EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN BHUTAN: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY BASED APPROACH

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this doctoral study was to explore the experiences of Bhutanese female educational leaders in a male-dominated society. The experiences of female educational leaders both in terms of opportunities and challenges are overlooked due to conventional masculinist norms of defining leadership. I explored how Bhutanese female educational leaders negotiate between being a female and a leader in a profession where leadership/administrative positions are predominately occupied by males. The study also sought to understand how their life experiences contributed to their chosen career path and what gender barriers they faced, and the role of gender in their professional life. Since the examination of the personal experiences of female education leaders in Bhutan is at the heart of this research, I used narrative inquiry paradigm by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) as my research methodology. My choice of narrative inquiry was grounded in constructivist epistemology that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). Thus, my research is formulated on two theoretical perspectives and they are feminist theories and interpretivism. The narratives of 15 participants were perceived valuable and essential not only in reconstructing leadership from feminist perspectives, but also in locating Bhutanese female educational leaders in a male-directed society.

Five broad themes emerged from the data and they are; 1) Bhutanese female educational leaders are inadvertent leaders; 2) gender is the paramount challenge for women in educational leadership position; 3) gender influences leadership practices; 4) Bhutanese female educational leaders are community role models, and 5) Bhutanese female leaders are situational leaders.
Along with key findings, I offer several recommendations for creating an equitable and just society, the most notable being a call to gender-equitable child raising practices. The recommendations suggested are realistic for empowering Bhutanese women.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Ann Sherman, who I call Annie.

You model how women should lead.

And without you, my dream would have been just a dream.
Acknowledgement

As I accomplish my doctoral journey, I reflect back on the path I have travelled, and I am of the understanding that the only reason I am able to achieve this aspiration is because many people have supported me throughout my entire journey in myriad ways.

The first person that comes to my mind to whom I feel more grateful and owe my deepest gratitude is Dr. Ann Sherman, my immediate supervisor who is also the dean of the education faculty. I have known Dr. Ann Sherman for more than a decade, and it is because of her continuous support and encouragement, I am able to achieve what I never dreamed possible. Besides being my mentor, Dr. Ann Sherman is a patron, mother, friend, and a guide to my two school aged children. Without Dr. Ann Sherman’s patronage, I would have never made this far in my academic pursuit. Not only I do I owe my gratitude for her academic guidance; I am indebted to Dr. Ann Sherman for extending her generosity in my children’s academic and social life.

Supervisory committee is an imperative element in accomplishing doctoral journey and without the guidance and wisdom of supervisory committee, my doctoral journey would have been incomplete. I thank Dr. Amanda Benjamin and Dr. Sherry Rose for being on my committee. Their substantial knowledge of gender and its related concepts, and their openness to feminist approaches to leading in a traditional leadership paradigm unlocked new dimensions in the way I perceive leadership. I am grateful to Dr. Sherry Rose and Dr. Amanda Benjamin for their feedback, advice, encouragement and smiles throughout my doctoral odyssey.

There could be no research without participants. Despite their professional and family obligations, the participants graciously volunteered their time, perspectives and
experiences for this research. I extend my deepest appreciation to my 15 female educational leaders for their time, candor, and the wealth of rich data provided in support of the study. Each and every participant’s experiences and perspectives are valued in crafting this study. I thank each individual participant for sharing their stories and experiences with me.

I would also like to extend my gratitude, particularly to the President of the University of New Brunswick for granting me the doctoral scholarship. My dream of pursuing doctoral studies would have remained as a dream had it not been for the president’s award, and the dean of education and her team’s generosity and support.

Similar thank you goes to the Royal Civil Service Commission of Bhutan for granting me the study leave to follow my dream.

Special thanks to my two loving sons, Jigme and Kuenga for their understanding and support, and putting up with me as I journeyed on through this protracted project. Watching my two children grow and turn into fine young men is another milestone in my doctoral journey.

I admire men who respect and empower women and I am blessed to have such a man in my life. I wish to thank my husband, Tshering Penjor for everything he has done to support and encourage me throughout this incredibly long venture. In fact, I seize this moment to express my long outstanding gratitude for his unwavering support since my teacher training days. I hope this record speaks volumes of the gratitude, appreciation and love I have for him.

The reminisces of the times I spent with my mother and her outlook has profound impact on me. The more I delve in understanding myself as a daughter, wife,
mother and more significantly as a Bhutanese woman, the deeper I began to value and appreciate and find meaning in what I am journeying. Her bodhisattva nature accompanied me throughout my doctoral journey and I thank her for being who she is.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all my family members and friends in Bhutan for their endless love and good wishes for the success of my doctoral expedition. Their good thoughts and prayers became my constant guide and kept me focused throughout the journey.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Personal Narrative</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education System in Bhutan</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Education in Bhutan</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-service program</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service program</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Selection</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State of Gender in Bhutan</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Study</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracing Leadership</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

viii
Complexities of Leadership …… 29
Defining Leadership …… 29
Educational Leadership …… 33
Types of Educational Leadership …… 36
Transformational Leadership …… 37
Instructional Leadership …… 39
Distributed Leadership …… 41
Sustainable Leadership …… 44
Reconceptualization of Leadership from Feminist Perspectives …… 45
Leadership Themes of Grogan and Shakeshaft …… 47
Relational Leadership …… 48
Leadership for Social Justice …… 51
Key Components of Social Justice …… 53
Defining Feminism …… 55
The Dawn of Feminist Thoughts …… 56
Feminism versus Feminisms …… 58
Feminism in Waves …… 60
First Wave Feminism …… 60
Second Wave Feminism …… 62
Third Wave Feminism …… 65
Post-Feminism …… 69
Renegotiating the Glass Ceiling: The dearth of Female Educational Leaders …… 72
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Loyalty</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity of Role Modelling and Networking</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women as Token Leaders</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcribing Data</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thematic Data Analysis</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Trustworthiness</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Narrative</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporality</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociality</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Narrative Design</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements in Designing Narrative Inquiry by Connelly and Clandinin</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Reliability in Narrative Inquiry</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strength and Weakness of the Narrative Inquiry ...... 100
Method of Data Collection; Interviewing ...... 101
Semi-Structured Interview ...... 102
Feminist Perspectives on Interviewing ...... 104
Voices and Interpretations ...... 105
Ethics in Narrative Inquiry Research ...... 109
Ethical Considerations ...... 112

CHAPTER FOUR: THEMATIC REVELATIONS ...... 115

Introduction ...... 115
Emergent Themes ...... 115
Theme One: Bhutanese female educational leaders are inadvertent Leaders ...... 116
Theme Two: Gender is the paramount challenge for women in leadership position ...... 122
Theme Three: Gender influences leadership practices ...... 132
Theme Four: Bhutanese female educational leaders are community role models ...... 139
Leadership-responsible role model ...... 140
Moral-responsible role model ...... 141
Gender role model ...... 144
Theme Five: Bhutanese female educational leaders are situational Leaders ...... 147
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings

There is lack of inspiration, aspiration and career exposure amongst Bhutanese female educational leaders

Absence of female as role model created anxiety and fear among women who are taking up leadership roles

Bhutanese female educational leaders confront challenges

convincing the rural community of their ability to lead

Bhutanese Female educational leaders are token leaders

Family responsibilities are barrier for female educational leaders

Bhutanese female educational leaders lead distinctly from men

Bhutanese female educational leaders are community role model

Bhutanese female educational leaders have good knowledge of leadership practices

Bhutanese female educational leaders are liberal feminist

Recommendations

Teacher Human Resource Policy 2014 (THRП 2014)

Gender responsive planning and budgeting

Women’s knowledge in the construction of knowledge

Policies and plans from women’s perspectives

Women mentoring women program

Leadership course at the tertiary level education
Gender-equitable child raising practices  ......  189
Men as caregivers and their participation in household works  ......  190
Further research to better understand the gender gap in educational leadership  ......  191
Research Limitations  ......  191
Conclusion  ......  192
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION  ......  194
References  ......  199
Appendix A: Interview Questions  ......  228
Appendix B: Letter Seeking Approval to Collect Research Data  ......  230
Appendix C: Letter informing District Education Office (DEO)  ......  232
Appendix D: Letter of Information and Invitation to Participant  ......  234
Appendix D: Letter of Information and Invitation to Participant  ......  237
Curriculum Vitae
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

My Personal Narrative

I begin my dissertation with personal narratives to allow my readers to understand the context and situation in which I was raised, and how the culture I grew up in shaped my attitude towards female empowerment especially in relation to women leaders. Sharing my personal narrative also brings to light my understanding of leadership and how the perception has shifted over time.

Remembering Childhood Experiences

I was born in Dechenchholing, Thimphu, when my father served as a Royal Body Guard (RBG) at the palace during the reign of the last years of the third king and at the beginning of the fourth king. After my birth, my father resigned from RBG in order to fulfill his own father’s dream of taking care of the ancestral home and the land that nourished him and his siblings for generations. Goemsa, the village where I grew up, became my home until I was enrolled in a school. Since there were no children of my age to play with, I would stick close to my mother in rice paddies, barns, and woods, and helped her with most of the domestic chores. As I reflect on my childhood memories, I vividly remember watching my mother as she tugged her kira (traditional dress) high over her knees as she advanced into the flooded fields and transplanted rice saplings alongside other women. Scorching summer heat did not seem to interrupt their labor; rather humming and teasing each other seemed to be the rhythm of the day as they raced each other to reach at the end of the field first. I recollect sitting on the edge of a rice field and watched them sing and laugh as they toiled in the heat except for when
they called out my name asking me to throw some bundles of rice saplings whenever they ran out. Witnessing such a jovial sight made time flew by and I never realized the hard work they endured. As the sun would begin to set, my mother and I would head home to cook supper for the rest of the women who helped in transplanting rice saplings. I would help her fetch water, firewood and make sure there was a constant supply of firewood in the mud rammed oven. Right after dinner, we would go to bed and that was the best time of the day for me since I got to listen to stories without any interruptions and pauses unlike the rest of the day. As I think of these childhood memories, I am filled with immense joy and today I find contentment in reminiscences. The numerous folktales that my mother narrated every night and the close interactions that I had with her on a daily basis have influenced the way I perceive the world even now. My desire to live in harmony with nature coalesced with my deposition towards valuing the importance of understanding one’s family roots have guided me in defining my personality, outlook and leadership in particular. Thus, the experiences of growing up in a rural place, and my intimate relationship with my mother, have become the basis for shaping my values, attitude, and meaning in life.

While, on one hand, I remember playing on my mother’s lap as she held, hugged and kissed me thousands of times, my recollection of the time I spent with my father seemed to be formal and distant. While I heard my father expressing his love, care and striving to give the best for me to his friends, I can barely call to mind any moments where he expressed those feelings to me directly. I seldom saw him at home, and while he was home, he sat cross-legged by the window in the centre of a semi-circle formed by other family members during meals. My mother would serve him first, and only then,
she would serve the rest of the family members. I recall sitting next to my mother and stealing a glance at my father occasionally while my father seemed to be thoroughly engaged in discussing the day’s schedule with other family members over the meal. He paid no attention to my glimpses. Sometimes, I would not see him for days and then suddenly he would show up with bundles of dry fish, packets of salt, bags of betel nut and countless other items that were not available locally. The thought of my father being home excited me even though there was not a really special moment to look forward to. It was only later that I came to learn from my mother that my father was the head of household, and that his existence was vital for the family’s survival and well-being. I was repeatedly told to abide by his directives and guidelines, and to respect him at all times. I expressed my love and respect for my father by being compliant and shouldering household chores obediently while my father manifested his care and affection for me through discipline and austerity. As I reflect on my memories, I am of the understanding that compliance, obedience, and conformity are languages through which Bhutanese children demonstrate their love and respect for their parents in addition to recognizing the male figures in a family as a disciplinarian. Of late, perhaps because of information technology and media influences, the conventional parenting approaches and perceptions seem to be changing slowly in Bhutan, but compliance and discipline shaped my worldview as a young girl growing up in a rural setting in Bhutan in the early 1970s.

What is intriguing about my mother is, while she has assumed all the responsibilities when my father was away, she did not identify herself as a key person in the family. She did not consider herself hold the same position she had ascribed to my
father, nor did she express any expectations for me from her. When I contemplate on these events, I am amazed by her compliant nature and how she let herself be defined by her husband’s choices and point of views. My mother’s perception of herself as a woman, and her perception of men as superior, is not an exceptional case confined only to my mother. Indeed, many Bhutanese women show a similar respect for men, and their understanding of rearing children, especially girls, seems to be grounded on a Bhutanese cultural belief that boys are superior to girls. Because of such cultural beliefs, I was taught to respect men more than women. This notion has not only influenced the way Bhutanese women perceive themselves in a male-dominated society, it has sometimes fashioned men to disregard women and their capabilities. Thus, Bhutanese child rearing approach, and particularly my mother’s style, has significantly contributed to defining my nature, personality, and outlook.

**School Days Memories**

I remember my conversation with my mother regarding how I wanted to be a woman like her and to spend the rest of my life in a village, but my mother wanted me to explore life beyond the fields and farm and away from the cattle. She educated me about the wonders of the world and told me I would be able to experience those dreams if only I would change my desire to be like her on the farm. She told me how much she lamented not being able to fully utilize the free education given to her by the government. The nearest and the only school from Goemsa was about 30 km and public transport was a rare sight in Bhutan in the early 1980s. Since it was an unimaginable idea to commute to school from Goemsa, once again, we moved to the capital city, Thimphu in pursuit of my education.
Moving from a rural area to an urban setting created a large shift in my life. Adapting to an urban culture, and being in a classroom with many other children, was a whole new experience for me. Waking up early and being on time for school was the toughest event for us to go through every day. My mother still tells me how arduous it was for her to make me sit in the classroom. As I reflect on these memories today, I immerse myself deeply in my own childhood experiences that have been critical in shaping me as a mother, wife, and school principal.

I completed my high school in 1996 but I was never sure of what I wanted to be later in life. My heart kept yearning to seek further knowledge. My father wanted me to be a teacher. His understanding of a teacher was equivalent to Guru Padmasambhava, the great Indian saint of the 8th century, who considered teaching as a noble profession that illuminates the darkness and ignorance of humans. My father believed that becoming a teacher would be a great opportunity to serve people and to gain merits in my next life. For these reasons, my father felt teaching was the best profession and that, as a woman and future mother, being a teacher would enable me to contribute to raising my own children. My father also had viewed the teaching profession as a secure job. When I ponder why I joined teaching profession, I realize that my career choice and desire to be a teacher were greatly influenced by external forces including my father’s belief and the cultural milieu I grew up in, rather than a personal urge. Perhaps, letting external pressures define me as I complied with my father’s expectations could be one of the reasons why it took me awhile to move into the leadership arena, unlike some of my male trainee colleagues.
Becoming a Teacher

My teaching career began at the same time as Bhutan introduced television and the internet in 1999. As much as there was discourse about the launching of television, an equal amount of dialogue spun around my head about media and its influences on education and students. When I graduated, I considered myself lucky to be placed in a nearby district in a higher secondary school with boarding facilities. Including myself, there were only five female teachers, and since the female teachers were limited in number, the girls' wellness and the hostel were supervised by one of the male teachers. As soon as I was posted in the school, I was asked to take up the position of looking after the girls’ wellness and hostel hygiene. So, in addition to my primary responsibility as a social studies teacher, I also took on the responsibility of caring for more than 100 girls as a matron, with the belief that I would be in a better position than men to understand their needs and concerns. My experiences of working as the girls’ matron created an opportunity for me to get to know individual students beyond their academic lives. Such associations with the girls not only helped me understand their personal narratives and backgrounds, it reawakened my early school days as a young girl in a boarding school who yearned to see her parents. It later dawned on me how vulnerable the girls were or could become, without a proper education. I didn’t release the power of the responsibility I was shouldering when I took up the position, but as I recall my initial years of teaching, I have come to understand that I shouldered a most important role in educating and empowering those girls.

As I think through my teaching memories, I realize that in my endeavor to understand my learners, I have discovered more about myself, a person whose
perception of education is not only to empower oneself, but to exercise that empowerment in a way that helps the community attain equity and equality. Such an understanding of education and its benefits later propelled me to strive for educational experiences beyond the mountains and valleys of Bhutan. Leaving my family behind for a year for an educational pursuit added another extraordinary experience in shaping of my outlook and understanding of my potential as a mother, school administrator and, most significantly, as a Bhutanese woman.

**Becoming an Educational Leader**

The number of schools in Bhutan has increased drastically since I became a teacher in 1999. Conversations in staffrooms, hallways, and recess times were filled with the news of new schools opening one after another. What excited and thrilled me most was learning about how my male colleagues sat for interviews and took up leadership positions prior to the completion of their teaching probation period. Such express entries into leadership positions left me wondering if leadership for me would be as straightforward as it seemed to be for them. While I kept teaching, raising my son, and restricting my movement between home and school, most of my male colleagues traveled around the country enhancing their profession. However, my story is not a singular case. Many other women share similar narratives. My best friend, who was awarded the best student of the year, has taken up the role of full time mother. However, at that point in time, all I desired was to be a good mother, wife, and teacher for my whole life. Perhaps, my late entry into the leadership sphere was influenced by my cultural and societal expectations of myself as a mother, daughter, and wife. When I contemplate the choices I made, and the priorities I set, I cannot help but chuckle at my
naivety and ignorance about my own potentials and the standards I have set for myself. Like many other women, becoming a school administrator was perceived as a distant aspiration and a masculine-only dream. I never envisioned that I would travel the road less explored by other Bhutanese women.

Though I did not have the slightest thought of becoming a school leader initially, my brother, who was then working as a senior education officer, constantly encouraged me to take up an educational leadership position citing changes in policy related to the empowerment of women. He not only motivated me to become a school administrator but inspired many other capable female and male teachers to enhance their own careers. While I was inspired by my brother to enter the school leadership realm, I believed that family responsibilities obstructed my leadership path and my reservations about my own leadership capabilities, especially when it comes to leading at par with men leaders kept impeding my decision to move forward. The wavering I went through making the decision to pursue educational leadership opportunities robbed me of my sleep and energy debating within myself about whether or not I was the making the right decision. Nevertheless, I followed my inner voice which directed me to want to seize the opportunity of becoming a female principal in a country where women’s leadership is rare although gender equality is an espoused value. So, I gave it a try. I was selected as one of the potential principals and took up the role of a vice principal in one of the schools in Thimphu. It was a turning point in my professional and personal life when I was selected as one of the potential school principals. Such a professional achievement made me more aware of my own capabilities, conduct, mannerisms, and I took advantage of every chance to learn more as I expanded my understanding of leadership.
The roles and responsibilities of the vice principal are perceived in a myriad of ways by many, but I have always considered the vice principal’s role as a bridge between the administration and teaching faculty. The success of the school depended on the trust, reliability, and honesty of this human bridge. Working as a vice principal for four years was a foundation, a real building phase, for my leadership preparation. It helped me understand that the culture of the school is shaped by the leadership style of the principal, and the principal’s outlook and attitude have a great impact on the teaching and learning environment. The years as a vice principal further inspired me to push myself to apply for a position of a principal, and by then I had become very conscious of my leadership potential and I no longer required any external coaxing or mental deliberation to pursue that dream.

I found that working as a principal was a completely different experience and challenge, especially when you are posted to a school where both the school and the immediate community have lost trust and confidence in each other. The responsibility of rebuilding the community relationship fell on the school principal and it was during those days that I came to a realization that the bond between the teachers and the community is imperative in enhancing academic excellence, and that I could play a vital role in promoting the relationship. People were of the opinion that since the previous principal failed to promote the relationship between the two sections, they had few expectations from me, especially since I was a female principal. In my pursuit to restore the trust and confidence in each other, I knew I had to be explicitly more academically focused, morally upright, financially clean and politically correct than they expected. Enacting such values won the confidence of both the teachers and community and
restored the relationship. It is with great pride I must confess that the seeds of relationship I sowed began to germinate. However, I did not wait long enough to reap the fruit since I departed from the school to pursue my PhD. I am pleased to know that the person who took the position after me has nurtured the relationship further.

While I have acquired a great deal of leadership skill as a school principal, there are certain challenges I have confronted particularly as a female educational leader. My decision-making skills and management abilities were constantly challenged by my staff, particularly male teachers and counterparts. In my effort to prove my capabilities as an effective female educational leader to my staff and to other future female educational leaders, I was compelled to work harder than my male counterparts, and in order for me to fit into a male dominated leadership sphere, I had to play by their rules much of the time. As I call to mind my leadership experiences, I realize that gender is the biggest challenge to women in a leadership positions, but despite the challenges, my personal experiences of working as a female educational leader in a male-dominated profession have unlocked new ways of thinking about the way women can view themselves. I believe many women have leadership capabilities and can become great leaders given the opportunity and necessary support. In fact, women leaders can be authentic leaders and can play a vital role in changing the educational system. My knowledge of the work of a school principal and my observations of the priorities female educational leaders have for schools are evidence that distinguishes women as educational leaders. Having more female leaders in schools is one of the many ways we can empower Bhutanese girls and in doing so also help Bhutan engage as a more equitable democracy.
As I reflect, I understand that Bhutan had remained unaware of new and diverse educational practices from the rest of the world for decades. The unexpected political change from monarchy towards the democratic government in 2008 inspired me as a female educational leader to seek an understanding of knowledge beyond conventional notions. Incorporating knowledge from a female perspective can add to an understanding of how the democratic approach is empowering women.

**My life as a PhD Student**

My life as a PhD student in Canada is also unique in many ways, and my experiences in Canada as a woman of color add to my developing understanding of myself and my research. Thus, incorporating these latest experiences will shed more light in understanding the essence of the study.

While the challenges of moving and pursuing new learning opportunities have shaped me into the person I am now, stronger and determined, there are people who have come along and have smoothened my PhD endeavor, many of them female leaders. It is because of the support of these people that I am able to use my stumbling blocks as my stepping stones in pursuing my dream, and be in the position what I am now. My close association with the people who mentored me has given me a new meaning for family, friendship, and leadership particularly for women leadership in a male-dominated society. The connections such as these are symbolic of the inspiration I feel when I strive to contribute to the knowledge about female educational leaders. Along with my own personal and professional narratives, I will use the dissertation to share the narratives of my participants, and together, aim to craft a profound contribution of women’s experiences in literature.
Background

Bhutan, popularly known to the outside world for its unique developmental guiding philosophy, Gross National Happiness (GNH), is a landlocked country in South Asia. It is bordered to the north by China, and to the south, east and west by India. According to National Population and Housing Census (2005), the total population of Bhutan was 634,982 spread across the total area 38394km². The population is projected to grow from 757,000 in 2015 to 887,000 by 2030 (Gross National Happiness Commission, 2012).

After a century of hereditary monarchy, the visionary forth king of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk, initiated democracy, and for the first time ever in the history of Bhutan, Bhutanese people participated in an election in 2008. Out of 72 seats in the parliament (47 seats in the National Assembly and 25 in the National Council) women secured 10 seats in the parliament of 2008. Currently, there are 6 women parliamentarians; 4 representing People’s Democratic Party which is the present government, and 2 Councilors in the National Council.

Education System in Bhutan

Up until the 1950s, the education system in Bhutan was primarily monastic. Dzongs (central administration buildings) and monasteries operated as centers of learning, and male children typically availed themselves of a monastic education. Girls remained at home, shadowing their mothers and other female figures in taking care of the family and farm. However, the advent of formal western education in Bhutan in early 1960s sowed the seeds of change, and the shift in the philosophy of education has
been gradually altering the way members of Bhutanese society think and act. Though some scholars acknowledge the first king of Bhutan for initiating western education in Bhutan, such a far-reaching educational tribute is greatly attributed to the third king of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, not only for establishing formal western education in the country but, also for opening Bhutan’s door to the rest of the world.

Since then, numerous schools were built across the country with assistance from India. Initially, many teachers and administrators were hired from India to assist Bhutanese educators in establishing a strong foundation in education. Government officials traveled far and wide to advocate with parents about the importance of enrolling children in schools, and the need to build the country’s economic stability. Parents welcomed the idea, and with great enthusiasm, they registered their male children but they were skeptical about enrolling their female children. Hence, the journey of western education in Bhutan began with a few hundred students, but with barely any girls, in the 1960s to now having 169560 students with girls outnumbering boys (Annual Education Statistics, 2016).

**Teacher Education in Bhutan**

In an endeavor to provide quality education to a continuously increasing student population, the government realized the importance of having qualified teachers and, consequently, Bhutan opened its first teacher training institute in 1968 in Samtse with an initial enrollment of 41 students. Numerous Bhutanese teachers were also referred to England, Switzerland, Canada and Australia to acquire the state-of-the art teaching approaches. On their return to Bhutan, these scholars modelled and cascaded the most appropriate teaching pedagogies to teachers through pre-service and in-service teacher
preparation programs and further shaped the Bhutanese education system. The initial years in the Bhutanese education system also witnessed innumerable support and assistance from these countries in the form of human resources in an effort to create robust curriculum, advanced teaching pedagogies and child friendly school environments. Today, there are 9081 teachers; 5334 male and 3737 female teachers in the school system across 522 schools in the country (Ministry of Education, 2014-2016). Realizing the importance of education as a pivotal key in contributing towards socio-economic development, Bhutan opened the Paro College of Education (PCE) in 1975. The two teacher preparation colleges are now the country’s premier educational institutions responsible for providing pre-service and in-service education for primary, secondary and postgraduate teachers.

**Pre-service program.**

Pre-service program offerings currently include a four year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and one year Post Graduate Teaching Certificate in Education after completion of an undergraduate degree (PGTC). The B.Ed. is offered to students who have graduated class XII. The most intriguing fact about class XII graduates is that they opt for courses and degrees depending on their academic performance. Class XII graduates who are the top ranking students often receive an attractive scholarship to a post-secondary institution outside Bhutan, and the next best students obtain scholarships within the country to pursue their undergraduate degrees. So, the trend has been that those graduates who are in the lower standings in academic achievement have been enrolling in the B.Ed. program, inviting criticism and sparking debates from the public as well as within the Ministry of Education (MoE).
Nevertheless, the current Teacher Human Resource Policy (THRP, 2014) calls for graduates from the two colleges of education, as well as from other recognized regional and international universities, to sit for Bhutan Civil Service Examination (BCSE). Only the ones who meet the standards set by Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) and the Ministry of Education are recruited as teachers. This has been a big shift adopted by MoE in their continuous attempt at enhancing the professionalism and competency of teachers. The university graduates who want to join the teaching profession sit for separate entrance examination and candidates meeting the required standards are selected to undergo the one year PGDE in Samtse College of Education.

**In-service programs**

Teachers are regularly updated on new development in curriculum and other educational concerns through in-service programs and workshops. Since 2000, in-service teachers holding a Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) were offered an opportunity to upgrade their qualification to a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) through distance education program offerings. In 2002, Paro College of Education introduced Masters of Education (M.Ed.) and the course is generally offered to school administrators during the winter vacation.

**Principal selection**

The Teacher Human Resource Policy 2014 (THRP) unveils many strategies to attract and retain the best and the brightest of students into the teaching profession. Unlike in the past, a well-defined career track that lacks gender sensitivity has been developed for teachers and the highlight of the THRP (2014) is streamlining career tracks particularly for school administrator selection and promotion.
The teaching track is a general and compulsory track for all new entrants of the profession and begins as something called Teacher III at position 5 (P5) level in the Position Classification System (PCS). Teachers wishing to join the administration track must be at a level of Teacher II at P4 level for 2 years and must fulfill other criteria before sitting for open competition. Initially, teachers must complete a minimum of 5 years to move from one position level to the next higher position level; P5 to P4, and must require serving another 2 years in the P4 level for them to be eligible for participating in the open competition for principal position. The next movement in the position level happens after every four years until teachers reach the level P2 and then 5 years the level, P1. Hence, teachers desiring to join the administration track must have a minimum of 7 years of teaching experiences before taking up an administrative role. Having a minimum 7 years of teaching experience seems fair and judicious enough for shouldering administrative responsibilities. The insertion of an open competition criterion in the administration track has been an inspirational element for teachers. It not only attracts the best people, but it also gives equitable accessibility and opportunity to teachers while promoting fair and transparent human resource management.

So, the entry level for the administration track begins as Principal III at P3 level and the highest position one can attain in the administration track is Principal at Specialist level (ES). In between the lowest and the highest levels in the administration track, there are other two levels that school administrators need to attain: Principal II at P2 and Principal I at P1. Therefore, for teachers who are aspiring to join the administration track and, as well as for those who are now in the track, it doesn’t matter how fast or slow teachers progress. The journey from the starting point to the end point
in the administration stream has been designed for a minimum 20 years of teaching services.

The other intriguing aspect of the process is allowing teachers in the administration track at P3 level, and above, to stay in the same position level for a maximum period of 5 years and teachers who are unable to move to the next higher level have to return to the teaching track. While this stipulation in the policy constantly serves as a cue to teachers to perform their best to move forward, implementation, particularly in terms of changing the track level, seems to be a big hurdle on the way. Teachers who are unable to move to a next higher level from P3 level to P2 level within 5 years to change the track seems to be a punitive measure that may not bring any positive professional behavioral change but such an action might demotivate the rest of the teachers.

Comparatively, Ministry of Education has the largest chunk of human resource and THRP (2014) is a long-awaited policy that is put in force with the best intention in restructuring the human resource. While the document contains clear and well-defined human resource management in reference to career tracks, recruitment, deployment, professional development and performance management, nothing tangible has been carved out with regard to other entitlements or benefits which other civil servants in similar positions are enjoying such as travelling overseas, flexible timing, less working hours to list few.

Though the current policy has drastically raised teacher recruitment standard, reformed selection and promotion processes, the reality of retaining and recruiting appropriate people will be a dream if other measures are not also put in place. In
addition, the policy as it exists is not sensitive to gender and may in fact perpetuate gender inequity as a consequence.

