, there was an added layer of oversight from the umbrella organization which has the power to disaffiliate an agency. These leaders believed that belonging to the parent organization was beneficial to them because they have access to resources available through the national network.

The following examples are those Board relationships that seemed to most positively impact the leader’s work towards the organization’s mission. The leader of the community foundation exemplified one positive example of a leader’s relationship with the Board of Directors. Her role as a leader was enhanced by the Board’s activities. This made working with the Board of Directors and enjoyable part of her role as the director. She stated, “I work really closely with my board of directors. It’s always my favorite part of being a director” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013).
She continued, explaining, “They’re usually such engaged people and you can get so much more done if everybody’s on-board and functioning smoothly...We’ve spent a lot of time working on that. Getting it to be like that” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). She and her Board of Directors function as a team. Her role in relationship to the Board is to provide support. She explained,

“I feel like to be a good board member you need a lot of staff support and ... They...look to the director for that because I’m here every day. ... I think actually the board manages the director, but it is really teamwork.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

For the regional foundation leader, her Board members bring value to the organization which enhances the relationship for both the organization and the Board. She noted,

“They bring a lot of value. They have expertise and so you try to figure out which members have which expertise and passions. ... But you’ve got to really keep them engaged so that means you’ve got to...give them real things that actually matter to work on.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

As evidenced by these examples, part of a nonprofit director’s role is to manage Board relationships, to make sure that serving on the organization’s Board is meaningful, and to utilize the skills, expertise, and resources that Board members bring to the table for the benefit of the organization. Three interviewees made comments about the two-way nature of managing Board relationships, “I learn from them and I hope they learn from me” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013). As a nonprofit director, Board relationships are an inherent part of one’s role, and from the evidence presented here these are most beneficial when the Board of Directors and leader work as a team.

Leadership and Organizational Structure

There are several notable findings regarding the leaders’ description and perceptions of their position within the organization. Primarily, the evidence from the interviews suggests that these leaders have a non-traditional approach to organizational hierarchy. Rather than approaching leadership from a traditional, command and control
model of organizational leadership, these leaders approach the structure of their organization as more “flat” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013).

There was significant variation in staff size across the organizations captured in the interviews. Admittedly, a flat structure is more easily achieved when an organization is small. The smallest staff comprised only the director and one part-time staff person (Leader A) while the largest was a staff of about sixty employees (Leader G). While staff size impacts the daily responsibilities of the nonprofit leader, it did not seem to limit/influence the extent to which the individual is perceived as a leader in the community or perceives their self to be a leader.

In addition to this theme, interviewees described the nature of their leadership positions. The leader of the social service agency described, “I just have a different set of tasks...it’s not like I’m in charge of everyone” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). She sees herself in a support role for ‘frontline staff’ who work with clients day-to-day: “I am a little more removed from the day-to-day. ...I feel like I've transitioned to this role of supporting the people who are doing that every day” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). Many interviewees shared this sentiment, that their leadership position required them to step back from the day-to-day work of the organization to a higher, more strategic level of work. Their position as the leader was to provide the support that the rest of the staff needed in their roles. Leader G simply noted, “My job is to help them be successful and achieve their jobs and work with the other staff” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013). Leadership entails a certain amount of distance from day-to-day programs and operations in order to provide support and maintain focus on the strategic and vision-oriented goals of the organization.
Nonetheless, continuing to engage in hands-on work and programming is an important part of staying engaged with the face-to-face work of the organization. The youth organization leader still works directly with kids occasionally. She described the value of this experience for her role as the executive director, “It’s a nice reminder when you get to go out and do those activities where you’re directly working on the programming of how important it is to bring those funds in and dot your I’s and cross your T’s and all that good stuff” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013).

She enjoys working with youth, and so the opportunity to stay engaged with some aspects of her organization’s programming motivated her in her leadership role as well.

Non-traditional Approach to Hierarchy. Unavoidably, leadership does have an inherent hierarchical nature because the leader, unless it is a completely democratic organization, is ultimately responsible for what happens. The leader of the grassroots organizing agency explained, “I tend to be ultimately responsible for the successes and the failures, so if something isn’t going well it’s going to come back to me and I’m going to have to probably find the highest level person in the other institution to solve it” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). The foodbank leader shared a similar sentiment: “When it all rolls down the hill it’s my head that’s on the chopping block” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Leadership does place these individuals in a position of authority. As a matter of personal approach to leadership, each of these women has to determine how best to manage this authority. Most often, the interviewees determined that their position in the organization should be one of support and facilitation of collaboration and teamwork. In the words of one leader: “I’m not just someone who’s kind of a dictator sitting there saying ‘you need to do this, you need to do this’ ... we work more collaboratively as a team.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). For this leader and others, collaboration and
working as a team with their staff are their organizational goals. As will be discussed in the following section, the leadership style of many interviewees also emphasizes this mentality of leading and working as a team.

This theme is reiterated by the social service agency leader. She does not see being at the “top” as what is most important for leadership. Rather, she works for collaboration across the organization. She articulated,

“If you look at our organizational chart, yes, that is my name at the top. And ultimately I do make decisions about a lot of things, but I think just as in a healthy family, nobody is laying down the law. It’s more just that we have conversations about things and I take into account what people are comfortable with and try to think of us as an organization as a whole. Not my decisions, it’s the agency’s decision.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

She emphasized communication as important for decision making. Moreover, she placed importance on each staff person’s comfort, stating that decision making should be done with each person’s comfort level in mind. She exemplified the non-hierarchical approach to leadership seen across the interviews in the way that she perceived decision making power to belong to the whole staff. Rather than being domineering and emphasizing her control and authority as the director, she believed that her position in one of listening to the needs, opinions, and ideas of others and facilitating an outcome that is beneficial to the organization as whole.

The regional foundation leader contributed another example of the non-traditional perception of leadership positions. She stated, “I think leadership is at all levels of the organization. I guess that is something very true, that I embrace, it’s not the top. Leadership is at every level of the organization” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Her comment demonstrates the leadership value of teamwork. She believes each member of the staff leads in certain areas specified by their position; her position as the director is not the sole location of leadership in the organization.
Notably, the authority inherent to positions of leadership seems to be important for organizational success. According to the experience of the social service agency leader, there should be a balance of authority and collaboration. She shared the perspective that leaders must demonstrate a certain level of authority in order for members of the organization to feel secure: “It’s been a balance of trying to take on authority, as I think people want me to. People want to feel secure and that somebody is in charge (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). Finding the balance between traditional, top-down leadership authority and non-hierarchical delegation and power distribution depends on the needs of the organization’s staff.

Leader F demonstrated the challenge that it can be hard to find this balance. She leads an organization that values a “flat” distribution of power and authority, but there are circumstances in which leading effectively requires her to be more authoritative. She shared that “it kind of catches people by surprise when I draw the hierarchy card and play that. …but I try and remind other people that I’m still in charge when we do this and you’re not” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Despite this difficulty, the interviewees seemed to agree that their position of leadership did not equate to top-down control, but rather to a less hierarchically driven position on the team.

For these interviewees, their position of leadership is characterized by the facilitation of collaboration, teamwork, shared responsibility, and communication. Having discussed the non-hierarchical approach to leadership common throughout the interviews, the analysis now focuses on the various leadership approaches and styles of these interviewees.
Leadership Approaches and Styles

A primary focus of this thesis is the examination of individual approaches to leadership. The method of in-depth interviewing provides data that reflect the personal explanations and perceptions of leadership style and the philosophy behind their leadership practices. The data collected evidences nine possible individual approaches to leadership, shaped by both the personal styles of each leader and their organization’s mission. An important finding of this research is that effective leadership is frequently achieved through the alignment of personal leadership strengths with the leadership needs of the organization. The grassroots organizing leader aptly summarized this as a perception:

“There’s an individual leadership style that you develop because of your personalities and your strengths and competencies and your limitations. And then there’s a leadership style you develop because of what you’re trying to achieve and the kind of organization that you work in. I think that there’s a lot about my leadership style that’s fundamentally the same. I tend to modify it more based on who I’m around.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

As she stated, one’s approach to leadership is shaped by personal style and then is developed and adapted to suit the needs of the organization. Evidence of this theme is presented throughout the chapter.

A second trend in the interviews is the description of a “hands-off” leadership style. Being a “hands-off” leader is characterized by not micromanaging or focusing too much of on the details of organizational operation. Rather leaders who described their approach to leadership in this way tried to instill trust in their staff, delegate responsibilities, and empower others in the organization to take the lead on certain projects (Leader C, Leader E, Leader H, and Leader I). While this is a commonality of several leaders, not all the interviewees described their approach to leadership in this
way. By contrast, one leader described herself as very hands-on and involved in the details of daily operation (Leader G).

In addition, many interviewees described their approach to leadership in terms of teamwork or team-related language. For some, approaching leadership from a team perspective was related to hands-off leadership style characterized by delegation and entrusting staff to perform their work without micromanaging. Leaders who approach their staff as a team discussed the importance of providing feedback, training and skills development, and personal care to the members of their staff in order for them to feel empowered. Ultimately, many interviewees worked from the assumption that both she and her staff share equally important responsibilities. Each can lead in their particular roles, and each brings important skills to the organization. The next section will focus on the way that these leaders perceive their leadership approach to have changed over time.

**Hands-off Leadership Approach.** Five interviewees emphasized their approach to leadership as “hands-off”. The interviewees defined this approach as delegating, not micromanaging; not being overly involved in the details of their staff’s work; and trusting their staff to meet expectations with minimal oversight (Leader C, Leader E, Leader H, and Leader I).

A significant reason for interviewees who take this approach is that they trust their staff to do their jobs well. Four of the leaders who described their leadership approach as “hands off” explained that trusting their staff is an important part of this style. The social service organization leader articulated this rationale, “They do not need me looking over their shoulders. I just really trust everyone that I work with... once...we have that trust then I...just let people go and trust that they’re doing what they need to do ... Yes, I’m responsible for what goes on, but in a way everybody else is, too” (Leader
C, personal communication, October 23, 2013). Her mindset of shared responsibility is part of her reason for leading with this approach. Similarly, Leader E explained, “I trust everyone to make decisions. My style is...‘Hey, you're responsible for this, do it. Come to me if the building is burning down or something,’ I let people be themselves, so it's all decisions” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Although this may appear hyperbolic, her comment captures the essence of this theme. In order for a leader to have a hands-off leadership approach, trust between the leader and their staff must first be established.

If trust has not been firmly established, then taking a hands-off approach can create leadership challenges. As exemplified by the experiences of two interviewees, sometimes staff members do not have the confidence to work without greater oversight from the leader. These situations create challenges for leaders who do not tend to lead with a lot of oversight or attention to detail. Leader E shared her experience, “A challenge that I face definitely is how to deal with people doing it themselves – I don’t have a problem delegating at all...What I do have a hard time with, people trusting themselves because I believe that they can do it” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Leader H similarly explained,

“I am not a micro manager at all. Which in some ways is almost bad, ... I have very high expectations, ...I just expect people to do it, and I find that more people than not actually need more direction than I tend to give.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Despite these challenges, the interviewees have found taking a hands-off approach to be an effective style of leadership overall. Part of what makes this approach effective for some is that it is well aligned to their personality and to the needs of the organization. For example, in the experience of the economic development leader, focusing less attention on the “minutia” of day-to-day operations, allows her to focus on guiding the organization at the strategic level. She joked, “I'm not a minutia fan at all. I could never
write on my resume ‘Detail Oriented Person’ – I’m big oriented” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). She is an example of how organization mission, leader personality, and staff needs all come together in effective leadership: her skills in strategic planning are well suited to the organization’s mission of regional economic development, her leadership approach matches her big-picture oriented personal strengths and she meets staff needs by empowering them and encouraging them in a way that allows her to be hands-off.

**Leading a Team.** The theme of leadership and teamwork is multidimensional. First is the importance of the team around the leader for providing support and supplementing weaknesses of the leader. Effective leadership does not happen on its own. The individual needs the support of those around them. Throughout the interviews, there was evidence that leadership is shaped and supported by the strengths of those around them. Several examples serve to illustrate this theme. The community foundation leader articulated,

“I think that some of the key things to me are having good people on your team. So having a strong board, having a strong staff. That’s so important to be an effective leader. I mean, nobody could do it on their own.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

In order to establish this support and the capacity to operate as a team, several leaders discussed the importance of developing a staff that has the skills and strengths to work together in this way. The fundraising organization leader discussed her experience building a good team, “[I] try to find peoples strengths and build on that. ...I feel like I try to bring out what’s best in them and have fair expectations” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013). Similarly, the health and wellness organization leader explained the qualities she looks for when hiring individuals onto her staff,

“I think it’s important as the CEO here to go out and hire the right people. And I think there needs to be a balance of that. I think you need to have people that have a passion for a nonprofit, but have the skills to do the job. ... I want to make
sure I’m hiring somebody who has a balance of the skills and the passion.”
(Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

These qualities are important for the culture of the organization. She ensures that new
hires will contribute both skills and energy that support the dynamic of the organization.

For the foodbank leader, the managers she supervises directly form the core of
her team. She approaches leadership in this group of core staff as working as a team
because these individuals have strengths and weaknesses which complement her own.
In her words, “We really work together well because I purposefully hired them
thinking... what are my strengths and weaknesses, what are theirs, and trying to really
mesh that together well” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). The
regional foundation leader approached the development of the team around her
similarly. She explained,

“I’m big into strengths-based leadership, lead with your strengths and know your
weaknesses and you hire people that compensate for them. ...I’ve had to do that
to make us strong. So I’ve got people much smarter than I am at PR, much
smarter than I am at statistics and measurement and evaluation, we’ve got a chief
financial officer that’s got a background CPA you know.” (Leader I, personal
communication, December 10, 2013)

Leading a team requires the ability to connect with others who bring different strengths
to the table and work effectively with them. These leaders demonstrate that having team
members who compliment their strengths and weaknesses is a component of effective
leadership.

A second dimension of this approach is leading the team and leading from a team
mindset/framework. This entails meeting staff needs, working together and
collaborating, and providing appropriate care. This theme is aptly summarized by the
perspective of Leader E: “We are all part of a team that is responsible for delivering
direct client services” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Her
approach to leadership is based on this conceptualization of herself and her staff as a
part of a team that works together towards one goal. The regional foundation leader offered a detailed rationale for her team-based approach to leadership. Through formal leadership evaluation, she had the opportunity to learn about her strengths as a leader. She learned,

“I am not a hard line negotiator, I don’t like to negotiate. At the end of the day, I don’t like to make huge big decisions. I am not a Type A kind of person, I am more of a convener, a connector, a networker, a host. I like to present things and work with teams to negotiate consensus.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

Having determined her personal strengths as a leader, she adopted the coaching model in order to match her strengths. The coaching model places her in a position of support and guidance for her staff. She works with them to problem solve and develop their own strengths. She articulated, “I believe that all leadership can be nurtured and a lot of it is mindset and intention and so forth and…I just fell in love with the coaching model” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Although not all of the interviewees who describe their leadership style in this way called it “coaching,” they did use many of the same descriptions as is demonstrated throughout this section.

For the five interviewees who approach leadership in this way, leading a team often means recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the staff and providing the training, development, or coaching that is needed to make the team stronger. Leader H summarized, “The tricky part is really understanding your staff as well and knowing what they need for them to function better. […]It’s just a difference of personalities and interpersonal styles” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Among the leaders, various conclusions were offered about the challenges of determining staff needs. The community foundation leader, for example, explained the approach she takes as a leader. She defined it as, “treatin people respectfully…good communication, clear communication. … it’s really listening to what people want and need and helping them
become the best that they can be ... if you lead like that with your staff then you know you’re going to be the best organization you can be” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). From her perspective, these leadership practices, listening, clear communication, and respect, create an atmosphere in which staff members feel valued and are able to grow, thus contributing to the effectiveness of the organization.

In order to develop the strengths of staff, leaders need an understanding of the weaknesses and needs of their staff. In particular, three interviewees noted that understanding the needs for feedback of their staff is important (Leader H, Leader E, and Leader I). The regional foundation leader understood her own preference for feedback and believed this is an important need for leaders to meet. She described her approach, “I like information, ...most people around me are people who thrive off affirmation. Like ‘That was great!’ I'm like the cheerleader” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Some staff feel more affirmed by praise and positive feedback than others. As the leader of a team, it is important for her to know how individual staff members respond to feedback. The economic development leader posited the value she believes people have for feedback: “In terms of, ‘Hey thank you for doing that, great job’ ...people like that more than money” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). In her experience as well as the experiences of other leaders described here, positive feedback makes staff feel valued and empowered in their position which leads to a more effective team dynamic within the organization.