**State of Gender in Bhutan**

Not much has been examined about gender in Bhutan in the past. Bhutan history includes narratives of victory, supernatural power, and authority revolving mainly around events and actions of men in public spheres like war, politics or administration. Less reference is given to women, and when women are cited, they are portrayed in secondary roles as wives, mothers, and daughters acting as nurturers and home managers.

Since the inception of planned economic development in 1961, with Bhutan becoming a signatory to The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, gender equality has been considered as an essential component for the economic development of the country, and thus, started receiving attention from political leaders. Indeed, gender equality is deemed smart economics (Bhutan Gender Policy Note, 2013). Having Bhutan join the global pledge to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 is another significant milestone in the history of eliminating discrimination against Bhutanese women, and by pledging to attain Millennium Goals, Bhutan committed to promote gender equality and empower women.

By becoming a party to CEDAW and Millennium Development Goals, Bhutan has not only witnessed the birth of numerous organizations and Acts that help in safeguarding women from all forms of discriminations, but it also led to amendment of already existing Acts. The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was
established in 2004 to fulfil the obligations of Royal Government of Bhutan towards CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC). Since then, NCWC has been a leading agent in mainstreaming gender equity related issues through the formulation of policies, and according to Choden, (2004) legislation of gender related policies and plans are mainstreamed in 11th five year plan.

Upholding its global commitment to promote gender equity and empower women, the first-ever baseline gender pilot study was conducted in Bhutan in 2001 and the research revealed many intriguing results. The study not only confirmed perception about male superiority but it also deemed women physically weak in assuming leadership positions particularly as Gups (local government leaders) since that position requires a great deal of mobility. The attempt to study, safeguard and change the political status of women made women conscious of their own capabilities and abilities to lead and contribute in a decision making process.

Although Bhutan has made remarkable strides in closing the gender gap in terms of school enrollment, health, economic growth and poverty reduction, there are areas where Bhutan certainly needs to pay special attention to close the gender gaps. According to GPN 2013, the two significant gender gaps that still persist in Bhutan are agricultural land holding and inheritance practices, and gender gaps in labor markets and job quality. Within the two significant gender gaps, many other inequities also occur. While GPN 2013 highlights the economic benefits of the matrilineal inheritance practice, it critiques women’s lack of agency over land to reap the full benefit from land ownership. Holding inheritance also affects the economic choices of women
particularly, if they make the decision to remain in their own village thus, impeding women’s mobility and participation in decision-making process.

In context to education, the Net Primary Enrollment Rate (NER) has increased to 95.2%, and girls have overtaken boys in terms of transition rate in primary education. However, in secondary education (grade XI and XII), the transition rate for girls plunges drastically from 94.1% in primary education to 69.3% in secondary education, reversing the gender situation in favor of boys. The pattern seems very similar in tertiary education. The total number of students pursuing various courses in tertiary institutions in Bhutan and outside is 15,174 as of 2016 with girls making up only 6642 of the total enrollment at the tertiary level education in Bhutan (Education Statistics, 2016). The figure confirms a gender gap in tertiary education. GNP (2013) also identifies sex segregation in the labor market, with gender roles in household chores and child care as the two main causes of job inequality for women. Despite some progress, women still face challenges in the labor market and there is gender gap within employment quality. While the female labor force numbers are high, there is a lack of employment quality. According to 2011 Labour Force Survey (MoHLR, 2012), Bhutanese women work in lower quality jobs than men and their earnings are still only 75% of men’s earning.

Out of 27,029 civil servants, only 9,585 are female civil servants meaning 64.54% are men. While there are 248 positions in executive and specialist categories in the civil service, barely 24 women have made to the executive and specialist level (Annual Report, RCSC, 2016). The 9.6% of women occupying positions in the highest decision-making body seems irrelevant when the country’s ratio of population is roughly 50 percent men and 50 percent women. The disparity in gender balance in civil
servants, especially the insignificant number of women in executive and specialist categories seems to validate the deep-rooted cultural perception that leadership is a male domain and Bhutan is a male dominated society. Though there is an increase in the number of women in the civil service from 29.9% in 2010 (Gender statistics Bhutan 2010) to 34.5% in 2015, the number of women in governance has decreased drastically from 10 in 2008 to 4 in 2013. Though there is 5% increase in the number of women in executive and specialist category within the last 5 years, the increase seems negligible in reference to number of men in executive and specialist categories.

Regarding the teaching profession, male teachers outnumber female teachers both in teaching and leadership positions. Of the total of 522 principals, only 60 females have attained the position of principals and these 60 females include both principals and vice principals. Exploring the narrative of these women (how do these women construct leadership? what are their challenges and opportunities in their leadership positions in a male dominated profession?), while connecting to my own lived experiences as a female school principal, will not only facilitate the understanding of women’s experiences but it will assist in integrating women’s knowledge into mainstream thinking about leadership. I am of the understanding that by exploring the narratives of female educational leaders who have diligently worked towards breaking societal and cultural barriers, it will smoothen the road for future aspiring female leaders.

Statement of the Problem

According to Annual Education Statistics (2016), the total of 522 schools exists across the nation to make education accessible to all children. The majority of school teachers, as well as school administrators’ in these schools, are by and large men. Of the
forty-five school principals in Thimphu, less than half are female. Of the 9081 teachers in the country, 3737 are female (Annual Education Statistics, 2016). Also out of 522 principals, only 60 are female. This statistics not only reveal that men outnumber women in the teaching profession, but subtly exposes the exceptionally low numbers of women who have shattered the glass ceiling and entered the male realm of leadership. What are the narratives of these Bhutanese female educational leaders? What are the opportunities and challenges of these female leaders in a patriarchal society? My understanding of their stories of courage and challenges of working with male coworkers not only elicit ways to understand leadership from female perspectives but also may provide important insights into how women make sense of their lives in a somewhat unbalanced social world. While myriad studies (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Blackmore, 1996, 2006, 2013; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Regan & Brooks 1995; Lambert & Gardner, 2009; Larson & Murtadha, 2002) reveal incredible accounts of female educational leadership in North America and Australia, barely any research has been conducted with narratives documented of the lived experiences of those women working in an overwhelmingly male dominated profession in Bhutan.

**Purpose of the Study**

Even though some women have broken the ‘glass ceiling’ and have become school administrators, there are still barriers and socially constructed restrictions related to gender that impede females from taking up administration roles. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived experiences of Bhutanese female educational leaders and how they negotiate between a female and a leader in a male dominated society. The aim of the research is to examine challenges and opportunities that Bhutanese female
educational leaders come across as leaders and how their gender comes into play. Exploring the rich narratives of female educational leaders can uncover powerful implications, not simply in understanding leadership from a female lens, but in examining the opportunities and challenges of female educational leadership and contribute to re-conceptualizing leadership. Therefore, my research fills a gap as well as carving out new ground. So I must ask who can better re-construct the life history of a Bhutanese woman than another Bhutanese woman.

Research Question

My study is guided by two main research questions:

What are the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan?

What are the challenges and opportunities of female educational leaders in Bhutan?

Theoretical Framework

Feminism and feminist theories help create the guiding framework for my research. Exploring vast arrays of feminist literature deepened my understanding of women’s history and status which I, as a woman, did not pay much attention to, particularly in context to leadership. The very concept of women in leadership positions owes its mere existence to the feminist movements and the struggles endured to surpass dogmatic notions plaguing leadership theories. Women’s transformative journeys from managers of the household to public figures in society demands a more in-depth reflection, deliberation, and celebration. The current research embraces a multifaceted exploration of feminism and investigates how it has contributed to preparing women to assume leadership roles.
Reflecting on my own practices, I recall that while my father encouraged me to be a teacher, it was my mother’s values and principles of social justice that essentially influenced my outlook on life in general, and education in particular. Her words of wisdom, love, care, and kindness, without a doubt inspired me to become a teacher in pursuit of social justice. Working with an underprivileged community in Bhutan paved the way for me to critique how Bhutanese educational policies and practices supports or prevents the provision of just and equitable educational experiences for all learners. My personal experience of injustice as a woman of colour living outside my comfort zone has driven me to reflect on issues of gender, race, and status. Delving deeply into social justice struggles has propelled me to critique the status quo, traditional patterns of privilege, and deep assumptions about what is real and good for citizens of the world.

Through my soul searching, I have come to realize that revitalizing the struggle for social justice in the Bhutanese educational context is a challenge that requires dedication, commitment and a passion to make a difference. Marshall and Olivia (2006) argue that the biggest change in cultural understandings and societal and school expectations will happen through sharing values, networking, and mutual support. Through the process of redefining my own leadership values, I aim to entice women leaders facing similar challenges to form a supportive community aimed at exploring new models, forging new alliances, and learning from one another.

This research is the outcome of years of experience as a female educational leader in the Bhutanese context. In this study, I address growing concerns regarding the status of female educational leaders and the challenges faced by these women in Bhutan. In an attempt to address these concerns, I embark on a journey into my personal
experiences and explore the concept of leadership and how it is manifested in
educational contexts, particularly at the hands of women. This research is occurring in
2016 but the seeds of my interest in the topic are shaped by my early experiences.

Significance of the Study

Exploring the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders has a
tremendous significance on spheres of society. Within the area of research in
educational administration, female voices and experiences have been largely left out. In
a way, women have been silenced by those in power from expressing their views,
opinions and experiences. This study disrupts the silence that women have suffered for a
long time and serves as a forum for them to share their experiences of leading in a male
dominated society. Through their experiences, I aim to nurture the next generation of
female leaders who are more competent and confident.

There is limited literature on female leadership in Bhutan and the research that is
available is mainly focused on women who are political leaders or who are inclined
towards joining politics. Actually, no studies have been conducted particularly on
Bhutanese female educational leaders. This research contributes to create and expand
knowledge by exploring the experiences of Bhutanese female educational leaders.
Therefore, a key significance of this study is that it is first of its kind.

The findings from this study can be used to design and redesign curriculum that
help both the teachers and students to reflect on their own roles and responsibilities
regarding girls and women. It will not only problematize the current curriculum and
school system but the findings can contribute in developing a curriculum that embraces
knowledge, strategies and information from feminist’s perspectives. Policy makers can
make good use of the study’s information to develop plans and policies that are gender sensitive and responsive. Above all, the knowledge generated from the study can be utilized to enhance women’s empowerment by creating plans, policies and strategies that support women to navigate beyond the barriers to ascend into leadership positions particularly as educational leaders. Empowering women through policies, plans and strategies can interpose in deconstructing conventional notions of leadership and reconstruct leadership using a feminist lens. Realizing the importance of voicing their experiences, my study serves as an avenue for women to share their knowledge and perceptions as they function as educational leaders in a patriarchal society.

Overview of Study

In the introductory chapter, I set the stage by presenting the background, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, and significance of the study. Chapter Two comprises a review of the literature situating and informing the study. I addressed relevant literature on leadership in relation to female educational leaders and highlighted some leadership practices that women identify themselves with. Feminist theories are incorporated because I am of the belief that feminism is at the heart of the women’s movement towards leadership. While there are varied understandings of feminism, almost all the participants in my study seemed to believe in liberal feminism.

Chapter Three describes the methodology through which the data were gathered, analyzed and interpreted. The three commonplaces of the narrative inquiry methodology; situation, temporality and sociality facilitated a better understanding the experiences of female educational leaders and making more valid interpretations.
Chapter Four presents the findings of the study which is developed through a thematic analysis of the experiences that fifteen female educational leaders shared with me during the study interview. Five themes come to light as their language is lifted and abstracted.

In Chapter Five, I discuss the result of the findings of the study by bringing to light eight key findings. The eight key findings are deliberated in relation to the existing literature, in relation to the current status of female educational leaders, and in relation to recommendations for enhancing future female educational leaders. Finally, Chapter Six not only summarizes the dissertation but it presents readers a reflective journey the researcher have been through in the process of writing the dissertation.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This study of women in leadership positions is a fairly new phenomenon in many societies, including Bhutan. In fact, women are still considered outsiders in the realm of leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Despite being newcomers in a male dominated field, studies about women in leadership positions, particularly in educational leadership, challenge the conventional concept of what it means to be a leader. Research findings about the ways many women lead have paved the way for a redefinition of educational leadership. Geyer’s (1989) assertion on how women leaders wield power is exceptionally effective and pertinent to the contemporary state of affairs where women’s efficiency in leadership has gained universal attention. As a woman with a vast array of experience in educational leadership, I am both compelled and inspired to delve deeper into women’s roles in educational leadership and how their leadership styles have impacted schools, people, and the communities they are engaged with. In exploring these concepts, this study not only examined the understanding of traditional leadership, it also explored the description of leadership from feminist perspectives and how conceptualizing the leadership from feminist perspectives could empower women.

Tracing Leadership

The word leadership is a complex and evolving concept (Bass, 1990). Stogdill (1974) points to the appearance of the word ‘leader’ in the Oxford English Dictionary as early as 1300 and the word ‘leadership’ roughly four hundred years later. Jennings (1960) states that in early Greek and Latin, the word leadership is derived from the verb
to act. The two Greek verbs, *archein* (to begin to lead, to rule) and *prattein* (to pass through, achieve) correspond to the Latin verb *agere* (to set in motion, to lead). Hence, by combining the words ‘to lead’ and ‘to rule’, leadership embodies a process that is centered on the interactions between leaders and followers where one cannot exist without the other.

**Complexities of Leadership**

Bass (2007) asserts that “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 16). Fleishman et al. (1991, as cited in Northouse, 2004, p. 2) states that there have been as many as 65 different classification systems developed to define the multifariousdimensions of leadership. Avery (2004) believes that leadership is a distributed phenomenon, occurring in various parts of an organization, not just emanating from the top. Northouse (2004) asserts that “although leaders and followers are closely linked, it is the leader who often initiates the relationship, creates the communication linkages and carries the burden of maintaining the relationship” (p. 3). Leadership is also believed to be a complex phenomenon involving the leader, the followers, and the situation (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 1999). While, a number of leadership researchers have focused on the personality or behaviour of the leader, perhaps the most effective way to understand leadership is to scrutinize some of the ways it has been defined.

**Definitions of Leadership**

Although there is no definite and specific definition of leadership, there are many operational definitions widely acknowledged among scholars and practitioners. Bass (2007) conceives leadership as:
the focus of group processes, as a matter of personality and 
inducing compliance, as the exercise of influence, as particular 
behaviours, as a form of persuasion, as a power relation, as an 
instrument to achieve goals, as an effect of interaction, as a 
differentiated role, as initiation of structure, and as many 
combinations of these definitions. (p. 16)

Solomon and Bowers (1981) define a leader as “a person who has 
influence with people, which causes them to listen and agree on common 
goals, to follow [leader’s...] advice to go into action toward these goals” (p. 
1). According to Northouse (2010), leadership is “a process whereby an 
individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 
3).

While leadership has a range of definitions, in essence it deals with the ability to 
influence others to attain goals. One of the phrases used to describe leadership designed 
by Bass and Avolio (Bass, 1985, 1998; Bass & Avolio, 1990) is ‘transformational’, 
which emphasizes the ability of leaders to transform their followers to perform beyond 
expectations. Este, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) divide group leadership into six 
main categories comprising of 1) trait theories, which attempts to explain that some 
people are born with specific inherited personality that are suitable for leadership; 2) 
power and influence theories, which, in turn, establish leadership in terms of the amount 
of authority and resource available to the leader and in the manner which leaders 
exercise that power over followers independently or mutually; 3) contingency theories, 
which consider that there is no best leadership style and success is determined by a
number of factors including qualities of followers, leadership style and situation; 4) behavioral theories, which emphasize the belief that great leaders do not inherently possess leadership abilities and leadership is an acquired skill; 5) cultural and symbolic theories, which explore the influences of leaders over followers in upholding their ownership, values and sense of belongingness to the school; and 6) cognitive theories, which emphasize that leadership is a social attribution that allows leaders to construct a meaning of the world through their experiences.

There is a growing trend among scholars that reflects a shift in paradigm regarding the notion of leadership, particularly in the context of educational organizations. The shift is from a rational perspective to a more symbolic one in leadership (Este, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). This move is seen in:

the management of meaning, the construction of institutional reality, and the interpretation of myths, rituals, and symbols. For the most part, however, cultural and symbolic views of leadership have not been incorporated into the practitioners’ perspective of higher education administration, perhaps because it tends to present the leader in a role that is considerably more modest than seen in images of heroic or transformational leadership associated with rational and power-based theories. (Este, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989, p. 7)

For instance, school principals who view their role as leaders from a symbolic perspective will be content with making marginal changes and improvements in learning spheres so long as their focus lies in assisting their constituents to make sense of the chaotic experiences that threaten to engulf them. This is in contrast to the rational perspective that emphasizes on big changes and making considerable adjustments in
educational spaces. In an attempt to identify leadership from a rational and symbolic perspective, I reflect on my understanding of teachers and students and how I value their opinions in the process of implementing change in the school. This in-depth reflection has pushed me to contemplate my actions and its implication on teachers, students, and the community.

Despite all these rampant assumptions, a leader’s life story can play a significant role in dissecting the concept of leadership. The implication of a life stories approach for the study and development of authentic leaders engenders intriguing discussions on self-transcendent values such as social justice, equality, honesty, loyalty, responsibility, gratitude, goodwill, appreciation, and concern for others (Shamir & Eilam, 2005). As a female educational leader operating in a system where the notion of leadership continues to be dependent on male norms, I find that it is increasingly difficult to lead from a more authentic leadership position. As I explore my own understanding of leadership, I envision the respective contributions and life stories of leaders like Jigme Singye Wangchuk, the fourth King of Bhutan, and Mahatma Gandhi, the father of Indian Independence. These inspiring leaders have shaped my understanding of leadership and have helped me to reflect on my leadership style. As I delve deeper into the values and principles demonstrated by these male leaders, I am left to speculate whether men and women possess leadership concepts differently. As a female educational leader, I aim to explore the deleterious factors that have attributed to the lack of female leaders in the educational sphere. I also aspire to unearth what role my female identity plays in the act of leadership displayed by me. I will address issues like how deeply my leadership styles are influenced by my culture, heritage, and personal history. The countless
questions that arise from exploring the notion of leadership only encourage me to examine this concept as a dynamic process, continuously changing its theories and practices to transform and adapt to a highly competitive global leadership context.

**Educational Leadership**

There is little doubt that the field of educational leadership has witnessed extraordinary developments and transformation. However, the educational hierarchy has been fostering a system that is more likely to retain the status quo. Instead of encouraging a culture of critique and possibility, we run schools like businesses, become excessively result-oriented and mechanical, and in the process, we forget to smile and share a moment of joy with our students, colleagues, and parents. In a school that is more concerned with assessments, test scores, accountability, and efficiency, leaders are likely to forget to reflect and analyze their own actions. Davis, Herbst and Reynolds (2012) believe that educational leadership has a big role to play in transforming traditional grading or marking practices through shifting the beliefs of school community and revising policies and practices. While educational leadership is envisaged as a by-product of the market-driven logic consuming educational spaces, its transformative effect begins to get lost in the process. To combat this market-driven framework, critical theoreticians can work to develop an emancipatory theory of leadership by creating a “public language that is theoretically rigorous, publicly accessible, and ethically grounded and that speaks to a sense of Utopian purpose” (Giroux, 1992, p. 8).

According to Heck and Hallinger (1999), the emergence of instructional and transformational leadership has led the way among conceptual models in the field of
educational leadership. These models have left their mark on the understanding of how administrators and teachers improve teaching and learning and how exercising these models can bring about improved educational outcomes. Transformational leadership focuses on developing an organization’s capacity to innovate. Rather than focusing specifically on direct coordination, control, and supervision of curriculum and instruction, transformational leadership seeks to build an organization’s capacity to select its purposes and to support the development of changes to practices of teaching and learning and developing a collective vision of and shared commitment to school change.

As a principal of a middle secondary school in Bhutan, I am of the belief that a central impediment to effective school leadership is going it alone in terms of responsibility, particularly as a female educational leader. Once a principal takes on the challenges of moving beyond the main requirements of her role as a policy maker, the responsibilities of running a school become all the more challenging (Cuban, 1988). The essence of educational leadership and how my values and principles are manifested in my actions as a principal are key components that continue to emerge in my practice as I seek a more evolved understanding of educational leadership.

Goldring and Greenfield (2002) contend that “contemporary images of principalship and superintendency increasingly evoke calls for a ‘special’ kind of leadership: that it be constructivist, transformational, facilitative, instructional, developmental, distributed, or moral” (p.1). These forms can be distinguished by their basic foci, key assumptions, and the nature and influence of leadership power (Leithwood & Duke, 2000). Goldring and Greenfield (2002) identify moral dimensions,
the stewardship of the public education, the complexity of the core schooling activities along with normative and people intensive characters, as four key conditions that distinguish educational administration from administrative work. It is, however, the stewardship of public education that mirrors my philosophy and inspires me to reimagine my contribution in educating children and improving the lives of *yak herders* in Bhutan. In my practice, I reaffirm Goldring and Greenfield’s (2002) position that as a female educational leader, it is imperative, “to build the capacity of public schools to ensure that children representing different races, ethnicities, social class, language, physical abilities and religions are interculturally competent and prepared to live, learn and work in a multi cultural society” (p. 5).

Ylimaki and Mcclain’s (2009) Wisdom Centred Educational Leadership model encourages the cultivation of six virtues of the Bodhisattva (generosity, discipline, patience, right effort, meditation and wisdom) in an effort to establish and ultimately maintain a balance between the joy of learning and accountability. I draw on Ylimaki and Mcclain’s (2009) model and expand my own understanding by focusing on characteristics like love, care, and compassion towards students, teachers, parents and the community. As a woman, mother, and a school principal, I am of the notion that women can be agents of change, transformative leaders and leadership for social justice. While characteristics like love, care and compassion are often at the heart of women’s leadership to bring change, it is imperative for women especially Bhutanese female educational to be self- confident, assertive, and self – assured of what is it that they want best for the school, educational system and particularly for girls and women.

Fullan (1992) points to the changing role of principals and maintains that:
The image of the principals in the research and policy literature has shifted since the early 1980s from the principal as “gatekeeper” to the principals as “instructional” leader. Planned change, school improvement, effective schools and staff development all bear the mark of the principal as central for leading and supporting change. (p. 85)

This is clearly evident in the Bhutanese educational system. Over the course of a century, the Bhutanese education approach moved from traditional autocratic administration and managerial leadership to transactional and instructional leadership. As an instructional leader, a principal is urged to maximize her responsibility regarding classroom instruction while minimizing the time spent on administrative issues that have little if any bearing on the students’ learning outcomes. While Hall and Hord’s (1987) three types of principals include initiators, managers, and responders, my experience informs me that rather than having three types of principals functioning in isolation, if need be, a principal can simultaneously function as an initiator, manager, and responder. In other words, in the process of executing educational leadership, school principals perform a multitude of actions ranging from being a manager, administrator, instructional and curriculum leader.

**Types of Educational Leadership**

The different types of leadership style that exist in school environments are acknowledged for their special attributes. As a professional, I am compelled to discuss the leadership styles that have influenced my experiences as a female educational leader in Bhutan. In my journey toward educational leadership, I have been influenced by concepts like transformational leadership, instructional leadership, sustainable
leadership, and distributed leadership. I will explore these leadership styles through an in-depth exploration of their implications on my practice.

**Transformational leadership**

Transformational leadership has emerged as one of the most frequently studied models of school leadership (Heck & Hallinger, 1999). According to Stewart (2006), the academic performance of students has a direct link to leadership effectiveness. What distinguishes this model from others is the leader’s influence and impact on teacher transformation and the restructuring of the school. Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) assert that school principals who succeed in their jobs use a variety of mechanisms to motivate their staff to bring about changes in the school culture.

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership emerges when leaders and followers compel one another to advance to a higher level of morality. Visionary transformational leaders are able to inspire their followers to alter their expectations, perceptions, and motivations, and to work towards common goals. In a similar vein, Bass and Riggio (2006) describe transformational leaders as:

- those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity.
- Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization. (p. 3)

The four different components of transformational leadership as developed by Bass (1985) consist of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration,
inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. According to Bass (1985), leaders possessing intellectual stimulation promote critical thinking and problem solving to make an organization more effective. Transformational leaders not only challenge the status quo; they also encourage creativity among followers. These leaders encourage followers to explore innovative ways of doing things and inspire them to take on new opportunities to learn. Thus, in an attempt to provide individual consideration, Bass (1985) affirms that transformational leadership extends support and encouragement to individual followers. With the intention of cultivating supportive relationships, transformational leaders keep lines of communication open so that followers feel free to share ideas for mutual development. In their role as inspirational motivators, transformational leaders have a clear vision and motivate followers to commit to a vision for change. The final component of transformational leadership developed by Bass (1985) is idealized influence which is characterized by modeling behavior through exemplary personal achievements, character, and behavior.

Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) broaden this concept by identifying six dimensions of transformational leadership. They are:

- building school vision and establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modeling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating a productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, p. 114).
The fundamental components of women leadership through the lens of my experience fosters a kind of transformational leadership that produces change, inspires followers to advance to higher levels of morality, yields extraordinary learning outcomes, and develops leadership capacity in followers by empowering them. As a woman who believes in change, empowerment, and developing leadership capacity in followers, I believe that attaining transformational leadership is the first stride towards building a meaningful social justice framework in schools.

**Instructional leadership.**

Various scholars (Hallinger, Murphy, Weil & Mitman, 1983; Patterson, 1993) have emphasized the role of an instructional leader as defining the school mission, managing curriculum and instruction, and promoting a positive school culture. Daresh and Playko (1995, as cited in Gupton, 2003) also share this vision on instructional leadership that consists of direct or indirect behavior that significantly affects teacher instruction and, as a result, student learning. Traditionalist principals spend the majority of their time dealing with strictly administrative duties. Cotton (2003) argues that effective school leadership must combine the responsibilities of traditional school leadership such as teacher evaluation, budgeting, scheduling, and facilities maintenance with a deep involvement of certain aspects of teaching and learning.

The move from administrative to instructional has been influenced largely by research which concludes that effective schools were mostly run by principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982). Hoy and Hoy (2003) maintain that schools are about teaching and learning; all other activities are secondary to these basic goals and “the critical role of principal is that of...”
instructional leader” (p. 2). Smith and Andrews (1989) identify four dimensions pertaining to the role of an instructional leader: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence. As a resource provider, the principal ensures that teachers have all the required teaching materials and the budget necessary to adequately perform their duties. A principal, who is an instructional resource, actively supports day-to-day instructional programs by modeling desired behavior, participating in professional training and consistently giving priority to instructional concerns. As a communicator, the principal has clear goals for the school and articulates those goals to the faculty and staff. Being a visible presence, the principal engages in frequent classroom observations and is highly accessible to both faculty and staff.

My experience as a principal indicates that instructional leadership pays little attention to administrative issues and managerial functions, yet provides extensive support and assistance for learning and teaching. According to Hoy and Hoy (2003), this pattern illustrates that instructional leaders need to spend time in classrooms and engage teachers in conversations about learning and teaching. This style of leadership has turned into the most popular theme in educational leadership particularly in the Bhutanese education context since 2010. Under the title “Instructional Leadership: A Paradigm Shift”, all school principals have been educated to adopt instructional leadership models. This particular understanding of leadership further inspired me to situate classroom instruction and learning at the center of my leadership practice. However, my male coworkers perceived such practices from a more cynical lens and were apprehensive about losing their power.
Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) assert that the importance of instruction overlaps with the social justice agenda of many women leaders. Instructional leadership complements leadership for learning [one of the themes developed by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011)] in understanding how women lead in educational settings. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) state that women educational leaders make decisions based on priorities like student learning, supporting professional development, innovations, and experimenting with instructional approaches. Though the intent of instructional leadership is to improve students’ academic learning, the extent to which it is efficaciously implemented in male-dominated leadership models requires further inquiry.

**Distributed leadership.**

Distributed leadership is gaining the attention of practitioners, professional developers, policy makers, and scholars. Professional developers have created programs for school practitioners that promote a distributed approach (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Harris (2005) suggests descriptive power, representational power, and normative power as the reasons behind the popularity of distributed leadership. Descriptive power captures the forms of practice implicit in professional learning communities and communities of practice. It is difficult to envisage how communities of practice operate unless leadership and other organizational components are distributed. Harris supports representational power by maintaining that conventional ways of operating schools does not meet learning requirements in the 21st century. Consequently, distributed leadership offers a way of thinking about leadership that accommodates new organizational forms and structures of leadership practices that are lateral rather than vertical. So Harris
Spillane (2006) states that distributed leadership is about more than accounting for all the leaders in a school and counting up their various actions to arrive at a comprehensive account of leadership. Moving beyond the principal or head teacher to include other potential leaders is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of what distributive leadership perceives to be the most challenging and essential aspect of leadership. Spillane and Diamond (2007) have established that rather than defining distributed leadership as a mere distribution of tasks, it needs to be redefined as an interactive web of leaders and followers who periodically change roles as the situations demands. Spillane and Diamond (2007) introduce two aspects of the distributive perspective; the leader plus aspect and the practice plus aspect. The leader plus aspect acknowledges that the work of leading and managing schools involves multiple individuals. The practice plus aspect is framed in a rather unique fashion; in that it is a by-product of the interactions among school leaders and followers.

Gronn (2002) considers the multiple meanings of distributed leadership that fundamentally fall into two categories; the first views distributed leadership as essentially additive (more leaders, spread leadership) and the second as more holistic, including all forms of collaboration and participation. A holistic view of distributed leadership is mostly concerned with the synergies that can occur when people come together to work, plan, learn, and act, thus generating further leadership capacity among individuals and organizations. Harris (2005) points out that distributed leadership is
essentially concerned with engaging a wide array of people in leadership activities.