Similarly, the organizing agency leader identified a particular skill that her staff needed to develop and provided the training and practice that they needed in order to become stronger in this area. In her experience, “It’s been interesting over the last 6 years of the training up and just sort of like ‘What do you mean you don’t know how to facilitate a meeting?’ And having to realize that people need more information and more
support” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She adjusted the things she was doing as a leader in order to meet the needs of her team. Her own experience as a young professional was very different; she did not have the benefit of leadership that was invested in developing her skills. She recalled, “I was just thrown into the fire and it was kind of a sink or swim training situation. That’s certainly not for everybody. But I appreciate the people who can swim in that situation” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Although her own experience shaped her appreciation for staff members who can learn and adapt on their own, she chose to lead in a more supportive way and tries to provide staff with the leadership and resources that they need. Similarly, the health and wellness organization leader described her staff expectations: “I have very high expectations, and I will work with you provided you’re working with me to achieve those. And we’ll have mutual respect for each other and we’ll work hard together and we’ll be successful together” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

The regional foundation leader believes she leads a strong team; the members of her team have motivation that is aligned to the organization’s mission as well as the particular skills needed to make the organization effective. She described her team in this way: "We’ve got people that work very independently, it’s not a job to them, it’s a passion, it’s a mission [...] We’ve hand-picked each person and we’ve got true talent combined with passion, and we’re highly entrepreneurial and we’re highly team oriented” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She continued, adding that, “it’s such a gift to be able to work in this world. There are not too many jobs like this, when you really think about it. So here, people have a mission and not a job and that makes my job a lot easier” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). The team dynamics of this organization are highly developed; they seem to exemplify a
mature level of teamwork. This is evident in the leader’s ability to fully delegate tasks. She states, “I’ve got clear lines of responsibility for team members that just take those areas and run with them” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). For leaders who approach leadership through a team framework, this level of shared responsibility, at which staff members have assumed a leadership role over their particular responsibilities, is an ultimate goal.

To achieve an organizational environment in which authority and responsibility for organizational success is shared at many levels of the organization, directors actively and continuously empower their staff. Throughout this section, there is evidence which supports this conclusion, such as interviewees’ experiences giving feedback to staff. The regional foundation leader most thoroughly detailed the impact of the investments she made in empowering her team. She stated firmly,

“You just want to empower people [as a leader]. And 9 times out of 10, they’re going to do a much better job with a task than I would have done with it. And that one time, they’ve got ownership they know that this will reflect them personally - they know they’re going to get credit for it, and they know at the end of the day, it’s going to help one more person.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

In her experience, giving individuals more responsibility within the organization leads them to be more invested in the mission of the organization. She continued, “My problem is kind of ‘Guys, you’ve got to go home now, it’s late, ... It’s more how do you protect from burn out than it is how do you get people motivated” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013).

Adopting the coaching model of leadership was eye-opening for her and helped her to identify her particular strengths and weaknesses as a leader. This approach to leadership resulted in the realization of the impact that investing in staff has on organizational growth. She realized that, “people...want to grow. And if you’re in a place where you’re growing, you’re happy with the people around you” (Leader I, personal
communication, December 10, 2013). Through coaching, she was able to foster a work environment wherein people were able to grow and develop their skills. As a result of working as a team and coaching to develop their strengths, the regional foundation leader has found that her staff are satisfied with the work that they do. The organization has benefited in that her staff, “can look back at the position they started with that’s miles back, they’ve really, really grown, they’ve taken on more responsibility, they’ve really had a chance to develop a portfolio of success ... I think as long as they feel they’re continuing to get more responsibility and more and more, they’re really happy about that” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). The justification serves to support an approach to leadership which empowers staff as team members with valuable contributions to make to the mission of the organization.

**Care and Leadership.** According to evidence from the interviews, demonstrating care for staff members is part of establishing the trusting relationships that empower staff to work independently in their positions and feel that they are valued as a member of the team. The concept of care is defined in the leadership literature by Joyce Fletcher who studied relational work and acts of care in the workplace (1999). Fletcher furthermore argued for relational and caring acts to be normalized and be made visible in the workplace as an aspect of a healthy workplace environment (1999). Additionally, Carol Gilligan’s work on female psychological development contributed to the conceptualization of care in the leadership setting (1982). She posited the ethic of care held by many women as a result of their psycho-social development and argued for the value of this approach to moral decision making in addition to the traditionally accepted, more masculine ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1982). From these early works, other research has followed which continues to promote acts of care in leadership practices.
While not all leaders feel that it is their responsibility to demonstrate care from their position of leadership, some integrate acts of care in their approach to leadership as a way of meeting staff needs and strengthening the team. Leader C provides a primary example from the interviews of incorporating care into her approach to leadership:

“Before...I was working with clients ... Making sure they had what they need and now I have that same feeling but it's about our staff. I feel like I'm mothering them a little bit just to make sure that everybody is doing okay ... Now I feel like I'm really focused on being in tune with how staff are doing, making sure that they are sharing, making sure that we are supporting each other.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

She continued, giving an example of how she has been intentional about integrating care into her leadership practices. She explained,

“[Under the previous director] the staff meetings were just very ...it was like information transference. It was just kind of a clinical feel of 'Here’s what you need to know about this week' and I have made them more of a supportive, warm thing where we just start by everyone saying how they’re doing.[...] Whatever people want to talk about. And that alone has changed the tone of the meeting where I feel like people will feel a little...more at ease with supporting one another.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

She adopted this as approach from her mentor:

“I don’t know if that is a women-centered style of leadership either, all I know is, when you get good people you want them to be there for a long time. So you want them to feel cared for, you want them to feel noticed as a person. We’re not working in a factory, we’re working in a place where people feel big things every day and you gotta take care of yourself. So I absolutely believe that that’s part of my leadership role.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

From the experience of these interviewees relational and caring practices are an important component of leadership style because they foster open communication and a healthy workplace environment. Acts of care help staff to feel appreciated, listened to, and valued, all of which create positive working relationships which contribute to organizational effectiveness in the experiences of these interviewees.
Changes in Leadership Approaches and Style Over Time

Interviewees were asked to reflect on how their leadership style has evolved or changed over time. The analysis of these responses demonstrates lessons of leadership and areas in which these leaders feel they have grown and improved as a leader. The impetus for change in leadership style can be internal, such as aging or changes in one’s personal life, or external, such as the growth of the organization. Overall, the changes described by the interviewees indicate maturity and increased expertise as the accumulation of leadership experience has honed their preferred style of leadership as well as those practices which are most effective.

Across the interviews, these leaders believed that it is important for leaders to continually grow, learn, and develop their approach to leadership. Leader B expressed, “I feel like it’s [leadership style] constantly evolving, I’m fairly new to this position and I’m just always learning a lot” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Likewise, Leader H added, “I’m always trying to learn more and figure out what can I change ... So I think [my leadership style] is constantly changing” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). This sentiment was echoed throughout many of the interviews.

For these interviewees, growth has been the result of change over time, as well as informal and formal learning experiences. Several leaders have had the opportunity to participate in formal leadership training which has helped them learn about their strengths and weaknesses as well as new frameworks of leadership (including Leader A, Leader B, Leader D, and Leader I). These experiences included leadership coaching, leadership conferences, and a local leadership program. For those who had participated in these experiences, there was significant value. For example, the community foundation leader had recently attended a leadership conference. She described the
impact of the experience: “It really was impactful to me. It captured a lot of my beliefs and it seemed like the perfect structure for the...foundation and our community leadership programs” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). As a result, she is able to better articulate her beliefs about leadership and hone her approach within the framework of this model. The value of formal leadership training was noted by several additional leaders for whom these experiences helped to specify the leadership approach to which they feel most suited.

As interviewees gain in years of leadership experience their perspective on leadership has changed. Three leaders noted particularly their increased awareness of the value and importance of listening to others from a position of leadership. Leader A compared:

“Because when I started as an exec director ... I really felt like it was my job to tell them what to do. ... And I ran into some struggles with that because they knew the community better than I did ... over the course of time I’ve learned that there are smarter people than I am and people with different experiences and my job is really just to try to guide and learn from them.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

Her experience was echoed by the community foundation leader:

“I ...suffered from the young person's disease, ...I knew everything. ... I was the smartest, I could tell you exactly what you needed to do. But I think the older you get the more you realize you don’t know anything! So I have to kind of catch myself when I'm working with younger people. I remember when I saw the world like that.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

These leaders find that over time they have become “more open to others’ suggestions” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). They listen more readily and understand the importance of these practices as a leader.

Other interviewees found that over time their expectations and approach towards staff has changed. Leader G explained the evolution of her perspective: “I think I’m more aware of the need to help different staff in different ways to get to their – to meet their potential. Because I think at first I kind of figured out, if I did it, everyone
should be able to do it the way I did it. And that’s not the case at all” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013). She exemplified this change, “I used to work 65 hours week so why can’t everybody else work 65 hours a week? Because that’s too many hours! And so I think as I’ve gotten older I’ve just become more aware of working with staff individually” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

For some interviewees, personal life experiences have been the impetus for a shift in their approach to leadership. Leader G noted that becoming a parent caused her to reevaluate her values as a leader: “I think I’ve always been very family focused. With regard to staff. But I think once I had my own child, it makes you even more family focused” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013). Another influencing factor is the simple fact of growing older. Even interviewees who are still relatively young recognized a change in their approach to leadership over the years that they have held their position (Leader B and Leader E). Leader H attributes change in her leadership style to the perspective she has gained with age: “I’d say I’m softer now in some ways. Part of that just comes with age and taking theory and what should be and knowing that it’s not always black and white sometimes you’ve got to bend” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Over time, leaders gain experience and perspective which allows them to reflect on their past leadership practices. On some occasions, leaders have formal development opportunities which facilitate reflection and help leaders identify strengths and weaknesses. Often, however, leaders identify changes to their leadership approach they have made or need to make through self-reflection.

In addition to personal changes which impact leadership style, changes to the organization itself impacts the leader. As the organization changes over time, it changes the role of the director and the needs for leadership. The regional foundation leader has
been with the organization long enough to experience such a change. She discussed the particular shift which has occurred in the mental practices she engages in as a leader now as compared to when she began as the executive director:

“The mental presence I think is something that I’ve felt a real growth, but I’m trying to even grow more personally. Because you start out ... I worked really hard and I was used to doing things. But...you have to make that transition from doing to sort of just leading and to empowering others. And now I’m trying to really transform to how...I can be clearer in thought, silence out...worries, all that stuff, and be much more strategic and prioritize with my time – and I think...you can’t always lead like that in an organization.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

As the organization developed, she recognized the need to be more strategic and less hands-on as the leader. Assuming a more strategic approach required a different sort of mental engagement. Other interviewees shared comparable experiences through which they learned to delegate greater responsibilities or be less detail-oriented as their staff size increased (Leader H and Leader G).

Whether as a result of changes in their personal situation, from altered dynamics of the organization, or through the accumulation of practice, the interviewees each described ways in which they feel they are a better leader now than when they first assumed a position of leadership. Increasing maturity and expertise over time allow the interviewees to feel more confident that they are leading effectively. The interviews evidenced that these leaders have a willingness to change and to continuously learn in order to hone their leadership style and approaches to be most effective for their organization and most suited to their personality.

**Leadership Work is Never Done**

Despite having overcome many challenges on the path to leadership and trials throughout their experience, the interviewees still have areas of their leadership style they hope to improve. As previously noted, many of the interviewees noted that their leadership style and approaches are continuously developing. The struggles that these
leaders identified are areas in which they recognize their own need for improvement. Leader B demonstrated: “There are some tasks that someone else could do. But I struggle with delegating so I tend to like to work on a lot of things myself and I like things a certain way” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She recognized that her leadership style could be improved by increased delegation of responsibilities to others.

Another leader discussed the difficulty she has dealing with the stress of being the executive director. She explained,

“It’s especially tough in this region to garner enough resources, to have enough resources to do the job and to do the work …. When you’re a deputy director [the tasks and responsibilities of leadership] comparable [to those of the executive director]. You have a leadership role but you’re not necessarily the person laying awake at night. Trying to figure everything out. It’s pretty stressful at times.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

For Leader F, being an executive director can be challenging because she feels she bears the full weight of responsibility for the organization. The challenges of the organization, as she mentions the ability to garner resources, become personal challenges on a certain level as she feels responsible for leading the organization through these challenges.

Leader I sometimes has difficulty maintaining a strategic perspective when listening and guiding her staff. She explained, “Especially as a leader in a small shop, I have to listen to my staff, but not too much, because I’ve got a different role” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She has to be vigilant that her position as the leader of the organization does not become too entangled in day-to-day staff responsibilities so that she can maintain the mental space and clarity needed to make leadership decisions.

These represent current challenges for the interviewees, but they are also areas of growth they have identified in their leadership approach and style. As suggested across the interviews, leadership development is never complete; there are always ways
that they can improve. Recognizing their personal struggles is a part of the process of continually growing and developing leadership practices.

**Confidence as a Leader**

The diversity among these leaders is manifested in the variety of their leadership approaches and styles. Concurrently, there are substantial commonalities among this sample of nonprofit leaders. These themes suggest nonprofit leadership lends itself to a collaborative, team-based approach to leadership in which individual team members lead within their areas of responsibility and expertise, each person contributing their strengths and supplementing the weakness of others, including the leader. The interviews also evidenced care as an important practice for maintaining open communication with staff and others related to the organization. By demonstrating care and acknowledging the personal needs of those around them, leaders foster a healthy and open work environment. Moreover, the interviewees demonstrate the importance of continually developing their own skills and strengths as well as those of their staff.

Another notable similarity among these women, explicitly mentioned by three, is the personal confidence they have in their own leadership capacity. They expressed this confidence as something inherent to their personality. For example, the community foundation leader feels that she comes to leadership naturally. As she commented, she has held an executive director position for most of her career: “I've been a director my whole life, I'm not one who likes to follow directions, so it suits me well” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). She added later, “I think I've always been interested in leadership even when I was a kid, you know? It's just something I always have felt was my place” (Leader D, October 28, 2013). She is confident in her capacity to lead and does not question her suitability for leadership. Similarly, the regional foundation leader reflected, "I've always felt like I would be a leader, I mean I always had
that feeling that I would do it” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

Even as a child, she felt that she had the potential to succeed in a leadership position.

The organizing agency leader described the aspects of leadership that she enjoys:

“I think that I like the demands of the job. I like the diverse set of activities you’re required to do, I like being in the lead. [...] The world is really a mess in a lot of ways and I like being in control of resources that might improve it.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

While she sees the problems and difficulties in the community around her, this leader wants to have a role in creating change. She, as the others shared, is confident in her ability to lead. She described certain aspects of her personality that draw her to leadership: “I mean I have ego and I have strong opinions and I’m not somebody who’s going to go ‘Oh gee, I hope they ask me what I think’” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Similarly, the economic development leader remarked, “And why wouldn’t I be a leader? I never thought...I’d play second fiddle. I’m like, no, I will be – I don’t know how I would ever go back” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). These interviewees are confident in themselves and their abilities and, as expressed here, they do not doubt that they are suited to their leadership positions.

This inner confidence is an important factor for leadership as it is reflected in their external attitudes and practices. Furthermore, the examples these interviewees set as women in leadership who are confident in their positions are important for the next generation of leaders: seeing women assume leadership without hesitation and lead with strong opinions, self-assurance, and personal confidence changes expectations of female leadership behavior.
6. Gender and Leadership in the Professional Arena

This section will discuss the impact of gender on leadership in the professional arena. Interviewees were specifically asked if and how they feel that their gender has influenced their experience as a leader. Leadership experience involves others’ perceptions and treatment of them as a leader, the interviewees’ perception of themselves as a leader, and their path and approach to leadership.

Thesis research found that overall gender did have a substantial and nuanced impact on the leadership experiences of the interviewees. To some extent, the interviewees provided evidence of treatment or perception which was directly related to their identification as a female. There was, however, a significant range in the ways in which gender has impacted the leadership experience of the interviewees, and the extent to which they perceive gender to influence perceptions and experiences.

The interviews evidenced several themes regarding the impact of gender on leadership in the professional arena. The discussion of these themes draws on the framework of several double-binds laid out by Kathleen Hall Jamieson and discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Jamieson’s double-binds provide a lens for analysis. This section will deal with the binds of femininity/competence and aging/invisibility (Jamieson, 1995). It is important to keep in mind that these binds can never be truly isolated, others binds are apparent and influencing factors in these experiences as well. In addition, Eagly and Carli’s work on positive and negative perceptions of leadership traits, particularly assertiveness, inform the discussion of the interview data.

First, this discussion examines the double-bind of femininity/competence. Within this discussion, there are particular focuses on the themes of female assertiveness and female attractiveness. Second, this section examines the aging/invisibility double-bind.
Perceptions of Gender Influence

Before discussing the impact of gender on leadership experience, it is important to note the varying opinions and perceptions of the interviewees regarding gender as an influencing factor on leadership style and experiences as a leader. Many interviewees differentiated the extent to which gender influenced their choices on the career path as compared to the impact it has had in their professional career.