Harris further cites that:

If one takes the theoretical and the practical stances on distributed leadership as polarized opposites, at one extreme, it could be argued that distributed leadership offers little more than an abstract form of conceptual analysis. While at the opposite extreme, it is prescriptive, offering simple descriptions and guidance about how to lead this way. In short, the prescriptive stance assumes knowledge of how leadership is distributed while the analytical stance sees distributed leadership as a tool, way of looking at leadership practice rather than a set of practical guidance. (Harris, 2005, p.11)

Spillane and Diamond (2007) state that distributed leadership is frequently used as a synonym for democratic leadership, shared leadership, and collaborative leadership among other things, but “a distributed perspective is a conceptual framework for thinking about and studying school leadership and management and an analytical tool to frame research on school leadership and management” (p.7). Much of the literature on leadership dwells on leaders and leadership structures, functions and roles. It focuses mostly on what leaders do in broad and general terms, but pays limited attention to the practice of leading and managing (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Knowing what leaders do is one thing, but having an in-depth understanding of how, when, and why they do it is essential if research is to contribute to improving day-to-day practices of leading and managing schools (Spillane & Diamond, 2007).
Sustainable leadership.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) have aptly pointed out that “change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain” and “sustainable improvement depends on successful leadership” (p. 1). Fullan (2005) describes educational sustainability as the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep humane values. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) affirmed that “sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future” (p.17).

Davies (2007) asserted that:

Sustainable leadership is founded on a passionate belief that everyone in the school will be successful on their learning journeys. It sees success as both sustainable and accessible to all. Sustainable leadership is made up of the key factors that underpin the school’s long-term success and development (Davies, 2007, p. 4).

Davies proposes nine sustainable leadership factors that need to be developed and deployed to combat the threat of managerial short-termism. The factors which have been drawn from recent research on sustainable leadership and strategically successful schools include (1) outcomes not just outputs, (2) balancing short term and long term objectives, (3) processes not plans, (4) passion, (5) personal humility and not professional will, (6) strategic timing and strategic abandonment, (7) building capacity and creating involvement, (8) developing strategic measures of success, and (9) building in sustainability.
Hargreaves and Fink (2006) put forth seven principles of sustainable leadership:

1) Sustainable leadership matters.

2) Sustainable leadership lasts.

3) Sustainable leadership spreads.

4) Sustainable leadership actively improves the environment instead of harming it.

5) Sustainable leadership promotes cohesive diversity.

6) Sustainable leadership develops and does not deplete materials and human resources.

7) Sustainable leadership honors and learns from the best of the past to create a better future.

The literature on leadership, particularly the various types of educational leadership, has provided a more nuanced interpretation of an evolving perspective on leading and managing schools. While I am of the opinion that leadership is an integral component of progressive change in schools, it is also important to realize that all types of leaderships have drawbacks if power is abused.

**Reconceptualization of Leadership from Feminist Perspectives**

In this section I will explore questions like would female leaders wield power differently? Would they be more humane? Would they perhaps even usher in some gleaming, renaissance era? The role of women in transforming a traditional perception of leadership is in line with Lupi and Martin’s (2005) position that due to differences in experience, socialization, opportunities or other factors, there are likely to be differences in how women and men develop and demonstrate their leadership styles. This literature review has helped me further examine my understanding of how women leaders wield
power differently and display their self-transcendent values. Aside from capturing the common experiences of women leaders which shape our world view, I also set out to better understand how women lead in new directions using innovative methods.

Leadership has essentially been a men’s club for a long time and women have been confined to the margins. The second half of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century witnessed a surge in the women’s movement leading to remarkable progress in the leadership sphere. In many cases, women have been welcomed into formal leadership roles when they behave similar to their male counterparts in a male-designed world (Lambert & Gardner, 2009). Despite the fact that women continue to be underrepresented in principalships and superintendencies, there is a vast array of literature that promises a redefinition of educational leadership notions (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

According to Blackmore and Sachs (2007), women engaging in educational leadership were not only managers of the processes of restructuring the educational workforce but were also involved with the transformation of educational work and professional identities. Lambert and Gardner (2009) suggest that leadership should be redefined as, “a capacity to engage in reciprocal, purposeful learning in community leading toward a shared set of goals, a shared purpose” (Lambert & Gardner, p. 16). Lambert and Gardner argue that reciprocity enables the pursuit of learning and leading within patterns of relationships in which individuals are mutually committed to each other, rather than being dominant and submissive. Being purposeful is concerned with moral values and envisioning a better world filled with equity, democracy, human rights, caring, and social justice.
At the heart of a community, like an organization, neighbourhood, or school, are concepts of care, inclusion, purpose, and lived experiences. Regan and Brooks (1995) stress that the qualities most women bring to educational leadership are inherently different from those practiced by men. Blackmore (1996) affirms that women construct and enact leadership in ways that depart distinctively from those of their male colleagues. Loden (1985) depicts masculine leadership as competitive, hierarchical, rational, unemotional, analytic, strategic and controlling. Feminine leadership is often described as having features that include being cooperative, intuitive, focused on high performance, empathetic, and collaborative. Restine (2003) aligns female educational leadership with empowerment, collaboration, building trust and relationship, and acting as an agent of change. Rogers (1988) describes women leaders as being oriented towards caring, nurturing, and inclusive participatory management practices.

**Leadership Themes of Grogan and Shakeshaft**

Based on women’s lived experiences in leading schools and districts, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) developed five themes regarding what female educational leaders pay attention to and how educational leadership can be redefined. The five themes are: 1) relational leadership, 2) leadership for social justice, 3) spiritual leadership, 4) leadership for learning and 5) balanced leadership. In exploring these themes, particularly relational leadership and leadership for social justice, I offer a more in-depth picture of the power wielding aspects of women in leadership positions. While I understand that women active in the educational sphere have their own leadership style, I am of the belief that women’s leadership experiences possess unique approaches and characteristics.
Relational Leadership

Relationship building is an integral part of leadership and researchers emphasize the role it plays particularly among female leaders. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that relational leadership is about being in a relationship with others in a horizontal, rather than hierarchical, sense. Women’s perception of power is related to the value they place on relationships. Power used to help others strengthens a relationship while power used to control tends to be damaging (Brunner, 2000). In a workshop conducted in Malaysia by Lambert and Gardner (2009), the female participants mentioned that they do not like to be called leaders because leadership is about power and authority. However, immediately after leadership was explained as a form of learning, the response was, “if leadership were defined like that, we would be proud to be leaders” (p.18).

Restine (1993) identifies relationships as:

fundamental aspects of the female culture. The quality of interactions depends largely in the degree of trust that exists, the degree that creativity and risk taking are encouraged, and the focus of commitment. Even though we may realize that disagreement and conflict are inevitable, our leadership behavior needs to be based on creating supportive relationship and creating human connections.

Whatever organization and individual achievement and successes occur, do so because of relationship between people rather than because of program or fulfilling job descriptions. (Restine, 1993, p. 32)

Rosener (1990) points out that men are more likely to use power that comes from their organizational position and formal authority than women. On the other hand,
women’s characterization and understanding of leadership and power is well within the confines of "transformational" leadership…getting subordinates to transform their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. Moreover, women attribute their power to personal characteristics like charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or personal contacts rather than organizational stature. Wangensteen (1997) points to the conventional wisdom that female leaders are more participatory and interpersonally oriented than male leaders and are more likely to adopt emphatic, supportive, and collaborative approaches.

Helgesen (1990) has established that women maintain a complex network of relationships with people outside their organizations. Accordingly, women consider representing their organization as a major aspect of their job, and spent between 20 to 40 percent of their time with clients, peers and colleagues. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) assert that women often describe power as something that increases as it is shared. They are also of the view that power needs to be conceptualized as something that is shared with others in a manner that promotes “power with” rather than ”power over” (p. 6). Witmer (2006) argues that the male culture often views power as power in itself and for itself while women view it as a limitless entity with an inclination toward empowering others.

According to Rothschild (1976), women view power as energy, potential, and competence of oneself. This is in stark contrast to the notion of ‘power over others’ that fails to espouse a relational approach of power. Women seek to achieve and maintain such power through personalized and cooperative means. Through the advocacy of shared power, an effective leader is borne; one who empowers others to act in their own
interest rather than coercing them to behave in a manner consistent with the goals of the leader. Rosenberg (1986) states that “women are more relationship centered than men, derive their self-image from their role as wife and mother, and tend to be more interested than men in the cooperative, social aspects of the work situation” (p. 763). Helgesen (1990) found that women were concerned with relationships to a point where they considered unscheduled tasks and meetings to be opportunities as opposed to a disruptive act. Women leaders also displayed a tendency to keep themselves accessible, particularly to their subordinates. Helgesen also suggests that women leaders consider it important to be caring and involved, and take time to listen and build relationships with other people. Meanwhile, a study on the integration of leadership conducted by Eddy (2009) revealed that men are more likely to operate from an authoritative perspective, using relational skills mainly to obtain their desired results.

Noddings (1992) and Beck (1994) argue that teachers and administrators respectively must view their engagements in schools as entering into relationships with people rather than assuming roles within bureaucratic systems. This shift towards an ethics of care compels school leaders to attend to the needs and concerns of individuals rather than groups, and to recognize the very human consequences of the decisions they make on behalf of schools. Working as a female school principal in a patriarchal society has driven me to question my own leadership style. Collaborating with mainly male coworkers, it was challenging for me to reveal my nurturing characteristics and femininity for the fear of appearing less capable. The early years of my leadership voyage was what Regan and Brooks (1995) described as “mimicking what we saw, learning to administer by modeling ourselves after the men around us, but harboring a
secret belief that we would soon develop in to better administrators than our models” (Regan & Brooks, 1995, p. 9). However, at the heart of my leadership crisis, I have incessantly prioritized classroom instruction, relations, professional development, academic performance, and students’ health and hygiene.

**Leadership for Social Justice**

Due to an escalation of social injustice in schools (Rapp, 2000), gaps in the socioeconomic status of mainstream and marginalized students (Coleman, 1990), and the complexities of an increasing multicultural society (Goodlad, 2001), social justice has become a vital concern for educational leaders (Furman & Shields, 2005). Larson and Murtadha (2002) point out that since injustice has always been part and parcel of human civilization, far too many individuals fail to see blatant injustice as unjust, and countless educators have come to believe that injustice in schools is natural and consequently unalterable. Research in educational administration indicates that injustice in schools and communities is neither natural nor inevitable. This particular strand of research falls under an umbrella of inquiry called leadership for social justice. The literature on leadership for social justice compels educators to rethink current school practices and policies in order to effectively meet diverse students’ needs, concerns, and issues (Marshall & Olivia, 2006).

The question of what social justice leadership is, what it encompasses, and why it matters in school leadership is answered in a myriad of ways by various scholars. According to Blackmore (2006), social justice is about addressing issues of inequality, power, responsibility, and ethics. It is centred on understanding the changing relations
between education, society and the state; education and work; and education and family. Furman and Shields (2005) describe social justice as:

- robust and dynamic understanding of social justice; acknowledgement of injustice related to power and privilege (including inputs and outcomes, behaviour and attitudes); recognition of individual prejudices as well as collective inequalities; and a concern for pedagogical implications of social justice. (Furman & Sheilds, 2005, p. 125)

Kumashiro (2000) uses the term *other* to identify groups of people who suffer without socially equitable change in schools:

- Those groups that are traditionally marginalized in society, i.e., that are other than the norm such as students of color, students from under employed or unemployed families, students who are female, or male but not stereotypically “masculine” and students who are, or perceived to be, queer. (p. 26)

Larson and Murtadha (2002) offer three strands for leadership for social justice that includes deconstructing existing logics of leadership, portraying alternative perspective of leadership, and constructing theories, systems and processes of leadership for social justice. Deconstructing existing logics of leadership encompasses critical race theory, gender representation, multiculturalism, and leadership theories for women and people of colour. In portraying an alternative perspective of leadership, issues like ethics of care, love, spirituality, and leadership need to be addressed. The final strand compels researchers to go beyond theorizing about social justice leadership and make recommendations for practice. Researchers must do more than articulate theories that can contribute to change in school while constructing theories, systems and process.
According to Larson and Murtadha (2002), the third strand holds the greatest possibility for impacting positive change in educational administration, and yet it continues to remain the least developed concept. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) claim that there are few discussions of what to do “on the ground” (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 64) to bring about change for greater social justice.

**Key Components of Social Justice**

Marshall and Olivia (2006) argue that three key components of social justice are leadership for social justice, moral transformative leadership, and social justice praxis. Leadership for social justice interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and different markers of otherness.

Moral transformative leadership perceives education and educational leadership from a progressive and critical theoretical view focussing on the use and abuse of power. It deconstructs the work of school administration to find out how leadership practices generate and perpetuate inequalities and marginalization of members of the learning community who are outside the dominant culture and views schools as places that not only engage in academic pursuit but also as locations that help to create activists who will bring about the democratic reconstruction of society.

Social justice praxis manifested in research and scholarship, conference presentations, and teaching can help promote leadership for social justice in education and educational leadership. Professional conferences and presentations are excellent venues to teach, inform, engage, learn and bring together diverse viewpoints that can lead to moral transformative leadership in schools.
For justice to prevail in a society, Furman and Shields (2005) link social justice to pedagogical practice and emphasize that:

Justice is present when there is space created into which students bring their lived experiences, their whole selves, inquisitive about the word and the words, when no voices are silenced or experience devalued. Leadership for social justice requires a careful examination of one’s own beliefs and practices and those of the institutions within which one works, for injustice is played out in both individual relationships and systematically, in policies that assume that any single approach curriculum, programming, resource allocations, or accountability is appropriate for all children (Furman & Shields, 2005, p.126).

School principals, particularly women, have an intense sense of social justice and humanity. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) point out that such disposition is embedded in the history of women and the social context influencing women’s lives. To attain social justice, Shields (2004) urges leaders to be adamant in transforming not just practices of schooling but socially constructed values, norms and beliefs. Various scholars (Murtadha & Watt, 2005; Marie & Normore, 2008) describe the narratives of the struggle of African American women educational leaders in their pursuit for social justice. Their fight for justice and equity in hopes of providing a free and fair educational experience for their children is an amazing account of determination and inspiration.

Studies conducted by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) reveal that women, more than men, talk about having entered teaching to change the lives of learners, to make the world a fairer place, and to change institutions so that all students have a chance to live a
more meaningful existence. In a study conducted by Merchant (2005) on the practices of social justice, one of the female principals pointed out that “passion for social justice is very personal and it has nothing to do with professional preparation. If you are in a principal’s position because of professional preparation, you won’t have that personal passion. Then the position becomes a burden” (Merchant, 2005, p. 168).

Gardner and Lambert (2009) point out that women are not drawn to education on account of salary, position, recognition or the potential for autonomy. It is most often values like caring, social justice, and equality that lead women to devote their lives to others, particularly children.

This literature review has been a journey of realization, contemplation, and a moment of comfort and discomfort in understanding and exploring myself as a female educational leader. Thriving as a transformational leader entails efforts to develop supporters into leaders, and create a space where all learners and leaders alike can find their voices and share their stories.

**Defining Feminism**

Studies focused on women, gender inequality, and leadership issues are limited in scope without reference to feminism and feminist theories. Despite the social and historical forces that rendered women second-class citizens, the phenomenon of women and leadership is at a tipping point (Lambert & Gardner, 2009).

Delmar (1986) reiterates the ever-changing nature of feminism and argues that in light of the disintegration of the contemporary notion of feminism, arriving at a unitary definition of feminism is a challenge. Freedman (2001) emphasizes the difficulties of defining feminism and maintains that it is not one single concept but a diverse and
multidimensional classification of ideas and actions. Defining feminism has been
difficult at best, but a persistent feature has been feminism’s concern with women’s
inferior position in society rooted in gender discrimination. Delmar (1986) argues that
the feminist mission to engender change in the social, economic, political, and cultural
sphere is aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating any and all forms of
discrimination against women. According to Delmar, it is difficult to come up with any
other ‘common ground’ between the different strands of feminism ‘beyond these general
assertions’ (p.8). Hooks (2000) asserts that feminism is a movement aimed at ending
sexism, sexist exploitations, and oppression. From Hooks’ position on feminism, it can
be extrapolated that regardless of who the perpetrator is, it is sexist thinking and action
that is the root of all problems. Consequently, to understand feminism, it is essential for
an individual to understand sexism.

The Dawn of Feminist Thought

Banks (1981) contends that women’s participation in evangelical movements in
the mid-nineteenth century in the United States and Britain awakened a feminist
consciousness that encouraged women to fight for their political rights. Grimshaw
(1986) argues that the most influential idea that had a direct impact on the emergence of
feminism was the introduction of the Rights of Man in the American Declaration of
Independence where women were politically excluded and not acknowledged as rational
beings. The changing concept of home, family, and personal life throughout the
Industrial Revolution sparked feminist thinking particularly among middle-class women
who were economically dependent on their husbands while at the same time excluded
from professions and occupations that were readily available to men (Grimshaw, 1986).
Frassie (1995, as cited in Freedman, 2001) claims that the term ‘feminist’ first appeared in a French medical text in 1871 to describe a cessation in the development of male sexual organs and characterized patients who were perceived to be suffering from the ‘feminization’ of their bodies. Before long, French writer Alexandre Dumas Fils recycled the word feminist in an effort to describe women behaving in a supposedly masculine fashion. Although in medical terminology, feminism was used to signify a feminization of men, in political terms it was first used to describe a virilization of women (Frassie, 1995, as cited in Freedman, 2001). This type of gender confusion was something that was clearly feared in the nineteenth century, and it can be argued that it is still present in a modified form in contemporary societies where feminists are sometimes perceived as challenging natural differences between men and women.

According to Delmar (1986), Women’s Right Movement began long before the term feminism was coined. Hence, many of the women’s rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not call themselves feminist.

When Wollstonecraft wrote *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), her intention was to counter Rousseau’s (1762) advocacy of a separate education for women and men. In his novel *Émile*, Rousseau theorized that women are “passive and weak” and should be educated merely to please men. Virtue or excellence was perceived differently for women than men. Wollstonecraft (1792) argued that education is a source of empowerment for women and every woman should have access to education. Wollstonecraft’s then revolutionary ideas regarding women’s capability to have rational thought proved to be a great challenge to the social norms that were meticulously controlled by men. Wollstonecraft (1792) believed "the most perfect education" to be
"an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attach such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (p. 129).

**Feminism versus Feminisms**

In exploring women’s rights movements, Delmar (1986) concludes that the identity of these movements emerges from a shared experience of being a woman, interconnected by a common bond of oppression and struggle. Delmar (1986) asserts that early feminism’s unity owes a great deal to women’s shared experiences in economic oppression, legal discrimination, and commercial exploitation and the internal response they developed to counter these forms of injustice. Harding (1986) argues that in the early years of feminism, there was a strong collective sense of “we” to feminist theorizing. However, the postmodern thought and the consequent fractured identities in today’s world have helped to decentralize feminism. The fractures in the ideology of feminism persists, since according to Hannam, (2007), it is the priorities of white middle-class Western women, including the right to vote and equal rights, that continue to be used as a lens to understand feminism. The immediate consequence of this attitude is that the concerns of women in other parts of the world – for clean water, decent food, and access to health care – are either marginalized or seen as somewhat less feminist. The earlier concepts of feminism emphasized on women’s rights and needs to attain equality with men within existing social norms and institutions. Yet, today’s feminist emphasizes a new vision for the social order in which women's experiences and ways of knowing are brought to the fore instead of being suppressed (Gross, 1986). Feminists have attempted to sustain the esprit de corps rooted in women’s solidarity with one
another even at the international level. Hannam (2007) states that the phrase “sisterhood is powerful” is one of the key catchphrases of the Women’s Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 70s. The focus on women’s struggle for their rights, autonomy, and equality had been the cornerstone of the movement toward solidarity for more than half a century. Nonetheless, the differences in class, race, nationality, and sexual orientation have constantly threatened to undermine this unity.

The strong desire to preserve certain views regarding feminism invariably encountered obstacles at a time when differing meanings of feminism for different feminists have manifested themselves as a sort of sclerosis of the movement implying that sections of feminism have separated from the core and consequently hardened against each other (Delmar, 1986). Tong (1995) offers an extensive and illustrative blueprint of twentieth-century feminist thinking. Despite all the trials and tribulations faced by feminist movements over time, Tong (1995) has identified seven forms of feminism that include: Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism, Psychoanalytic feminism, Existentialist feminism, and Post Modern feminism. Meanwhile, Delmar (1986) has raised concerns regarding ‘the impossibility of constructing modern feminism as a simple unity in the present or of arriving at a shared feminist definition of feminism’, as a consequence of the ‘fragmentation of contemporary feminism’ (p. 9). This fragmentation in contemporary feminist thought has led to multifarious manifestations of feminism as each category is acknowledged for its influence and recognition of the idiosyncrasies of different periods in the history of women’s rights movement. Feminist pluralism offers a myriad of ways to make sense of the world and bring together even conflicting views and assumptions. Delmar (1986)
has established the existence of various forms of feminism that have succeeded in compiling not only different but also conflicting assumptions regarding women’s rights issues.

**Feminism in Waves**

The common assumption that feminism is rooted in a singular school of thought from five decades ago has been challenged time and again. The United States witnessed three successive waves of feminism that date back to the late 19th century and continue into the modern day. Each ‘wave’ set in motion a series of struggles to attain justice for women pertaining to issues related to the ‘weaker sex’.

**First Wave Feminism**

First wave feminism evolved within the context of the industrial society and liberal politics. It refers to the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century feminist movements that were concerned with gaining equal rights for women, including the right of suffrage (Freedman, 2001). First wave feminism formally began at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 when women rallied to the cause of equality; it was in 1860s that the first women’s suffrage organizations were formed within the broader political context. One of the leading personalities in the women’s rights movements drafted the Seneca Falls Declaration in 1848 outlining the new movement's ideology and political strategies (Humm, 1992). Hannam (2007) maintains that women demanded the right to vote as a natural right based on their shared humanity with men and believed that they could not be fully human unless they have full citizen rights. The demand for women’s suffrage raised the consciousness of universal sisterhoods and led to the organization of women’s suffrage movements which were first developed in Europe,
North America, and white-settler colonies of Australia and New Zealand and reached a zenith prior to the First World War (Hannam, 2007).

Burns and Chantler (2011) point out that the most pivotal campaigns in the women’s struggle to attain equal rights involved the right to vote, the right to property, and access to education and divorce laws (Humm, 1992). Krolokke and Sorensen (2006) maintain that the first wave of feminism in the United States was interwoven with other reform movements including abolition and temperance and initially involved women of the working classes. Although women of color actively participated in the movement, the first wave of feminism was dominated by white, middle-class, and well-educated women with male supporters filling auxiliary positions (Hannam, 2007). The Nineteenth Amendment of 1920 which gave women the right to vote was the outcome of sixty years of struggle and the dedication of countless women, particularly Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-19020), and Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928).

The question that emerges is why women’s suffrage became a contentious issue and why it took over sixty years to achieve any significant rights in that particular realm. The issue at hand seemed to have been men’s reluctance to include women in public spaces. The fear of losing their place of power in society propelled men to create obstacles for women who sought suffrage. Hannam (2007) argues that both supporters and opponents of suffrage believed that women would use their voting power to bring about social and political change. Consequently, if women were ‘granted’ political voice, the traditional roles of men and women in relation to family and the workplace would come under attack. After years of political struggle and numerous sacrifices,
Humm (1992) asserts that, first wave feminists created a new political identity for women and won legal advances and public emancipation for women including family allowances, the right to vote, contraception, abortion, and welfare rights.

While the first-wave of feminism was monumental to women’s ability to secure some of their basic social and human rights, Bhutan did not grab the depth of this dialogue until much later in the 20th century. According to Choeda (2007), Bhutan remained isolated from the larger world until the middle of the 20th century because of its geophysical and political state. Various religious leaders ruled Bhutan throughout its tumultuous history and monastic education was the only form of education available in the country for a very long time. By enrolling in monastic education, young boys enjoyed an all-out access to Bhutan’s only educational sphere in Dzongs (fortress) and were eventually referred to as monks (Dorji, 2005). Albeit education provided various opportunities for men, women’s role in shaping the history of Bhutan was largely ignored. While the history of Bhutan is modeled on the glory of men, there is no reference or discussion about women leaders and their achievements. Although, the government founded the National Women's Association of Bhutan in 1981 in an attempt to improve the socioeconomic status of women, little stride has been made toward improving women’s position in society, particularly in educational spaces.

**Second Wave Feminism**

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960s and continued well into the 1990's and built on the accomplishments of first wave feminism as well as on the civil rights movement. This phase opened up various professions for women, equality in the workplace, payment for domestic labour, and the right of women for control over their
reproduction (Burns & Chantler, 2011). Reproductive rights and sexuality were at the core of second wave feminism which also included the fight against sexual and domestic violence (Humm, 1992). Hooks (2000) contends that the sexual exploitation of women's bodies had been a common occurrence in radical movements for social justice. The women of the late '60s and early '70s who demanded abortion rights had witnessed the problems that arose from illegal abortions and forced marriages as a consequence of unwanted pregnancies.

Incorporating women’s experiences and idiosyncrasies in the construction of knowledge was the cornerstone of second wave feminism. The feminists of this era challenged traditional forms of knowledge production by arguing that women’s experiences had historically been either excluded or only included in an effort to maintain existing unequal gender relations (Burns & Chantler, 2011). Fonow and Cook (2005) argue that research in second wave feminism focused on women’s lived experiences as a way to recover what had been omitted. Second wave feminists were concerned with establishing gender as a social construct while also challenging the biological determinism of sex.

Unlike first wave liberal feminists, Krolokke and Sorensen (2006) refer to the second phase as radical feminism in the women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s due to their extreme views and actions. Hooks (2000) asserts that second wave feminism began with protests against the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and 1969. These feminists viewed events like the Miss America Pageant as a means to suppress women by exploiting normative beauty culture. Various feminist groups including the New York Radical Women (NYRW) protested against how women
in such competitions were paraded around like ‘cattle’ to show off their physical attributes. They stressed on the underlying assumption that physical beauty is more important for women than they presume (Freeman, 1975). Despite the fact that women obtained the right to vote, it did not translate into major changes in the social and economic sphere for some time. The U.S. government’s emphasis on the importance of traditional gender roles as a result of the upheavals brought on by wars, student protests against the Vietnam War, and the call for reform in education (Hannam, 2005), the gay and lesbian movements, civil rights and the Black power movements reignited oppressed groups including women, the working class, Blacks, and homosexuals (Freeman, 1975) to further pursue their rights. Simone De Beauvoir’s The Second Sex (1949) and the publication of Betty Freidan’s Mystique Women (1963) reenergized women’s pursuit of a sense of identity in the society and challenged existing gender roles. De Beauvoir’s (1949) profound statement that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p.267) came at a time when women were viewed as the “other” in relation to men. Freidan’s Mystique Women revealed the realities of white middle-class housewives who were frustrated, and discontent contrary to society’s depiction of their lives. The second phase of feminism also witnessed the coining of powerful expressions that generated a feeling of solidarity amongst women including “personal is political”, “consciousness raising” and “sisterhood is powerful” (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). Rampton (2008) argues that the second wave was based on a fusion of neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory which associated the subjugation of women to critiques of broader issues like patriarchy, capitalism, and normative heterosexuality. Sex and
gender were differentiated—the former being biological, and the latter a social construct that varies from culture-to-culture.

The beginning of second wave feminism in the West corresponds with the end of the age-old policy of self-imposed isolation in Bhutan. While second-wave feminism created political upheavals through consciousness raising and situating the issues faced by women at the forefront of feminist activity, Bhutan was either persuading or coercing parents to send their children off to schools. Male children in the family were pressured to attend school while girls were compelled to stay home and take care of aging parents since they were believed to be better caregivers and nurturers. The de facto inequalities that kept women extremely under-represented and marginalized are visible in the life narratives of my mother and her siblings. Out of seven siblings; all the four male siblings were enrolled in schools and were encouraged incessantly to continue their education. Although my mother and her sisters were fortunate enough to experience schooling, the traditional belief of women’s place in the household forced them to leave school and leave their parents’ home to live with their husband’s family at a very young age. Choeda (2007) asserts that parents were discouraged from enrolling their daughters in school in Bhutan due to the inaccessibility of school sites and undeveloped boarding facilities.

Third Wave Feminism

If second wave feminism is conceived as radical, my understanding of third wave feminism is one of boldness and courage. The third wave transformed the face of feminism by establishing that all young women are capable of becoming feminists and are also capable of integrating feminist values into their lives (Gilmore, 2001). Third-
wave feminism is a term that has come to define a generation of women’s movement that began during the 1990s and continues to this day. The third-wave is at times epitomized as a response to frustrations with the second wave that began in the 1960s and continued through the 1970s and 1980s (Janus, 2013). Born with the privileges that were earned by first and second-wave feminists, third phase feminists consider themselves capable, strong, and assertive social agents. These feminists deem themselves to be a new generation and present themselves as unique and distinct from second wave feminists. They believe that feminism is natural; it is already interwoven in the fabric of their lives and interpreted as a form of entitlement (Snyder, 2008).

According to Baumgardner and Richards (2000), “for our generation feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it—it’s simply in the water” (p. 17).

Krolokke and Sorensen (2006) use phrases like “lipstick feminism, girlie feminism, riot grrrl feminism, cybergrrrl feminism, transfeminism, or just grrrl feminism” (p.15) to describe the third wave and how young feminists display their femininity in a more playful and less pompous fashion. Snyder (2008) believe that ‘girl power’ or ‘girlie culture’ is a central component of the third wave and ‘girlie’ encompasses the tabooed symbol of women’s feminine enculturation. Rather than rejecting makeup, fashion magazines, high heels, and the Barbie doll culture as a sign of men’s control over the market and the exploitation of women’s body, third wave feminists embrace them as part of the younger generation’s effort to reclaim previously derogatory labels such as “slut” and “bitch”. These third wave feminists stubbornly venture into male-dominated spaces to claim positions of power.
Third wave feminists have challenged the ideology of middle-aged bourgeois women who believe that time, money, and stature are imperative for the success of social movements (Gilmore, 2001) and third wavers reached out to a wider audience through popular books such as *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* by Rebecca Walker (1995) and *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* by Barbara Findlen (1995). Unlike the second wavers, third wave feminists had enough courage and confidence to bring issues pertaining to sexual matters and desires to light. These views are echoed by Snyder (2008) who asserts that third-wavers feel entitled to interact with men as equals, claim sexual pleasure as they desire and actively play with femininity.

Rampton (2008) argues that grrrl-feminism identifies itself as a global and multicultural phenomenon and believes in the celebration and recognition of differences in race, class, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Heywood (2006) argues that third-wave feminism has no identifiable single-issue agenda that distinguishes it from other movements for social justice and seems to include any viable approach so long as it pays attention to gender issues and favors social justice by eschewing victimization. This is clearly evident in the writings of Krolokke and Sorensen (2006):

Third-wave feminism is also inspired by and bound to a generation of the new global world order characterized by the fall of communism, new threats of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, and the dual risks and promises of new info-and biotechnologies. A common American term for third-wave feminism is “grrrl feminism,” and in Europe it is known as “new feminism.” This new “new” feminism is characterized by local, national, and transnational
activism, in areas such as violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation, and the overall “pornofication” of the media. While concerned with new threats to women’s rights in the wake of the new global world order, it criticizes earlier feminist waves for presenting universal answers or definitions of womanhood and for developing their particular interests into somewhat static identity politics. (p. 17)

Third wave feminism is venturing into complex spheres deemed unattainable by second wave feminists. Third-wave feminism challenges the notion of universal womanhood and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity in transversal theory and politics (Snyder, 2007). The historical journey of women from the 1960s to the 1990s is a voyage of remarkable achievement. It took extraordinary drive and strength for women to realize their potentials and emerge in the public space despite importunate resistance from the opposite gender. Women’s place, roles, and contributions to society as politicians, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, administrators, CEOs, scientists and more importantly as educational leaders has progressed drastically over time.

In light of these changes, it is essential to explore whether Bhutanese women are treated as equal partners to their male counterparts or whether they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. It is critical to understand what policies, plans, and approaches are designed to encourage women’s engagement in leadership positions and how encouraging and receptive male coworkers are including women in such realms. In exploring these notions, it seems that I am left with more questions than answers which will likely inspire further research in an effort to break down barriers faced by disempowered and marginalized groups.
**Post-Feminism**

The array of meanings inserted in post-feminist philosophy has generated not only confusion but also a dialogic culture within the existing literature. Faludi (1992) views this variation as a systematic backlash against feminism; a conceptual shift and a focus on debates around difference (Brooks, 1997). Furthermore, the addition of the prefix “post” is an indication that feminism is no longer essential in today’s world. Littlewood (2004) contributes to the discussion by offering two thought-provoking assumptions. Littlewood establishes that first and foremost feminism has attained all its goals and is no longer needed and secondly feminism pushed the boundaries too far while aiming to fulfill its agenda. This has inadvertently upset the natural evolution of the movement, making both men and women unhappy in the process. The notion of “pastness” of feminism or “feminism no longer required” is still up for debate and has been shown to vary depending on space, race, class, and gender.

Faludi (1992) maintains that the simplistic media constructions regarding feminism either emphasizes that feminism has won and the right to exercise equality rests in the hands of women or depicts feminism as a lost cause rejected by women. While Faludi views feminism and its struggle for women’s equality as the main cause of exhaustion and disillusionment (professional women are burn out, single women grieving from man shortage, and childless women depressed and confused), she also stresses that the blame cannot be squarely put on the shoulders of feminist politics. Whelehan (1995) blames the political structure of the media for supposedly encouraging women to blame feminism for a multitude of dissatisfactions including exhaustion and disillusionment.
Wolf (1990) argues that today’s successful women are still oppressed by Western standards of female beauty and women are lured into believing that perfection can be achieved through plastic surgery. Wolf investigates how cosmetic surgery is tied into the consumerist culture of capitalism and considers the beauty industry as a new form of patriarchal domination over women and their bodies. Stacey (1987) asserts that in the contemporary post-feminist era, feminist ideas are simultaneously incorporated, revised, depoliticised and also attacked. Meanwhile, Gill (2006) contends that much of what counts as feminist debate in Western countries actually takes place in the media rather than outside it. Sexual freedom, the right to drink, smoke, have fun, and be fiscally responsible is what McRobbie (2004) identifies as features of post-feminism. Littlewood (2004) reiterates McRobbie’s (2004) depiction of post-feminism and uses phrases like fun and sexy, bored with politics, and busy picking up the latest makeup without any concern for issues like unequal pay. The celebration of cosmetic procedures in an effort to maintain a youthful appearance, valorization of female achievement within traditionally male-dominated spheres is the way women in the post-feminism era are depicted in the media (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

Gill (2006) argues that post-feminism is rather complex because of its tendency to interconnect feminist and antifeminist discourses. On the one hand, young women are praised for their 'can-do' girl power attitude, while their bodies are exploited as sexual objects. Furthermore, women are depicted as active, desiring social beings, all the while being subjected to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance that has no historical precedent. Brooks’ (1997) assessment of post-feminism addresses a wide range of
issues and readdresses issues of gender equality, difference, patriarchy, race, and gender, and informs that feminism needs more deliberation and exploration.

While my literature review is entirely based on Anglo American texts, it has opened many perspectives to situate Bhutanese women and their progress in the field of leadership and equality. Despite recurring claims that we dwell in the post-feminist era, issues related to equality and justice necessitate more in-depth discussions and research. I am also of the belief that while few Bhutanese women have entered the post-feminist era, the great majority of women in Bhutan are struggling to establish a presence in a male-oriented society. More than ever, there is a need for collective action in Bhutan but according to Piepmeier (2006) post-feminism eschews collective action by either underrepresenting or at best obscuring women’s various fears in society including social and economic qualms.

The examination of feminism and feminist theories have offered a new perspective in the manner I perceive my culture and institution. I began to delve deeper into understanding my culture and, how the culture and institution I grew up have shaped me and Bhutanese women in general. For instance, as a woman born and raised in a traditional family, neither did I dare to enter the main altar in temples and monasteries that were restricted for women nor have I got the confidence to question why women were not permitted. Rather, unquestionably, I have confirmed to cultural norms and societal expectations expected of any women and, abided by the rules that were set for women. As I reflect on these cultural and religious expectations and norms in reference to literature on feminism, I am beginning to understand that culture is a social construction constructed by those in power. In a similar tone, so is the concept of
leadership. While acknowledging women’s knowledge and ideas especially in defining leadership seems to be a big challenge, and the biggest hurdle seems to be embedded in disrupting the traditional notion of leadership, I am of the belief that exploring the narratives of female education leaders and their understanding of leadership will shed some insight in reconstructing leadership from feminist perspectives.

**Renegotiating the Glass Ceiling: The Dearth of Female Educational Leaders**

The existence of a glass ceiling as a distinctively gender phenomenon was challenged by the appointment of Carleton Fiorina as the first chief executive officer of the Fortune 500 company Hewlett-Packard. According to Fiorina, women face “no limit whatsoever. There is not a glass ceiling” (Meyer, 1999, p. 56). Former U.S. Senator of State Hilary Clinton did not echo these sentiments by referencing the invisible barriers faced by women when she conceded the Democratic presidential nomination to Barack Obama in 2008. Clinton noted that although she was unable to ‘shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling’; her supporters helped her put about 18 million cracks in it (Hall, 2011). Catalyst (1999) issued a report that highlighted the existence of a glass ceiling particularly for women of color. The term glass ceiling has been used to describe an invisible barrier that is transparent, yet strong enough to prevent women and other minorities from accessing top leadership positions (Klenke, 1996). Although glass ceilings exist at different levels in various organizations and industries, the term typically suggests a transparent barrier individuals face in their attempt to access top management positions (Powell & Butterfield, 1994). It has been several decades since the glass ceiling metaphor was first used to describe the often subtle but extremely powerful barriers faced by women who set out to assume their fair share of leadership
roles. The proverbial glass ceiling explores why few women attain leadership positions; why they do not move up the position ladder as rapidly as men; and why women tend to face stringent promotion requirements compared to their male counterparts (Klenke, 1996).

The debate on the underrepresentation of women in educational administration goes back to the 1970s. Dispelling the myths surrounding women’s capabilities in leadership has been an ongoing challenge since the issue was brought to the public fore. While some believe that the glass ceiling concept regarding female advancement has diminished, there are those who insist that the invisible factors that inhibit women from aspiring to leadership position must be identified and eliminated (Weber, Feldman & Poling, 1981). According to Young (2003), shortage of female school administrators established the presence of glass ceilings that exist for women and minorities in their attempt to access higher paid positions. Despite being encouraged to shatter the proverbial glass ceiling, Shakeshaft et al. (2007) identified ten factors that attribute to the continued presence of these invisible barriers for women: 1) poor self-image or lack of self-confidence, 2) lack of aspiration and motivation, 3) family and home responsibilities, 4) working condition and sex discrimination, 5) lack of support, encouragement, and counseling, 6) socialization and sex role stereotyping, 7) preparation programs and curriculum materials, 8) finances for continuing training, 9) too few role models, sponsors, mentors, and networks, and 10) sex discrimination in hiring and promotion that operate as barriers to women aspiring to become educational leaders or move up the corporate ladder.
Dyrchs and Strack (2012) claim that ‘old boy networks’, ‘male–oriented selection criteria’, and the ‘absence of role models’ continue to have a direct impact in women’s path to top leadership positions. The presence of more women in positions of power has brought on the assumption that most advanced industrial societies appear to be approaching gender equality. Despite an impressive presence of women in the labor force and educational institutions, the presence of men and women in elite leadership positions attest to the existence of external barriers that block women’s vertical mobility preventing them from advancing to certain levels in the leadership hierarchy.

**Family loyalty.**

According to Shakeshaft et al. (2007), family and home responsibilities are a contributing factor to women’s lack of administrative success, either because women disproportionately bear the brunt of family life demands or because employees believed that women’s commitment to the job comes second to family. Purcell, MacArthur, and Samblanet (2010) assert that women’s tendency to leave work, reduce their hours, or not work in the first place is either a by-product of preference for more traditional female roles or an inability to balance work and family life.

Stone (2007) states that many women are being ‘forced out’ of their jobs rather than ‘opting out’ on account that strong ideologies of care are among a myriad of factors that compel women to make these decisions. Furthermore, women’s ‘family friendly’ approach in the workplace often leads to career penalties like the ‘motherhood penalty’. For instance, instead of integrating ‘family-friendly’ measures to allow mothers with young children to work, women who try to balance being model employees and ideal mothers face a double bind. These supermoms often face burnout and marital difficulties
from an ongoing effort to balance work life with a second shift of family responsibilities at home (Hochschild, 1989). Lips and Colwill (1997) argue that working mothers usually take on the responsibilities of two full time jobs; one outside the home and the other managing life at home; cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for the children. Researchers show that in dual career families, mothers continue to assume the main responsibility of caring, nurturing, socialization of children, and house work.

Schwartz (1989) pointed to how corporations made a distinction between ‘career primary women’ and ‘career–family women’. The former group puts their careers first while the latter seeks a career-family balance. The ‘career primary’ women prioritize their career progress and relegate family and social life to secondary status. They are willing to give up their marriage or family to reach the highest level in their careers. On the other hand, women with a career–family orientation pursue professions where issues like working hours, compensation, and advancement can be decided in accordance to family demands and obligations. Schwartz further argues that organizations nurture the careers of the first group and prime these women as potential top executives while offering the career-family women flexible work arrangements and family supports in exchange for fewer opportunities for promotion and advancement. The “women in the middle” as characterized by Brody (1981), are expected to juggle multiple roles including caring for parents as well as managing their family and career.

My experience of leading a life of a ‘woman in the middle’ reaffirms the challenges women in leadership position face. Societal and cultural expectation, along with family obligation has influenced career and leadership-related decisions at every stage. The fact that women’s advancement in the workforce has fallen under career-
primary and career-family category has compelled me to reflect on the choices I have made and the priorities I have set in my life. I have also reexamined both the opportunities and challenges that I encountered in my quest toward educational leadership and the invisible sacrifices I made in an attempt to do what is best for my family. At the same time, such career and family choices have propelled me to reflect on the Bhutanese education system, its policies and practices, and the importance given to the issue of gender equality by policy makers. The question that remains is how women rise to the top levels of their professions while at the same time taking on considerable family care responsibilities. This critical question is one of great significance within the Bhutanese context and one that has yet to be addressed by the existing models of leadership.

**Scarcity of role model and networking.**

Shakeshaft et al. (2007) claim that a paucity of role models is a barrier to women’s leadership aspirations. Driscoll and Goldberg (1993) maintain that while men have ample role models to look up to and be guided by through the behavioral minefield of workplace, the same cannot be said for women. Young (2003) asserts that three factors appear to greatly impact women’s path to leadership: the administrative role models they encounter, the type of leadership literature they are exposed to, and the endorsement and supports they receive. The presence and absence of these factors can either facilitate or inhibit women’s entry into leadership positions. Klenke (1996) argues that a shortage of women in leadership roles is an immediate outcome of the absence of female mentors. More so, women are perceived as either incapable or unable to possess the legitimate authority or power to serve as mentors. Regan and Brooks (1995) claim
that their idea of leadership was shaped by watching male administrators around them and they engaged in their leadership responsibilities by mimicking and modeling the men around them. Gardiner, Tiggemann, Kearns & Marshall (2007) argue that girls might be less likely to aspire to become scientists because there are fewer female scientists who can serve as role models. Exposure to professionals from the same gender can provide such role models, break stereotypes regarding gender roles, and improve individual women’s aspirations and propensity to enter traditionally male-dominated areas (Asgari, Dasgupta, & Cote, 2010). Women in leadership positions can inspire young girls to aim for top leadership jobs in the future through two main channels: first, by undertaking policies that make it easier for women to succeed, thus changing beliefs of what is possible for girls; and second, by providing a role model of a successful woman (Beaman, Duflo, Pande, & Topalova, 2012).

At this point of my literature review I set out to re-evaluate my leadership style and seek out a female role model or mentor. I recall engaging solely with my male colleagues for advice and guidance whenever I encountered a stumbling block in the daily execution of school affairs. It is not because I did not have confidence or trust in myself or my female school leaders but I was taught to believe that men’s opinions were more astute and better suited to my needs than those of my female colleagues. I believe that since the concept of leadership or role model is constructed and defined in line with men’s perspectives, women adopt leadership styles, either consciously or unconsciously, from a man’s point of view. More importantly, this greatly influence female students’ perception of women leadership. I believe now is the right time for female Bhutanese
educational leaders to re-examine their understanding of leadership and seek out female role model and mentors.

Another barrier which hinders women’s access to leadership positions is the informal networks that exist in organizations. Klenke (1996) states that information exchange, career planning, professional support and encouragement, and increasing visibility are benefits of informal networking. Schmuck (1976) contends that since women were excluded from informal networks, they were unaware of administrative positions and had access to fewer people for support. Moore (1999) argues that the formal and informal networks that operate within senior management are at the core of male hegemony. White (2003) contends that for many years, higher education management profile has been a boys’ club which has excluded women. The exclusion is felt in promotion policies and processes which act against women by being interpreted subjectively (Wynn, 1997). Thornton (2000, as cited in White, 2003) asserts that since top managers are white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle class man, they tend to promote individuals with similar features. White (2003) argues that given the narrow executive profile, no women would be promoted to senior management and the few that do get promoted pay a price. Klenke (1996) contends that as long as men’s connections continue to be powerful informal groups with greater access to professional, financial, political, and legal resources, the structure of organizations will continue to serve as a barrier to women’s leadership aspirations.

**Women as token leaders.**

Women in occupations that are non-traditional for their gender often find themselves holding token positions- a position in which they are treated as symbols or
representatives of their sex (Lips, 1997). Lips (1997) theorizes that the token status places women in a vulnerable position and makes it difficult for them to excel at their job. Kanter (1977) further contends that token leaders go through considerable workplace stress as representatives of their groups making them visible and invisible at the same time. The findings of a research carried out in a military context by Yoder (2002) shows that the lone token woman rarely fits in the male-dominated space even if she is superior to her male counterparts and excels in her performance. Since women in leadership roles are considered as a symbol or token, Klenke (1996) warns that these women are under constant surveillance where their every move is monitored. In my experience, working with majority male coworkers showcased their inclination to dominate every discussion. Subtle isolation from the group, exclusion from the discussion discourse, and rejection of opinions and suggestions brought on by the relentless isolation, exclusion, and rejection are just some of my experiences with male co-workers. Kanter (1977) contends that women leaders in token scenarios are viewed as a mother, seductress or sex object, pet, and iron maiden. Kanter (1977) argues that it is not a wise idea to introduce lone employees into a work situation in which they are fenced in by members of the opposite sex.

At first reflection, I am left to wonder how intelligent and sensible it is to distance oneself from the leadership ladder for fear of tokenism. My personal experience demonstrates that a woman’s path to educational leadership is one of extraordinary challenge. Women’s bravery and courage to enter male-dominated spheres is an outcome of ongoing struggles by women’s movements. The findings from the present literature review lead me to conclude that obstacles and discriminations faced by a great
majority of women is a clear indication that women’s progress toward equality in leadership positions has been slow if not extremely challenging. The incongruity between expectations about leaders and expectations about female gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) has yet to spell the end of glass ceilings.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In light of my interest in exploring the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan, I have chosen to adopt a narrative inquiry research methodology. The use of narrative inquiry as a research methodology, particularly in the field of education where participants are urged to tell their personal account of events, is explored in great depth in Clandinin’s (2007) Handbook of Narrative Inquiry. An in-depth exploration of the inner workings of narrative inquiry has led me to conclude that this was an appropriate methodology for this study. The examination of the personal experiences of female education leaders in Bhutan was at the heart of this research. The approach holds the participants perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount essence of the study. The narrative inquiry paradigm also seeks to better understand why behind the human action. In this chapter, I examined the significance of narrative inquiry and I also address the method of interviewing as my research tool and how interviewing as a meaning-making process can shape and reshape the society we live in through in-depth interpretations and the empowerment of the respondents.

Methodology

Grounded in the epistemology of constructivism and a post modernism theoretical underpinning, this research falls under qualitative approach and utilized a narrative inquiry methodology to explore the life stories of female educational leaders in Bhutan. Founded on socially constructed knowledge claims, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and they develop subjective
meaning of their experiences (Creswell, 2003). Exploring narratives about what it means to be a female educational leader is one of the many ways of understanding leadership from feminist perspectives. Sharing narratives through experiences would locate their understanding of themselves as a female school principal; their challenges and opportunities.

**Research Question**

The current study explored the narratives of fifteen Bhutanese female educational leaders and their understanding of leadership. The study of women in leadership positions is a fairly new phenomenon in many societies, including Bhutan, where women are still considered outsiders in the realm of leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Despite being newcomers in a male-dominated field, studies about women in leadership positions, particularly educational leadership, challenge the conventional notion of what it means to be a leader. The primary question guiding my research is: what are the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan? A secondary question is: what are the challenges and opportunities of female educational leaders in Bhutan?

**Participants**

Using narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) as my research methodology, the narratives of fifteen female educational leaders whom all have at least three years of leadership experience were examined. The participants were from different parts of the country, and the diverse perspectives offered by these individuals offered rich narratives and a broad spectrum of leadership activities.
Data Collection Process

Fulfilling the research ethics and proposal, I flew to Bhutan in 2014 December and spent a month in the field collecting data. Each day, I was in the field collecting data as early as 6 a.m. and continued until as late as 11pm. I interviewed fifteen female educational leaders from seven different districts in Bhutan: 3 district education officers, 4 higher secondary school principals, 2 middle secondary school principals, 1 lower secondary school principal, 2 primary school principals, 2 lower secondary vice principals, and 1 teacher development administrator. All participants have leadership experiences ranging from 3 years to 28 years, and all of them have more than a decade of teaching experiences. Thus, the diverse experiences of participants contributed significantly in making this study rich and powerful.

The participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique and I exercised a one-on-one interview approach with a semi-structured method. The interview venues were selected according to the participants’ convenience and ease level. Hence, the interviews and audio recordings took place concurrently either in their offices, houses, or classrooms. Each interview was conducted in English, and depending upon the participant’s responses, the interviews lasted up to 90 minutes.

Transcribing Data

Applying the transcription guidelines proposed by Creswell (2002), the interview data were transcribed verbatim. It took approximately 4 hours to transcribe each hour of interview data. There were numerous audio recording playbacks in between the transcribing in trying to grasp the right word in each case. Certain phrases and words that were responded to in the Bhutanese national language of Dzongkha were
transcribed as said in an attempt at preserving the original flavor and the essence of the phrase. Other actions; pauses, phones ringing, laughter that occurred during the interview were also transcribed. Transcribing was time consuming and monotonous, but it was the best approach to come in direct contact with the data and know the data thoroughly. The familiarity and understanding of my own data facilitated my generation of themes with ease and comfort. It not only contributed to me understanding the participants but it confirmed my thinking as I developed an understanding for the meanings of their narratives. Once I have transcribed the interviews of 15 participants, I assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and confidentiality purposes. The transcripts were emailed to individual participants for verifications.

**Thematic Data Analysis**

There are many methods to analyze research data. Among many, thematic data analysis is a widely-used qualitative research method especially in educational research. I as an educational researcher, I applied thematic analysis method to create meaning of my data. An identity code number was assigned to each transcription for confidentiality, and they were printed out on a different color paper for easy sorting. The transcriptions were thoroughly read, coded on the left margin, and any possible or potential patterns related to vocabulary, phrase, frequency of occurrence and sentences that seemed to emerge during the reading process were recorded on the right margin of the page. Such detailed analysis of the data helped me in identifying themes which were later generated by categorizing similar and related information and ideas by cutting and pasting together the interview segments on bristle board. Once the themes were generated, I finalized the
name of each theme. I further described and supported each theme with quotations from
the original text to help in communicating its meaning to readers.

**Data Trustworthiness**

There are certain techniques to check whether data were trustworthy or the
participants were telling the truth. For qualitative research, assessing such
trustworthiness is referred to as validity and reliability (Creswell, 2003). Creswell
(2003) argues that trustworthiness is all about establishing four things credibility,
transferability, confirmability and dependability. Credibility is how confident the
research is in the truth of the research’s finding. Transferability is how the researcher
demonstrated that the research’s findings are applicable to other contexts such as similar
situations, populations, or similar phenomena. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality
in the research in the research’s findings meaning that the findings are based on
participants’ responses and not on any potential bias or personal motivations or of the
researcher. This involves making sure that researcher bias does not distort the
interpretation of what research participants said to fit in a certain narrative. Finally,
dependability is the extent that the study could be repeated by other researcher and the
findings would be consistent. In other words, if a researcher wants to replicate the study,
they should have enough information from the research report to do so and obtain
similar findings. A qualitative researcher can use inquiry audit in order to establish
dependability, which requires an outside person to review and examine the research
process and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings are consistent and could
be repeated. The study is grounded on the understanding that the experiences that the
participants have shared during the interview are factual and correct. As a narrative
researcher who upholds moral, principals and ethics and the highest form of human essence, the data collected during the interview were treated with utmost respect and transcribed word for word with skewing the interpretations of the research participants. Also, the data were stored in secured computer that could be accessible only by the researcher. Transcripts were emailed to individual participants for verifications.

**Importance of Narrative**

Human life is full of stories that work to enrich the very essence of human existence. Grounded in the epistemology of constructionism where “truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8), stories are forms of narrative that help to construct knowledge. Narrative as a form of story is generally perceived as a culturally constructed expression to share experiences (Turner & Bruner, 1986). In the words of Kramp, (2004) “stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with the past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (p. 107). In line with the view that narratives record human experiences and retell stories and events that have the most profound impact on individuals, Webster and Mertova (2007) emphasize that narratives allow researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexities and richness. Didion’s (1961, as cited in Kramp, 2004) argument regarding narratives filling the space between “what happened” and “what it means” purported more than half a century ago, still holds true today. Dyson and Genishi (1994) assert that human beings progressively have richer experiences because stories help in transforming the present and shaping the future. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) echo these sentiments and maintain that:
People shape their daily lives of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters a world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 479)

This point adds to the conversation on how human experience and narratives are interconnected. Thus, narratives need not be detached from real life, but instead should be perceived as forming a meaningful connection to life. In the education milieu, what makes human experience worthwhile are the educational values, principles, and morals derived from stories. The stories that we hear, read, or create in various teaching and learning contexts help us to learn and reflect on our practices, morals, and principles. By empowering teachers and educational leaders in Bhutan to explore their experiences, this research embarked on an educational journey that brought teachers’ voices to the forefront of educational initiatives aimed at improving the practice of female leadership in the Bhutanese context.

**Narrative Inquiry**

The development of narrative inquiry as a research methodology is rooted in the reading of human experience in which individuals live storied lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) were among the first researchers to use the term ‘narrative inquiry’ with a focus on personal storytelling in teacher
education. Their work established that what we know in education comes from telling each other stories of our educational experiences. Cortazzi (1993) contends that emphasis on teachers’ reflection and knowledge concerning what they know, how they develop professionally, and encouraging teachers’ to share their experiences have contributed to the development of narrative inquiry. Chase (2005) describes narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods-all revolving around an interest in biographical as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 641). Riessman (1993) defines narrative inquiry as a useful approach when undertaking the systematic study of personal experiences and meanings. Narrative inquiry is a by-product of narrative knowing, as researchers involved in narrative inquiry are interested in establishing the meaning of an experience or event and narrate it in the form of a story (Kramp, 2005). In light of the fact that narrative inquiry centers on personal as well as social experiences of individuals, Creswell (2002) argues that narrative inquiry is oriented towards micro-analysis as opposed to a theory applicable to a vast array of people.

To construct a story from past experiences and to make sense of those experiences both for the participants and the researcher, Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) maintain that: Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it (p. xvi).
According to Elliot (2005), this underlines the three principal features of narratives that include chronological or representations of sequences of events, meaningful, and the inherently social nature of narratives that target a specific audience. Elliott (2005) argues that “chronology of event” differentiates narrative inquiry from description. To my understanding, the stories must be in sequential order, meaningful and social in nature. For instance, telling stories about what it means to be a female principal is one of the many ways of exploring female principal’s positioning in an educational context. Sharing narratives of various experiences would situate their understanding of themselves as female principals and address challenges and opportunities in relation to their male coworkers. It is essential for narratives of female educational leadership to be in a clear sequential order in an effort to connect events in a meaningful way by offering insight into the world of female leaders’ lived experience. The understanding of a phenomenon or an experience rather than formulating a scientific explanation, as underlined by Elliott (2005) is the main purpose of narrative inquiry. This study explored the experiences of female educational leaders and constructed meanings out of their experiences.

While narrative inquiry is viewed as a latest approach in qualitative research, it has gained popularity among social researchers. As a research methodology, narrative inquiry offers a powerful framework for “addressing the issues of complexity and cultural and human centeredness in research’ (Webster & Mertova, p. 3). Narrative inquiry also delves into sensitive areas that other methodologies are either anxious to venture into or have failed to adequately address.
The narrative inquiry methodology is set in human stories which are the key avatars of our understanding of the world, of experiences, and eventually of ourselves. As a research methodology, narrative inquiry provides a robust structure for capturing human experiences, interpreting those experiences, and constructing meaning.

**Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry**

Clandinin and Connelly (2007) maintain that narrative inquiry is founded on the philosophical views of Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience where education is life and life is experience. Narrative inquiry is based on Dewey’s principles of experience, interaction, and continuity. Interaction refers to the shaping of relationship between the person and the contexts in which they live in the world. Dewey believed that present experiences are borne out of past experiences interacting with present situations as they continue to shape other experiences. This establishes that we are always in a relation in the world and our experiences are both personal and social. Dewey (1938) explored the principle of continuity when he wrote, “every experience lives on in further experiences” (p. 27). He continued, “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies it in some way” (p. 35).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) examine this spectrum by inquiring into experiences as part of our past, present, and future. Using Dewey’s principles of continuity and interaction, narrative inquiry has three commonplaces or dimensions, which provide the conceptual framework for research. Swanson (2013) asserts that the principle of continuity creates the notion of temporality while the principle of interaction engenders the concept of sociality in narrative inquiry. The three commonplaces of
temporality, sociality, and place are distinctive attributes of narrative inquiry and serve as a conceptual framework. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) borrowed the idea of commonplaces or dimensions in narrative inquiry from Dewey’s (1938) criteria of continuity (past, present, future), interaction (personal and social), and situation (place).

Narrative inquiry is constructed from the simultaneous exploration of all three commonplaces. Clandinin and Huber (in press) argue that by focusing on the commonplaces, narrative inquirers are presented with the opportunity to handle the intricacies of people’s lived experiences both within and outside of an inquiry with an overview of the future. I explored the notions of temporality, sociality, and place in greater depth in line with Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) assertion that refer to these commonplaces as “checkpoints for novice inquirers to direct his or her attention in conducting a narrative inquiry” (p. 479).

**Temporality.**

The first commonplace focuses on Dewey’s notion of continuity in experience—that is, every experience takes up something from the present moment and incorporates it into future experiences. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state that “events under study are in temporal transition” (p. 479), meaning that people always have a past, present, and future. A narrative inquirer does not describe an event, person, or object as such but rather describes it with a past and a present while also attending to its own and the participants’ lives. I have realized that an event in the life of a female principal is not isolated from temporality but is in fact in a process of constant transition as the variable of time leaves its footprint behind. As a narrative inquirer, I approached my study from the perspectives of Dewey, and explored experience or event in the form of a story,
interpret, and construct meaning rather than provide “think descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the event.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), “to give a narrative explanation, one needs to know the temporal history, that is what happened the day before, the day before that, the month before that and so on” (p. 480). Since 2008, Bhutan has undergone tremendous changes in its system of governance by transitioning from a monarchy to a democratic state. In light of these changes, I was academically and professionally driven to unearth how women’s experiences have been shaped in the midst of Bhutan’s changing politics. I also explored these women’s understanding of leadership, expectations, contributions, and their place in the Bhutanese society.