Two respondents did not feel limited by gender in their career choices. Leader B explained, “There weren’t other paths that I looked at that I didn’t go into because I thought oh that wouldn’t work because I’m a woman” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Later, she added, “I can’t think of any concrete examples where I have felt like I was being treated differently because I was a woman” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She does not feel that gender is more influential than other individual traits as an aspect of identity and identity perception. Rather she emphasized the many attributes influencing social perceptions: “the way that you respond to people is dependent not just on, it’s dependent on their age and their gender and the way they look and the way they dress and the way they speak and yea” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Expressing a similar sentiment, the leader of the social services agency explained,

“I can’t point to a time I ever felt marginalized because I’m a woman in leadership or anything like that. Also, just taking over for a former director who really had a presence in town and everyone knew her and she was there close to the beginning... that’s mostly helped, just because she’s really laid the foundation for a lot of great things in the agency.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

She believes that being the second women to head this agency as lessened the extent to which people in the community perceive her gender to impact her leadership style. Leader G stated simply her hope, “I want to think not [that gender does not influence peoples’ perceptions of her as a leader], but I also probably think that it does at times”
(Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013). By contrast, Leader E feels strongly that at a societal level gender is inherent in perceptions of leadership. She argues,

"Gender I think is bigger than what we all will admit. ... We're amazed when we have an African-American president? We haven't had a female president! Look at Congress, look at CEOs across the country. I mean what do we have, maybe 5? Out of the 500 Fortune 500 companies are female. Really? That's the best we can do? So what is that? Is that women are incompetent, that they're not as smart? What is it? We know that's not true. So it's perceptions." (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

She sees the disparity of women in the highest levels of leadership nationally as evidence of the extent to which perceptions of gender influence leadership experiences. Many interviewees agreed with her, based on the ways that they have identified the influence of being female on their own experiences. For example, as a woman leading a nonprofit organization, Leader I reflected:

"I think gender has played a huge role in shaping my career choices. I don't think I saw it at the time, but looking back I absolutely think that. I think that I felt that women were expected to care. To be giving, you know not to be too controversial, not that I haven't grown to understand there are times that you do need to be controversial." (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

As demonstrated here, some interviewees discussed the influence of gender in their careers from a systemic level, discussing trends they have observed, while others discussed their personal experiences; many perceived and shared both during the interviews.

While many of the interviewees exemplified leadership style differences influenced by gender, this opinion was not unanimous. The youth agency leader did not believe that her male peers practiced different leadership styles than female leaders in the nonprofit sector. She articulated,

"I don't view their leadership their approaches to leadership or their leadership styles as drastically different than my own. That doesn't really say a lot. And maybe that has something to do with my age, too. I'm just not even now
necessarily wanting to fit into gender roles, certain gender roles.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She does not want to necessarily associate herself with social expectations of a “female” or “male” leadership style. Rather, in her experience, male and female leadership styles do not differ drastically. It seems that she hopes to avoid the assumptions and expectations which result from assigning gender to styles of leadership. While her perspective represents an ideal, other evidence from the interviews suggests that leadership approaches are implicitly linked with gender assumptions.

**The Femininity/Competence Double-Bind**

The double-bind Jamieson labeled femininity/competence was evidenced pervasively throughout the nine interviews. She writes, “We still confront a bind that expects a woman to be feminine, then offers her a concept of femininity that ensures that as a feminine creature she cannot be mature or decisive” (Jamieson, 1995, 120).

Research has demonstrated the social association of femininity with traits that are inconsistent with maturity and primarily negative while masculinity is associated with traits aligned to maturity and authority (Jamieson, 1995; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Traits psychologists defined as feminine “included being easily influenced, emotional, and illogical” (Jamieson, 120). Jamieson describes the entrapment of this double-bind:

“The words commonly associated with the femininity/competence bind are ‘too’ and ‘not . . . enough’. The evaluated woman has deviated from the female norm of femininity while exceeding of falling short of the masculine norm of competence. She is too strident and abrasive or not aggressive or tough enough. Or, alternatively, she has succumbed to the disabling effects of the feminine stereotype of emotionalism.” (Jamieson, 1995)

The health and wellness organization leader described her experience navigating the double-bind of femininity/competence. In her experience, the bind juxtaposes fulfilling expectations of femininity of being caring and soft, or “sympathetic,” with expectation of competent leadership to not be too soft, or “not professional enough.” She elaborated,
“I can be very professional, I can be very business-like [...] And I think sometimes women get a little bit of a bad rap, of being not like that. And I think that’s unfair at times. [...] I think trying to make sure people know you have the balance of both and I want to be sympathetic to your family needs and what you have going on, but I still want to make sure that when you’re here you’re following the guidelines set out for staff and you respect that.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

For female leaders, double-binds can emerge as threats to credibility and reputation. As evident in this example, Leader G recognizes that she must find a way to manage these competing expectations of femininity and competence or she will be subject to negative assumptions about her leadership ability, as she says, be given “a bad rap.”

**Reactions to Female Assertiveness.** An important theme throughout the interviews was the interaction of assertiveness with culturally constructed understandings of femininity and gender. As Jamieson notes, “Assertiveness is valued in men, but not in women” (Jamieson, 1995). Throughout the interviews, a particular barrier for these women within the double-bind of femininity/competence was the level of assertiveness with which they spoke and behaved. As demonstrated by evidence from the interviews, leaders who assumed an assertive style were often met with a negative response from staff, Board members, or others in the community suggesting that the leader’s behavior was inappropriate for her gender.

In the discussion of female leaders’ assertiveness, there is a sub-theme of the threat of being pierced as a “bitch.” Three interviewees made statements explicitly about the threat of being perceived as “bitchy” as they discussed the theme of assertiveness and gender in their leadership position. This trend is often noted in the gender and leadership literature. Jamieson’s work notes, for example, “‘Women are not called tough leaders, they are called bitches,’ Stafford adds. The works used to describe comparable male behavior are positive. ‘A woman is aggressive and harsh, and a man is directed and goal-oriented,’” says Dr. Pam Douglas...” (Jamieson, 1995).
Navigating the double-bind of femininity/competence creates challenges for women in leadership as they develop their personal leadership style. They must be assertive to the extent that it is necessary for effective leadership in their position, but risk being perceived as too assertive because of social expectations of women as understanding, soft, and mild. The implications of this double-bind are evident throughout the interviews. The following examples capture particular instances in which interviewees felt that they were perceived as a “bitch” or “bitchy” for their actions.

As she described the way that she believes gender influences the way she perceives herself, the youth organization leader stated,

“I care how I am perceived. I don’t want to be perceived as weak, but at the same time I don’t want to be perceived as a bitch. So I would like to fall somewhere in between, be assertive but not the point where it’s perceived in a negative way or overbearing. I don’t know if men have those same kind of thoughts when they’re approaching a situation, that they have to balance between those two things. They probably don’t.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She continued by giving an example of a time when she had to confront a student employee about a behavioral issue:

“As part of my pep-talk I was like you have to be more of a guy about this, like just not caring whatsoever about him perceiving – this young student, what do I care, this 21 year old – thinking I’m a bitch, you know, who cares. So I think I just kind of approached it as I need to be as assertive as necessary and thinking no man is going to be thinking is he being too mean, am I going to hurt his feelings? No.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

For Leader F, combating the double-bind of femininity/competence has been taxing and it has challenged her perception of herself as a leader. When asked how her leadership style has changed over time, she responded, "Yes, for sure. I am so much more of a bitch. Straight up. [...] You know it’s the stress for sure. It’s being a woman and feeling very often like you’re not being listened to” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She has ascribed the label of “bitch” to herself as an expression the direct, authoritative, and assertive style she feels she has adopted in order to make herself
heard. Her perception that assertiveness as a leader makes her a "bitch" evidences the struggle for women to break this bind.

The community foundation leader has also experienced the difficulty of acting assertively as a leader without being penalized for acting too assertively as a woman. She described her perception:

“I think [gender] plays out a lot in the Board room. ... I think that when I have a strong opinion in the board room I’m being pushy and bitchy and not listening to them. ... That I’m stepping out of line. But I think if I was a guy that would never come up. ... People haven’t said ‘You’re pushy and bitchy’ they’ve said I’ve ‘dismissed other board members’ opinions’ and I think if I was a guy that wouldn’t come up.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

She continued, “I think it’s hard for me to express a strong opinion in a culturally approved manner” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). She gave an example of this:

“One of my board members, in a conversation about how ‘you need to work on this’ expressed it this way, and it’s probably true that, I’m so close to what’s going on and I am so much in it because it’s my job that I feel pretty strongly about some directions that we need to go or some decisions we’ve made.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

Even as the director she faces expectations of femininity: that she will be open, receptive, warm and gentle in response to others. However, these are not the traits that she feels she should be expressing as a leader, particularly in cases when she feels she is advocating for the best interests of the organization. The conversation with her Board member exemplified the type of penalizing reaction to female assertiveness as a result of unfulfilled expectations of femininity. By demonstrating her competence and ability to guide the organization, she failed to conform to expectations of femininity.

Leader F has also experienced negative reactions to her competence as a female leader, “Even my Board, even leadership people in the organization can...not know what to do with a very direct female. They really, I think, love and respect what I do and they understand that I’m pretty good at it” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5,
2013). She recognized that she challenges their expectations of gender through her confidence and skill. Discussing her reaction to gendered expectations of assertiveness, Leader F added, “I tend to be pretty yang in how direct I am and tend to talk as much as the boys, partly because I just hate being in a room where the men do all the talking and so it’s like ‘I’m gonna balance this out’” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She did not hesitate to confront the inequitable expectations of men and women to have opinions and speak their mind. She recognized that, as a woman, her direct manner challenges social expectations of femininity because she is assertive rather than passive, opinionated rather than quiet.

In order to lead, these women must have firm opinions, vision, and direction. Assertiveness is necessary for effective leadership. Thus in facing the double-bind of femininity/competence, these leaders’ assertiveness has been a source of tension because they do not conform to socially constructed displays of femininity. The experiences of the interviewees suggest that with patience and perseverance this tension can be resolved.

**Challenges of Attractiveness.** Another aspect of the femininity/competence double-bind which has influenced interviewees’ experiences is the expectation of female attractiveness. Femininity is typically culturally constructed around the ideals of youth and beauty (see for example Jamieson, 1995). A woman who is old or unattractive is somehow less feminine than a woman who is young. Because attractiveness is a measure of femininity, women in leadership positions must balance these demands with the demands of competence in leadership. For the interviewees, social expectations about attractiveness have influenced the way they are perceived as leaders. As stated by Leader F, “I have to say that there are some immense drawbacks [of being female]. One is that there is still an expectation of being attractive, being sexy” (Leader F, personal
communication, November 5, 2013). She continued, adding, "I think the other issue is simply being listened to as opposed to being looked at, regardless. Really where the ideas are all...that people are focusing [on]" (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). Social expectations of femininity put pressure on women to be attractive, but in positions of leadership women are sometimes penalized for attractiveness; being attractive as a leader seems to heighten the influence of gender perceptions. Leader F experienced one such negative reaction as a result of her appearance:

“I had two leadership men make passes at me about two years ago, and it was really uncomfortable and it was partly uncomfortable because I’d like been working out and I’d gotten back to a size 4 and the reward that I got for that was that. And it was really creepy. And unfair. So one of those individuals I still interact with and it’s fine and he got the hint pretty quickly, but it’s just, it was a drag. How do you prevent it? By not responding at that time ... It happened a couple times and I didn’t respond and he figured it out. So yea! I think it’s still awfully tough." (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

Attractiveness poses its own double-bind for women. Women are taught from childhood to strive towards certain culturally constructed ideals of beauty, but as professionals can be delegitimized for being too attractive, or scorned for not being attractive enough. The regional foundation leader discussed the challenge women and girls face in combatting these pressures: “I think...as women, ... we start out with these magazines and ‘This is how you should look’ and ‘This is how you should think’ and ‘You should worry what this person thinks and this popularity contest’ – and you have to really learn to cultivate your own voice, your own vision” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Reflecting on the experiences of younger women and the socialization of gender through such outlets as media, she finds that women must combat ideas of femininity that they have been presented with in order to gain the confidence and self-assurance needed to lead. Girls and young women are often taught to strive toward an ideal of attractiveness
and to value physical appearance as a part of their self-image. As adults, women face expectations of attractiveness in accordance with characteristics of femininity.

The expectations of attractiveness for femininity can cut both ways. While in the personal experiences of the interviewees attractiveness was often a trait they tried to downplay, other women use attractiveness instrumentally in order to receive attention or gain power in a situation. One leader gave an example of this perspective on attractiveness. She explained,

“I’m kind of dealing with this a little bit on my board right now- when women use their sexuality to maneuver through a situation. I have one board member who’s doing that now, - flirting with board members, you know holding side conversations, kind of using her sexuality to...draw attention to where she’s at and where she’s coming from.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

For the leader, this display of socially constructed femininity in the form of attractiveness is problematic for women who do not wish to receive attention based on their physical appearance. Expectations of attractiveness as an aspect of femininity create a complex series of barriers and decisions which women must navigate from the time they are children in order to develop a positive self-image and the self-assurance needed to lead. As leaders, the interviews evidence the persistence of social expectations and perceptions of attractiveness as factors which influence one’s presentation and approach to leadership.

**A Higher Competence Threshold.** Another important aspect of the double-bind of femininity/competence is that there is a higher competence threshold for women who are leaders than for men. This means that women are expected to have a higher level of competence and experience than a man in the same position. Jamieson writes, “Social scientists have confirmed that, in general, women are assumed to be less competent than men” (Jamieson, 122) leading them to have to display their credentials more often in
order to be considered competent. There was substantial evidence from the interviews around this theme.

A primary example came from the foodbank leader’s experience:

“I think it comes back to ... the age and gender thing that I still occasionally feel like I have to throw my credentials out there ... You can see that transformation...they become more engaged in talking to you or actually asking for input that kind of thing. Because I often...kind of give my resume of I've worked and here and here and here and I do have this experience. ... I don’t think you can separate gender out by itself.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Notably, she did not attribute gender as entirely responsible for the fact that she has to provide evidence of her credentials in order to be taken seriously as a leader. Age and gender intersect in these circumstances making it even more challenging for women who appear both young and female to be perceived as legitimate in positions of leadership. A more extensive discussion of the compounding impact of age and gender follows this section.

The economic development leader recognized that she has to demonstrate a higher competence threshold in order to be perceived as a qualified leader. In order to combat social expectations of femininity which would discredit her in leadership, she described her approach in this way: “Perseverance. ...how do I get people to take me seriously? Well, you surprise them. And you do that by, I think women still have to work harder than men, we still have to prepare more, we still have to watch the language that we use and what words we use” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

She exemplified the higher expectations of women:

“We have to keep purposefully, keep emotions out of what we’re saying and it’s hard to do that. ... Men are just as sensitive as women, take things personally a lot. But we get accused of having emotions, when they do it, well they’re just angry or this and this, but we get accused of it.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)
She recognized the unequal standard of emotional control placed on women compared to men. Even so, in order to navigate the threat to women of being perceived as too emotional, her solution was to achieve a higher threshold of competence. She concluded, “So how do I maneuver that? How to maneuver it is just to watch yourself a little more closely and know what you’re talking about and know what you’re doing and let others know that you’re a leader. I mean it’s really all you can do” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Even at the top of the organizational hierarchy, maneuvering gender stereotypes is important for being taken seriously in the community outside of the organization. The health and wellness organization leader sought to achieve the higher threshold of competence expected from women similarly. She stated,

“I had some men who were maybe a little more difficult to work with because I was I was a woman. ... But I've never let it bother me. I actually almost look at that as a challenge to prove them wrong and show them that I’m just as good or better than any other person they've had in this position. I'm the first female CEO in 111 years.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Describing a similar experience, Leader H explained, “There’s a lot of the Good Ole Boys network, there’s a lot of that still out there and trying to figure out as a younger woman compared to most of them, kind of providing yourself in general you know credentials but then also how do you get into that, Good Ole Boys network” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). She continued,

“How do you overcome this challenge? You just kind of go in and kind of have to be assertive and stand your ground and...call them out on some stuff sometimes. ...when they start calling you ‘honey’ or ‘sweetheart’ and like, sometimes you can play it off as goofing around with them like ‘Hey! I'm too young to be your girlfriend’ give them just kind of bring it to their attention.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

As the interviewees face higher standards of competence and prejudicial treatment because of their gender, they have met these challenges with steady perseverance. In order to overcome these barriers, these women have accepted the challenge of having
the credentials and experience to legitimize them in the professional arena. Ultimately, when confronted with the competing demands of femininity/competence, the interviewees maneuver these circumstances with determination and self-confidence. In the words of Leader H, “I think there is probably something a little seeded in the back of my head, the whole like defiant I’ll argue about it... I’ll show them! I can do this, I can be in charge, we can make it work” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). These interviews evidence the great extent to which the double-bind of femininity/competence pervades the leadership experience of women. Nearly all the interviewees were influenced by expectations of femininity, many because they were judged as too assertive and others for resisting emphasis on female attractiveness.

**The Intersection of Age and Gender in Leadership**

Another substantial theme across the interviews was the important intersection of age and gender as influencing factors on the perceptions of these leaders. The women interviewed identify perceptions and stereotypes about their age to be a significant influence on how they are perceived as a leader. The interviewees’ ages ranged approximately from early twenties to early sixties. The age range among the interviewees captures experiences of individuals perceived as young and female and individuals perceived as older and female; each bear social expectations which if not met can lead to negative social perceptions.