Sociality.

The second commonplace, sociality, is concerned with both personal and social conditions. This commonplace resonates with Dewey’s notion of interaction, that is, people are always in interaction with their situations in any given experience. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state that narrative inquirers are concerned with the personal as well as social condition of participants. By personal condition, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) refer to feelings, hopes, desires, emotions, and moral disposition of both participants and inquirer. Factors like environment, people, culture, and policy make up social conditions under which people’s experiences unfold. Another dimension of the sociality commonplace is the relationship between participants and the inquirer. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) emphasize that narrative inquirers should not isolate themselves out of the inquiry but find techniques to inquire about their own experiences.
along with those of the participants as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process.

McMillan (2008) states that behavior is best understood as it occurs without external constraints and control and situational context is a vital element in understanding behavior. Upon further introspection, I have concluded that while Bhutan is highly influenced by technology, it is still very much a rural society. Even so, the political transition from hereditary monarchy to democracy has changed the Bhutanese people’s perception, behavior, and culture. People’s experiences and life events are dictated by internal as well as external forces and it is through assigning value and meaning to such narratives that knowledge can be created. In interpreting these narratives, I acknowledged the personal as well as social conditions of the participants. As a narrative inquirer, I refused to isolate my experiences from that of the participants; instead my experiences are connecting and expanding trails of meaning making in concert with my participants’ experiences.

**Place.**

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) describe place as “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of place where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). They stress that place has a significant impact on actual lived experiences or events. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) contend that most researchers often wish to escape the limitations of place in the interest of generality but for narrative inquiry, specificity of location is considered crucial. They also argue that when narrative inquirers write about the relevance of their work for others, they need to acknowledge the qualities of place and its impact on the study. In similar vein, while context enables
the researcher to construct meaning (Kempt, 2005), situational context is imperative in understanding behavior (McMillan, 2008). To understand how a place influences an experience, a story will have different meanings at different places, times, and social contexts. Chase (2005) stresses that a story told to an interviewer in a relaxed setting will differ from the same story told to a reporter for a television piece, or a room full of people who have had similar experiences.

Bauman (1986) views narrative inquiry as a joint production of an inquirer and respondent. I believe that exclusion as well as inclusion of any of the three commonplaces can have a significant impact on the experiences shared and stories interpreted. Bhutan’s unique geographical location, with China in the north and India surrounding the rest of the country, and its political transitions give it a strategic advantage in the region. This study explored how the participants’ understanding of Bhutan’s geographical location shape their understanding of themselves as female educational leaders, what values and dreams they hold for future female leaders and, what policies and approaches are viewed as essential in supporting future female educational leaders.

**Types of Narrative Design**

While narrative is a broad theme, narrative research subsequently assumes multiple forms and meanings. Casey (1996) categorizes eighteen types of narrative research forms: autobiographies, biographies, life writing, personal narratives, narrative interviews, oral histories, testimonies and personal documents, personal accounts, documents of life, life stories and life histories, ethnohistories, ethnobiographies, autoethnographies, ethnopsychologis, person-centered ethnogeaphies, popular
memories, and polish memories. While each type of narrative form provides a structure for conducting the study (Creswell, 2002), Huber and Whelan (1999) propose that narrative research forms can be combined to construct partial life stories or personal narratives. Although personal experience story is a narrative of an individual’s personal experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) extend the notion of personal story to be both personal and social in an effort to unearth the essences of the experiences of teachers.

Regarding the development of narrative inquiry, feminism has been hailed for breathing new life into the study of personal narratives. Women’s lived experiences and stories of trials and tribulations in their struggle for a place in society have been told and retold through personal narratives (Chase, 2005). Acknowledging that narrative inquiry has the capacity and dynamism to penetrate the lives of women through the sharing of stories and experiences, I concluded that this paradigm is the most appropriate approach that can be adopted to examine the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan.

**Elements in Designing Narrative Inquiry**

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) recommended seven elements in their attempt to do an in-depth exploration of the act of narrative thinking and these elements of designing narrative inquiry guided me throughout my doctoral journey

1) **Imagining a lifespan.**

Here, the narrative inquirer focuses on the experiences of one or more individual. The focus on experience draws on Dewey’s (1938) philosophy of experience. According to Dewey, experience is constant and is a key element to learning. Dewey believed that every experience grows out of and merges into new experiences. Connelly and
Clandinin (2006) argue that the inquirer must focus on understanding an individual’s history or past experiences and explore how they contribute to present and future experiences. My research focuses on exploring the experiences of female educational leaders and how their experiences of leadership have shaped their understanding of themselves.

2) **Living and telling: A starting point for collecting field texts.**

The researcher may begin an inquiry with the living or with the telling. In telling, the researcher or inquirer interviews participants who have stories to tell. The telling consists of an array of field texts such as personal journals, stories, photographs, artifacts, annals, chronologies, family interview, and conversation field notes among other things (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Wortham (2001) places greater emphasis on the interpreted meaning from the telling by the researcher than on stories told as a unit of analysis. Mishler (1986) argues that in telling, the primary working methodology is interviewing. In living, the inquirer participates in the actual setting of life as it unfolds. Thus, it is essential for the inquirer to understand the structure and protocol of the institution in general and actual setting in particular prior to the start of the research. Because of limited time and the need to complete the research on time, I have employed telling aspect of narrative inquiry.

3) **Defining and balancing the commonplaces.**

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state that this theme involves imagining the chosen topic the participants and the inquirer need to examine, describe, and specify commonplace to be built into the study. In an attempt to balance the commonplace, I
have designed a set of open-ended interview questions related to leadership, feminism and challenges confronted by the participants as a female educational leader.

4) **Investment of the self in the inquiry.**

In designing a narrative study, the researchers need to consciously imagine themselves a part of the inquiry. In telling, the inquirer may appear to be an outsider looking inside whereas in living, the researcher is required to thoroughly plan for her or his participation in sharing their story in the study. Acknowledging the element of investment of the self in the inquiry, I have positioned myself as an insider and shared my narratives as a female educational leader in the hope to make the participants locate their understanding of themselves as a female leader.

5) **Researcher-participant relationship.**

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) assert that a study centered around living tends to cultivate a more intense relationship between the participants and researchers whereas an interview study beginning with telling is more likely to develop a close relationship among participants and researchers. The bond that I have developed with the participants is extraordinarily unique. We would have never understood each other better if we have not shared our experiences of being female educational leaders in Bhutan. Sharing experiences of trials and tribulations related to gender in a male-dominated profession united our hearts and purpose in life.

6) **Duration of study.**

According to Wortham (2001), less time was spent on field text collection and more time devoted to the telling and interpretation of field texts for the creation of meaning. But for inquirers, whose starting point is living, more time is used in becoming
familiarized with the setting, gaining the trust and confidence of school officials, seeking approvals from the administration, and more importantly capturing different and often invisible ingredients of the living that are not attainable through interviews. Because I already understood the context and had the trust of the participants I was able to focus more time on interpreting their stories and narratives.

7) **Relationship ethics and narrative inquiry.**

While the issue of ethics is central to any research, the relational ethics of narrative inquiry needs special consideration; researchers must deepen the sense of what it means to interpret a life story and to live in an ethical manner (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Ethical consideration starts with infusing narratives with the most serious ethical issue that arises between texts and readers. Since the issue of ethics in narrative is imperative, I discuss it in greater detail as a separate topic.

**Approaches to Narrative Inquiry**

There are two approaches that can be employed in narrative inquiry; telling and living. The diverging point between telling and living is a difference between “life as lived in the past” and ‘life as it unfolds’ (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 482). According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), telling inquiry or interview study involves participants in interviews or storytelling and offers “retrospective accounts” (p. 483) of the participants’ life as the inquirer carries out a series of interviews with the participants. On the other hand, living inquiry or participatory study as maintained by Connelly and Clandinin, (2006) portrays life as it unfolds. In living inquiry/participatory study, the inquirer participates in the actual setting as it unfolds. In both forms of narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggest that the inquirer adhere to
seven considerations. Of the two hypothetical narrative inquiries, I chose the telling approach to delve into the experiences of female educational leaders in Bhutan. The telling approach helped position participants to better understand themselves as they told their stories and practice valuing their unique life experiences.

**Validity and Reliability in Narrative Inquiry**

According to Webster and Mertova (2007), the concept of validity in traditional research has been reduced to testing and other measurement instruments. Traditional research overlooks the complementary aspect of the research topic under study and is bound by statistical findings. However, in narrative inquiry, validity refers to the strength of the analysis of data, the trustworthiness of the data, and the ease of access to that data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Polkinghorne argues that the validity of narrative is more closely associated with meaningful analysis than with consequences. Since narrative inquiry research is more oriented towards interpretation of stories, the result of narrative research cannot claim to correspond to what has actually transpired. Narrative inquiry does not claim to represent the absolute “truth” but rather “verisimilitude” (Webster & Mertova, 2007) and the outcome of narrative research generally stays open ended (Polkinghorne, 1988). Riessman (1993) claims that a personal narrative is not meant to be read as either a record of what happened or a mirror of the outside world. This is an indication that narrative inquiry does not struggle for validity in denoting what is out there in the world.

In quantitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measuring instruments. In narrative inquiry reliability refers to the dependability of data. Polkinghorne (1998) contends that in narrative inquiry, reliability is achieved through
trustworthiness of the notes and transcripts rather than stability of measurement. Webster and Mertova (2007) claim that since narrative inquiry focuses on the individual human experience of reality and critical events, the differences between individuals are expected and valued. While narrative inquiry informs us about human events, its reliability is not measured through statistical measurements. Instead it is measured by accuracy and accessibility of data, implying that readers have access to the relevant text or transcript.

Even though the traditional criteria for validity and reliability do not blend well with narrative inquiry, I reflected on the ethics, as well as morals, of the participants and researchers since validity and reliability in narrative inquiry rely on honesty, authenticity, and truthfulness. Thus, this study is grounded on the trust, honesty, morals and ethics of the participants and researcher.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is about listening to people’s narratives and unraveling how their stories and experiences influence their perception of the world and relationship with the institution of schooling. In my mission to seek out and collect stories about personal and social experiences, I perceived my participants from a new dimension and developed a close bond with the participants, reducing a commonly held assumption that research is distinct from practice and has insignificant application (Creswell, 2002). An additional strength depicted by the inquirer is the co-construction of a space to listen to the participants’ voices, experiences and insights. In the telling inquiry, participants revisit their own experiences, making it speak in new ways, in a new context (McEwan & Egan, 1995). The processes whereby the participants tell their story to the inquirer
and the inquirer retells those stories in a narrative form make narrative inquiry a labour-intensive process. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) caution the inquirer about the authenticity of the story and the inability to collect the real story due to the horrific nature of the participants’ incident. The greatest challenge, according to Creswell (2002), is the ownership of the story and the possibility of losing the participants’ voice in the narrative report.

**Method of Data Collection: Interviewing**

It has been well established that interviews are central to any research rooted in narrative inquiry. Qualitative researchers are inclined to draw on interviews as an essential method of data collection with the goal of uncovering and co-constructing the meaning of people’s lives (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The utilization of interviewing as a means to acquire information is so prevalent today that it has been argued that we live in an interview society (Silverman, 1993). Interviewing is not simply the natural exchange of asking questions and obtaining answers (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Holestein & Gubrium, 1995), but a process involving two or more people engaged in a conversation that ultimately leads to the creation of a collaborative effort called the interview.

Interviewing has gone through a series of metamorphoses, to a point where the conventional notion of interview, as an instrument for collecting objective data to be used neutrally for scientific purposes, is refuted (Fontana & Frey, 2005). An interview was originally an instrument of “pathological diagnosis” but later became a “methodology of friendship” (p. 254). This is an indication that interviewing is politically, culturally, and contextually driven. The changing phases of interviewing also
challenge the philosophy of positivism which maintains that there is no absolute truth (Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002).

In a qualitative research interview, interviewers are seen as active participants in their relationship with the interviewees, and the interview is considered to be a negotiated achievement between the interviewer and the interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The transformation in the interview process, as Holstein and Gubrium (2003) claim, is highly influenced by poststructuralist, postmodernist, and constructionist theory where the interview is viewed as a “site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge” rather than an “information–gathering operation” (p. 4). Empathetic approaches to interviewing have been considered as novel ways of understanding interviews where the interviewer hopes to use the research result to help improve the lives of the interviewees. The notion of turning interviews into a walking stick to help people get on their feet (Fontana & Frey, 2005) is one of the many ways women’s voices and experiences can be used in creating knowledge.

The literature on research interview reflects on three types of interviewing; structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interview. Fontana and Fray (2005), along with Qu and Dumay (2011), expand the interview dimension even further by including focus groups and group interviewing. However, I discuss semi-structured interviewing in depth since I utilized semi-structured interviews as my data collection method.

**Semi-Structured Interview**

At the center of the pendulum that encompasses structured and unstructured interviews lies the semi-structured interview. Even though semi-structured questions are open-ended, they are specific in intent. Semi-structured questions generally possess a
framework of themes that need to be explored. This gives room for new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee states and allows for probing, follow up, and clarification (McMillan, 2005). Because the interviewer is required to probe and follow up on questions, different interviewers will obtain different responses from the same interviewee depending on the manner in which questions are asked. This is different from the structured interview, where the same more or less ‘objective’ truth will be shared no matter who conducts the interview as long as the right questions are asked and the same structures are followed. Hence, the interview possesses a situated event in which the interviewer creates the reality of the interview situation (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

The semi-structured interview helped me to better understand the stories of female educational leaders from the perspectives of the women involved and they allowed me to develop meaning from their experiences. The accessibility to rich conversations, the flexibility to modify style, pace and the arrangement of questions, the capacity of disclosing often hidden facets of human behavior, and the opportunity to portray social reality from the point of view of the interviewees (Qu & Dumay, 2011) can be accurately obtained through semi-structured interviews. Prior to interviewing the research participants, it was crucial for me to frame the interview questions in a manner that made the interviewees confident enough to share their stories, rather than feeling victimized. I looked beyond traditional interviewing styles and established a balanced rapport with research participants. Developing an empathetic attitude towards the participants’ situation not only helped in understanding the participants’ lives but also assisted me in knowing/locating myself as a female educational leader while respecting
the respondents’ voices and reflecting critically throughout my research journey. Kvale (1996) uses two contrasting metaphors in illustrating the role of the research interviewer; miner and traveler. Among the two metaphors, I presented myself as a traveler whose travelling experience and stories engendered a new set of knowledge that not only transformed myself but the people I have worked with and met throughout my journey.

**Feminist Perspectives on Interviewing**

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, social science studies continued to be grounded primarily in men’s experiences. Interviewing women or including women’s voices in social science research was not considered valuable enough for research. Similarly, feminist research observed traditional interviewing as a masculine paradigm, rooted in masculine culture and traits while ignoring other qualities culturally associated with femininity (Punch, 2005). Oakley (1981) identifies the dissimilarity between traditional interviewing involving detachment and objectivity, and feminist interviewing encompassing emotions, sentiments, and opinions. Likewise, Reinharz and Chase (2003) observed that gynopia or the invisibility of women in social science research is not only rooted in gender issues but is also race and class based. Denzin (1989) uses the phrase “gender filter knowledge” (p. 116) to elaborate this point by stressing that the sex of the interviewer and the gender of the respondents make a difference because the interview takes place within the cultural context where masculine identities are differentiated from feminine characteristics. Lofland (1975) attempts to describe women’s invisibility rather vividly:
Despite, or perhaps in parts, because of, their omni-presence, they remain, by and large, merely part of the scene. They are continually perceived, but rarely perceiver. They are part of the furniture of the setting through which the plot moves. Essential to the set but largely irrelevant to the action. They are simply there. (pp. 114-115)

Bhutan is a male-dominated bureaucracy from parliamentarians to educational leaders. The lack of incorporation of women’s views at both the national and local levels has become an area of great concern for me. As a woman born and brought up in a male-dominated family and culture, going against my father’s wishes would not only be unacceptable but also reprimanded. In such a context, I am forced to ask myself how the Bhutanese society perceives women educational leaders and what policies and plans have been put in place to hear their voices for the purpose of transforming society. What strategies have been developed in schools for girls to learn to express themselves from a very young age? This not only problematizes the Bhutanese educational system but also emphasizes my role and responsibilities to afford a safe space for girls to express themselves.

**Voices and Interpretation**

Exposing and redressing women’s invisibility as active social contributors has been one of the biggest achievements of feminist research. Feminist researchers employing an interview strategy have played a pivotal role in breaking the traditional ways of perceiving interviews. Unlike traditional interviewing, feminist interviewing involves minimizing the status differences between the interviewer and the respondents, developing an equitable relationship based on trust and understanding, the interviewer
and respondent’s self-disclosure, and encouraging openness to generate a deep and meaningful discussion (Reinharz & Chase, 2003; Oakley, 1981). Hertz (1997) highlights the importance of voices, whose voices we choose to represent and whose voices we choose not to represent, which data we choose to include and which data to exclude, while writing the narratives. Mishler (1986) emphasized that empowering the respondents encourages them to express their voices and is more likely to produce honest narrative accounts. Elliott (2005) contends that the inquirer thrives in eliciting narratives when using everyday language that relates to their life experiences as opposed to sociological language. Although a sisterly bond is expected to develop between the women (Oakley, 1981), Reinharz and Chase (2003) argue that there is no guarantee that the women would like each other and want to continue their relationship once the study is complete. Reinharz and Chase (2003) cautioned researchers that women who have rarely had the opportunity to express themselves may not know how to handle the interview. This is particularly evident if in the course of the interview, the women are forced to endure unpleasant flashbacks leading to an emotional break. Since a narrative of female educational leadership is an unexplored area, I personally believe that interviews stirred up emotions in the process of reflection, realization, and contemplation. Undergoing an emotional swing made participants reflect on their leadership style and helped them locate their understanding of themselves as female educational leaders as they described their challenges and opportunities with male coworkers. Perceiving their experiences from an emic stance drained me emotionally as I connected my own leadership experiences of working in a male-oriented society with their narratives. Sharing leadership experiences and locating a commonplace within
ourselves in a male-oriented society was not only a fulfilling experience, the mutual feeling bonded us closer in our quest for constructing meaning of our own experiences.

Tannen (1993) contends that interpreting any woman’s experience is complicated when involving a complex understanding of a woman’s social status, her place within the community and society, and cultural limitations and resources shaping her everyday life. Chase (1996) shares the challenges of narrative interpretation and the criticism received from participants for misinterpreting their statements.

According to Jayaratne (1983), feminist researchers use semi-structured and unstructured interviews as the primary methods for collecting data about the lives of female participants as they convey deeper feelings or more emotional closeness to the interviewers. Reinhart and Chase (2003) underline that semi-structured and unstructured interviews would give a woman self-realization where she may discover her thoughts, learn who she is, and find her voice. They further emphasize that interpreting women’s words and stories require a delicate and reflexive balancing act. This includes understanding and respecting women’s interpretations of their lives, particularly how it is distinct from others, and identifying how the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ lives is socially situated and simultaneously reflecting their own personal experience.

Similarly, Olesen (1998) identified problems of voice, status of reflexivity, and the difficulties of post-modern textual representation in presenting feminist research. Ensuring that women’s voices are heard without exploitation or distortion is a huge concern and challenge in feminist research. Hertz (1997) identifies three dimensions with regards to voices; voice of the author, voice of the respondents in the text, and the
third voice appears when the self is a subject of inquiry. Chase (2005) maintains that narrative inquirers develop their own voice as they construct others’ voices and realities. It was a daunting task to blend all three voices into one; representing the author’s identity while simultaneously writing down the respondents’ narratives and representing their individuality.

The ability to reflect critically on the self as the researcher is referred to as reflexivity by Guba and Lincoln (2003). Reinharz (1992) suggests that there are three selves; research-based selves, brought selves (the selves that historically, socially, and personally create our standpoints), and situationally created selves. Every single one of these selves comes into play in the research setting and consequently possesses a distinctive voice. Correspondingly, Guba and Lincoln (2003) emphasize the need to interrogate each of these selves over the ways in which research efforts influence the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that shape our lives. While reflexivity can be attained by forging a close relationship between researcher and respondents, Speer (2002) contends that many feminist researchers do not have strong reflexivity skills. Guba and Lincoln (2003) argue that one of the dangers of conventional research is the problem of representation which serves to silence those whose lives are not considered suitable for social science exploration. Hence, post-modernist research narratives increase the range of understanding, voice, and offer diverse stories of human experience can be attained through story tellers, poets, playwrights, experimentation with personal narratives, reflexive interrogation, and deconstruction of forms of autocracy ingrained in representational practices.
In addition to the problems pertaining to voice, reflexivity, and representation of feminist research, issues like deconstructing traditional concepts, making feminist work count, valuing gender difference, and validity of feminist research continue to be sources of complexity in feminist qualitative research.

Realizing the challenges of making decisions on how to use the narrative’s voice to interpret and represent the participants’ stories, Chase (2005) categorized three voices; 1) the researcher’s authoritative voice; separating the researchers and narrators voice’s through interpretation, 2) the researcher’s supportive voice; bringing the respondents’ voice into the limelight, and 3) the researcher’s interactive voice; inter-subjectivity between researchers and participants’ voice, position, social location, interpretation, and personal experiences. As highlighted by Chase (2005), I needed to understand myself if I was to interpret the participants’ stories, just as the readers need to identify with the researcher’s positions if they are to fully embrace the participants’ stories.

**Ethics in Narrative Inquiry Research**

Simply put, ethics is the act of distinguishing between rights and wrongs, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and ensuring that no harm is done in any capacity during or after the research. Ethics is paramount in research and conducting research involves the application of fundamental ethical principles like honesty, integrity, respect for intellectual property, and confidentiality to name a few key deliberations.

The need for ethics in research dates back to a period between the 1930s and 1970s when the U.S. government conducted the Tuskegee Syphilis Study involving the natural progression of untreated syphilis among African American men who thought
they were receiving free health care (Brandt, 1978). Henceforth, many precautions have been taken to protect research participants. Almost all the literature on ethics in research incorporates four elements including the principle of voluntary participation, the requirement of informed consent, not putting participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm, and guaranteeing confidentiality and the principle of anonymity on the part of the participants (Trochim, 2006).

The narrative study of human experiences and lives is a challenging task. Bakan (1996) was skeptical about narrative interviewing for the fear of converting what is private into public causing social, mental, and financial harm. Chase (1996) cautions that while all interviews raise ethical issues, narrative research demands that special attention be paid to the participants’ vulnerability during narrative analysis or publication. Chase’s work about female superintendents’ experiences in a male-dominated and white profession demonstrated the women’s vulnerability to potentially damaging statements they had made about their colleagues which could have strained their professional relationship or reputation. While conducting research on older African American women, Etter-Lewis (1996) was forced to deal with the issue of anonymity when her participants refused to partake in the research if their names were revealed. While anonymity and the use of pseudonyms weakened the credibility of the interview data, Etter-Lewis (1996) argued that names or labels are not necessarily a “negative trait or quality” (p. 118) and while naming research participants may appear to promote authenticity, there is no guarantee that the data obtained in such a fashion is more reliable. Etter-Lewis (1996) argues that inquirers must keep the narrative process humane and preserve the personal dignity of the respondents. Ignoring the respondents’
unwillingness to answer interview questions and probing into the participants’ personal lives may portray the interviewer as an authoritative and coercive figure.

Josselson’s (1996) discussion about the complexities of ethics in narratives reveals how writing about other people’s lives has affected her as she sums up her discomfort in three words—dread, guilt, and shame; the dread that she may have harmed someone and would be confronted with, “how could you say that about me?” (p. 69); the guilt of removing herself from a relationship with her participants in order to forge a new relationship with her readers, and the feeling of shame for using other people’s lives to demonstrate her expertise.

However, seeking permission from the participants to use or modify their materials for various purposes, and concealing their identities, empowers the participants and reduces their vulnerability. Etter–Lewis’s (1996) interview with a retired teacher who refused to give her age made me realize that sensitivity is subjective and I respected participants’ silence when they were uncomfortable about sharing some of their experiences. Bar-On’s (1996) experience of interviewing children of Nazi perpetrators reflected the importance of ethics in research and the purpose behind interviewing. Although, balancing the voices of different participants to ensure that each of their voices was heard was an uphill task, I incorporated every participant’s perspectives to empower their experiences. I conclude that ethics defines the essence of an individual as opposed to being bound by time, space, and the situational context of the study. I believe that people who allow their lives to be studied for research purposes must be given special considerations along with distinctive care and protection.
Ethical Considerations

My in-depth study on ethical dilemmas and issues confronted by both researchers and participants during and after the study, particularly about the work of female educational leaders by Chase (1996) and Bakan (1996), made me contemplate my research and its participants, and particularly my role as a researcher in conducting the study morally. While many women were quick and ready to share stories of triumph with pride and jubilation, several appeared ill at ease to reveal their challenges of leadership for fear of appearing less capable. Exploring the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders is delving into sensitive areas that other researchers are either anxious to venture into or have failed to adequately address. Realizing the sensitivity of the research, I established a strong foundation by gaining the trust and confidence of my research participants.

Fifteen female educational leaders, with a minimum of three years of leadership experiences, from three different districts participated in the study. Participants for the study were selected through purposeful snowballing sampling. Data were collected through one-on-one interviews using a semi-structured interview approach with each interview being audio taped. Interview questions are attached as appendix A.

Prior to interviewing them, I fulfilled all research protocols. The foremost step towards fulfilling the research protocol was seeking permission from Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of New Brunswick. Since my research involved humans as research participants, I submitted a written proposal to the REB where I guaranteed confidentiality and principle of anonymity on the part of participants besides other elements in the proposal. REB approval is attached as appendix F. Seeking approval
from Ministry of Education and subsequently from District Education Office was the prime protocol in advancing my research. All these protocols were fulfilled before I moved in the field to collect data. I also explained the purpose, significance and impact of the study on the country as a whole, and for women in particular, to participants. This was achieved by incorporating four elements of ethical considerations; 1) the principle of voluntary participation, 2) the requirement of informed consent, 3) not putting participants in a situation where they might be at risk of harm, and 4) guaranteed confidentiality and the principle of anonymity on the part of participants. These four elements of ethical considerations were realized through the letter of consent explaining the nature and the purpose of my research and it helped me obtain their consent prior to their participation in the study. By doing so, respondents indicated that they had read the letter and agreed to participate in the research. The participants were further provided with additional explanations when I visited the site for data collection. Since this research examined the challenges of female educational leaders in a male dominated profession, upholding the confidentiality of participants was at the forefront of this study. Thus, protecting their identity and maintaining anonymity of the participants were highly respected. This confidentiality was maintained by providing unique identification number on their data. The data were secured throughout the duration of the research and the data will be retained for at least five years after the completion of the research. Since my data are all in soft copy, I will put in place every possible ways to erase using software application designed to remove all data from the storage drive.

I developed four letters: a letter seeking research approval from Ministry of Education, Bhutan, a letter seeking approval for teachers’ participation from District
Education Office, a letter of information and invitation to participants and a consent from attached and all these letters are attached as appendix B, C, D and E.
CHAPTER FOUR

THEMATIC REVELATIONS

Introduction

In light of my interest in exploring the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan, I adopted a narrative inquiry paradigm (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) as my research methodology. The examination of the personal experiences of female education leaders in Bhutan is at the heart of this research. The primary question guiding my research is: what are the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan? A secondary question is: what are the challenges and opportunities of female educational leaders in Bhutan?

Emergent Themes

Five broad themes emerged from the data and these are: 1) Bhutanese female educational leaders are inadvertent leaders; 2) gender is the paramount challenge for women in educational leadership position; 3) gender influences leadership practices; 4) Bhutanese female educational leaders are community role models, and 5) Bhutanese female leaders are situational leaders.

The themes reveal intriguing narratives about the state of female educational leaders in Bhutan, their challenges and opportunities in a male dominated society. No such studies have been explored in the past, and the narratives of these female educational leaders play a substantial role in disclosing women’s trials and tribulations, achievements and accomplishments. The themes not only bring to light the potential and capacity of Bhutanese women, but they also reveal how culture and policies fashioned by men can impede women from attaining their potential and utilizing their strengths.
1) Bhutanese Female Educational Principals are Inadvertent Leaders

There are many intriguing explanations about why female teachers have taken up educational leadership positions. Many of the study’s participants express the view that they joined the teaching profession solely for the love of teaching and children. Very few of them had predetermined plans or aspirations to become leaders in the school system. However, because of their hard work, potential and professionalism, many of the participants described how they were assigned leadership position by higher authorities, becoming school leaders inadvertently.

Dechen, who is a higher secondary school principal, narrates her leadership journey,

*I did not get inspired to become a principal. It seems like it just happened because I am a very hard working person and I feel my leaders have seen that in me and they felt I would become a genuine leader.*

In retrospect, the diligence and commitment found in the nature and work ethic of these Bhutanese female leaders may well emanate from old Bhutanese cultures and traditions where women shoulder domestic chores and responsibilities at home as a daughter, sister, mother, wife, but predominantly because they are female. At a very young age, Bhutanese girls are educated about the essence of nurturing, loving and caring, and they are also expected to perform household duties like cleaning, laundry, and general upkeep of the house.

In the words of Palden,

*I had no aspirations to be a leader when I was first entrusted with a leadership role. All I believed was that I was doing a good job at what was given to me.*
Perhaps, I was too naïve to have leadership aspirations, or I was content with what I was doing then. I was most comfortable being back stage.

Similarly, the lack of leadership aspiration and inspiration amongst the participants reveal something about women’s place in Bhutanese society and the general attitude towards women in leadership positions. For generations, Bhutanese women have lived in the shadows of men and rarely experienced public life. Women have been responsible for raising children, tending to their husband’s needs and desires, and are primarily homemakers. Their public space and public exposure are exceptionally limited and restricted. Though this trend is fading slowly, even women like the ones involved in this research seem to believe that they still belong in the background. Breaking this stereotype and changing their understanding of themselves may well be a phenomenal task. Lambert and Gardner (2009) maintain that women still allow themselves to be described by existing cultural priorities like home and hearth, as well as culturally fashioned roles carved out by others, and this certainly seems to be the situation for these Bhutanese school leaders.