Another of Jamieson’s double-binds useful in the discussion of this theme is aging/invisibility by which women must either face the negative culturally assumptions and stereotypes associated with aging, or become ‘invisible’ by stepping back from their career once they reach the ages at which these stereotypes become relevant (1995). Jamieson writes that the social stigmas of age are compounded when gender is added to the equation (1995). She illustrates, “Fifty-year-old women, for example, are not seen to
be as attractive as their younger sisters, and older men are thought more attractive than older women, a view more often held by men than women” (Jamieson, 1995). In the experience described by the grassroots organizing agency leader, aging has caused particular challenges:

“I find it very interesting what it takes to get a message across. I find the gender and age assumptions – I mean I’m 46, I’m not a spring chicken – but the gender and age assumptions that people can make, including my own board, can really just rocket me into pissed off. And I have increasingly struggled to just sort of stay centered and breathe and let it all be okay and let it all sort of roll off. … I have ended up being much edgier and that has taken a toll on me for sure.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

For Leader F, the negative stereotypes of aging, particularly for women, can be avoided in the persona of a “wise woman.” This is how she hopes to avoid the double-bind of invisibility as an older woman. She stated, “I don’t even understand it quite yet as a woman getting older, I’m really interested in how a person becomes kind of a wise woman, and becomes someone respected” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She continued to discuss this theme:

“Because we still tend to be really concerned with looks, and I go to a lot of high powered meetings and who’s getting the attention. And to be young and female seems to be much easier to be sort of picked up on kind of put on stage, and that’s not entirely true, so I’m really paying close attention to this about women over 50 who are leading, how are they leading and what’s going on for them, what are they being asked to do. I’m really fascinated by that.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

The foodbank leader believed that age has been a greater influence on other peoples’ perceptions of her than her gender alone. She explained,

“I think age actually ends up being more than gender. … I think age or the perception of age,...I come off looking very young, young and then female on top of that, I think a lot of people [think] ‘Oh it’s just some dumb young girl’ and you really have to make an effort to prove yourself. ... [I]...felt like there was more times I was challenged, especially by men, do I ‘really know what I’m talking about’ or do I ‘really have the experience to know what to do’ or whatever it was. Until they have the proof, then they’ll take your word for it.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)
Here it is clear that assumptions about age are compounded with assumptions about gender creating an even greater barrier for the leader. The intersection of age and gender had a particular influence on the leadership experience of many of the interviewees.

**Too Young to Lead?** Among them, there was a theme of feeling too young to be in a position of leadership, either presently or earlier in their career as an executive director. For one of the youngest interviewees, it was difficult to gain the confidence she needed to lead the organization. She reflected, “I think I’ve become more assertive. I think I had a lot of insecurity coming into my position. I felt really young, I just felt young” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She continued, explaining,

“As the director I just felt young to be in this position. And didn’t have a great deal of leadership experience... So I think initially there was some great insecurities there, but as with anything, with any job you kind of grow in your confidence and as I had more success in what I was doing my confidence began to grow and now I think I can be more assertive.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

As a relatively young leader, she has experienced increased skepticism about her legitimacy as a leader because she is both young and female. She noted the influence of assumptions about her age as compared to assumptions of gender: “I think I’ve seen more push back because of my age. And maybe that’s my own perception, or maybe just being new to the position or my lack of confidence in some areas. As opposed to just it being just being a woman asking for something as opposed to a man asking for something” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She has experienced this “push-back” particularly in the community where outsiders of the organization question her competency as a leader and as a woman.
The social services agency leader, similarly, experienced some lack of confidence due to her age relative to some of her staff members. She recalled her feelings as she transitioned into a leadership role,

“A couple of the people that I supervise are in their 60s and I’m 35 and they’re my mom’s age. All of a sudden I’m their boss, so that’s been something for all of us to adjust to. [...] I really try to respect they’ve been there a lot longer than I have. They know their jobs very, very well.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

The community foundation leader shared a similar experience and reflected on her own lack of confidence as a young director: “Really my first job I was just so young. I don’t think that I – My first job I just don’t think that I had the confidence or conveyed the confidence” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). As iterated here, there was a theme throughout the interviews of confidence, both its importance for leadership, and difficulties developing confidence in the face of negative assumptions about age and gender.

Importantly, Leader E noted that these deeply engrained assumptions of age and gender influence women’s as well as men’s treatment and perceptions of female leaders. She stated, “Women do it to themselves as well. We do this to other women” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). She continued,

“If I have a woman standing – especially a young women – so age, that has played a role. So if I have a woman standing in front of me, and...she’s talking about an investment in a company and she’s saying X,Y and Z. And I have this white haired man come in and tell me something else, I don’t know what it is but I feel like, as a society, we pull our attention, and we trust the white haired male. And I don’t think there’s anyone exempt from that, and if they say they are, they’re lying.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

She emphasizes the pervasive nature of culturally constructed assumptions about age, gender, and leadership.
While being a leader at a young age seems to be related to certain challenges, women in leadership also face challenges related to age as they become older. One leader discussed a particular challenge women face:

"I'm also having menopause. Yea, man. Hormones. Men don't have to deal with hormones, they don't have to deal with hormones and they don't have to deal with kids in their leadership roles. And they may have their own personality issues or temper issues, but literally, they don't have to deal with hormones...you just can tell that the boys in the room aren't dealing with this.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

From the analysis of these leadership experiences, it is evident that age along with gender significantly influences outside perspectives on leadership, as well as the leadership experiences of these women. Women leaders who are perceived as young, face an even higher competency threshold in order to be considered as legitimate. These social demands often make it difficult for young female leaders to feel confident in their role. However, as they became more practiced over time and with perseverance, the interviewees were able to overcome negative assumptions about their age. As women in leadership become older, they may be caught in the double-bind of aging/invisibility. One interviewee noted that she tried to assert herself as a ‘wise woman’ in order to combat invisibility as an older woman and maintain the value of her voice and expertise.

Despite the success of these interviewees in overcoming the double-binds of femininity/competence and assumptions of age, women continue to be significantly influenced the leadership challenges as a result of their gender. One leader summarized as she reflected on the implications of the barriers to leadership: “I don’t know if it’s going to get any better. I think if you’re not very good at something or you’re – wow that sounds like an awful thing to say, but hopefully if you’re good and have something to contribute, it doesn’t matter regardless of age or gender. But I’m not sure” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She hopes that in the future age and gender will not be barriers to legitimacy as a leader, but at the same time she recognizes
her own implicit assumption that unless you are “very good at something” you will not meet the high competency threshold for a woman to achieve leadership.

**Advantages of Gender for Women**

While women face more challenges in leadership because of their gender than men, the interviewees also noted several advantages for women as leaders. Leader F noted, “I think the positive in a lot of ways, are connections to women and other women” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She added furthermore that she believes there are certain leadership skills that women possess more often than men. She states that women have,

“the ability to bring in ideas that I think are uniquely female – maybe not uniquely female, but...I like the complexity that most of the women that I work with are able to think in terms of complexity. Not that men can't think complexly, but they tend to kind of dive into a project. They aren’t always looking at the lateral or horizontal connections and networks, they tend to kind of go deep and be very knowledgeable and have depth in an area. But I think it’s a really different way of looking at a problem.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

Leader D supports this idea that making connections and collaborating are more often leadership styles practiced by women. She described her own leadership style in this way: “I think that...connecting people and collaborating is one of my higher priorities and a way that I work frequently and I think that is a more feminine trait. That more ...women gravitate in that area, whereas men are more independent” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013).

Comparably, several interviewees noted their own tendencies to be empathetic and emotionally supportive, leadership styles often associated with women (Banducci, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Fletcher, 1999; Helgesen, 1990). Leader B compared her leadership style with that of the previous director: “I mean [gender] does play a role and I think maybe I’m more empathetic than..., there was a male director in my position before, but I also think part of it is just personal experiences that I had as well that
influence the way that I respond to the volunteers that we work with or the kids that we're serving” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). Similarly, Leader C expounded on her perception of gender's influence on her leadership style: “As far as how it plays a role in leadership, ...just being emotionally supportive of staff and recognizing that people have families and other needs to attend to” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013).

**The Persistent Impact of Gender**

For the interviewees, there are daily manifestations of gender's influence on perceptions of leadership. Often these leaders are presented with situations in which they must navigate double-binds; they navigate the risk of social backlash in order to lead in the style they find to be most effective. These situations involve decisions about what to wear to the office, how to speak to Board members, how to provide staff feedback, how to present an idea on a committee, and the examples could go on. The interviewees’ approaches to these challenges are shaped by their personality, past experiences, and leadership style.

While each interviewee could provide anecdotal evidence of the impact of culturally constructed expectations of gender on her experience as a leader, several interviewees gave particularly detailed accounts. Their stories illustrate the persistence of gender disparities and that challenges for women to overcome cultural assumptions of femininity and age. The health and wellness organization leader told about her experience as the only woman on a committee for her agency's umbrella organization:

“I actually was invited to sit on a planning committee for [the organization's] leadership conference next year, and I went to the meeting and kind of started to laugh because...there were 8 CEOs and I was the only woman. So I'm like 'Alright, I'm your token female on this committee of CEOs' but then I started to think about it that there's just not that many women to pick from.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)
She realized that women were drastically underrepresented in the leadership of agencies across the state. While this is evidence of larger institutional and societal barriers to women's advancement into leadership positions, in Leader G's personal experience on the committee, “I felt an equal part in the conversation, ...I didn't feel like the men were excluding me” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

By contrast, the foodbank leader experienced particularly blatant gender discrimination in circumstances in which she was constrained by expectations of her behavior as a leader. As a leader acting as the public face of the organization at a community event, she was ridiculed because of her gender at a personal level, but was not able to defend herself. She discussed this occurrence, a local golf fundraising event, explaining,

“We were the only team that had women on it. It was really interesting. I mean, talk about a good old boy's network, those were all businessmen from the...community on teams. ... We were the only women out there and the sexist comments, even the way we were introduced and assumed that we couldn't play golf. ... Even the golf pro there, he was the worst, if I ever see him I'm going to hit him with a golf club if I have a golf club in my hand ... It was kind of this weird, like 'oh here's some little girls coming along to try and play golf.’” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

She continued,

“The golf pro came out to see us along because the men behind us thought we were taking too long. And the way he approached it with us, and it was like this very 'you obviously don’t know what you're doing, how to play the game'... and so at one point I don't remember what I exactly said, ...just kind of ...throwing whatever credentials that you can out there at him.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

She felt constrained by her leadership position because she could not stand up for herself without potentially causing a problem for her organization. She explained, “know when to pick your battles and also then not to create some battle where he's going to go bad mouthing in the community” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Despite the blatant gender discrimination she experienced, there was no way for
her to confront the issue without damaging her image as a leader. She could not risk backlash from a confrontation which would be seen as too aggressive for female behavior.

The double-bind posed by expectations of femininity and expectations of competence causes female leaders to push against culturally constructed demands of femininity. In order to effectively lead, women push against ideals of femininity characterized by quietness, passivity, softness in order to be assertive. In the same way, women leaders aim to be recognized for their ideas, opinions, actions, and successes, while avoiding judgment based on their socially perceived attractiveness. As demonstrated in the interviews, women strive to meet higher expectations of competency and experience in order to be perceived as legitimate and qualified for leadership.

In addition to the binds of femininity, the interviewees face assumptions of age compounded with expectations of gender. The intersection of age and gender is challenging for women both at the beginning of their careers and as they get older. Again, women face challenges to being perceived as legitimate leaders when they are younger because they are assumed to lack the skills, experience, and ability needed to be successful. Women must cultivate self-confidence and perseverance in order to overcome culturally constructed expectations of gender and age.

Gender also positively impacts women as leaders. Evidence from the interviews suggests that certain leadership traits, such as collaboration, emotional intelligence, and horizontal problem solving, are related to gender in some way.

In sum, each of the interviewees identified some way in which gender impacted their leadership experience. From their comments, perceptions, and experiences, it is clear that gender influences the challenges and perceptions leaders face. While each
interview acknowledged gender expectations as impactful in their leadership experience, many did not feel that they faced substantial barriers because of gender. Each stated, however, that they hope gender will be even less of a barrier and less of an influence on others’ perceptions for the next generation of women leaders.
7. Leadership and the Nonprofit Sector

This thesis is framed by research and popular opinions which suggest that nonprofit leadership is associated with a more collaborative, values-based approach when compared to approaches in other sectors which are associated with more traditional leadership styles (see Edwards, Yankey, & Altpeter, 1998; Herman, 2005). This chapter aims to assess the extent to which collaborative and values-based leadership is practiced by women leading in the nonprofit sector of Southeastern Ohio. It also explores whether these leaders have developed their own approaches to nonprofit leadership. Furthermore, the chapter explores whether the ‘relational’ and ‘collaborative’ styles of leadership associated with women leaders lend themselves to nonprofit leadership.

As a component of this analysis, this thesis examines the intersection of women’s leadership and nonprofit leadership. For women leading nonprofit organizations, assumptions of “soft” or “communal” leadership styles may be particularly prevalent. However, from the interviews with nine women all leading in very different organizations, it is clear that nonprofit leadership requires a wide spectrum of leadership approaches, from assertive and hands-on, to coaching, to providing care. Chapter Five examined these specific leadership practices. The current chapter considers the implications of nonprofit sector characteristics for women in leadership roles.

Across the nine leadership interviews, several characteristics of the nonprofit sector were more commonly discussed as relevant to the leadership experiences of these interviewees. Primarily, interviewees described the flexibility of both their position at the organization, as well as the work their organization is able to do within the sector. Some related this organizational flexibility to personal experiences (discussed in greater
detail in Chapter Four), such as raising children, while others focused on the work their organization is able to do within this environment.

As is pertinent to the research questions discussed above, this chapter has an additional focus on the influence of gender on nonprofit leadership. Some research shows that women make up a greater portion of nonprofit sector leadership than private sector leadership (Dym & Hutson, 2005; Nank, 2011; O’Neill, 1994; Pynes, 2000). Through these interviews, it is possible to gauge perceptions of whether there is a greater portion of female-led nonprofit organizations in Southeastern Ohio. These perceptions give some insight to the dynamics of leadership at play in the nonprofit sector of this region. Particularly, the extent to which women feel their gender influences perceptions of their leadership ability in the community. Demonstrated in the following section, it seems that despite the many women running nonprofit organizations in this area, there are still substantial leadership and gender stereotypes which they must overcome.

**Gender and Nonprofit Leadership**

In the nonprofit sector of Southeastern Ohio, there are many women leading nonprofit organizations. According to three of the women interviewed, the nonprofit sector in this region is female dominated. This perception impacts the identity of these leaders’ and their understanding of gender dynamics in other sectors and parts of the state. According to the experiences and perceptions of the regional foundation leader, the nonprofit sector across the state of Ohio is female dominated. As she described the rationale for her opinion she stated,

“You have a lot of women in leadership in the nonprofit sector, I used to also work for our statewide association for philanthropy...I was interning there, too. I remember we were preparing for the annual conference, and so they would make all the meal choices based on what they thought women would want to eat since they thought women were more sensitive about healthy, conscientious diets.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)
She explains that this perception is informed by statistics from philanthropic network organizations,

“And that by and large, if you look at stats from both the Council on Foundations and Philanthropy Ohio, it is a female dominated field, the nonprofit field by in large. And so I think that’s great, but how we also strengthen, the stronger society will have women leading across our different sectors. And we’re still falling behind there.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She takes a firm position on the need for gender equality in leadership. Interestingly, this translates into a push not for more women leadership, but for more men to lead in the nonprofit sector. She believes there needs to be more women leading in the public and private sectors in order to have a strong economy and democratic society.

Leader B also shares the perception, based on her observations, that leadership in the nonprofit sector of this region is female dominated: “There are certainly more female executive directors and directors and CEOs [of nonprofit organizations] in Athens county than, more female than male that I’ve observed” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013).

The fundraising organization leader who has been an executive director in the region for over ten years, provided a somewhat different perspective, yet came to the same conclusion that there are many women leading in the nonprofit sector in this region. She explained that her gender is not a part of her identity as a leader because there are so many other women leading nonprofit agencies in the area, she is not as conscious of her gender as a leader. She stated,

“Part of what makes me not think of my gender in that role [leadership] is because so many exec directors of nonprofits are women. Most of my board is women, it seems like there’s a lot of women in this community who are leaders and are willing to share their time and expertise to work in the nonprofit world” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013).

Notably, she says that she feels the women leaders in the community are “willing to share their time and expertise”. In the literature, some authors note that there is often a
greater expectation of women in leadership positions to give back, to reach back and help others along the way and that there is also greater social expectation of women to be giving (Fletcher, 1999; Sandberg, 2013).

While there are many nonprofit organizations run by women in Southeastern Ohio, there is also a significant difference in the representation of women in leadership of larger organizations according to the experiences of the interviewees. This perception is a theme discussed in the nonprofit literature (see the literature review in Chapter Two) which has similarly found that gender disparity “remains in terms of the size and types of organizations” where women hold leadership positions (Nank, 2011; see also Bell, Moyers, & Wolfred, 2006; Pynes, 2000). The community foundation leader, who has held leadership positions in multiple nonprofit organizations in various fields of the sector, noted that women consistently lead smaller organizations while larger organizations in size and budget tend to be run by men. She stated,

“It’s probably the same as a for-profit as nonprofit – that the smaller organizations all tend to be women leaders, and as the organization get bigger and more powerful it tends to be all men. And it’s the same in the philanthropy field, it’s the same in the arts field. And I just never felt the drive and aggression to pursue those kind of jobs. And so that probably is gender related.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

She continued, providing an example of her personal experience in which this trend was apparent. She described,

“I sit on a state board and you see it at the State board level, like all the big foundation except for one are men. Powerful men, making hundreds of thousands of dollars and all the small little community foundations they’re all women. It’s pretty across the board.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

Similarly, the youth organization leader expressed her perception of gender division by size of organization in both the private and nonprofit sectors. She noted,

“I just have kind of observed that in some of the other agencies in the [country] most of the larger ones … are managed by male CEOs. But I think the nonprofit
sector compared to the private sector has more females in leadership roles.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

The leader of a youth organization expressed her perception that, “There are advantages and disadvantages I ... to being a woman who’s a leader of a nonprofit” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She feels that in some ways, female directors are perceived more positively than a male director would be, while in other ways, women are seen as less capable. Her explanation is notable for the socio-cultural assumptions of gender that seem to be at play. She explained her understanding of certain gender differences in leadership:

“We [women] can do the more grassrootsy stuff and the more kid friendly stuff and work with the families and things, but I think some of the agencies get to a level where for whatever reason they’re pulling in a CEO- and it’s not just actually a male or female thing but sometimes they get to a point where they’re pulling in a CEO from the private sector and by and large it’s been a man.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She observed, like the other interviewees, that larger agencies tend to be run by men, while there is the perception that woman can do more “grassrootsy stuff” and tend to direct smaller agencies. This observation fits into the discussion of male-female difference in leadership, and whether there are certain leadership capacities more often developed in women than in men and vice versa. To Leader B, it seems that larger nonprofit organizations’ more traditional organizational structure and culture is better suited to a traditional leadership style which are socially ascribed to men. Essentially, as she stated, bringing in a CEO with private sector experience equated bringing in a male leader, who is socially expected to practice traditional, top-down leadership.

The trend of male dominance, and even social preference for male leaders, in leadership positions of larger organization is persistent. A final piece of evidence from the interviews is the experience of the health and wellness organization leader who is
one of only ten female executive directors out of sixty total in the parent organization to which her agency belongs. She articulated,

“Of the 60 [organizations in the state of Ohio] less than ten [executive directors] are women. [...] Now, of the larger [agencies’ executive directors], Cincinnati [is the only female-led agency]. [...] All of the other large ones are run by men.”

(Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

However, she is hopeful that this disparity is changing:

“I think, the [parent organization] is aware of the uneven breakdown, and I think they’re looking at women and I think they’re also looking at ethnicities, as well. Because years ago I think it was Caucasian men, and the United States is not all Caucasian men.”

(Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Some interviewees offer the culturally constructed traits of femininity as an explanation for the disproportionate number of women running smaller nonprofit organizations. For example, being emotionally drawn to provide care, essentially defined here as being willing to earn very little income doing low-profile nonprofit work, is socially acceptable for women, whereas men are expected to be in a ‘breadwinning’ position. As one leader remarked,

“There are a lot of nonprofit organizations in [this area] and a lot of them are very small and the majority of them are run by women. And I think that’s probably for a couple of reasons. I think one, because they have the passion for what that organization’s about. A lot of the smaller nonprofits do not pay a salary that can support a family on its own, so they’re going to be married to somebody else who makes up the difference in the salary or something like that. Now the YMCA is the opposite. I’ll sit in meetings of [the statewide organization] and of the 60 [executive directors across the state] less than ten are women.”

(Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Another interviewee added,

“In most of the nonprofit [and] government jobs that were social service related – social services tend to be dominated by women, yet most of them are run by men. And I think there is some gender issue there. Same with running the federal government. Even looking at foodbanks nationwide, there’s probably more men leading them than women.”

(Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Thus as the interviewees perceive this gender disparity by size of organization, they look for explanations for this gap. Some believed that gender was a more significant cause of
this difference than others who offered alternative explanations. These alternatives, such as women’s aptitude for grassroots or social service jobs, or that they are motivated more by passion than by the desire for status, equate a more traditional gender framework.

**Public, Private, and Nonprofit Differences: The Role of Flexibility**

Interviewees were asked to specifically address their perceptions of flexibility in nonprofit leadership. Flexibility has been discussed as a difference between the nonprofit, public, and private sectors (WorldatWork, 2011; Zhu & Johansen, 2013). Flexibility, as it pertains to this discussion, encompasses organizational characteristics which are less bureaucratic, rigid, or rule-bound than other organizations. Flexibility allows more room for distinction, innovation, and creativity. Furthermore, flexibility allows for greater case-by-case decision making, enabling leaders’ discretion with regard to policies, staff, and the work of the organization.

The research on flexibility in organizational settings across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors identifies some ways in which nonprofit organizations seem to have greater flexibility. A survey of 537 organizations across all three sectors found that flexibility options do vary by sector (WorldatWork, 2011). Results indicated that private, publicly-traded and nonprofit organizations generally offer more flexibility to staff (WorldatWork, 2011). Additionally, the study noted that compressed workweeks are more common in the public sector than other sectors (WorldatWork, 2011). Finally, the study supports the notion that workplace flexibility has an overwhelmingly positive effect on engagement, motivation and satisfaction among employees (WorldatWork, 2011). Other research finds that “nonprofits, while more flexible than public organizations have less flexibility than private organizations because they are constrained by the regulations and stipulations that come with government grants and
contracts” (Zhu & Johansen, 2013). Because there is great variation within all sectors in the type and structure of organizations, it is not surprising that flexibility research is somewhat inconclusive. Several interviewees made comments which support Zhu and Johansen’s conclusion that the nonprofit sector falls between the private and public in terms of flexibility. However, because there are such varied definitions and aspects of flexibility which influence perceptions, it is difficult to create a standard for measurement. It does seem, however, that the nonprofit sector is perceived to be a flexible environment by the interviewees in this study.

Five interviewees discussed flexibility in terms of impacting their work in two ways. Some talked about it as expanding their work and others expressed that it limited their actions. Three of the leaders interviewed noted that they believed that in some ways they have more flexibility in their positions than public or private sector leadership. For some this quality was very important in their approach to leadership, while for others it was apparent in specific activities of the organization, such as fundraising.

As the leader of a local fundraising organization compared, “Well certainly, nonprofit leadership in my experience is a lot more flexible. You have a lot more ability to change things than working in state government” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013). In her experience, the nonprofit sector was not burdened by the bureaucratic and institutional processes of government thus allowing change to occur more readily. Moreover, the nonprofit sector is less burdened by partisan politics as compared to governmental institutions. As exemplified by the experience of Leader A, nonprofit organizations can adopt a position on a partisan issue without the complexities of navigating the political arena. This makes it possible for nonprofits to advocate for
issues, policies, or ideologies that are too politically divisive, complex, or unknown to
pass through legislative bodies. She exemplified,

"You can adopt local recycling, or composting as a business, all these crazy ideas
– you know 'crazy', but that maybe take a little less effort than trying to pass
legislation through two bodies and have it signed by the governor." (Leader A,
personal communication, October 18, 2013)

Through this example, she, somewhat facetiously, points to structural differences
between the nonprofit and public sector that allow nonprofits to operate more
independently. In government, leaders are bound by more complex institutional
requirements than most nonprofit leaders who have the flexibility to try new things
without the same threat of political fallout.

Her comment about nonprofit organizations adopting ‘crazy’ ideas refers to a
common characterization of the nonprofit organization as “other,” existing outside of the
traditional organizational and institutional frameworks of the public and private sector.
Many nonprofit organizations do not fit into traditional organizational models of being
revenue driven, hierarchical, and bureaucratic. Moreover, the extent to which a single
“nonprofit organization” model can be established is limited as not all are revenue
driven, not all are volunteer or membership based, not all are issue-oriented.

Because there is no standard model for what a nonprofit organization does or
looks like, nonprofit leaders often have to explain or justify their organization. The
leader of a youth agency shares her perception, “Sometimes I think that the private
sector doesn’t take the nonprofit sector quite as seriously. [...] But I do think that they
perceive us as the weaker field” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013).
In her experience, many people do not understand many aspects of her work as the
director of a small agency. She stated,

"If you’re not a part of a group or a culture or a family that believes in service or
that is involved in the nonprofit sector in any kind of way then there are a lot of –
there’s a lot that is lost. And it’s just like sometimes like we’re speaking different languages.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

However, while nonprofit organizations may be difficult for people outside the sector to understand in traditional organizational frameworks, the nontraditional or a-typical nature of the sector’s organizations constitutes some of its greatest strengths, such as innovation and independence.

The leader of a nonprofit that does grassroots organizing in rural communities spoke passionately about the value of independence and innovation in the nonprofit sector. She stated,

“Running an organization like this – that is kind of an anomaly in this space. We’re not the university, we’re not a business, we’re this like independent nonprofit that can basically do whatever it wants to do if it’s connected to its mission, its board supports it, it raises the money. So we can always innovate, we can go to the edge of an idea. Which is one of the things that I love about the nonprofit sector, very much. […] Public [sector] sure can’t do that. Very, very public sector places – their hands are terribly tied.” (Leader F, personal communication, October 5, 2013)

She highlights the advantages of nonprofit sector capacity to innovate over government.

The relative institutional independence is portrayed as flexible and freeing by this nonprofit executive. This is another manifestation of organizational flexibility which was seen as benefit to many of the interviewees in their leadership roles.

Another interviewee’s method of explaining the nonprofit sector’s relationship to the public and private sectors focuses on revenue streams. Flexibility was an important theme with regard to funding sources. Leader H posited,

“Nonprofit I think is kind of in the middle in some ways. Because there are more rules [than in the private sector] because you’re probably given some government funds, but there’s still other money there other funding grants that come into play that have a little more leeway than when you’re in government.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

Her remark references flexibility as “leeway” in terms of regulation regarding funding (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Regulation and accountability
are important issues for the sector and nonprofit executives in order to maintain the
public trust. As stewards of philanthropic gifts, nonprofit organizations are responsible
to their donors. The foodbank leader commented on regulation across sectors,

"It's definitely different than private sector, mostly because there are - private
sector the rules are a lot looser, there's a lot more leeway with things of like how
you spend money and that kind of thing. [...]Government dollars it's [regulation
is] very strict, it's very tight." (Leader H, personal communication, November 13,
2013)

For the interviewees, tight regulation and accountability measures can be burdensome.
While they recognize the need and importance of such measures, the amount of
regulation associated with various revenue streams received by the organization is a
factor in their management style. Two of the interviewees reported they have succeeded
directors that were not good fiscal managers. These two women are charged with
rebuilding public rapport and fiscal accountability in their organization. Leader H
explained,

"The leadership of how you lead and address those kinds of things... With
government and even in the nonprofit because so much of it is public money I
think that you have to be very transparent. Whereas in privates you can do what
you want it's your own private business, how you spend your money and how
you do things is totally different. And so that's one of the ways, it's been real
important to my job, making sure we're following rules and being fiscally
responsible and being as transparent as we can. And as the leader you have to
explain that to people because unless they're dealing with it directly at the higher
level they're not going to understand that. And being able to have people
understand that and explain it to them. And being able to explain that without
making them mad or worried." (Leader H, personal communication, November
13, 2013)

The other interviewee discussed the progress her organization has made towards
financial stability, but recognizes steps the organization needs to make in order to be a
sustainable agency. She noted, "I feel like we're much more financially stable now than
we were when I started [a year ago]. I came on ... we didn't have any reserve funds, we
don't have an endowment" (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013).

These challenges make nonprofit leadership strenuous in some circumstances. Another
interviewee commented on the stress of nonprofit leadership compared to the public sector job she held previously. She stated,

"Government is straight 8 hours in and out...it was definitely you work your hours and then you’re done and you don’t take it home with you. This job, I take it home and it’s brewing in my head all the time.“ (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

These interviewees demonstrate both the benefits and challenges of leading in the nonprofit sector. The sector’s relative flexibility in terms of organizational decision-making, staff policies, and leadership direction and vision enable leaders to innovate and pursue creative solutions the problems they seek to solve. However, this less formalized structure also forces leaders to make more decisions about how to run the organization which can add work and challenges to the leader’s role. With regard to finances and funding, the nonprofit sector is perceived to have greater flexibility than the public sector, having less bureaucratic processes, and less flexibility than the private sector which is not held as accountable to stakeholders outside the organization. The evidence presented here suggests that these interviewees have experienced flexibility as a benefit to their organization and leadership practices. For many, flexibility has been essential for allowing them to develop a leadership style that is suited to the needs of their staff and the goals of the organization.

Characteristics of the Sector and Organizational Dynamics

As evidenced by these nine profiles of nonprofit leaders, organizations are uniquely shaped by their mission, staff, board of directors, and environment. Leadership style ultimately depends on the mission and needs of the organization and its staff. This theme is demonstrated repeatedly throughout the interviews and discussed in depth in Chapter Five. These leaders feel that they are being most effective when they recognize and meet the needs of their staff and their goals for the organization. The interviews did not suggest that nonprofit leadership is inherently more collaborative or values-based;
while some interviewees tried to practice collaborative leadership styles, they also noted circumstances in which more direct, traditional leadership was needed.

While this was expressed in multiple ways across the interviews, the leader of a grassroots organizing agency clearly articulated this perspective. In her agency, being non-hierarchical is an organizational value and an expression their mission to promote grassroots action/leadership. From her perspective, the nonprofit sector is typically less hierarchical than traditional, private sector organizations. She explained, “I think my impression is the private sector tends to be more hierarchical and the nonprofit tends to be more horizontal. ... Very flat, we tend to be very flat here. ... It’s definitely a value in the organization” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). In this organization, being non-hierarchical is an organizational value as well as a leadership value. For this organization, being non-hierarchical or “flat” means empowering all members of the staff to take on leadership roles and engaging in collaborative decision making.

However, in certain circumstances, in order to lead her staff and best serve their clients, the leader must adopt a tone of authority or command. As she articulated, “I try and remind other people that I’m still in charge when we do this and you’re not.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). She expressed that there is a balance: in order to be an effective leader for her organization she needs to retain a certain level of power, “remind other people that I’m still in charge,” but also to encourage collaboration and listen to others’ opinions (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013). This leader values the collaborative process, a value expressed by several interviewees. Her approach to collaboration is based in her graduate education. She contextualized,

“I studied theories of participation in graduate school and part of the question that I had at the time was whether different participatory models led to better results and how – what the balance is between advancing an agenda versus
asking everybody what they want.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

However, from her experience as an executive, she finds the need for a balance of both: that there are circumstances in which collaboration is beneficial and positive and other circumstances in which the collaborative process stagnates progress. In some circumstances, the collaborative process itself can be a barrier to progress. She explained,

“I think it’s a really tricky balance in community development, I think we’re at a place where sometimes leaders have to know where we can go, but then in our sector we also get a little trapped by the collaborative process and gauging and asking opinions.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

She continued,

“I think it’s an important balance … I think sometimes… it’s probably more okay for people to lead, but they have to do it by listening and they have to try to bring other people along. It doesn’t mean that they have to not know where they think things should go.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

Based on her experience working in a field in which the collaborative process is essential for building community, she recognizes the benefits of consensus building and collaborative decision-making. However, leadership in these circumstances requires facilitating a collaborative environment while maintaining sufficient authority in order to move the process forward. Among the interviewees, collaborative leadership was practiced, but not at the exclusion of more direct communication and management practices.

**Frustrations for Nonprofit Leaders**

Several interviewees noted frustrations that they have experienced as a result of working in the nonprofit sector. These frustrations stem from common misunderstandings about the nonprofit sector. Their comments recall the differences between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors underscoring the nontraditional space the nonprofit sector occupies in the economy. Because these organizations diverge from
revenue driven business and institutionalized public services, their organizational models vary and can be difficult for outsiders to understand. As the youth agency leader expressed,

“If you don’t work in the nonprofit sector or if you’re not a part of a nonprofit board there are just some really basic things that you might not know or might not understand that for someone in our position can be frustrating. [...] I have such a hard time with that statement or that conversation [about ‘overhead costs’] because I feel like if you don’t invest in the management and the leadership and the infrastructure of your agency it will crumble.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

Similarly, the health and wellness agency leader remarked on a conversation that she has frequently with community members,

“Yea, ‘You’re a nonprofit so can’t I come for free? Why do I have to pay?’ ‘Well, being a nonprofit doesn’t mean that you come for free.’ [...] It’s interesting trying to educate not just the staff, but the community in general about truly what a nonprofit is.” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

Nonprofit organizations are commonly assumed to be cost free. This can cause difficulties for leaders to garner support and funding for their organization from the community because of misconceptions about the nature of the organization and the actual costs associated with the value it creates for the community.