While some female teachers are recognized for their hard work and encouraged to take up leadership positions by the administrators they work with, others share narratives of critical situations in the school that have compelled them to step into the leadership domain. Pema, who is currently a senior education officer shares,

*There was a need. I was in Southern Bhutan and there was a school in a community that was suffering without a principal. So, since my DEO believed that I am hard working and that I manage my classes and students well, I was directly appointed as a principal. That is why I feel it has nothing to do with*
inspiration or aspiration but rather it was more about filling a need at the specific time.

Tseyang narrated similar experiences,

*Though I had a great passion to be a teacher, it never occurred to me that I would be a leader...It was not really planned and I wasn’t ready to be a principal but the education ministry had identified me and then it was mainly the situation in the school which gave me this opportunity even though I believed I was not prepared. I took it as a challenge and I have learned great lessons from these experiences.*

While the participants feel that their shift towards leadership positions seemed to be primarily circumstance driven and decoded by others, my contact with myriad literature, and my own lived experiences as a female educational leader in a male dominated society, corroborates that women’s progression towards leadership is not only an amalgamation of hard work, professionalism and situational context, but the movement of women towards educational leadership positions also seems to have been propelled by a policy shift. During the beginning years of western style education in Bhutan in the 1960s, the understanding of the need to empower women crafted a fresh path for Bhutanese women. As a result, a number of Bhutanese women have stepped into the mainstream decision-making positions, particularly as school principals. Though Bhutanese women are still somewhat novel in the leadership realm, their capabilities and potentials are vividly evident from their current positions as principals and senior education officers.
Some participants claimed they took up a leadership position because of peer and family pressure. Yangchen alludes to this when she said, “I have worked as a teacher for more than twelve years and by then, many of my friends had taken up leadership roles. That was a pressure for me. And the other reason is my parents’ expectations from me”.

Another pressure can be found amongst friends; friends who are moving up and encouraging their friends to think about helping out where needs exist in filling open principal positions. Denzang, who is a higher secondary school principal, describes her experience with pressure from peers,

*After my graduation, I was posted in one of the schools in central Bhutan. My friends were not ambitious and we are happy with what we had and what we were doing. But in 2006, one of my good friends got transferred in the same district in a principal position. She encouraged me to also take up a leadership position.*

Narratives such as these help me understand and interpret how Bhutanese women are sometimes leaders by chance. While some participants were aware of wanting to become a teacher early on, their knowledge of career choices and opportunities seem to be uninform and not fully developed. This could be a result of an absence of career guidance or exposure to varied positions within the teaching profession. Chapcha cheerfully stated that her parents never shared any ideas of her becoming a school principal, rather her parents were very content with their daughter having a job!
A few decades ago, popular professions amongst women were nurses and teachers. Many Bhutanese women choose to become teachers because they were inspired by female teachers who served as role models to school girls. Parents and elders believe that choosing the teaching profession could have multiple benefits; service to humanity, apt profession for would-be mothers in educating one’s own children and, most interestingly, teaching is perceived as a feminine profession. This was revealed above in the account of Denzang who appeared to be relaxed and at ease with her profession until her friend urged her to take on a leadership role.

The participants of this study revealed that they did not consciously aim or plan for their own participation in school leadership positions. Rather, in most of the instances, the higher authorities recognized the participants' potential and hard work, and a leadership responsibility was assigned to them. They became principals mainly because higher authorities have either encouraged them to take up leadership roles or entrusted them with leadership positions. Had they not been entrusted with leadership roles, I am of the belief that many would have never come forward to take up leadership positions on their own. The women interviewed here discussed this in such a way as to suggest that many Bhutanese female educational leaders lack the confidence to come forward and be at the forefront of their school. Also, this seems to indicate that Bhutanese women either wait for or need external coercion to reaffirm their potential for offering leadership within their school context. Though self-promotion may sound egocentric, however I believe that Bhutanese women of today need to step forward and say “I can do that and I can do it well” rather than waiting for someone to acknowledge their potentials.
Leadership is often a male dominated domain in Bhutan and the fact that this may well be the case represents another significant reason why women may shy away from taking up leadership roles. Phuntsho, who is a senior principal, elucidates her experiences,

*In the beginning, I was not interested in becoming a school principal because there were barely any other female principals. So, I asked myself; can I do it? What will my friends think of me? Am I the right person? I am the only woman amongst men and how will I deal with them?*

This perception of Phuntsho resonates with what Mahmood (2004) says about patriarchal norms that reduce women to subordinate positions, gender-role stereotypes mirrored in parental and societal expectations of demure girls and assertive boys. Mahmood (2004) goes on to suggest that it is a perception about women’s low potential for leadership that contributes to the creation of the glass ceiling syndrome that continuously impedes women’s progress to leadership positions. In a similar tone, Lambert and Gardner (2009) declare that leadership is always associated with the person in power, person in-charge or person with authority roles and they are president, priest, executive officer, father and brother. Often, people have been excluded from a leadership title by tradition, bigotry or fear and those were mostly women and people of color. While Lambert and Gardner expressed these in the context of western cultures, Bhutan is not unique to these rigid structures.

Because of the accommodating nature of Bhutanese society, a number of female teachers have now been nominated or appointed to take up leadership roles, particularly in educational leadership, but there still remains a gender bias although technically there
is nothing to prevent women from taking on these roles. Women do get appointed when there is a need or when they are very qualified but the statistics reveal that there is still a huge gap in gender numbers as well as resistance to women being in principal roles. According to Bhutanese Education Statistics 2015, there are 528 government schools (including primary, lower, middle, higher and central schools) and 80 schools have female principals and of these, most are teaching principals. In the entire country, there are only 19 women who occupy full-time principal positions. If this is examined in terms of proportion in relation to the total number of principals, women comprise only 3.6% of educational leadership positions.

2) Gender is the Paramount Challenge for Women in Educational Leadership Position

The fact that we hear of support being provided to women in educational leadership roles in Bhutan suggests that Bhutanese society is starting to more favorably welcome women into leadership roles. The participants described the encouragement and the way they see officials entrusting capable and competent teachers with leadership positions as examples of this happening. Yet, there are certain challenges Bhutanese women confront in their administrative functions and sometimes the tense experiences are typically tied to their gender as women.

The participants explained that because they are women, their leadership competencies and maturity scale are constantly challenged professionally, intellectually, emotionally and politically. Out of 15 participants, 6 principals highlighted management and administration issues in terms of size, resources, and program implementation as stumbling blocks in their leadership path. Nine principals revealed
gender as the most challenging factor in the leadership sphere. The participants disclosed that men demonstrate their indifferent attitude towards women in subtle ways. Dechen shared how her male vice principal intentionally discounts her leadership contributions but acknowledges the input of other teachers in realizing the school goals. Ana disclosed her lamentation for being born a woman and candidly said that most of her colleagues who were not as capable as her had already assumed management roles and are in better positions than her. She wished she had been born a male so that she could also avail the opportunities that are greatly relished by men. Anna woefully says,

> *When the decision is to be made, they would listen more to males since decision makers are males. To me, discriminating conduct such as this is an outcome of a culturally demeaning phrase associated with women; amsumoram gi gacheya meshe (women know nothing). Though I excelled in numerous fields and I have achieved a principalship position, however such derogatory remarks have constantly restrained me and generated the feeling of men as superior.*

Pema passionately narrated that when she was placed as a senior District Education Officer (DEO) in one of the dzongkhags in Central Bhutan, it was challenging for the people in the community to accept her as the DEO. Pema had to remind Lam Naten, the head of the religious affairs in the district, that she is the DEO of the district and not the wife of the DEO. She says the situation turned out to be worse when people in the community started addressing her as ‘Sir’ DEO. Community members are accustomed to seeing and dealing with men and declared that they have never had female educational leaders and, therefore, have no familiarity of interacting with female DEOs. It was arduous to convince the people, particularly in a remote
community, that women can be and already are leaders. Female leaders do exist, though, easily countable regarding numbers! Pema reminisces about her initial years of leadership when she had to act and think like men in order to fit into the 'male world', as she was the only female surrounded by all male principals at every meeting. Accounts such as these remind us clearly that leadership has most often been seen as the realm of males and not women, and in some cases women are still not welcome especially in contexts like Bhutan where it has not been common to see women in leadership roles, whether in education or otherwise.

In a similar tone, some participants felt that they have been given symbolic treatment only. Since female principals are always fewer in numbers, their presence is either overlooked or showered with lavish attention to the extent of referring to them as ‘darling’ or yelling at them and reminding each other with contempt, ‘we have a woman among us’. With either approach, participants felt disrespected and humiliated. Capcha explicitly disclosed her uphill challenges as a woman in a leadership level position.

_Though there are three of us, most of the time I am alone among 27 male principals. Some of them feel that they can take advantage of me, and say nasty things, and call me 'darling'. I have to remind him that I might be his daughter's age and he could be my father, and both of us are here as respected principals and I am nobody’s 'darling'. Basically he was trying to test my emotional strength. It is important to maintain discipline, dignity, and actively participate and present your views authentically. If not, they will try to mess around with you. Sometimes, their words are so abusive that I have to warn them of meeting protocols and language etiquettes. So they must have found me to be a_
disciplinarian trying to remind them that they are principals and must be polite, decent and proper. Initially, I felt humiliated and had to literally remind them of my presence. So I am of the notion that they are so used to having meetings amongst themselves (men) for a long time and suddenly when a woman pops into their arena it breaks their behavioral pattern. But I want to make them perceive me not only as 'a mere woman' but rather someone who they can consult with.

It is ordinary and culturally appropriate for women to seek counsel and guidance from men, and women often feel assured that the directions and advice of these men is sound and valuable. Father, brother, uncle and husband are sought out in times of critical decision making and their opinions are effortlessly acknowledged. Usually, women enthusiastically cooperate and respect the advice of males. This could well be because of the conventional image of men as superior to women. Nevertheless, the scenario seems to be slightly reversed for women in leadership roles. While women lead and take charge of their family’s welfare and household responsibilities, their voices and experiences are rarely valued and included in the decision making process in the work setting of a school. So to have their voices incorporated, women are literally compelled to demonstrate their intellect, prove their potential, and have to work two fold more than men. Pema passionately said that whenever she presents her ideas in a meeting that is generally male-dominated, she always ensures that her views are valid, rational and justifiable. This demands her to be critical and analytical of her own views before they are presented and such mental deep deliberation places additional stress on her. In a parallel tone, Tseyang confidently stated that she had to project her assertive personality in order to have her opinions and views acknowledged.
In a corresponding fashion, study participants disclosed some amazing instances that have bothered them constantly, experiences they were unable to vent about previously because of their apprehensions about Bhutanese society being small and closely knit. Palden honestly narrated her leadership experiences,

When I was first appointed to a leadership position, I must confess that I did not sense ready acceptance from my colleagues even from those who believed in my competence. I spent some agonizing time trying to understand if the approach I took was wrong or if it was something else. After much soul-searching and talking with a confidant, it dawned on me that perhaps it was because I was a female. In one way this was confirmed when one guy asked for transfer and another colleague indirectly confirmed my suspicion. When I was appointed as the officiating director, I believe there were speculations and while many thought I was the right person to officiate, some senior guys weren’t really looking forward to that news. Sensing lack of collegiality and low morale, I organized informal sessions to build teams, trust, and to get to know each other well. And well, I wasn’t surprised to see the very people missing! I think definitely my age and gender played against me. But it wasn’t so when I was just one of them. Whenever there was something to be done within a short time, people were more than willing to volunteer if I led that work! What does it say? I can only guess but do not have a definite answer. Our organization was without a leader for more than a year. While I sensed higher authorities recognizing the potential in me (Some actually asked if I was eligible to apply. One in fact suggested in the meeting that the criteria can be revised!) Sometimes I kept mum.
But that is understandable. But what I couldn’t understand is the comment from the Chairman when I went to put in my resignation. He said that he empathize the situation I was in for a year and that he did consider appointing me as the leader of the organization but he had to decide against it as I was too young! Honestly, I had no desire to lead that organization; my only desire was to end that suffering imposed by political war. But in retrospect, I thought if I wasn’t good enough to lead an organization given my qualification, track-record, and experiences, then majority of the MPs and NC members do not qualify to lead the country! I feel age and gender are two important factors especially when one progresses to a formal leadership position. This is not just in the mindset of the illiterate but still deeply rooted in the literate too. In an informal leadership position people are more than willing to give you that responsibility. I find it quite funny…really am laughing! I think it really depends on people around you….it really is a mixed bag of experience for me. I had been in situations where those in higher authority recognized my worth, and did not feel threatened but complimented, in fact. I have also been in situations where it is just the contrary. I think its got to do with politics…if it is a leadership in a professional position there isn’t much challenges for female; but if it is a position that require more play with the politics, they definitely do not want a female who is ethical, forthright and who refuses to compromise her values.

It could be reasonable to surmise that Palden experienced discrimination because of her gender, despite her excellent track record.
Although some women are brave enough to enter into leadership that is typically retained and reserved for men, shouldering family responsibilities at home is another intriguing factor impeding women’s accession to leadership ranks as well leading to the stagnation in their career enhancement. Executing leadership roles and responsibilities identical with men in the office space, along with the need to fulfil the cultural expectations of women at home, are dual responsibilities that cause women leaders to burn out, quit, or be stagnant in their leadership aspirations. What is more complex is, on one hand women are culturally perceived and considered as inferiors, while at the same time, society expects them to exercise professional leadership. Integrating these two diverse thoughts call for the creation of a new image of a woman. According to Tsemunhu (2009), such a conception is described as a third space, which is neither traditional nor modern. Current Bhutanese female educational leaders can be referred to as demonstrating a ‘new image of women’, women who not only have the responsibility to build a desired leadership image but also to create their own realm that is welcoming and appealing to other women.

Conversely, while men may require putting their maximum energy into the workplace, they are typically free from household chores while at home. Men often have their supper cooked for them and their laundry washed. Without any hesitation, Dechen unveiled her role as a mother and wife when she is at home.

*As I walk in the house, I am no longer a principal. I leave my leadership position in the school. Since we dwell in a male dominated society, women do most of the household work. I become a mother and start doing everything since I don’t have*
a helper. I am glad at least my husband helps our children with their school work.

Many female leaders perform dual responsibilities and are deprived of spending quality time with their family with less time for themselves. Thus, it becomes a challenge for women to balance their family life with their professional life. Tseyang reminisced about her life as a school principal.

*When I was a school principal, the greatest challenge I faced was balancing my family life and school because as a school leader, it demanded great commitment and sincerity. I have to say that to certain extent I was unable to balance it. I was extra committed towards my school and profession since I was more concerned about my career than my family. This is what makes me regret at this point in my life. Had I given little extra time to my family, I think I would have been a better leader.*

Dechen had her own set of experiences and she described,

*Being a mother, I have obligations to my own children and family. When my attention is more on my school, my children are neglected. When I focus more on my children, my school is neglected and I feel guilty for neglecting my school.*

Dechen further declared that she was taken aback when her children started questioning her about coming home late while other mothers came home on time. It became a ritual for Dechen to come home late, a ritual that might result in the loss of her family life.

However, perceptions about gender roles have been changing and many amongst the population are now more supportive of gender equality. Bhutanese society, as a whole, seems to be of the opinion that women can work outside the home and that men
should now play a greater role in child care (Bhutan Gender Policy Note, 2013). While women have moved beyond their traditionally defined roles and have helped men in numerous areas, it is now time for men to start to change their actions in building an equitable and just society. Men extending their roles into childcare and household chores, and women stretching out their responsibilities in a management position, demand new societal perspectives and attitudes. Acceptance, tolerance and open-mindedness, particularly from male counterparts, can contribute enormously, in a positive way, towards creating a equitable space for women leaders. Thus, the excruciating accounts and struggles that Bhutanese female educational leaders go through in defining and re-defining their roles not only shapes new identities for themselves, but assists in cementing a leadership pathway for future Bhutanese women in general.

Amongst the participants, some principals and vice principals have been working as educational leaders for more than a decade in the same position while others have been hopping from one school to another. Few migrated into a management role quite late. The professional sacrifices women have endured reveal the priorities women have given to their husbands and families. Placing men’s career at the forefront and leaving their own profession behind has not only impeded women in attaining leadership roles but has delayed them realizing their own potential and possibilities. Lekzang earnestly speaks of her dreams of being a full-fledged school principal,

*Although I have had the aspiration to be a principal but since I am married to a professional man who was placed in an urban setting, and the principal vacancies are always in remote places, I did not want to go there. Not being able*
to go to remote places as a principal is a constraining factor for a woman because I have to prioritize my family over my career. Had it been a different scenario, I would have been a principal long time back. In a way it has got to do with the visibility of enabling environment for female teachers to take up leadership roles.

Bidha narrates a similar aspiration,

*I am very interested to take up full leadership positon and I feel that I can do a better job as a full-fledged principal but then family is my greatest concern. My husband works here. Whenever I sit for an interview, my placement is always out of Thimphu. In 2008, I got selected as a principal but again my placement was out of Thimphu. I want to take care of my children, their education, and want to be close to my family.*

The subordinate positions and choices Bhutanese women have chosen and assumed endorses the perspective of “the denied self”, one of the four perspectives expounded by Lambert and Gardner (2009) wherein culturally expressed gender roles regulate much of what women believe about themselves, other girls or women. Within this perspective, their beliefs and values are dictated by parents, religious practices or strong societal obligations. In general, Bhutanese society seems to be operating still from a conventional gendered stance, and the walls built around the notion that “compliance is a woman’s virtue” and “desirable women are submissive and passive” are hard to break down, a break down that is needed if these ideals are to dissipate. This belief system seems to be still running strong in most of Bhutanese culture. In what
manner do women break this mould and become less restricted and confined by their gender? Once again, this situation summons changes in outlook, policy, and practices.

3) Gender Influences Leadership Practices

The data not only revealed Bhutanese female educational leaders are inadvertent leaders confronting numerous leadership challenges related to gender, it also revealed how gender impacts leadership practices.

Fourteen out of the fifteen participants declared that gender influences their leadership practices and styles. Only one participant disagreed with this. She describes this difference in opinion as being in a state of uncertainty about her leadership practices. Almost all the participants acknowledged demonstrating compassion, love, and care in crafting their leadership as distinct and with striking differences from their male counterparts. Tshomo confidently said that dictating to, and imposing rules on, teachers and staff hinder the attainment of a school vision and in creating sustainable leadership amongst teachers. Tshomo believed in leading with a loving and caring approach and, therefore, she incorporates these attributes in her own leadership practices.

In a parallel tone, Chukha ardently recounted one of her most memorable experiences related to the ways her gender contributed significantly in defining her leadership practices,

Women are in the position to literally grow and be with children, be more responsible to their needs. Women understand children more so as a mother than as a teacher and that mother instinct is more special. All they need is our attention, care and support. I guess I am too emotional and that is one major
phenomenon I do. I always tell my children how much I love them. I am one person who is very expressive of my emotions and I always tell them I care for them and in one occasion I even cried in the morning assembly to convince them how much I care for them. If we look at men, they are more into physical demeanour. If they want to see a game, they only want to see the game. Are they really concerned about the emotions that children go through in the process of the game? I am doubtful if they really go through or look into such emotions of children. For me even if it is a game, I truly care about children’s emotions than the end result of the game. Knowing the feeling of children give us so much strength to work for them rather than knowing the outcome of the game.

Likewise, Phuntsho narrated her leadership experiences and described how her caring nature has contributed to the winning of the hearts of the teachers she works with,

In the beginning I was managing like men; I was using power over. I tried to control them because that is what I have seen many male principals doing. I think my teachers did not like me. They thought I was being very dominating and authoritative… it took a while to change my leadership style. There was no one I could seek advice; I was working in a rural area and there was no internet and computer. I was using typewriter. With experience, I realized I need to change my strategy. I exercised power with or sharing my power with teachers. I started being me, the real me; compassionate, caring and loving. My teachers started changing and they started liking me.

However, there was a solitary participant who was skeptical about gender and its influences on leadership practices especially concerning decisions women leaders make.
She opined that women are emotional and emotions cloud judgement and influence behavior. She expressed the view that men are better at decision-making since they detach emotions from influencing their decisions. The assertion that women are emotional makes me raise the question of what we mean by emotional, what constitutes emotions, and how emotions essentially influence decision-making, especially in the context of female leadership. When we say someone is emotional, are we referring to all emotions or just to some? If crying, emphasizing, or the nurturing nature of women leaders can cloud judgement and ultimately impair leadership, emotions like sadness, anger, and shame can equally muddy the waters. When decisions need to be made judiciously, in a well deliberated and rationale manner with the consideration of all valid facts, it is difficult to distinguish between gender differences with regards to allowing emotions to cloud judgement and influence behavior. Thus, believing that women are emotional and that emotions cause women to be less capable of assuming leadership positions are sexist perceptions and seem irrational. It is a generally held view that women are emotional and Bhutanese women are no exception to this stereotypical picture. Though the social norms and expectations differ for men and women when it comes to crying with it being generally more acceptable for females, however, there seems to be no room for such expressions in the leadership arena for either men or women in Bhutan. Social expectations such as these make women’s transitions to leadership positions even more difficult. Bhutanese female leaders tend to conceal their more ‘feminine’ leadership practices for fear of being branded incompetent and incapable administrators. The taboo gets extra testing when women leaders have to suppress the urge to cry and are forced to ‘try to act like men’; both in conduct and
emotions. Negotiating emotions such as crying in the work place is a sign of strength rather than a symptom of weakness and it increases women’s awareness of their own strengths and potentials that reside within themselves, and in doing so, women have the power to transform society.

In other interviews, this theme of gender influences on leadership styles became apparent in the way female educational leaders make decisions. Yangchen says,

*Sometimes we come across disciplinary issue and the student needs to be sanctioned according to offence committed but then, when parents start narrating their problems; low income, illiterate and inability to admit the child in a different school, I get absorbed in their hardship wholly and I cannot help but to alter the decision. If I send him out of school, the child would be deprived from studying and I don’t want the child to land up in the street.*

For some participants, the loving and caring nature of female educational leaders are made evident in their leadership practices when they sponsor students with school uniforms, fees and stationary, and making allowances in accommodating staff’s needs and emergencies. Tshomo has worked with both male and female principals and said,

*when female teachers have personal issues, as a mother, wife and a daughter, I do empathize with their problem but since male principals have no experiences of being a woman, they look at it differently”.*

Other participants stressed building an ambient physical environment to distinguish their leadership practices and they believed in developing a welcoming atmosphere as one of the best approaches to reflect their psychological and emotional characteristics.
Phuntsho described how she portrayed her inner self through building ambience school surrounding.

In the beginning I tried to be a male which I am not and managed the school. Later on when I started being myself as a woman, I realized I was doing better because majority female are loving, caring and take care of students like their own children. Men forget that since they seldom play that role at home. Some men overlook the physical ambience of the school. For instance, if you miss a small flower pot or a garden, you will realize that mother’s touch is missing. In a same way, if I don’t beautify the school with flowers, I don’t feel happy. I want to create such an environment for my students, parents and teachers are happy seeing the physical ambience of the school. I would like to see even my visitors going through that wow expression and wanting them to feel that they are eager to send their children to this school. Physical ambience has a strong message and effect.

In a parallel tone, gender influences on leadership practices are also expressed in the way some participants organize, coordinate and pay attention to others. Dechen says, I think the feminine attributes of women are contributing in redefining leadership roles. Women take care of the school in great detail and pay attention to minute features. Women focus greatly on health and sanitation and develop physical ambience that are generally ignored by male principals. I consider it as strength in women. Not to say that I am perfect, but I try my best to take good care of school surrounding, flower gardens etc.
Deki said that women leaders illustrate unique leadership practices by incorporating an aesthetic sense of beauty. They accomplish this by placing a great deal of emphasis on campus beautification so that children love coming to school and enjoy being in the school. Deki, Chapcha and Phuntsho all argued that female educational leaders also have strong curriculum knowledge and pay more attention to academic affairs, unlike their male counterparts who focus more on co-curricular programs.

Participants discussed power, authority, and transparency and how women and men leaders manoeuvre these elements differently while executing leadership roles. Lekzang shared how her leadership practices diverge from male counterparts,

> Women are more particular about finance and use finance judiciously and are well accounted for. Female leaders are more transparent and more open. I am not secretive at all and I share information with my staff unlike men. I take responsibility and I like people taking responsibilities and if I have made a mistake, I apologize and I expect the same from others. Men are very egoistic and are of the perception that they are the best. If there were some mistakes, they will look for some excuses to put the blame on. I am sensitive to my staff’s needs and genuinely concerned about my students’ learning. Maybe that has a lot to do with me being a mother, daughter, wife, and sister. Female leaders are polite but male counterparts would not hesitate to scold and abuse physically. But I as a female, I would feel embarrassed to do that. That is why I never shout at children in the assembly. Some leaders take pride in doing that but such things are against my ethics. I like to use my office to talk with my teachers and I don’t like to show that I am in power and demand respect. Women leaders believe in garnering
support, making faculty in understanding the vision and the mission of the school, and listening to voices of teachers and students.

Tseyang disclosed a similar understanding of male leadership practices,

*I feel men are conventional leaders. Once men assume leadership position, they try to make themselves more prominent and visible in the community to show that they exist by bringing change in the school just for the sake of bringing change. They ignore whether change is necessary or not. They try to be too authoritative and want to hold on to the string of every decision, and to every petite issue, they have to show their power and existence by beating up students, shouting at students even when those are not required. They have other alternatives but they resort to these. So I feel these are done intentionally to prove their existence. Women leaders maintain a low-profile and do not show their physical strength.*

The theme about how gender influences leadership practices is made more explicit in Palden’s interview where she shared her experiences working with male counterparts.

*I feel conventionally most leaders in Bhutanese culture are authoritarian. Also, the cultural expectation is for the leaders to be all knowing and most traditional leaders project that image in spite of the fact that it is impossible to be specialist in all fields. I consider myself quite different because I make a conscious decision to be democratic and collaborative. I believe that a leader is one who listens to all views, but makes the final decision based on sound argument and be accountable for no matter what. As a leader, I do not think about myself; my*
time will end one day but others will have to take up the position. So, in the larger interest of the organization and the work, I feel the leader has to set example and standard that one is capable of.

Denzang recalled her experiences with the effects of gender from policy point of view.

*When women are leaders, they are more careful. They respect the rules, policies and abide by them. They are also particular and all these help in smooth functioning of the school. In general, men like to take risks. They are authoritarian and over confident. Sometimes because of their over confidence, they break the rules and indulge in corruption.*

In case of Pema, she said that she thinks she portrays herself differently from what other participants have described in respect to male leaders. She does not believe in insisting on formalities like making appointments, demanding respect in the form of ceremonial rituals such as bowing or standing up if one is seated when she comes or goes, rather she said she was available to her staff anytime.

The leadership practices participants have shared state that gender influences on leadership practices is strong and evident, and female leadership is distinct from male administration.

4) **Female Educational Leaders are Community Role Models**

Although gender has been a barrier for Bhutanese female educational leaders in general, all fifteen female principals in the research identified themselves as community role models and are of the perception that they have a bigger role to play in educating and developing the community than many other community members. Participants
described role models from three varying perspectives: 1) leadership-responsible role models, 2) moral leadership role models, and 3) gender role models. These variations in understandings of themselves as role models have facilitated them in cascading their leadership through a diverse continuum.

**Leadership – responsible role model.**

Participants who perceive their work from a leadership-responsible role model lens consider they are, by default, role models since they are in leadership positions. Being in a leadership position demands these women demonstrate role-modelling with confidence in order to reap the same conduct from their fellow teachers, students and the community at large. They count it as their primary responsibility to implementing policies, building trust, and organizing educational programs for enhancing learning. Yangchen confidently expressed her position in upholding the leadership-responsible role model,

*People have different ways of looking at you but for me, I try to be a good role model because when you are the principal, you have your staff, colleague and students looking up to you. So I try my best to be a role model for everybody.*

Besides academic and administrative responsibilities, school principals have huge moral responsibilities to shoulder. The moral conduct of school leaders not only has significant influences on administrative and academic responsibilities but it also shapes children’s outlooks and ethics.

Capcha says:

*I feel I am in position to be a role model to some extent for my time commitment, and the programs I organize in the school. We always try to have GNH pillars in*
place and teachers and students are thoroughly engaged with program. But being an emotional person and being very possessive about the school, sometimes I break down and I feel I am not a role model but my children understand my emotions and they say that they should not do anything that would hurt principal. So I think I am a role model and I don’t have any bad social behaviors and I am away from troubles. I may not be a perfect role model but I am a role model.

Chapcha’s understanding of time commitment as an essential component of being a role model reveals time commitment as the biggest challenge for female leaders specifically when women have children and are also managers of their households. This challenge can lead to role abandonment or role engulfment, either as a caring mother or as a committed principal, respectively. In either case, women are affected. Sacrifices and compromises women render in their career pursuit seem infinite and beyond many people’s grasp of understanding except for those who have lived it. At this juncture, it is intriguing to ruminate about whether or not male counterparts undergo similar experiences. Chapcha denied being a role model when she emotionally broke down in front of her students, but this brings to light how Bhutanese women leaders are compelled to conceal their emotions to fit in the male designed world, and lead from a more accepted male perspective.

Moral –responsible role model.

Some participants define being a role model from both moral and ethical paradigms. These women were of the perception that morals and values are at the essence of humans, and since leaders are people first before principals, they are
expected to lead from this moral perspective. Critically, the principals’ beliefs seemed to indicate that this is all about manifesting high principles for proper conduct explicitly by demonstrating, integrity, uprightness, morality, ethics and values that define a worthy human being. Thus, as school leaders, some participants involved in this study genuinely believed that it is their responsibility to ensure standards of moral and ethical conduct, and simultaneously influence teachers and students’ values and attitudes.