An important caveat in the discussion of nonprofits’ flexibilities is the relationship of the organization and its donors. In the sense that nonprofits are dependent on philanthropic donations, they are highly accountable to this group of stakeholders. Thus, there are certain pressures for nonprofit leaders that exist because of this accountability. The economic development organization leader remarked,

“The leadership piece behind that is sometimes our hands get tied. And for nonprofits there is some tying the hands when it comes to the regulatory nature of Boards of Directors, you know private businesses a Board of Directors may or may not exist for a company. So the level of economy is different.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

From the perspective of a local community foundation leader:
“I think non-profits could learn from for-profits the way they look at money. So I think they’re different that way. ... I think sometimes, when they [business people] enter the non-profit realm kind of lose their common sense, especially on the board level. They might be a really smart businessman and they get on a non-profit board and they try to lead with their hearts and that’s not why they’re on the board. We need your business professionalism here, so. I think that the non-profits that can be run more like a good business and would...probably [be] stronger.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

The economic development leader agreed stating, “I think for nonprofits to survive today, any nonprofit, they have to look at what they do as a business” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). She explained,

“Everything that we do has to be focused on revenue. And the only way you can get revenue is to create value for our customers and for your clients. [...] I think a lot of times people in the public sector forget that the – you do have a customer.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

In the experience of these interviewees, there are often leadership and management practices associated with the for-profit sector that are applicable to their organization. While nonprofit organizations have certain inherent differences regarding their designation and role in the economy, the management of these agencies is not innately different from leadership in other sectors. Rather, as demonstrated here, nonprofit leaders contribute to and learn from leadership practices across sectors.

**Nonprofit Organizations’ Role in the Community**

Evidence from the interviews did suggest that the collaborative styles of leadership (discussed at length in Chapter Five) practiced by these women were well suited to the organizational environment of the nonprofit organizations which they led. Yet as evidenced by the frustrations some leaders experienced, collaboration must be balanced with direct communication and firm leadership in some circumstances.

For each of the interviewees, flexibility played an important role in their approach to leadership. As evidenced by the experiences of these interviewees, nonprofit leaders often have greater flexibility with regard to decision-making,
establishing organizational goals and vision, and staff policies and procedures. This enables leaders to innovate, pursue creative solutions, and collaborate with other organizations in the community. However, with regard to finances and funding, nonprofit leaders often have less flexibility than private sector executives because they are more accountable to a Board of Directors, donors, and other community stakeholders which are invested in the mission of the organization.

Many interviewees shared their perspectives on the role of nonprofit organizations in their community. These perspectives suggest, despite having strong beliefs in the work in which they are engaged, leaders have a realistic understanding of the impact they can create. As the community foundation leader stated, “The money, money doesn’t solve problems, it’s a complicated social fabric – so I’d like to say we’ll change the world, but I guess I’m jaded and don’t see it that way. But to be able to support the work of innovative people who do have ideas on how to move the needle on things. … If we can bring people together for more impact, that’s what we really strive to do.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

She believes that her role as a nonprofit leader is not to try to ‘change the world’ but rather to support the work of others in the community who are working to make a difference, to make connections and to build community. As a foundation leader, she believes that a role she plays is to support other nonprofit leaders and organizations through grant-making: “The grant-making part is enabling people who are the experts in the area to do more and be more successful in their work” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). Another interviewee added, “I think that’s part of the role of the nonprofit in the community is to make change to not accept the status quo and so I advocate for policy now” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013). In the end, the interviewees’ bottom line is to focus on the impact that the work of their organization has on the people they serve. As Leader H articulate, “It’s looking down the line at who the client is, what are we doing and why are we doing it and how does it
benefit the people we’re serving” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Thus while nonprofit leaders can learn from public and private sector leadership, they are also distinctly motivated by their organization’s mission.
8. Leading in Appalachia: Regional Influence on Leadership

In this chapter we will look at the last piece of our leadership puzzle. The analysis focuses on the possible impact that Appalachia as a region has on the organization and their leadership mission. It explores how and in what ways working in Appalachia had an impact on the work of nonprofit organizations as perceived by their leaders. Specifically, this thesis is interested in whether the lack of a dense leadership network in the Appalachian region relates to or affects leadership styles and opportunities for women.

The interviews provide evidence of the impact of the geographic and cultural location on these nine non-profit organizations and their leadership. They demonstrate the impact of social and cultural attitudes and values as well as economic and environmental characteristics for leaders in the Appalachian region.

The history of the Appalachian region of the state has been different than other parts of the state (as discussed in Chapter Three). Because of its wealth in natural resources has experienced the boom and bust cycle of resource extraction, without benefiting from profit or development. The Appalachian counties of Southeastern Ohio are some of the poorest in the state of Ohio (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). The nonprofit and philanthropic sectors of this region work to bridge the gaps between government services and the market, filling community needs. In the developing economy of the region, nonprofit organizations, in collaboration with local and state government, have proved important for organizing, incubating, and coordinating local initiatives.

Historically, the leadership network of Appalachia has been underdeveloped and lacking in infrastructure. Leadership positions have often been monopolized or controlled by external actors, specifically the business and government sectors. As a result, the opportunities for local leadership were often stifled or suppressed. Thus
networks of leaders from within the community did not develop. As discussed in Chapter Three, efforts were made to address the economic disparities in the region in the 1960s through the creation of community action agencies and again in the 1980s when Governor Voinovich created the Governor’s Office of Appalachia (Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, 2013). Today, there are efforts throughout the region to foster leadership development and a network of leadership in order to strengthen the region and establish a pipeline of future leaders for the region. One such program was begun by the community foundation interviewed for this thesis.

These leadership interviews capture the experiences of these women leaders who are leading within that structure, as well as their efforts to foster leadership for the future. Ultimately, the goal of this analysis is to contribute to the development of leadership in the Appalachian region.

There was a particular focus during the interviews on the perceptions among local nonprofit sector leaders of regional influence on nonprofit and philanthropic work. The interviewees were each asked about the extent to which being a non-profit leader in Appalachia influences her leadership style. In addition, respondents also offered their experiences and perceptions of regional influence on their work at various times during the interview. Some elaborated more in this subject than others.

There was substantial variation in the number of times and extent to which leaders discussed the influence of characteristics perceived to be Appalachian. While some interviewees discussed challenges their organization faced that were unique to the rural region, other discussed benefits unique to the region. Across the interviews, the leaders identified characteristics of Appalachia that affected their organization; these included social, political, and geographic issues. The impact of regional characteristics were both positive and negative: for some interviewees, a culture of wariness and
distrust of outsiders was a barrier to the effectiveness of their organization, while for others, the cultural values of generosity and community were beneficial to their work.

**Ties that Bind: Investing in Appalachia**

Several major themes regarding the influence of regional characteristics on nonprofit leadership and work were present across all nine interviews. First, in capturing the leadership narratives of local nonprofit leaders, there is abundant evidence demonstrating the personal and professional investment of these individuals in the Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio. For some this tie to the region began while attending college in the region, others were raised in Appalachian Ohio. Some interviewees expressed the intention to make their homes and livelihoods in this region indefinitely, while others felt less tied to this particular geographic location. For example, Leader A explained that she was not particularly tied to this region. She explained,

“[It] could change, because we always say that if our son goes away to school or moves to Chicago or NY or something that we’ll want to move and be around him but it’s not cut in stone. ... I see a lot of people moving here, especially women, moving here to be with their children and take care of their grandchildren. ... I’m just saying that may be me someday somewhere else.” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

This perspective contrasted with that of Leader C who called this region “home”:

“I saw a lot of Athens county and the surrounding area and just really came to appreciate this place, not the city of Athens, but just the region that we live in and I think I saw a lot more of it than the typical freshman, sophomore, or really just college student in general. It just really felt like home to me and I think that’s why we’ve ended up here semi-permanently. This feels like where we want to be.” (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

Her work as a nonprofit leader in this area is tied to her appreciation and enjoyment of this region.

Across all nine interviews, there was consensus that the organization’s leadership and work in the community are influenced by region-specific factors in some
way. Five leaders discussed social and cultural attitudes and values which influenced their work. In other cases, leaders perceived characteristics of the surrounding environment and economy as factors influencing their work. This section will begin by discussing the challenges and opportunities for leaders presented by social and cultural values and attitudes in the Appalachian region.

**Insiders/Outsiders: Becoming a Community Member**

A frequent theme in the interviews was the dichotomy of insiders and outsiders: insiders being individuals who are from the region versus outsiders, those who have moved into the region as students or adults. This theme was manifested in many instances throughout the interviews, including the theme of wariness or distrust of outsiders that several leaders experienced in the community. Furthermore, this dichotomy was evident among the interviewees themselves who seemed to all identify as residents of the region, yet felt differently about whether they were an insider or outsider of the region. For several, even though they felt that they were an insider of the region, community members perceived them as outsiders. The impact of this dichotomy shaped the leaders’ interactions with community members and those engaged with the organization.

The leaders widely discussed the social and cultural trend of wariness and a lack of trust of people who are considered “outsiders” of the region that is evident in Appalachia. This perception is founded in the interpersonal experiences of leaders with community members, clients, and long-time residents of the county.

For the foodbank leader, working with residents of Southeastern Ohio necessitates a different tone and style as a leader compared to her experience working at an agency in Franklin County. Through experience, she learned that even the way she
dresses must take on a different tone in order to align with cultural standards so as not to be perceived as threatening or too powerful. She explained,

“If I show up where there’s – if I walked into a pantry even the pantry volunteers and workers, if I come in with a suit, they’re like ‘Whoa, who’s the suit person’ and [put up] instant walls. Whereas if I come in more casual, I’m one of them, I’m at the same level, I’m not trying to be snooty or over them and act like I know it all.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

She adopts her leadership style to fit these cultural standards of behavior and appearance because she believes it is important for her organization and herself to be “more in tune with our clients” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Another woman, the leader of a branch of a national organization that works with youth, shared a similar experience. Being conscious of how she is perceived is important to gaining the trust of the families of clients and volunteers. She stated,

“You sort of have to take one hat off and put the other on. I’m going to dress, and behave, and speak very differently if I’m talking to Rotary than if I’m going to one of our client’s homes. If I walk into one of our client’s home the same way I was dressed at Rotary and I speak that same way I might offend them, or they just might not even want me to come into their home. They won’t open up to me.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

For the youth organization leader, long-term community members are sometimes wary and hesitant to trust her because she is perceived as an outsider. She attributes this to the gap between how she identifies herself and how members of the community identify her as she transitions between being a student and member of the community. She explains,

“Even though I feel like I’m an Athenian through and through because I’ve lived here and worked here for a number of years, I don’t think a lot of the families would say that about me. …definitely as an outsider, […] they are less wary of people who have been here for generations.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She added, “It takes a little longer to develop trust and respect from those families and individuals that we work with” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). In her experience working with youth and families in Appalachia, overcoming the stigma
of being an outsider and earning the trust of families and community members was a difficult process. As she learned how to work with the clients and families her organization serves, she developed listening and communication skills. She explained,

"It took me a while before I felt comfortable ... I think I just learned over time or have maybe just become more empathetic or more compassionate or just a better listener, I don't know, where I can do a better job of working with both our parents and our volunteers and our funders and ... doing that dance." (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

While social and cultural differences were a barrier, she learned how to lead in a way that overcame these differences, making her a more effective leader for an agency serving this region.

Other leaders also contrasted their leadership experience in Appalachia with other social and cultural environments. The leader of the regional foodbank contrasts her experience working at an agency in Columbus with the attitudes of community members in Appalachia:

"[In Columbus] it was a very ‘us versus them’ mentality. Here it’s more ‘these are our friends and neighbors. ...It is much more ‘these are our own community members, ...they work here, but also we live with them out in the community.’ It’s a much more personal connection." (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

In contrast to the less personal urban experience, her experience in Appalachian culture demonstrates the cultural value placed on community and personal relationships. Becoming aware of cultural values and widely held attitudes is perceived as important for effective leadership among leaders who are not natives of the region.

Understanding the Region: The Importance of Cultural Values

Another theme across interviews is the importance these women place on leading in a way that is informed by the values of the region in which they operate. Cultural awareness is a value many of these leaders share. As a leader, it is important to be aware of traditions and values that may be different than other regions in order to
guide the organization’s work in a way that is suited to those values. Two interviewees captured the essence of this theme. The leader of a local community foundation stated, “I think we have to be really sensitive about Appalachian traditions and values and... fit our organization within that context or it won’t be successful” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). She related the importance of being aware and ‘sensitive’ to community values with the success of the organization. Similarly, the youth agency leader expressed, “You kind of have to juggle being able to relate to some of the clients that we work with and the kids but then also deal with the professional side of what we do” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). She must be able to act and communicate in such a way that is consistent with the culture of community members in some circumstances, while maintaining a professional air in other capacities as the executive director.

In these responses the reason that leaders believe being aware of community values bears such importance is its impact on the success of the organization. In order to further the mission of their organization, individuals in leadership must behave, dress, and communicate in a fashion that reflects community values.

Two interviewees identify themselves as Appalachian natives; they were born and raised in this region of Southeastern Ohio. For these two leaders, the region had a personal impact on their development as leaders, as well as continues to be the location of their organization’s work. As natives of the region, these leaders offer perspectives and experiences that are informed directly by their identity as Appalachians. During the interviews, these women’s personal identification as a part of the culture was a clear influence on the tone that they used to speak about nonprofit work in the region.

One of these leaders was born and raised in Washington County, Ohio and she now runs a technology business incubator. During her interview, when asked about how
being a leader in Appalachia influenced her leadership style, her response focused on how her own identity as an Appalachian shaped her leadership style. She articulated, “Appalachians typically are very resourceful people. We’ve had to be, it’s what our region is. So I’m one of those people that believes in collaboration will accomplish anything” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013). Drawing again on the insider/outsider theme, she explains why she believes there is wariness among Appalachians of people who seek to lead here but are not from the region. She remarked, “Part of the Appalachian struggle is when outside people come and try to tell us what to do. It is really difficult then, because we have a little bit of a chip on our shoulder because things have been taken away from us.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

She includes herself in these statements, making it clear that she identifies as an Appalachian. Her thoughts about the region come from a place of familiarity and community. Referring to her statement about Appalachian’s having a “chip on our shoulder” she says, “So people generally still have that attitude but it’s changed a little bit. I still maintain that attitude a little” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013).

For leaders who are not “insiders” to the region, their experiences with wariness and distrust from community members align with the explanation offered here. As outsiders, they are seen as coming in from outside and trying to wield power/control of resources. From her position of leadership, the economic development leader recognized the view that she holds, and worked to overcome it in order to achieve collaboration. She aptly explained the rationale behind her defensive reaction: “I find myself- not meaning to, not wanting to – but...I listen to them, I want to hear what they want to say, I like to look for people’s true motivations. ... And if I don’t believe they have pure motivations then sometimes it’s hard for me to work with them. ... I give people the benefit of the doubt but I will quickly flip a switch and say, ‘Well you wouldn’t understand, you’re not from here.’ And then
I’ll work it back out, because we all have to work together, we all have to do well.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

In this statement, “because things have been taken away from us,” she references the social impact of deep, historical roots that inform understanding still today. In a region where talented people often leave, this leader stands out as an example of success for the region as someone who achieved higher education and then stayed in the region to pursue her career. She has chosen to live and work in the region to create change in her capacity as a leader.

**Local Divisions: Barriers to Building Community**

Building community is not always easy as evidenced by interview comments about county divisions, rural/urban divisions, and town/gown divisions. These divisions create challenges for leaders working in the region. Several leaders observed strong divisions between counties and others between the city and less populated areas of the county. The fundraising organization leader described division in the region as “silied”. When there was an opportunity to merge with other organizations with similar missions in other counties, there “was a lot of different opinions [on the Board of Directors] as to whether that was the best idea for Athens County.” Expanding on this experience and others, she stated “Appalachia can be very siloed. Athens County, we don’t want to have anything to do with any other county, but it’s like that everywhere I guess” (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013).

Furthermore, because there is a large state university located in the region, there is a significant economic and social divide between community members who are connected to this institution and those who are not. This division of “town and gown” is a longstanding issue. For the director of the regional foodbank, these differences impact how she interacts with various members of the community. She is conscious of the politics that exist in these community dynamics:
“Athens with the university here makes a big difference. Very local people don’t want to mix with the university population, they don’t feel comfortable, part of it’s education, but it’s just status and just cultural differences. It’s everything. Even since the employees and how I interact with them.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

The youth agency director has observed the economic differences among the students engaged in her organization. She noted, “It’s such a small town but yet you have such great divides in the experiences people have and where they’re coming from” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). These divides, between urban/rural, town/gown, and others have been noted in recent literature on Appalachian development. As one author noted, “Appalachia has become a region of diverse lifestyles where a wide spectrum of social classes live in close proximity in small towns. Face-to-face contact among people of all classes is a reality of daily life in rural areas and small communities” (Harper, 2000). However as the author notes, “Social stigma is directed against the lower class” (Harper, 2000). This juxtaposition of lifestyles and socioeconomic status was observed by several leaders. The youth agency leader has noted its particular implications for high school students and their perceptions of their future goals. These status differences are a community division that the interviewees work to overcome.

**Regional Values: Generosity and Commitment to Community**

Four of the interviewees discussed the regional value of commitment to community. As is referenced in personal accounts and literature, residents of Appalachia hold community, kinship, and ties to the land as important values (Caudill, 1963; Obrien, 2000; Harper, 2000, Ziliak, 2012). For leaders of nonprofit organizations in the region, this value touches many aspects of the work that they do.

The community foundation leader observed that people tend to be private about their wealth and often do not want the community or the foundation to know about their
resources until after death. However, when there is a need in the community, individuals act with great generosity. She noted, “People are fairly private here, yet, on the other hand, those people will reach out and help their neighbor without thinking about it and I think that’s an Appalachian value that’s maybe not the same in an urban area” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013).

The leader of the youth agency also shared her exposure to this value held in the community. In the process of fundraising, she has observed that people want their resources to stay in the community in which they live, usually the same county: “There is a real focus on local. ... I just think it’s the culture here” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013). These experiences suggest that the region’s residents, both in more populated areas and in rural parts of the counties, share a cultural value placed on generosity and supporting one’s community.

Another manifestation of the cultural value placed on community expresses itself in the way that agency-client relationships look in the public and nonprofit sectors of Appalachia. The foodbank leader described it as “Much more casual. Much more relationship built” compared to agency-client relationships in the urban area of Columbus, Ohio (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013).

The regional foundation leader, who was also from Appalachia, discussed the importance of this regional value on the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. She posited, “In Appalachia, and I think the research would back me up, it’s that people tend to stay more connected to their community, to live here, stay here, family roots are really important. That sense of this land – and so our community is less transient than other communities” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She spoke extensively about the impact that this regional value has on communities, emphasizing the cultural mindsets and values that influence nonprofit and philanthropic efforts in the
region. The populations of Appalachian communities, especially small towns and rural areas, tend to be somewhat less transient than other regions which may be a result of the cultural value placed on family and ties to the land, as discussed by the foundation leader.

The perception that the Appalachian region is a less transient population than other parts of the state is seen as both a strength and challenge for the region and these nonprofit organizations. One consequence observed by the regional foundation leader is “we don’t have as many new ideas, new ways coming in. You don’t have the diversity that you have in other areas” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). This presents a challenge which nonprofit and philanthropic leaders must overcome in order to engage the community with their vision for the future of the region.

As a native of the region, the foundation leader has a particular stake in the region that is evidenced by the passion with which she speaks about the strengths, challenges, and opportunities in the region. The mission of her organization, which she has been leading for around seven years, is to increase resources in the region through philanthropic investment. This foundation leader, along with the other leaders interviewed in this research, believe that there is wealth and abundant opportunity in this region and that they have a role to play in maximizing their benefit for the region. Four interviewees discussed at length the initiatives their organizations are engaged in to maximize these various opportunities for community improvement.

Looking Forward: Opportunities in the Region

In Appalachian communities, the interviewees perceived that some people have diminished expectations of what is possible for the future of their region. This cultural attitude is apparent to a leader who grew up in the region and now works in the philanthropic sector. She explained, “It can be a cultural mindset and a place that has
had a lot of boom and then bust, and then not a lot of movement on the bust for, say, 100 years. Sometimes there’s a diminished expectation and a lot of people talk about this in our culture” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). As an Appalachian, her perception of this mindset is based in personal experiences as well as professional experience at the state and local levels. Her professional opinion is valuable as she has spent most of their adult life working on regional policy and regional philanthropy throughout the region.

Because of the cultural mindset and history of boom-bust described above, the leaders interviewed here feel strongly about the need to cultivate a positive and hopeful attitude in the Appalachian region. One leader spoke extensively about the need to shift this cultural attitude:

“There is this sense of ‘I can’t do that, I can’t I can’t I can’t’ that’s the big reason we started the ICAN program – I can. Our entire campaign at this foundation came out of how can we share stories of success. Saying, ‘You’re going to be successful because you are from Appalachia, because of the experiences that you had here that creativity, the resilience, the culture, the love around you, this community’ [...] But that’s not the dominant message, that’s the message we’re promoting and so I think there’s an Appalachia as far as we’re doing that, of this kind of diminished expectations and you see it especially in the educational systems.” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She emphasized, “You have to expose people to how it can be, because a lot of people tend to think nothing is going to change” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Continuing, she expanded on this point,

“I think it’s just little things, sometimes seeing ‘Oh my gosh, there is another reality that is possible and it’s crazy that the people in Ironton, Ohio don’t have access to a hospital, that’s it, I’m going to do something about it.”’ (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

She was drawn to philanthropic work because she believes it offers opportunities to bring about these changes, both in the physical status of the community and the community mindset. She experienced a transformation in perspective personally when she traveled to Switzerland and came back to Appalachia “thinking so much completely
differently about how the quality of life can be” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). Visiting a country with “free education” and low unemployment inspired her to work to make these resources available to people in her own community.

A critical part of looking forward is empowerment. In order to generate human capital and empower community members to aspire to better their communities, the nonprofit leaders and organizations captured in this study employ a variety of strategies. The grassroots organizing leader whose organization does work throughout the region explained how her work and the work of her organization focuses on empowering and uplifting the Appalachian population they work with. She explained,

“When you’re working with very grassroots people or low income people the role that we try to play here at [our organization], regardless of our leadership position is one of listening and supporting those people. And making sure they understand that they have a leadership role to play and that they have gifts to share. [...] As organizers, which we basically are here, you try to lift up other people to try to be their own leaders when you’re doing community-based work.” (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

The goal of empowering and inspiring leadership among community members strongly influences the leadership approach she uses when working in these grassroots, community-based settings. In order to encourage community members to step up to leadership, her approach must be to support through listening and guiding in an encouraging way.

Another way that nonprofit leaders are working to capitalize on opportunities for growth and development in the Appalachian region is by engaging community members who have wealth, resources, and ideas and calling on them to support the region they are from. The regional foundation leader uses the example of one of her board members to exemplify the kind of aspiration she and her organization aim to inspire. As an individual, she shared this aspiration and is personally passionate about
instilling it in others, particularly those with resources to invest in their community. She narrated,

“One of my board members, he’s the chairman of a major company who’s grown up here in this area. It’s like you just have a chip on your shoulder. ‘I’ve seen that everybody else can have this, why can’t we have these opportunities?’” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)

In the same vein, she expresses a frustration that, “Often the people that are making the biggest impact are the people that have not grown up here, or have grown up here and have moved away and come back” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She herself is someone who moved away briefly before coming back to the region in her current position. While she is passionate about philanthropy’s impact and inspiring community philanthropy, other interviewed leaders take different approaches to community investment. Some have identified the need to create jobs and focus on economic growth. The economic development organization leader aims to foster regional improvement by capitalizing on technological and creative opportunities for entrepreneurship and economic development. She remarked,

“A lot of people in this community are pretty innovative and creative and all of those things. It’s not necessarily – part of this intention when it started was let’s take technology being developed at the university, why aren’t we turning it into businesses for the poorest part of the state of Ohio?” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

Other leaders work towards developing the region’s leadership network and training young leaders. Leader D focuses on leadership training and the development of a leadership network. Fostering leadership in the community is a relatively new initiative for the foundation, but it is something that this foundation leader along with another local nonprofit leader have considered important for many years,

“We talked a lot about leadership and how there was kind of a void for bringing up new leaders in our community. So, we...wanted to start a leadership program and I was interested, so we started this leadership program. And it’s just kind of taken off since then.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)
It is as a result of her perception that the leadership network in her community was underdeveloped that she developed a leadership program for the county her foundation serves. To her, the lack of a developed leadership network was stifling the community’s ability to grow because there was a lack of coordination between overall community needs and leadership skills and initiatives. She stated,

“I think that to be able to move a community forward, you have to be able to understand where the community is going, or wants to go, or needs to go, what the big problems are. So, our community leadership program really focuses on different aspects of the community – where the needs are, where the issues are, where the energy is – so those graduates get real intensive learning in those areas.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

She believes that from her position of leadership, the greatest impact she can make towards meeting community needs is to develop the leadership network. Furthermore, she expressed the importance of aligning leadership to community opinion and needs. She argued for an approach to leadership that does not have a pre-determined or individual agenda, but rather for leadership that is informed by community needs and conscious of public opinion, stating:

“We get great feedback and our favorite feedback is from people who were raised here and go through the program and their eyes are kind of opened as to what all is involved in their community because I think when you’ve grown up in a place you have a real definite idea of what your home place is, but then you’re exposed to all these other communities and issues and resources that you’ve never encountered growing up.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

As the community foundation leader, she played an important role in guiding the vision of the foundation’s initiatives. Leader D articulated,

“That’s what [we] were perceiving when we started the program was that a lot of community leadership was done by the same set of guys, you know, were on the boards of everything. And yet, they would complain that there was nobody stepping up, there was nobody to do stuff, but they were kind of blind to all these new people coming in and new opportunities and their role as mentors to the next generation, they never really took that role – in my eyes – they never really took that role, so our program kind of slid in and played that function in the community.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)
She recognized that there was a lack of leadership infrastructure in the region:

“I think that since we don't have big corporations [in this region] that there's kind of a culture in big corporations of bringing up the next generation, you have to be looking for who's going to replace who, who's going to replace you when you're retired, but in entrepreneurs it's just your own business and you don't think like that. That may be why that kind of culture was like that.” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

The community foundation's leadership initiative seeks to foster relationships and make connections among the nonprofit and philanthropic leaders in the community in order to grow the leadership network in the region. As reflected by the private sector's model, this network is important for continuing to carry out organizations' mission and goals, providing services to the community, and creating long-term impact. Leader D emphasizes the connective aspect of the foundation's leadership initiative: “[Another] part of it is that our speakers, who are, ... they're all people that are in high level leadership positions in our community that are meeting these young people, so it's connecting people up that way, too” (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013). Developing the leadership network of Appalachia is important, as she says, for connecting the next generation of leaders to the mentors, support networks, and tools they will need to be effective.

Through these multiple approaches, nonprofit and philanthropic leaders are working to capitalize on the wealth and abundant opportunities that exist in the region in order to raise expectations of what is possible for the future of the Appalachian region. Through the interviews, they reported the success that they have experienced thus far in expanding and maximizing opportunities for growth and development in the region.

**Gender and Appalachia**

Historically, the nonprofit sector has been associated with women because of their presence as philanthropists and volunteers. As noted in Odendahl and O'Neill’s *Women and Power in the Nonprofit Sector*, some have described the nonprofit sector as
“gendered female” (O’Neill, 1994). Yet leadership positions in this sector, as in the public and private sectors, has been dominated by men. As noted in the literature review (Chapter Two), while there has been an increase in the percentage of nonprofit organizations led by women, gender disparity remains in the size and type of organizations run by women (Nank 2011, Guidestar, 2013, Bell, Moyers, & Wolfred, 2006). Nationally, women disproportionately run nonprofit organizations with smaller budgets (Bell, Moyers, & Wolfred, 2006 cited in Nank, 2011). Thus it is noteworthy that in this region of Appalachia, it seems there are a proportionally greater number of women running nonprofit organizations than there are men. However, there seems to be some inconsistency in the perceptions of the interviewees.

The economic development organization leader recognized that while the public and private sectors remain largely male dominated arenas of leadership, the nonprofit sector in this region looks differently. She observed,

“But when you’re looking at nonprofits that’s a little unusual, women typically run nonprofits. [...] But in Columbus women ran nonprofits, but when it came to positions of leadership external to that, its’ almost all men. And you come here and almost all of our leaders are women. I mean, when it comes to entrepreneurship before Tech Growth Ohio started at the Voinovich School it was a Good Old Girls Club to some extent. [...] So all the different organizations, like Rural Action: woman led, AceNet: woman led, The Foundation for Appalachia Ohio: woman led. You go through all of the organizations and there’s a clear pattern.” (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

Similarly, the health and wellness organization leader recognized that, “There are a lot of nonprofit organizations in Marietta and a lot of them are very small and the majority of them are run by women” (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013).

Although this view was widely shared, some interviewees observed otherwise. By contrast, another interviewee perceived there to be fewer women in leadership in Appalachian Ohio. Although, her perception seems to be largely based on private sector leadership and does not necessarily reflect her perception of nonprofit leadership.
Leader I stated, "I’m not sure that Appalachian is any different on the gender issues than the rest of the area and you just may see – but I do think there are less women in leadership positions" (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). She gave examples to support this opinion: "I am usually the only woman on a panel, I serve on a board and we just had another woman join, but I was the token woman. ... It’s an Appalachian organization" (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013).

While her own organization’s Board of Directors has fairly equal representation, it was difficult to find private sector women in executive positions. She added, “We actually had an AEP pull the account holders for all the business that bought power from them, and look visually for female names, and we came up really, really short. So there is, I think, in this region, a bigger gap in women leading than there are in other areas” (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013). These experiences inform her perception of the gender distribution of leadership in the region, but, notably, are primarily based on private sector interactions.

One other interviewee noted an example of a male-dominated niche in the region’s nonprofit sector. As the leader of a large foodbank she observes,

“Many of the pantries are generally [run by men]. The rest of the region is much more traditional in those Appalachian culture, there is much more traditional roles, so many of the pantries are church based or just – I guess the church based ones are the ones I’m thinking of – they tend to be run by men.” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

She added, “Even though there’s this Appalachian culture which I think is very community based there’s still some very set traditional, women’s and men’s roles... in the more rural smaller areas” (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013).

Significantly, she attributes this example of gender division to regional culture. Because many of these food pantries are located in small, rural towns, they are more likely to be
socially conservative areas in which traditional gendered divisions of labor and organizational roles are common.

The interviews provided evidence of regional characteristics that shape the leadership experience and work of nonprofit organizations in the area. From the interviews, there was evidence of the impact of social, political, and geographic issues on nonprofit leadership. The regional impact on the experiences of these leaders was both positive and negative. As demonstrated in this section, some interviewees faced leadership challenges as a result of a culture of wariness and distrust of outsiders. Other interviewees experienced the benefits of working in this region because of the cultural values of generosity and community. Notably, seven of the interviewees grew up outside of Appalachia but have chosen to make their homes and livelihoods in this region. Only two interviewees grew up in Appalachia. This raises the important point that to develop a leadership network in Appalachia, there must be efforts to particularly cultivate men and women who are from Appalachia to be leaders. In this way, Appalachian natives, rather than outsiders, will be influential as the region’s nonprofit sector leaders, entrepreneurs, and business leaders.

Historically, few women have been leaders in the Appalachian region of Ohio or other states. The fact that there are many women leading prominent and growing nonprofit sector organizations in this part of the region is noteworthy. These agencies will continue to play an important role in the development of the region, and their leadership will have significant impact on the development of the leadership network throughout the region. As this thesis has evidenced, these women are positive and successful examples of leadership with regard to organization culture and effectiveness and in regard to the work-life balance of the leader. Their leadership approaches and
styles as well as their paths to leadership are valuable contributions to general knowledge about leadership in Appalachian Ohio.
9. Observations for Leadership in the Future

Summary of Findings

The research for this thesis evolved out of questions derived from the bodies of literature surrounding women and leadership, leadership in the nonprofit sector, and research on Appalachia. The intersection of these fields heretofore has not received significant attention by scholars, yet it is an interesting area to study since a substantial number of nonprofit organizations in Southeastern Ohio are led by women. An exploration into the various paths, events, experiences, perceptions, and influences which have shaped these women leaders is the result of this research.

Based on the observation that women leaders remain underrepresented across the public and private sectors, (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Catalyst, 2013; Kellerman & Rhode; Wilson, 2007), yet lead a number of nonprofit organizations (Dym & Hutson, 2005; Guidestar, 2013; Nank; 2011), this thesis explored the paths by which these women arrived in their leadership positions. This research shows that this group of leaders is well educated and most had prior nonprofit leadership experience. The most influential experiences along their paths to leadership were internship and volunteer experiences which nurtured and inspired their interest in nonprofit work. Through these internship and volunteer opportunities, many of the interviewees experienced epiphany moments in which they learned something new about themselves, which later had an impact on their career trajectories.

The interviews underscored the importance of mentoring and the significance of mentor relationships for leadership aspiration and the development of personal confidence. Each of the interviews identified mentors who helped them to grow as professionals and encouraged them. Notably, the interviewees expressed that mentors could be either positive or negative role models. Some interviewees actually were
motivated to lead by negative mentors who practiced, in their minds, poor leadership practices. The majority of mentor experiences, however, were described as extremely positive by the interviewees. As a result they hope to emulate the leadership styles of these role models, as well as to have the same positive impact on those that they have the opportunity to mentor.