Participants who viewed being a role model from a moral perspective identify several characteristics and these involve leading in the fashion that promotes moral influence. One of the participants, Bidha narrates,

*There is a code of conduct for teachers and there are certain things teachers can do and cannot do. I follow these rules. I am a role model to my teachers and students especially in modelling how we dress, talk and address the community as a teacher. Simply instructing students is not a good approach to teach morals, but demonstrating your ethics, values and principles through action is the best method. In my attempt to inspire students, I share my school life experiences as a good student. When I share I have received numerous awards as a student, my students do not believe me. So, I literally take my awards/certificates and show it to them.*

The meaning of moral–leadership role model is deepened when Tseyang says, *I believe in being a role model for students, teachers and the community at large because if one needs to earn respect, if the program has to execute well, and if we have to build a culture of mutual trust and respect within the community,*
within the school, the educational leaders have to be authentic, good human being and inspirational leaders.

Similarly, Palden opined that she has always strived to put in her best effort, not because she wanted to be identified as a role model, but because she believed she should portray herself as a good person through her conduct, work ethics and work quality. The participants’ conviction about steering leadership complexities with morals and dignity suggest that doing so, not only tests leaders’ ethics, it also means leaders need to be reflective of their values, principles and integrity in decision-making. Nelson, Guerra and Henry (2011) argue that women not only work with a moral imperative but they take personal risk in taking action to address inequality and inequity. What the participants in this research expressed was in itself a testimony to women’s way of leading; placing their values, principles and morals at the forefront of their leadership. The participants’ high regard for the moral imperative problematizes the current education system in general and education specifically; how do we develop the moral imperative in school leaders? and how are leadership preparation programs aligned with the moral imperative? This calls for challenging and changing the current policies and practices. Fullan (2003) claims that what has been missing from the practice of too many school leaders is a moral imperative. Fullan (2003) claims that a more equitable educational system includes leaders who are willing to engage in practices that challenges the current system and who act with a moral imperative. This is essential to transcending current practices. Contextualizing what Fullan (2003) declared, it is intriguing to examine how the Bhutanese system credits female educational leaders who believe in building moral based community.
The perception of a moral-responsible role model corresponds to Sergiovanni’s (1992) conception of moral leadership. According to Sergiovanni, moral leadership is a process of having the head, heart and hand working together to make sound decisions. Rules, regulations and theories of practice govern the head. The heart is what the leader believes, values and commits to, and the hand shows one’s decisions, actions and behavior. Thus, head, heart and hand should not operate in isolation, but rather, they must perform in unison to lead ethically.

**Gender-role model.**

Some participants describe their understanding of being a role model from a female gender perspective and state that they believe in the crucial role they need to perform beyond their regular leadership duties. This seems to be based on the premise that Bhutan is a male dominated society and there are not too many women in management positions, particularly as educational leaders. Although a number of female leaders are still novices in the leadership realm that has been dominated by men for many years, they feel they need to set exemplars and standards for other women. The study participants believe that their role as female school administrators have profound influences on parents and girls in the community they serve and what Yangchen says below echoes of their beliefs.

*When there are so many people looking up to you, I try my best to make sure that I give in my best. During one of the parent teacher's meeting, I heard a parent telling her daughter, “See, your principal is a woman. You being my daughter, you should take her as your role model and be somebody like your principal”. So as a female leader, I think I have inspired girls and parents unconsciously.*
In a parallel tone, Pema states,

*I consciously aim to be a role model for school girls. During one of my visits to schools in the community, I observed that a particular school has no female teacher. So, picturing a woman as a principal is beyond imagination in that locality. The children went home and told their parents that a female teacher has come to their class. It was breaking news for students. So, this made me visit all the far flung schools in the community and inspire them. When I introduced myself as a DEO, they were surprised to know that the DEO was a woman since they were accustomed to seeing males as DEO.*

Pema says,

*Though I try to set examples regardless of gender, being a woman, I feel I have a bigger role than male principals. This is because I feel have extra responsibility to inspire and motivate girls particularly in a country where the leadership roles are extremely confined to men. So, as a woman myself, I consider it as my job to create programs, avenues and possibilities for girls to build their leadership competencies.*

Some participants in this study conceptualized the idea of gender role models to include the numerous responsibilities and duties they perform daily as a mother, school leader and a woman in general. The participants consider each of these roles to be vital and they believe in performing them with integrity and dignity. Phuntsho says,

*Charity begins at home. At home I am a role model for my children because they look up to me as a mother. At school, I am a role model to my colleagues, vice principal and staff. If I am not a role model, they will not trust me or have*
confidence in me. I am a role model to students because they believe teachers are their mentors. Social service event was organized in the community and I was invited by the organizing committee to give a talk to the women in the community. It was an introspective moment for me. Recently I met few young and fresh female principals during one of the conferences. One of them told me that she is going to quit leadership position expressing that it is men’s job, and not meant for women though she has been a school administrator only for 4 years. I tried my best to motivate her and assured her that women perform better than men.

Women have a history of nurturing children and are often known for their caring, loving and compassionate nature. There exists a societal expectation for almost all women to perform the role of mothers and most women have role models for this. What is unique in Bhutan is the lack of role models of female school leaders. In the absence of female mentors, many male leaders, and cultural and societal expectations of leadership, have left little space for women to be themselves when serving as leaders. While some women manage to lead using what might be considered male strategies, others seem to be swimming in a sea of dilemma, not certain of their leadership practices as women. So, the question remains ‘who do women follow as their own role models?’ This, to me, is one of the more incomprehensible aspects of being a female leader. Thus, being a female role model to others in Bhutan would seem to be both challenging and demanding.
5) Bhutanese Female School Principals are Situational Leaders

Although many of the participating Bhutanese women are recent players in the leadership arena, they seem to have a good level of knowledge about leadership and leadership practices. Words such as 'inspire', 'influence', 'motivate', 'lead', 'guide', 'set examples', 'serve', and 'role model' were effortlessly articulated by more than half of the participants in their attempts to define leadership. Leading their conscience with these words, women leaders are trailblazing with the confidence that leadership is situational and that no single leadership style works all the time. Participants in this study are convinced that different situations call for different leadership styles, and what a leader does is determined by the situation in which each person is functioning.

Exploring participants’ understandings of leadership reveal that Bhutanese female educational leaders believe themselves to be agents of change, symbols of strength and truth, and are full of knowledge. Tseyang’s understanding of leadership is highly inspired by the 5th king of Bhutan, as she says,

_I believe in the statement of His Majesty the fifth king when he talked about leaders. His Majesty told us that leadership is all about leading of the self before leading the masses. It is about disciplining and leading oneself so that others can follow you. So, I believe that leadership is about the ability to get things done not through coercion, but by inspiring others._

The lens Tseyang espoused to define leadership deserves deeper reflection on one’s own pledges and actions as leaders. While it is simple and straightforward to lecture, translating words into action entails soul searching, and calls for leaders who are brave, courageous and true to themselves. Leaders who can turn such convictions into
behavior are true bearers of high morals, principles and ethics. Thus, exploring ways and means to strengthen generations of women upholding similar values and ethics is one of the requisites for establishing a gender equitable society. Similarly, creating an equitable society should not be left only to women; rather what is needed is a collective and collaborative approach. To start with, we need male counterparts who are accepting, tolerant, accommodating and acknowledging, and who are willing to share in the responsibilities of domestic work, including the work of care and cultivating respectful relationships, and who are willing to share in the responsibilities.

Lekzang argues,

*People define leadership in different ways. For me leadership is being able to do things that are expected of you like planning out well, being able to use the human resources, and more importantly being able to bring everybody on board to understand and set up vision for the school and exploring ways to achieve goals. So involving people or being able to involve people is important. It is about inspiring people to work towards your vision for the benefit of the school.*

The above descriptions reveal two important aspects of school leadership. Firstly, Bhutanese women leaders are cognizant of leadership from a western literature context; they are of the idea that leadership is a joint venture and people must be involved in decision making process. Denzang argued that leadership is more about coming and working together rather than ordering and dictating to others which none of the participants like. This is in stark contrast to other more traditional forms of Bhutanese approaches to leadership; leaders are considered know-all figures, needing to
display power, having the ability to generate fears, and showing high levels of power and control.

Secondly, many of the participants (nine out of fifteen) discussed leadership with expressions about inspiring, leading, or demonstrating influence. In my opinion, the participants conceptualized leadership most often from conventional norms. This is mainly because almost all the leadership concepts, theories and models were developed by men, and over the years women have developed patterns of perceiving leadership from male standards. Such perceptions has deprived women of their feminine/feminist perspectives and not allowed them to reveal their true self to themselves and to society. Although, earlier, some participants enthusiastically expressed an interest in incorporating their feminine characteristics into their leadership practices, however, their inability to spell out or integrate these attributes while defining leadership makes me skeptical about their level of understanding/awareness of themselves as female educational leaders. Hence, it reveals that the female participants’ view of leadership is more about accomplishing goals than essentially inspiring followers. To me, this demonstrates male perception of leading; they are inspired to get the job done and then wash their hands of it.

Nevertheless, there are few study participants who carry leadership to a new height and portray it from a distinctly female dimension. They are of the notion that leadership is a relationship between a leader and followers, and the union must be grounded on love, care and respect so as to attain success. What is imperative about the described relationship to these women is the act of reciprocity and this is reaffirmed when Lambert and Gardner (2009) assert that when leadership is viewed as the capacity...
to engage in reciprocal, purposeful learning in community, the concept of leadership is shifted into the network of learning relationships in an organization.

The participants who described leadership from this reciprocal understanding not only have a clear knowledge of leadership, but they seemed to have a firm grip on different types of leadership practices. This different type of knowledge aided and guided the women to lead with sound judgement and wisdom in many different situations. This was evident when different participants alluded to the integration and juggling of various leadership practices; instructional, stewardship, servant, shared, distributive, democratic, and transformational leadership in their effort to bring change in schools. Tseyang shares her leadership description.

*I am not really sure what educational leadership I am practicing but I think it is a mixture of everything. Sometimes, I have to act depending on the situation and that makes me a situational leader. At times, I have to be autocratic when there are no alternatives or no other approaches work. So in such circumstances, I have to be autocratic for the betterment of an organization but mostly it is consultative, team work, collaborative leadership, and collective management. I try to enhance leadership in others; I decentralize and I make sure I provide necessary support.*

Lekzang shared a similar opinion;

*I believe in being a situational leadership because if you practice one defined leadership, you are going to fail as you are dealing with people with multiple qualities, needs and concerns. Therefore, you can be successful if you know what situational leadership is. For me, I would like to use multiple leadership styles.*
As a leader, knowing all leadership styles and being able to use it in the right situation is an asset. For me, I can be perceived as an autocratic leader in certain situation and I can be very liberal in other settings.

In a same fashion, Tshomo opines her understanding of leadership, I don’t believe in practicing one type of leadership. My leadership is determined by the situation and it is blend of everything. For instance, if I assign a work to a group, I give them enough freedom to go about with the task and as long as they complete the task in on specified time, I don’t interrupt. At the same time I believe in assisting as and when they need help.

Such narratives from the participants reveal that situation, context and temporality influence leadership decision-making practices making leadership extremely complex and indeterminate. Although most participants claim themselves as situational leaders, in general, there are specific leadership approaches that participants pay attention to at different times and in different contexts. Their emphasis on certain leadership approaches is highly swayed by policy realization partnered with one’s own conviction about management. Chapcha elucidates this complexity,

I cannot stress what particular leadership practices I follow. I am democratic, more of a servant leader, but today because of the guidelines from Ministry of Education, I am expected to be to be more of an instructional leader. Because Ministry of Education focuses so much on instructional leadership believing that it will enhance academic performance, I am consciously trying my best to be more of instructional leadership.

Correspondingly, Ugyen says,
I believe in instructional leadership and this attention is as per the requirement of the ministry. Seventy percent of a principal’s time should be devoted for classroom instructions. As a senior education officer, I feel our time should also be devoted to instructional hours rather than on management. For that very reason, at the district level, we have district academic board and committees comprising of subjects experts.

Likewise Ana narrates her leadership accounts;

I practice instructional leadership which means I don’t want to sit in my office and do only administrative work. I like to try out new things that will enhance learning; design tools for evaluation, develop school based professional development programs, and remodel teaching pedagogies and strategies to tackle the same concept. I am a person who loves children and I love to teach as much as I can. Through teaching I can understand the strength and difficulties of both teachers and students, and their needs.

Dechen justified for her inclination towards shared leadership and says,

In my school, I practice shared leadership. It is a leadership where teachers lead each other as academic heads, club coordinators, or committee advisors. Of course principals have certain authorities to make decisions, but we are guided by school policies and procedures that are developed by ourselves. I believe in consultative decision-making with the staff because it is not the principal who rules the school but the teachers. No matter what bright ideas, or friendly policies you have, if you don’t have the support and the strength of your
teachers, principal alone cannot run the school alone. So, shared leadership is very important if you want to ferry the school to the next higher level. In a similar context, Denzang voices, 

I believe in democratic leadership and I believe in making decisions democratically. I don’t want to decide anything on my own for the school because at the end of the day it is not the principal who is solely going to do the job but the teachers. So, if I don’t give them independence nor they contribute anything and take responsibility, it is not going to work well.

The narratives of female educational leaders not only reveal the vastness of their experiences and knowledge about leadership and leadership practices, but it also reveals their ability to adapt and adjust in a leadership landscape which is male dominated. Their democratic leadership approaches discloses the strength of mutual and collective model of leading at the same time encouraging teachers to perform their best when they are empowered with independence and space to think and act.

Conversely, male leaders have played a significant role in demonstrating leadership dexterity, and those women who have taken up leadership roles with or without any reservation have shadowed men ever since they entered the realm of leadership. This is primarily due to lack of female leaders mentors. Currently women have realized the downsides of following male dominated practices and felt the need to depart from men’s way of managing while crafting a female image of their own.

The five themes that emerged from the data demonstrate a desire to create an identity for female educational leaders in a Bhutanese context where leadership is observed most often from conventional framework. The themes also demonstrate the
level of understanding that the Bhutanese female educational leaders’ have of themselves as female leaders and the level of awareness they have of their leadership styles and approaches.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the key findings while highlighting this study’s unique contributions, recommendations for future research and concluding remarks.

Key Findings

Five broad themes emerged from the data analysis and they are: 1) Bhutanese female educational leaders are inadvertent leaders; 2) gender is the paramount challenge for women in educational leadership position; 3) gender influences leadership practices; 4) Bhutanese female educational leaders are community role models, and 5) Bhutanese female leaders are situational leaders.

The themes brought to light intriguing narratives about the state of female educational leaders in Bhutan in particular and Bhutanese women in general. The five themes developed from the narratives of fifteen female educational leaders disclosed many key areas that influenced their lives as women. Among many fascinating key areas, the subject of gender seemed to be the most common theme that cut across all other themes creating a mutual space for the participants. An in-depth discussion of key areas shed more light in understanding the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders.

There is a Lack of Inspiration, Aspirations and Career Exposure Amongst the Female Educational Leaders

The emergence of Bhutanese female educational leaders as inadvertent leaders highlights some fascinating facts about female educational leaders in Bhutan. Their reasons for their inadvertent leadership were that leadership was assigned to them,
families and friends influenced them, and some women were driven by circumstances such as absence of male teachers to take up leaders in a particular school. Explanations such as the ones above suggested that the participants lacked personal inspiration and private aspirations to become leaders, and they did not come forward to assume leadership roles even though they had the potential and the ability. Rather, women responded to an external person to force or recognize their abilities. The data also revealed that Bhutanese female educational leaders seemed to lack career guidance or exposure. Most of the participants expressed that they joined the teaching profession solely for the love of teaching and children and they did not have any predetermined plans or desires to engage in leadership positions. The participants credited their hard work and professionalism for the unexpected turn in their teaching profession journeys.

The lack of inspiration and aspirations, career guidance, and the reluctance to come forward, may stem from different standards and norms of raising girls and boys. Culturally, from a very young age, Bhutanese girls learn to be feminine, cooperative, respectful of men, compliant and submissive. Boys, on the other hand, are expected to be aggressive, bold and powerful. Even with regard to availing education, sons are given preferences over daughters. The household chores are given to daughters while anything associated with outside the house is considered the boys' jobs. In a nutshell, Bhutanese culture subtly teaches boys to become leaders while girls are educated to be nurturers. Such approaches to the raising of girls and boys have not only created a feeling of superiority in men and inferiority in women, but it has fashioned a society that is accustomed to listening to and obeying the opinions of men.
Though the trend is slowly changing and the situation seems to be improving, there are still many cultural implications in the manner of how Bhutanese society operates and perceives leadership. My understanding of myself as a woman was shaped by my own cultural upbringing in consort with my experiences of growing up in a male-dominated family. My parents supported me becoming a teacher because they believed that teaching is both a noble and feminine profession and since it was expected that I would also be wife and mother, teaching was supported. It is amazing how my participants' narratives resonated with my own life stories. However, my exposure to different cultures, years of living outside Bhutan, and being in contact with a myriad of leadership literature has reconstructed my personal perspective of leadership and women’s place in society. I have been motivated to delve deeper into seeking answers about not only joining the teaching profession but also about choosing an administrative track within the teaching profession.

**Absence of Female as Role Models in Educational Leadership Created Fear and Anxiety Amongst Women Who are Taking up Leadership.**

The absence of females as role models or mentors in educational leadership seems to have created fear and anxiety amongst the participants during the initial period of their leadership. Having very few women in the leadership realm made them doubt their own capabilities. Even though the participants had the academic qualifications and felt they were eligible to be leaders, some of the participants were not certain if they should become leaders. The dilemmas that the participants experienced were often because of the absence of female role models, particularly amongst fellow educators.
The dearth of female role models is not confined to Bhutanese women as women around the globe have shared similar sentiments as Bhutanese female educational leaders. Driscoll and Goldberg (1993) argued that while men have ample role models to look up to and be guided by through the minefield of workplace, the same cannot be said for women. Shakeshaft et al. (2007) claimed that the shortage of role female role models is a barrier to women’s leadership aspirations. The administrative role models women encounter, the type of leadership literature they are exposed to, and the endorsement and support women receive are what Young (2003) believes to greatly impact women's paths to leadership. The presence or absence of these factors can either facilitate or inhibit women's entry into leadership positions. This has caused me to reflect on my own leadership style and mentors and ask myself how did I lead, did I have a role model, and what support and encouragement are extended to women who have desires and potentials to be leaders?

I reminisced about a few female educational leaders with whom I have interacted but none of them were qualified enough to be my role model in my opinion. They did not qualify to be my role models because firstly, I rarely heard them talk about their leadership styles and skills. Secondly, the daily discourse I heard about good leadership or efficient leaders always revolved around men leaders. Thirdly, it was not because I did not have confidence or trust in female educational leaders, but I was raised to believe that men's opinion were wiser and better than women's. Thus, I recall engaging solely with my male colleagues for advice and guidance whenever I confronted hurdles on my leadership path. When I think of it now, I have belittled my own experiences and knowledge by discounting the knowledge and experiences of those Bhutanese female
educational leaders. I was conventional and old-fashioned! Such a perception was again tied to the double standard approach of raising girls and boys differently. It has created a feeling in Bhutanese women that suggests men are better leaders than women.

According to Mahmood (2004), the idea that men are superior to women was born out of gender-role stereotypes mirrored in parental and societal expectation of demure girls and assertive boys. Bhutanese society was no exception to gender-role stereotypical parenting though the trend is slowly changing.

For many years there were no female role models in educational leadership positions in Bhutan, so it was not easy for women to take up educational leadership roles. Nevertheless, the participants revealed that some male allies or male educational leaders in higher positions with whom they have worked identified their potentials and assigned them to leadership positions, thus, they aiding them in becoming inadvertent school leaders. Some of the women were encouraged by their husbands when they were uncertain about their leadership assignment. Involvement of an external force, mostly men, in identifying their potential revealed that often men seemed to have a great influence on women who have taken up leadership roles by encouraging and pushing the female participants into leadership roles. The participants’ narratives also indicated that since leadership is normally a men's realm, men seemed to have identified and encouraged those women as leaders who behaved similarly to them.

My own taking up of a leadership position was purely an unplanned shift and, had it not been for my brother who had constantly encouraged me to take up a leadership position, I would still be a teacher. My brother's role as a senior education officer not only motivated me but he encouraged many other female teachers in
realizing their leadership skills. While he has now exited the education ministry, his traditions are intact; almost all of the female teachers who he inspired are still working as effective educational leaders across the country.

The narratives of my participants, as well as on my own stories, make me contemplate my own potential and abilities that I have demonstrated as a teacher and how those have helped pave my own leadership path. One aspect that I am confident about during my early leadership phase was watching the male administrators around me and mimicking and modelling them secretly. As much as women may need men's support and encouragement in attaining their goal, women need more females as role models to inspire more women and craft their own leadership path.

What is now crucial is the creation of an enabling environment for women to take up leadership roles so they can serve as role models for younger generations of women. The narratives of the participants clearly suggested that women are genuinely interested in taking on leadership roles but one thing impeding their transition into leadership roles is the absence or lack of an enabling environment with female role models. The increasing instances of hard working female teachers assigned to leadership positions by male higher authorities suggests that Bhutanese society is starting to favorably welcome women into leadership roles. Nevertheless, there are certain challenges that the female participants confronted in their leadership roles and those stressful occurrences are by-products of the absence of female role models in leadership positions.
Those in charge of preparing new teachers should start introducing ideals about leadership for both male and female students, including presenting both genders with the opportunities for leadership and the study of leadership at the teacher college level.

**Bhutanese Female Educational Leaders Confront Challenges in Convincing Members of Rural Communities of their Ability to Lead**

Even though during this study an equal emphasis was placed on exploring both the challenges and opportunities of being female educational leaders in Bhutan, the participants often focused more on narrating the challenges than the positive prospects. The explorations seemed to blatantly reveal that female educational leaders that women are more concerned with challenges and able to be vulnerable in their leadership style.

One of the challenges encountered by the research participants were the difficulty in convincing members of the rural community surrounding their school of their ability to lead. Some of the rural community members would not believe the participants when they told them that they were the new educational leader and that they have been placed in the community as the principal. One disappointment occurred when the villagers addressed one of the participants as ‘Sir’. When told that ‘Sir’ is for men, villagers responded that they were accustomed to seeing and dealing with men as educational leaders. The villagers further declared that they had no familiarity of interacting with women as leaders and so they did not have a term or word to address female educational leaders. There was a case where one female educational leader was mistaken for the wife of the educational officer by villagers since they assumed their district education officer had to be male. Such reactions, and sometimes resulting
resistance, from the rural community are in itself evidence that people in Bhutan, particularly in rural areas, still associate leadership with men and associate women with household duties. Their inability to visualize women as leaders working shoulder to shoulder with men revealed that women are still not favored as leaders. But in most cases, the female participants turned the tables around and managed the incidents effectively to educate the community.

The outlook of villagers inspired the female educational leaders to reach out to the most remote villages and advocate to people about the importance of educating girls. They deliberated on the essentiality of girls becoming leaders who embrace the ways in which as a leader they are interdependent, independent and dependent on a range of others in their professional and personal lives by deconstructing the cultural notion of early marriage or getting married to an affluent husband and relying on him.

Culturally, the idea of relying on husbands for personal well-being and economic security has paralyzed women’s progress in many public areas. The high dropout rate at the secondary and tertiary education levels, the existing societal customs, and women’s inequality can be linked to the belief. Over the years, this cultural belief has produced generations of women who were mostly unaware of their own potential. At times, the way parents groom their daughters also has had a significant role in the outlook of Bhutanese women in society. Though this trend is waning slowly and a few women, especially the participants of the research have stepped into public spaces, the beliefs and perspectives of large sections of the country’s population are still shaped by traditional thoughts and the age-old traditions are still a challenge to the acceptance of female educational leaders.
At this point in time, there is an urgent need to explore as many approaches and strategies as possible to change the perception towards women in leadership amongst the population. While policy intervention, systemic restructuring, and the creation of an enabling environment for women are vital for women’s progression into the decision-making arena, finding ways to help women believe in themselves and their personal strengths in changing the dominant culture is of equal significance. All other strategies of empowering women are secondary if women do not have the confidence and trust in themselves and their leadership style while they resist the hegemonic cultural expectations of leadership. Building trust in and motivating women should start as they start schooling and by the time girls are in high school, they can be self-assured, self-reliant and assertive. Therefore, as an educator and school administrator who is constantly in direct contact with children, it is my responsibility to educate children on the importance of gender equity and female empowerment through educational programs that will allow all students to be critical and analytical learners. As much as girls need education and support as they take on contemporary leadership roles, equal attention and care must be offered to boys from an early age, not only to enrich their level of acceptance of female leaders, but to disrupt the conventional frame of mind amongst men and women. Only then will we witness a society that promotes the equity of both genders. Although the idea of achieving an equitable society sounds distant, the goal of empowering women is a strong beginning if we have a strong beginning.

The noble idea of educating children about female leadership and gender equity demands a shift in three things. These include curriculum, teaching pedagogies and parenting styles. The shift in these three must be in unison with one another, rather than
any one of the areas transforming in isolation from the others. Each of these must integrate concepts and philosophies about gender equity and must work in collaboration to realize the vision of enhancing women roles in educational leadership specifically and in society in general.

**Bhutanese Female Educational Leaders are Token Leaders**

Due to the absence of female role models, there are barely any women in leadership positions and the few who are in leadership roles face numerous challenges that are typically linked to their gender. Despite confronting challenges in the leadership realm, Bhutanese female educational leaders are continuously under the surveillance of the public, not just as a woman, but often for being a leader amongst men. Because of their number, female school leaders are highly visible in the group and everything they do or say is thoroughly scrutinized by not only themselves against cultural norms but also by others. This was evident when the participants revealed being their own critics prior to voicing their views in a meeting. They also describe how engaging in deep deliberations within themselves has drained them.

Lips (1997) argued that the low number of female leaders often results in them being given a token status that places women in a vulnerable position and makes it difficult for them to excel at their job. Token leaders go through considerable workplace stress as representatives of their gender making them visible and invisible at the same time (Kanter, 1977). Thus, Bhutanese female educational leaders are often token leaders and because of their high visibility, they face additional performance pressure.

As a female school principal working in a male dominated profession, I always felt the need to work harder and perform better than my male counterparts. The fear of
being branded as incapable and incompetent by my teachers, students and community, who were accustomed to working with male leaders, urged me to seek meaning in my work and increased the commitment I had for my school. Now as I reflect on my personal experiences as a school leader, I realize that my constant struggle with the issue of conformity, as I attempted to fit in with the majority of male leaders, was more taxing than administrating the school.

Tokenism is not only confined to female educational leaders. Rather tokenism seemed to be at play at the higher decision-making level in hiring female executives and specialists across the government. According to RCSC statistics 2008, 17 out of 242 executives and specialists were female across the government. Currently, out of 253 executive and specialist positions, 25 are women (RCSC Annual Report, 2015-2016). The statistics revealed that there was an increase in executive positions of 2% within 8 years. With the annual increase of only 0.25% in women taking up executive and specialist positions, it would take more than a century for women to be proportionally represented in the leadership sphere in Bhutan. Also, Bhutan is a signatory to the Beijing Platform of Action of 1995 and according to the Signatory, Bhutan pledged to create gender equality by 2030. However, the current movement towards gender equality seems to reveal that Bhutan’s assurance in closing the gender gap is progressing at a snail’s pace and such slow progress could be a result of a lack of emphasis placed on gender issues by policy makers, who are most often men. The situation might have been different had there been more women at the highest decision making level. My perception of a reverse scenario is based on the premise that having more women at the highest decision making level would create a strong and unified voice and leaders like
the participants could add their own narratives to the experiences of women in general discussions. This could eventually facilitate the empowerment of women.

Female educational administrators seen as token leaders are not the only thing that adds to a feeling of invisibility. These women also face challenges when they are the only female in a group of male leaders. As a minority in the leadership realm, women leaders are at times viewed as seductresses, pets, mothers, sex objects or iron maidens. The narratives of Capcha, one of the research participants disclosed that being the only female principal in the district, and being quite young compared to her male counterparts, expressed her discomfort with sitting amongst men, being called ‘darling’ and being treated like a ‘rare species’ in the group. As a leader, there are certain roles and responsibilities one has to shoulder. In an attempt to execute leadership roles and responsibilities, staying late at work, attending unexpected meetings, travelling and mingling with counterparts who are mostly men, become a part of leadership responsibility and one cannot escape this reality if one wishes to remain in the position. If women leaders are to be professional, it is expected that they travel, mingle with male counterparts and come home late, however society seems to perceive these activities as culturally unusual. Their conduct is considered unbecoming of women and demonstrating a lack of family commitment and at times their marital loyalty is even questioned. Contrary are the accounts of men who might be the only male in a group. Society accepts and tolerates male leaders working beyond office times and it is considered normal for men to be on the move. If men happen to be fewer in number, they seem to be free from any of the unpleasant suggestions and rumors as experienced by women.
Therefore, in a country where almost half of the population is female, it is imperative to reflect on the challenges of women as ‘token’ leaders, particularly in the educational leadership sphere. Different strategies and approaches must be explored and adopted to encourage as many female teachers as possible to take up educational leadership positions and avoid making women ‘token’ leaders. Strategies and methods must be designed in such a way that leadership positions can be accessed by female teachers despite their gender and slowly changing cultural norms. One approach of doing this is by encouraging politicians and educators to value the pledge Bhutan committed to at the international level. If Bhutan is sincere about making a gender equity commitment, either a separate policy must be put in place to attract more female teachers to assume school administrators’ role, or the Teacher Human Resource Policy (THRP 2014) must reflect strategies to inspire more female educational leaders. Developing a gender friendly approach will not only create gender equity but gender equality too. Regrettably, the current THRP 2014 is gender insensitive and any policy lacking gender sensitivity, will impede women’s progress and this is evident in the current unequal participation of women in all public spheres. Therefore, more than gender equality, gender equity is imperative and the concept of gender budgeting and gender responsive planning must be incorporated in the education system if both gender equality and equity is to prevail.