Additionally, interviewees were asked about the possible significance of gender for mentor relationships. The evidence from the interviewees delivered a mixed response. For some interviewees, the fact that their mentors were female was important on their perceptions of their capacities for leadership, and encouraged them to see that same capacity in themselves. Furthermore, several interviewees noted the importance of encouraging women in the next generation of leaders to continue to pursue positions of leadership despite persistent gendered barriers. However, as a caveat to this finding, a few interviewees noted that mentor relationships and networks should not be gender exclusive. They believed that, in order to maximize leadership potential, gender should not be the main focus of mentoring, nor should it deter women or men from supporting developing leaders of any gender.

Furthermore, this study found that gender dynamics in the domestic arena influence women along the path to leadership. The interviews demonstrated that, from an early age, family and other close relationships influenced these women’s perceptions of themselves and their potential to lead. Interviewees recalled the important role their parents’ encouragement played in helping them to succeed. As professionals, each of the interviewees had to establish some kind of balance between work and life outside of work. For the interviewees who are married or have children, the domestic arena produces substantial responsibilities which compete with the demands of work. The evidence from this research found that work-life balance can be established along a
spectrum; what is important about this balance is that it must fit with and be comfortable for the leaders and their families while meeting the needs of the organization. Balancing professional and domestic demands necessitates support from family, particularly spouses. In sum, establishing work-life balance is essential in order to avoid stress or relational strain and to allow the leader to be effective in their role in the organization.

Further examining the experiences and perspectives of these interviewees, this project has explored the leadership styles and approaches they practice. Through the method of in-depth interviews, this research was able to capture the nuanced descriptions these leaders gave of their leadership approaches and styles, and thus examine the extent to which there were similarities and differences among these nine leaders.

The evidence from the interviews demonstrated that nonprofit leaders feel that an especially important role they play in the organization is guiding strategy and aligning it to the organization’s vision. Another significant trend among the interviewees was that these leaders have a non-traditional approach to organizational hierarchy. Rather than approaching leadership from a traditional, command and control model of organizational leadership, these leaders approach the structure of their organization as more “flat.” While they recognize that they are ultimately responsible for decision-making, most of the interviewees shared decision-making and leadership responsibility with their staff. A major component of this leadership practice is building trust among the staff and instilling them with confidence in their roles.

In conjunction, the leadership approaches and styles of the interviewees held several themes which foster trust in the organization’s culture. First, this research identified a “hands-off” leadership style as a trend among these interviewees. This
approach was characterized by not micromanaging or focusing too much on the details of organizational operation. Rather leaders who described their approach to leadership in this way tried to instill trust in their staff, delegate responsibilities, and empower others in the organization to take the lead on certain projects.

Additionally, the evidence from these interviewees suggests that leaders often rely on the support of those around them to supplement their weaknesses and strengths. This reality created for many of them a team-based approach to leadership. Leading like a team involves empowering and equipping staff with opportunities to lead, grow, develop skills, and identify strengths and weaknesses. As evidenced by the interviews, leaders who approach their staff as a team were able to delegate more and focus on leading from their personal strengths. In sum, this research found that the nine interviewees’ approaches to leadership are foremost tailored to meet the mission of the organization and the needs of its staff and are then blended with personal styles of each individual leader. Thus nonprofit leadership for these particular leaders emerges from the organization’s mission and values.

This research found that gender does have a substantial impact on leadership experience. As discussed earlier, these interviewees did not feel that their gender posed a significant barrier to becoming a leader, but they did encounter many challenges in the professional arena that they felt were related to their gender. Establishing work-family balance, while primarily a theme discussed in the context of life outside of work, had a clear influence on the interviewees’ practices as a leader.

Even more prevalent in the interviewees were the leaders’ encounters and experiences in double-bind situations in which they were caught between opposing social and cultural expectations. Primarily, the interviewees experienced the double bind of femininity/competence in which expectations of traditionally feminine behaviors and
appearance, such as being ‘soft’ and ‘gentle’, conflict with social expectations of leadership competency, such as being ‘direct’ and ‘assertive’. The interviews evidenced challenges which were particularly common relating to attractiveness, assertiveness, and the high competency threshold which exists for women in historically male-dominated leadership and managerial roles. For the interviewees, these challenges were negative experiences, but none felt that they were so difficult as to deter her success or confidence as a leader. Moreover, the interviewees were optimistic that in the next generation of leaders, gender would be even less influential on the experience of women. The argued that being a female, in reality, was beneficial for leadership, despite the persistence of certain narrow social expectations of women’s roles.

A third dimension of the interview analysis was the influence of nonprofit sector characteristics on leadership. Based on the literature, non-profit organizations are often associated with a collaborative, values-based leadership approach (Banducci, 2005; Edwards, Yankey, & Altpeter, 1998; Herman, 2005; Nank, 2011), this thesis examined whether the interviewees practice these leadership styles while also exploring their own approaches to nonprofit leadership. There was evidence from the interviews which supported the theme of collaborative leadership in the nonprofit sector. Further, evidence from the interviews suggested that nonprofit organizations often have flexible organizational policies which allow both leaders and staff to more easily establish work-life balance.

Additionally, there was evidence from the interviews which supported the assumption posited by the research questions that nonprofit leadership is often values-based. This was evident based on the interviewees’ descriptions of their passion for the mission of the organization. One leader made a comment which aptly summarizes the influence of many of these themes on her leadership experience. She remarked that,
“I guess I feel some sense of responsibility to keep this place afloat and to continue making improvements in growing because of all the support that I’ve had. I wouldn’t want to let all these people down. And the big thing is just all of the kids that we work with. [...] Everything I do comes back down to that and being able to have those kinds of relationships and help kids through tough times along with better things.” (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

She is motivated in the work that she does by both the support that she has received personally and professionally and by the mission of her organization to better the lives of youth in the community. As a nonprofit leader, these motivations are common among the interviewees, many of whom have a genuine passion for their work.

Finally, this thesis examined the impact of the geographic and cultural location of Appalachia on these non-profit organizations and their leaders. Results from this project suggest that it is important for leaders in the region to understand and act according to regional cultural expectations. This was particularly evident regarding the tone, dress, and manner in which leaders approached community members. If leaders acted outside of culturally normative behavior, they encountered reservation and hesitancy among community members. A major theme throughout the interviews was the dynamic of insiders versus outsiders, essentially the perceptions of individuals who have lived in the region for their whole lives and people who are not originally from the region. Among the interviewees, there were both regional insiders and those perceived as outsiders thus contributing comparative perspectives. The interviewees from the region spoke about their work in the community in terms of “we” and had a broad perspective on the impact of the work of their organization in the community. For interviewees who are considered outsiders of the region, it was important that they establish rapport in the community.

This thesis was specifically interested in the extent to which the lack of a dense leadership network in the Appalachian region affects leadership styles and opportunities for women. Among the interviewees, several seemed to share this perception. Many of
these leaders and their organizations are engaged in efforts to maximize the potential for leadership and development in the communities they serve.

**Lessons Learned About Leadership**

In order to continue to shift expectations of leadership away from traditional, hierarchical, command-and-control styles, the voices of leaders like these interviewees need to be amplified. As demonstrated by this analysis, nonprofit leadership in Appalachian Ohio often diverges from traditional norms of leadership, emphasizing rather, collaboration, a “team” mentality, “flat” organizational structures, and flexible workplace policies. For these interviewees, these leadership practices have allowed themselves and their organizations to be effective and successful in creating the change they wish to see in the community. From this research, there are several important lessons that can be extracted to benefit future leadership and future research.

As has been noted in previous research (see for example Kellerman & Rhode, 2007), workplace practices and policies must continue to become more flexible in order to allow for the establishment of work-family balance for employees across sectors. While the nonprofit sector, as exemplified by the organizations in this research, seems to be mindful of the need for flexibility in order to establish work-life balance, this must become normative. For some interviewees, organizational expectations of leadership performance continued to make it difficult for them to establish a balance that was comfortable. In order to prevent against burnout, particularly among leaders who were, flexible practices are an important model for other organizations across sectors to follow.

Additionally, developing a strong leadership network in Appalachia will depend on mentorship and succession planning. Specifically, investing in the next generation of leaders in the organization and equipping them with the knowledge gained by current
leaders’ experience. Furthermore, it is important that mentoring relationships do not overly emphasize gender, nor become gender-exclusive opportunities. As evidenced by the mentorship experiences of many of these interviewees, the value of mentorship is the confidence, knowledge, encouragement, and coaching that these leaders instill in the next generation. Yet, it is important that women continue to encourage one another to achieve and pursue leadership careers so that the next generation of women has role models to look up to.

Finally, women in their capacity as nonprofit leaders are clearly having a positive impact on communities in Southeastern Ohio. Yet, they still experience negative reactions and their legitimacy is sometimes questioned because of their gender. The women interviewed in this study have overcome assumptions of femininity, assertiveness, competence, and age and have succeeded in establishing themselves as leaders in the community. From their experiences, there are many lessons to be learned about the shifts in cultural attitudes and social expectations that are still needed in order for men and women to have equal opportunities to pursue leadership roles. These shifts need to happen in order to society to benefit from the full potential of its future leaders.

**Future Research**

The findings of this research represent a limited sample of the leadership styles and experiences of nonprofit leaders in Appalachia. Although this work makes an important qualitative research contribution to the study of gender and leadership in the nonprofit sector and of leadership in this region, further research is needed to continue to explore effective methods of leadership.

Future research into effective leadership methods in the nonprofit sector should be comparative in order to provide evidence of the particular differences in leadership practices between the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Similarly, while there has
been much comparative research between men and women's leadership styles, inquiry into the extent of these similarities and differences in the nonprofit sector is needed. Currently, some observers suggest, in the nonprofit sector gender does not suggest a different leadership style to the extent that it does in the public and private sectors where command and control is more likely to be found. Moreover, a comparative study of gender and leadership as it varies across sector would contribute to the knowledge of gender's influence on leadership and how this influence varies across sectors.

Additional research is also needed into leadership in the Appalachian region. As the region continues to lag in areas such as employment and education, it is paramount that strong and effective leaders invest in the region in order to continue the development efforts which have brought substantial improvements to this point. As efforts described in this thesis suggest, there are programs and initiatives in place which have begun to build formally the region's leadership network and offer leadership development opportunities. Research surrounding these efforts is needed in order to ensure these initiatives achieve their goals.
Afterward

As I walk out of the building and back to my car, recorder zipped safely in the pocket of my bag, I feel energized. I was impressed by the passion she has for her work and her eagerness to share advice and encouragement. She struck me as someone who really loves her work. I could also tell that she works hard, holds high expectations of herself and others, and is personally invested in the success of her organization. She cares about her staff and works to help them succeed. She is busy, yet, I remind myself, she took the time to sit and talk with me for over an hour, a statement of the value she places on investing in young professionals.

After nine interviews and four months of writing, I am hopeful that I have captured trends and lessons that will be interesting and useful to others. There is great value to be gained from the experiences and examples of these leaders. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to talk with each of these women one-on-one. By sharing their leadership experience, these women not only contributed to the goals of this research endeavor, but they also taught me about the life choices and opportunities that I have ahead of me as I pursue my own career in the nonprofit sector. And while the analysis of these interviews brought to fruition the findings of this study, for me, there were so many personal lessons learned from the time of the interview through the concluding pages.

As I reflect on the conversations I had, I think, “These are amazing women.” Their leadership journeys reflect a breadth of experience; each has overcome challenges and had remarkable opportunities. The opportunity to collect their stories has been a gift. As I take the next steps down my own path to leadership, I will be guided and encouraged by the examples of these women.
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Appendix A – Pseudonyms Key

Pseudonyms for Interviewees with In-text Citation:

- “Community fundraising organization leader”
  (Leader A, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

- “Youth organization leader”
  (Leader B, personal communication, October 21, 2013)

- “Social services agency”
  (Leader C, personal communication, October 23, 2013)

- “Community foundation leader”
  (Leader D, personal communication, October 28, 2013)

- “Economic development organization leader”
  (Leader E, personal communication, October 31, 2013)

- “Grassroots organizing agency leader”
  (Leader F, personal communication, November 5, 2013)

- “Health and Wellness agency leader”
  (Leader G, personal communication, November 6, 2013)

- “Foodbank leader”
  (Leader H, personal communication, November 13, 2013)

- “Regional foundation leader”
  (Leader I, personal communication, December 10, 2013)
Appendix B – Participant Solicitation

Guidelines for First Contact with Interviewees

Dear ________________,

I am a senior in the Honors Tutorial College at Ohio University completing my senior thesis in Political Science under the direction of Dr. Lysa Burnier. I am writing to you as a woman leader of a non-profit organization operating in Appalachia Ohio to request your participation in my thesis project.

Broadly, my research interests are in leadership, particularly in the non-profit sector, gender, and Appalachian studies. The focus of my thesis is on the leadership experiences of women who run non-profit organizations in Appalachia Ohio.

I am contacting you as the [President, Executive Director, etc.] of [whatever organization] to request to interview you for my thesis because I believe your experiences will be a valuable contribution to this research.

The interview will cover topics related to your leadership style, career experiences, personal commitments, and experiences working in the non-profit sector and in Appalachia. If it is alright with you, I would like to record the interview. The interview recordings will be kept confidential and anonymity will be maintained in the thesis.

Would you be willing to participate in my thesis project?

If you are willing to participate, I estimate that the interview will take between 45 minutes and 1 hour. I would be happy to hold the interview at a time and location convenient for you, preferably in October or early November.

You can reach me at cb237009@ohio.edu by replying to this email or at (614)743-5454. Please let me know if you would like more information about the project as you consider participating.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Caroline Boone
Appendix C - Interview Protocol

Interview Questionnaire

Opening

- What level of education have you attained?
- How long have you held your current position?
- How many staff do you manage?

Professional

1. Please, describe your current leadership position.
2. How did you come to your current position?
3. How do you describe your personal leadership style?
4. Has your leadership style changed over time?
5. Do you feel that leadership in the non-profit sector is different from leadership in the public or private sectors? In what ways?
6. To what extent do you believe your leadership style has been influenced by the mission and structure of your organization?
7. To what extent does being a non-profit leader in Appalachia influence your leadership style?
8. Non-profit organizations are sometimes seen as having more flexibility than a traditional government agency or business. Have you experienced this flexibility?

Personal

9. How has your personal life impacted your career? What are some of the challenges you have faced in balancing your work and personal commitments?

Gender

10. Has your gender played any kind of role in shaping your career choices or career path?
11. Do you feel that your gender has influenced others people's perceptions of you as a leader?
12. Has gender factored into your own understanding of yourself as a leader?
Mentoring

13. Have you had a mentor or mentors? Are you a mentor to anyone?

Closing

14. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview?

15. Is there anyone else that you recommend I interview for this project?
Appendix D – Interviewee Consent Form

Ohio University Consent Form

**Title of Research:** Women Non-Profit Leaders in Appalachia Ohio

**Researchers:** Caroline Boone, Dr. Lysa Burnier (advisor)

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**

This study is being done to better understand the experiences and practices of women holding positions of leadership in non-profit organizations in Southeastern Ohio. Specifically, this study will focus on your experiences, development, and approaches as a leader.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about your experiences as a woman who has held or holds a position of leadership in a non-profit organization in Southeastern Ohio. You will be asked to answer these questions as completely as possible and to expound on your experiences.

You should not participate in this study if you feel uncomfortable with the prospect of sharing narratives of your personal experiences.

Your participation in the study will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour, although there is no limit on the time you may take to respond to the questions.

**Risks and Discomforts**

While no discomfort is anticipated as a result of your participation, you will be asked to share your experiences as a professional, which may require discussion of some personal details.

**Benefits**

This project will benefit society and the social science community by developing what is understood about leadership in non-profit organizations, women’s leadership styles and experiences, and non-profit leadership in Appalachia Ohio. Furthermore, society will
benefit from the completion of this project because of its focus on women leaders in Appalachia, a demographic and geographic area which has historically been underserved and underrepresented in arenas of leadership. The development of a fruitful non-profit sector has enormous potential benefits for the Appalachian region. Thus, the contribution that this study makes to the understanding of effective non-profit leadership will bolster the capacity of the non-profit sector to make an impact in the community.

Individually, you may benefit by participating in this study because of the rewarding nature of sharing your experiences and advice as a leader. You may find that sharing your personal experiences of leadership with others is rewarding for the potential encouragement and guidance that it may provide to future leaders.

**Confidentiality and Records**

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at Ohio University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Your study information will be kept confidential by storing all interview recordings in a locked cabinet to which only the primary investigator and her advisor will have access. The interview transcriptions and other analysis will be stored on a password-protected laptop to which only the primary investigator will have access. Only the primary investigator and her advisor will have access to the interview data at any time during the study.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:
* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Caroline Boone at cb237009@ohio.edu or (614) 743-5454, or Dr. Lysa Burnier at burnier@ohio.edu or (740) 593-1337.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740) 593-0664.
By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study.
- you are 18 years of age or older.
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature ______________________________________ Date __________

________

Printed Name ____________________________

Version Date:

09/02/2013