**Family Responsibilities are Barriers for Female’s Leadership**

One undeniable reality about the participants of the research were their common responsibility and obligation towards their family and parents, and the participants involved in the study have undoubtedly revealed the realities of their lives in this regard
through their narratives. While men look after their parents and nurture children in some ways, male roles are more inclined towards administering and directing the family. The larger portion of the day to day work load, including taking care of elderly parents and raising children, is still being shouldered by women even if the women are in the leadership ranks.

Women in my study who chose to serve as educational leaders were not relieved from household chores and family responsibilities. These women continue their traditional roles and responsibilities as part of their home life, while at the same time functioning as administrators executing leadership roles and responsibilities. The dual responsibilities of juggling family responsibilities and educational administrative matters concurrently (unlike their male coworkers) seem to deprive women of some quality family time and causes stress and fatigue amongst women. However, the experiences are seemingly opposite with male leaders when they are at home. They barely shift their roles as much as women who are expected to transform their responsibilities. Even if both partners are working, Bhutanese women often take the lead role pertaining to household duties; men’s participation in cooking and raising children is minimal. Typically, almost all men have their laundry done and meals cooked. Such realities can mean that what women are made to go through in their daily lives makes leadership unappealing and experiences of leadership very taxing. However, the trend is changing and Bhutanese society, in general, is of the perception that women should now take up leadership positions, but it is disheartening to know that men have not stepped out of their leadership arena and extended their hand in child and domestic care (BGPN, 2013).
My memories of working as a female school principal are similar to the narratives of the participants. While I worked 6 days a week from 8 am through 4pm, I always believed that I have other greater responsibilities to carry out beyond the school gate and these include those as a mother, a wife and a daughter. I consistently sit down with my sons and go through their day’s learning and help them with their school work. Though my mother made my life easier by helping me with cooking and household chores, I never detached myself from culinary and household errands. I always took ownership of the household chores and guided my children with their school work after school hours. However, I noted that my own school janitor had the reverse life after school hours. According to his wife (who weaves exhaustively to supplement his income and works all day to look after their four children), as soon as he gets home, she serves him tea, snacks or a late lunch. She keeps a bottle of cool beer with appetizers ready for him to savour. When he is done eating, he relaxes by watching TV shows or sometimes runs to visit his friends. Seeing him and other males receive ‘first class’ treatment, I admit there have been some moments when I wished I had been born as a man.

As I reflect on my leadership memories, even though I have a caring mother and a very supportive husband, there have been numerous situations where my own gender challenged my interests and pursuits and, perhaps, the most critical period happened when I planned to pursue my Masters degree in Canada. I had many sleepless nights debating within myself about whether or not it would be acceptable to leave a toddler and an elementary school-aged son in my mother’s care for a year. I was apprehensive about what people might say about me and my marriage, and how a year away would
affect my relationship with the people I love and care for. Of all the worries, I feared society would brand me as a poor mother or a non-traditional Bhutanese woman. In spite of all the trepidations, I followed my heart and earned the M.Ed., but I still bear the scar of guilt of leaving my children behind and putting my career at the forefront. I believe such personal emotions have a great deal to do with being born as a woman, a daughter and especially as a mother. Yet again, the accounts of Bhutanese men pursuing their dream jobs have often included leaving behind a pregnant wife or small children. As a Bhutanese woman, one is tied to family responsibilities and commitment unlike many men, and this has impeded women’s progression.

The narratives of the participants demonstrate how maintaining traditional family responsibilities have affected their career. There are cases where most participants have prioritized their spouses’ career over their own by sacrificing their individual professional growth for the enhancement of their spouses’ career. In response to their husbands’ careers, some women have remained in the same position in the same location for more than a decade, while others took a long time to come forward to take up leadership roles. The participants in the research who came forward describe being stagnated in the same rank for decades. Those who felt this way believed it was related to fulfilling the cultural expectations of being a good mother, daughter or wife by shouldering conventional family responsibilities, and placing men’s careers at the forefront of family decisions and priorities. The shouldering of multiple responsibilities not only seemed to stagnate women but it caused some feelings of having to give up leadership opportunities amongst the participants.
The two distinct responsibilities that women in my study balance at home and work not only demand of them to change their roles, but these two sets of responsibilities also challenge the women to constantly shift their identities and perspectives from one focus to the other. How can Bhutanese women exercise educational leadership while at the same time be expected to comply with traditional norms of subservience to family? This is a unique situation demanding idiosyncratic characteristics as female leaders try to juggle the problem and Tsemunhu (2009) calls for a ‘third space’ which is neither traditional nor modern. As a female leader, one is expected to create a ‘third space’ which is neither traditionally powerless nor aggressively powerful but blend the two and create a hybrid leadership style. Contextually and culturally, the concept of third space perfectly fits the situation Bhutanese female educational leaders find themselves in. The enthusiasm in creating a new image of women that is distinct to Bhutanese female educational leaders should not be left to women alone; rather, it should be pursued as a joint venture between women and decision makers who are mostly male. The creation of a new space and image of leadership for Bhutanese women not only calls for a shift in current policies and plans but it should also value and incorporate women’s experiences and knowledge as an integral component in making the policies and plans. Such a scenario demands a new societal perspective and attitude, especially from male counterparts, with men taking equal ownership in household duties as one progressive instance in establishing a new pattern. Only then, will the family responsibilities and commitments that women shoulder serve as an asset rather than a liability to women’s leadership path.
The data also unfolded in ways that demonstrated that the research participants were different in many ways from male leaders in their leadership practice. The distinction in leadership practice can be observed in the way women focus on five areas, namely, 1) creating a conducive school environment, 2) emphasizing academic learning, 3) possessing a sound knowledge of curriculum, 4) developing horizontal relationship with teachers, and 5) demonstrating love, care and compassion.

Almost all participants described the ways these five areas are distinct and unique to women’s leadership. For instance, almost all the Bhutanese female educational leaders interviewed demonstrated a great aesthetic sense and participated in such activities as nurturing flower gardens and nature clubs in schools while male leaders seemed to strive to develop the school campus mainly because of obligations. In my experience the onus is often modelled through administration and delegation of responsibilities. Male educational leaders seem to lean more towards administrative issues and seem to enjoy executing projects, taking pleasure in managing finance, and making their presence visible by exerting power and control, while in my experience female educational leaders are often motivated by the concept of instructional leadership and fostering horizontal relationships. What is exceptional about many female educational leaders is their expressions of emotions particularly love, care and compassion for their school, staff, students, and family.

The leadership approaches of Bhutanese female educational leaders participating in this study, and their prioritization of school programs, seemed to have been highly influenced by their gender, and also the social, political and economic context of their
lives. I believe that the Bhutanese female educational leaders’ connection with instructional leadership and their possession of sound curriculum knowledge are the results of spending more time in the classroom than many men do prior to taking up leadership positions. The special care and love that female educational leaders have for students and school may well emanate from being a mother, daughter and wife bearing the responsibility of raising children, siblings and caring age-old parents. Their personal involvement in the upkeep of their school surroundings can be traced to gender segregated roles and domestic responsibilities women have undertaken while growing up in Bhutan.

Because of women’s urges to change the system and create more equitable learning situations, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify women’s ways of leading as being in harmony with leadership for social justice. Although Bhutanese female educational leaders are sometimes inadvertent leaders, their connection to the work of social justice is not accidental. The context and the narratives of these Bhutanese female educational leaders vividly illustrate how their approaches to leading resonate with the traits of leadership for social justice even if they don’t use that explicit language. Such accounts of life-transforming acts of female educational leaders encourage me to recollect my early childhood memories. My heart fills with joy at the thought of my mother and I treading along the terraced rice field picking wild flowers on our way to work. I played alongside her and helped her by passing bundles of paddy seedlings while she remained in the muddy field transplanting the seedlings. The simplicity of the rural life and my attachment with my mother utterly inspired me to become someone like her and I even expressed my interest to her. But my mother wanted me to explore
the world beyond the mountains and paddy fields. She educated me about the wonders of the world and told me that I would have all the powers to see those fantasies of the world if only I would change my perception of being like her on the farm. Although, in terms of academic credentials, my mother may not be competent enough to be called an educational leader, her values, inspiration and her covert approaches in empowering women were powerful enough to inspire me to seek out my dream. Perhaps, this is another way to describe leadership for social justice!

As a female educational leader working in a minority and economically less developed community, I was moved by children’s innocence, parents’ illiteracy, and the low socio-economic state of the community. What inspired me the most to give my best was the parents’ trust and children’s respect for teachers. My extra emphasis on health and hygiene of 6 to 9 year old children, transforming teaching pedagogies, re-evaluating assessment criteria, respecting instructional time, and transforming the physical ambience of the school invited applause as well as criticism at times. My personal involvement in bringing a professional change to the school took much of my family time. The community appreciated my effort in transforming the physical and academic face of the school while some disapproved of having to do much work after my arrival as principal. My co-workers had the impression that I was indulging into teaching basics and, as a principal, I should be refraining from such deliberations. When I did this, it was with the belief that an education foundation must be strong. I believed that as a principal, my sole responsibility lay in cementing that foundation. I am certain that priorities are bound to shift and ways of doing things are likely to change when a leader is new to a school, but I have gained a feeling of fulfillment in knowing that the early
childhood center I established with the joint support of UNICEF Bhutan and Ministry of Education is still operating and benefiting the community. It was a discovery for me in knowing what I believed in, and focused on, was in relation to the principles of social justice.

**Bhutanese Female Educational Leaders are Community Role Models**

The interview data also revealed that these Bhutanese female educational leaders are not only accountable for educating children but also for helping them develop a sense of themselves with regard to morals, leadership, and an understanding of the role of women as community role models. Therefore, female leaders also need to learn to be secure in their own understanding of themselves as community role models, as a leadership-responsible role model, a moral-responsible role model and also a gender role model. These are very similar to Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) idea of the kind of citizens that exist and can be supported as personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens and justice oriented citizens. The leadership-responsible role model and moral-responsible role model seem to resonate with the attributes of a personally responsible citizen. All three characteristics of citizens take responsibility for integrity, honesty and self-discipline values either as both a good citizen and leader. The participants are of the belief that it is their responsibility to ensure the standards of moral and ethical conduct, and simultaneously influencing teachers and students. They are of the perception that morals and values are the essence of human beings, and they believe that they must lead from this viewpoint.
The gender role model perspective places gender at the forefront of their leadership as an inspiration for other women. The approaches and commitments of the participants in presenting themselves as gender role models have earned them recognition as leaders for social justice. This vision of leading from a gender role model perspective seems to overlap with the vision of a justice-oriented citizen. Both models aim to change the current system by critically assessing the social, political and economic contexts and aids leaders pursuing plans and strategies to create a fair and equitable society.

The role model perspectives perceived by the participants in my study seemed to originate from personal and social experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge these experiences of the participants and construct three commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place. The authors draw a relationship between how past, present and future, interactions and situations influence the manner of how people construe life and the choices they make.

Working as a female school principal in a minority community, I have always considered myself as a role model and I constantly felt that I had a bigger role and responsibility to shoulder. However, I had never given any thought to my disposition or tried to figure out what role model perspectives I fit in. After much introspection, I realize that I embrace all the three perspectives in different ways and the three perspectives do not stand alone from each other; rather they occur in a way that overlaps with one another with no one perspectives being more expressive at a certain time than the other two. My tendency towards the leadership-responsible role model and the
moral-responsible role model has continuously shaped my conduct and philosophy while my gender subconsciously influences my decisions and priorities.

There is no strength greater than the power of believing in oneself and the narratives of these female educational leaders’ convictions about themselves as exemplary figures are classic examples. But how do we keep the flames of believing in oneself burning in the hearts of female educational leaders and simultaneously light the hearts of other Bhutanese women? The policy and decision makers must consider this as a serious concern and must ruminate on it if they genuinely care about creating a gender equitable society.

**Bhutanese Female Educational Leaders have Good Knowledge of Leadership Practices**

Despite being inadvertent leaders and subjected to gender challenges, Bhutanese female educational leaders from my study have established their own trademarks in the leadership realm. They not only consider themselves community role models, but Bhutanese female educational leaders have sound knowledge about leadership and leadership practices. Their exposure to contemporary leadership literature and theories, and their experiences of living and working in a traditionally male dominated society have gifted them with multidimensional views of leadership and leadership approaches. Their knowledge of democratic, instructional, transformational, distributive, and servant leadership practices facilitated them in influencing, inspiring and motivating their teachers and students rather than projecting themselves as traditional leaders who claim to know everything; instilling fear in their followers or displaying a high degree of power and control. Examining leadership concepts and theories from both the traditional
and contemporary perspective has provided Bhutanese female educational leaders with adequate knowledge and experiences to conceptualize their own leadership. They often identify themselves as situational leaders. By situational leadership, they refer to practicing multiple leadership styles depending on the situations rather than using a one size fits all approach. Thus, under situational leadership style, if a democratic leadership style doesn’t work, they switch to a slightly more autocratic style to achieve the goals set for the school.

Bhutanese female educational leaders in my study identifying themselves as situational leaders resonates with the idea of situational leadership articulated by Hersey and Blanchard (1969) more than four decades ago. Although the concept of situational leadership may seem to be a little stale, the essence and spirit of situational leadership still seems to be convincing in certain circumstances. According to Hersey and Blanchard, there is no single best leadership style and different situations call for different leadership styles. Depending upon the situation, leaders may need to adjust their leadership style to better fit a certain set of conditions. Alongside the situation, I believe that the context and the personalities of the leader and followers influence what is the best leadership style. Given such circumstances, my experiences of working as a school principal reaffirmed that for leaders to exercise situational leadership, both leaders and followers need to collaborate and shift their ways of doing things, while accepting that there may be different ways to address a challenge depending on the circumstances.

Conversely, while Bhutanese female educational leaders perceive leadership distinctly and brand themselves as primarily situational leaders, their perception of
leadership, in general, is often more oriented towards a more masculine perspective, subtly echoing the knowledges and experiences of men. This stance is primarily grounded on the belief that almost all the leadership concepts and theories that Bhutanese female educational leaders have observed and experience are highly developed by men and men’s way of leading, and these have influenced women’s perception of leadership. While leading from men’s reference point may have somehow helped women in developing initial leadership attributes, it discounts women’s knowledge, femininity and fails to integrate women’s experiences in defining leadership. The exclusion of women’s knowledge and wisdom from the mainstream literature has produced generations of women who are less confident, less competent, unaware of their potential and contributions, and less motivated to assume leadership positions. It is the right time for Bhutanese female leaders, particularly educational leaders, to deconstruct the notion of conventional leadership and better understand leadership from more feminist perspectives. Regan and Brooks (1995) depart from traditional leadership images and identify collaboration, caring, courage, intuition and vision as the five most important attributes of female administrators. Similarly, Lambert and Gardner (2009) reconstruct female leadership as, “the capacity to engage in reciprocal, purposeful learning in community” (p.6). Presenting such revolutionary perspectives on leadership has empowered me to problematize my own beliefs, culture and knowledge about my understanding of leadership. Defining leadership from feminist perspectives has not only reinforced my understanding of myself and rediscovering leadership attributes from a feminist outlook, it has also empowered me to help me gain the strength and power to acknowledge my female qualities as an asset in
defining my leadership rather than considering them a liability. Therefore, every woman leader in Bhutan must be empowered to reconstruct leadership in a way that provides an opportunity to make changes. I acknowledge this rests in the hands of policy and decision makers who must be progressive, open-minded and liberal-minded if positive changes are to occur. Predominately, the concept of describing leadership from feminist perspectives rests in the hand of women to start a movement towards networking with each other and collaborating with likeminded.

**Bhutanese Female Educational Leaders are Liberal Feminists**

Although Bhutanese female educational administrators are inadvertent leaders, they seemed to have acquired a great deal of knowledge about leadership and leadership theories according to their interview responses. Not only do the participants identify themselves as situational leaders, but their beliefs and actions are predisposed towards building a just and equitable society by demonstrating themselves as community role models, particularly as gender role models. Their belief is that all people are created equitably and deserve equitable treatment and opportunities that women hold the equivalent intellectual capacity as men, and should be given the same opportunities in political, social and economic spheres echo the ideology of liberal feminism theorized by Betty Friedan (1963).

Bhutanese female educational leaders in my study are of the perception that women have both the physical and intellectual strength but the existence of age-old cultural belief that women’s place is in the home has fastened them to family household chores. Women have developed a mentality about where they belong relative to where their male counterparts have placed them until the advent of Western education changed
their way of life in some ways. Wollstonecraft (as cited in Cahn, 2009), one of the first feminists articulated something similar to what the research participants thought but in a more powerful and revolutionary manner. She reasoned that if men were confined to the same cage that trapped women, men would develop the same flawed characters. So, by the time women came into the educational process and started entering leadership roles, men were ahead of women in all spheres and have created boundaries and norms that have made it harder for women to cross into leadership frontiers. Hence, most of the participants in the study feel that many boundaries should not exist and are passionate about creating equitable rights and opportunities. They strongly argue that an equitable society can be created by reforming the existing polices including the teacher human resource policy and changing the budget formula while exploring, creating and implementing enabling environment for women to assume leadership.

While the participants echo the spirit of feminism, especially liberal feminism, it is intriguing to know that they do not associate their beliefs and actions with feminism ideology and efforts in their narrative descriptions. One possible reason for disaffiliating their beliefs and undertakings from feminism and its ideology could be due to their lack of exposure to feminist thoughts and ideas since the ideology of feminism evolved from the West and it did not reach Bhutan until recently. According to the interview narratives, even today, educated women in Bhutan, and particularly these research participants, seem to hold a vague and narrow understanding of feminism and feminist theories. Some connect feminism with something negative. Such a limited grasp on the women’s movement seems to have not only deprived Bhutanese women of their rights, equality and justice but it has also impeded Bhutanese women’s progression in the
economic, social and political arenas. On the other hand, these women possessing limited knowledge about their own rights and equity may have a lot to do with the society and the system women live in. Bhutanese women dwell in society where art, religion, culture, language, policies, and knowledge are expressed from men’s points of view and it is men who set standards and rules about how women should conduct themselves, what they should wear, and what profession or career women should take up. The system, which is bureaucratic in nature and controlled by men is purposefully braided with existing societal norms and traditions, thus, creating further complexity as we attempt to separate the system from male dominated societal norms and traditions.

Given such situations, women are restricted in expressing and exploring anything beyond the conventional culture and knowledge and those who think out of the box, and bring in new perspectives, seemed to have a difficult time fitting into the existing system. Thus, in general, many Bhutanese women live a compliant life without questioning their rights and entitlements, yet simultaneously many feel the need to break the cycle.

While there are numerous instances that authenticate how decision makers expect women to behave and dress, the two instances described here are noteworthy as I reflect on rights and cultural beliefs, and how these beliefs have influenced Bhutanese women’s role in society. Of late, women have been joining in traditionally male dominated games such as khuru (game of darts) and this has raised many eyebrows at all levels of society. While there are pockets of people welcoming this cultural shift as a sign of women’s empowerment, women’s rights and freedom, many are skeptical about the cultural transformation that is undergoing in the society. Many are blaming the fact
that women are playing khuru as the main cause for natural disasters that struck the country recently. Such is the world of Bhutan where a lack of scientific understanding might still see natural disasters blamed on the actions of a group of people. Women playing khuru is viewed as unbecoming of women and is, therefore, associated with bad omens, forest fires, earthquakes, abnormal rainfalls that destroyed farm produce. Local gossip linked all these natural disasters to women playing khuru. Therefore, some people believe that women should be prohibited from playing khuru in order to prevent any future disasters.

Similarly, the latest rule imposed by Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs allowing women to wear only ada rachu (a long piece of a simple patterned woven fabric worn by women over their right shoulder on formal occasions and while visiting dzongs, monasteries, temples and offices) has sparked countless debates both on the mainstream and social media. My understanding of the ada rachu rule is, it was conceived by 20 male cultural officers during the sixth annual conference with the intent to create uniformity amongst common women and preserve tradition. Some people view this move as oppressive and a sign of suppression of the general population of women by taking away women’s rights and freedoms to choose to wear rachu of any color and pattern of their choice. These two instances demonstrate how experiences and the perspectives of men shape Bhutanese women’s way of life even today. So far, no women leaders have openly come forward to challenge the rule. This speaks volumes about the status of female leaders and their place in the leadership realm.

There are a couple of non-governmental organizations and autonomous agencies that look into promoting, protecting and reporting about women and women
related issues. What is crucial at this time is, a body of research that explores and archives Bhutanese women’s narratives, knowledges and experiences before the accounts of Bhutanese women become endangered. Research into the views of Bhutanese women can create an enabling environment for Bhutanese women to make a transition into leadership roles more comfortable. In Bhutan, female educational leaders can play a powerful role in changing the mindsets of students, especially girls. Women should be encouraged to empower the future generations of women.

Recommendations

The narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders revealed numerous facts about women in leadership positions, as well their status in Bhutanese society. The challenges and opportunities (though they are rare) faced by the female educational leaders, as well as my own experiences as a female school principal, facilitated me in arriving at the recommendations contained in this chapter. While I have touched upon some recommendations and blended them wherever they fit in the discussion, the following recommendations are made acknowledging that these areas need immediate attention to smooth the leadership path for Bhutanese female educational leaders in particular and Bhutanese women in general. The recommendations are both short term and long term.


Although the policy was crafted and implemented with good intent, it somehow lacks attention to integrating any tenets of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those concerning the promotion of gender that Bhutan pledged to achieve by 2015. The policy is a ‘one size fits all’ kind of a document meaning that the policy is not
gender sensitive and does not address any clear and systematic career pathways to academic achievement for women specifically. Developing a blanket policy will neither promote gender equity nor address any gender related issues. Reviewing THRP 2014 and incorporating the ways and means to empower female teachers are essential if Bhutan, as a nation and the Ministry of Education in particular, believe that having more female teachers as educational leaders will have a positive impact on education and the country.

**Gender responsive planning and budgeting.**

Achieving gender responsive planning and budgeting entails identifying interventions to address gender gaps in government policies, plans and budgets. In other words, it means including women, children and other minorities’ needs, and concerns and challenges in the planning and budgeting processes so that there is equitable development across all sectors of society. Investment in women and children is sometimes considered trivial and most often these marginalized groups slip through cracks of Bhutan’s developmental efforts. Though the idea of gender responsive planning and budgeting was conceived during the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, it has taken a considerable length of time for Bhutan to begin materialize these ideas.

Gender responsive planning and budgeting is highly recommended for the education sector, especially with regards to identifying potential female educational teachers and building leadership capacity in them. So far, only a limited number of female teachers have taken up school administrators’ roles and this seems to be tied to a lack of confidence and inspiration.
The remoteness of schools, many that are poorly maintained or are located away from a vehicle accessible road, and others that suffer from a dearth of decent accommodations, have further exacerbated the lack of female teachers in these locations, let alone the female administrators. Bhutanese decision makers, in consultation with gender experts, must develop long term plans and policies to make female educational leadership positions accessible even in remote places. Having females as school principals, especially in remote places, would reverse the narratives and experiences of the community as well as inspire more girls to attend school. Thus, decision makers must explore and provide solutions with as many possible strategies that include prioritizing and investing in building leadership capacity in female teachers, creating decent housing in order for all teachers to feel safe and comfortable, and providing remote living allowances depending on the remoteness of schools. These kinds of actions might do well to encourage female teachers who are on the threshold of leadership positions.

Women’s experiences in the construction of knowledge.

Almost all literature on Bhutan, including textbooks, history or non-fictions, acknowledge the role of men in shaping the culture, history, art, and religion in the nation. Women and their achievements are rarely recognized. Integrating women’s ways of leading, narratives and experiences in the construction of knowledge could serve as a broader foundation for building leadership capacity of women. This entails promoting research and archiving women’s narratives, particularly about their leadership styles and their contributions in creating Bhutan’s unique identity. Diversifying Bhutanese curriculum by including as many female figures as possible from all walks of life, geographic regions and religions, would provide different perspectives for Bhutanese
girls. Acknowledging women’s experiences and knowledge in the construction of knowledge also calls for honoring ordinary women, such as my own mother in achieving extraordinary knowledge, skills and services.

**Policies and plans from women’s perspectives.**

Framing Bhutanese policies and plans from the perspectives of women is an approach to incorporating women’s knowledge and experiences in the construction of knowledge. In many cases, rules and regulations are made for women by men who are in power, rather than involving women and acknowledging their rich experiences and knowledge in developing polices, government acts, and programs for women. Framing policies and plans that integrate women’s experiences will eventually support other women in realizing their potentials, making their leadership road more accessible. This recommendation encourages the recognition of women’s participation, opinions and knowledge.

**Women mentoring women programs.**

Mentoring is a relationship in which a more experienced or knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person. What is essentially missing in female leadership situations in Bhutan is mentoring; both formal and informal. Male teachers have access to both formal and informal mentoring and receive mentorship at both official and informal settings. This is because school administrator’s positions are dominated by men. Male teachers can easily connect, access and visualize themselves doing similar presentations. In reality, men can pick and choose to emulate any number of leadership mentors. Contrary are the accounts of female teachers in Bhutan and female teachers who cannot relish the luxurious number
of choices available to men. Introducing a female mentoring program is an approach that could be used to inspire leadership aspirations in women. Women trailblazers and role models, both present and past, could be honored either by acknowledging their achievements and engaging them as mentors. Trailblazers and role models are often unaware of the influence they are having on others. Introducing women as mentors or figures of inspirations will not only help future female educational leaders acquire leadership abilities and skills, it will also facilitate women in the construction of leadership styles and attitudes from a more feminist perspective. To move on, personal and planned mentorship must be encouraged. By personal mentoring, I am referring to a kind of mutual mentoring such as is found in friendship, because I believe good friends can help each other become more fully aware of who they are as individuals. To support planned mentoring, programs must be established to promote the development of women leaders.

**Leadership course at the tertiary level education.**

While some men seem to be naturally inclined towards leadership and leadership related work, women often need to be coaxed to take leadership positions, especially when it comes to applying for school administrators’ jobs. This may be based on the notion that leadership is linked to power, authority, who makes the decision, who is in control, and Bhutanese society has usually visualized men with such descriptions. Lambert and Gardner (2009), Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), and Regan and Brooks (1995) illuminate many overlooked narratives of female educational leaders in the West that I view as similar to the experiences of the participants in this study. Introducing women to leadership experiences, and the ideas and theories of leadership from different
perspectives at an initial stage in their career, will boost their ability to become more self-assured. These Bhutanese women may well then be able to fashion leadership styles according to their gender rather than to have male dominated leadership fashioning them. Introducing leadership courses at the B.Ed. level would also help women see themselves as leaders from an early stage of their teaching professional life. Initiating clubs or programs in schools related to empowering girls could have tremendous impact on girls in the later stage of their lives.

**Gender-equitable child raising practices.**

The feeling that men are better leaders than women often originates from cultures of child-rearing. Male and female children are raised differently in the Bhutanese culture. Raising a child without segregating disciplines, expectations, advices and household chores could promote a feeling of equity amongst both sexes in all spheres of capacities. This gender-equitable practice of raising children could ultimately lead to the development of an understanding that both men and women can be leaders and nurturers. Cultivating practices of a gender-equitable child-raising model would, not only help eliminate the feeling of superiority that some boys develop, but it could also broaden the acceptance level of boys for the leadership roles of women. This way they could eventually learn to accept girls as equal partners later in their lives. What is vital at this point in time is the need for parents to change their outlooks and behaviors in order to transform the attitudes and behaviors of their children, particularly those of sons. Rather than teaching children about gender equity and women empowerment verbally, the parental influence will be at its greatest if parents, especially fathers, consistently translate their words into actions. Many a times, children learn more
through demonstration and experiences than from explanations. Boudet et al, (2012) emphasized that the willingness of mothers and fathers to embrace gender equity in their children’s education can result in a significant change and could make future gender relations more equitable and harmonious.

**Men as caregivers and their participation in household work.**

According to Gender Policy Note 2013, perceptions about gender roles are changing and Bhutanese society as a whole is of the understanding that women should work outside home and men should play a greater role in child care. Women still bear the brunt of the household chores and also have less rest time, facing the double burden of working both outside and inside the home. The data also revealed that educated women in urban areas would like men to take up more responsibilities of household chores. The participants of this study also shared similar narratives and have expressed that having so much responsibilities both at home and at school is demotivating them from furthering their leadership aspirations. While some husbands extend their help at home, the support was confined mostly in helping their children with their school work. The number of women entering leadership realm would escalate if men participated equally as caregivers and participate in household chores. My understanding of men’s participation as caregivers and sharing household duties extends beyond the boundaries of being a disciplinary figure and handyman. It is about taking equal ownership of kitchen and laundry duties, and bearing the responsibility of feeding children, changing nappies, bathing, putting them to sleep, purchasing groceries and attending parent-teachers meeting on a regular basis. Undertaking such equality in household work and
being equal partners as caregivers would not only ease women in shouldering leadership roles but support an improved economy in the country.

**Conduct further research to better understand the gender gap in educational leadership.**

There is a huge gender gap in educational leadership in Bhutan. Though teaching is generally considered a feminine profession, male teachers outnumber the female teachers and almost all administrators positions are occupied by men. Out of 539 schools in Bhutan (Annual Education Statistics, 2015), only 11% have female administrators. Also, most elementary teachers are female and most upper level secondary teachers are male. Further research must be conducted in order to better understand the gender gap in educational leadership in Bhutan to close the gender gap in leadership.

**Research Limitations**

Although narrative inquiry methodology provided me with the opportunity to capture and understand the educational as well as personal experiences of female educational leaders in a male–directed profession, there were some research limitations that were outside my jurisdiction. It is undeniable that the experiences of the participants were diverse and not identical because of the diversity in the characteristics of the participants such as length of teaching and leadership career, the location, and the position of the participants. Integrating additional methods of participants’ selection could have increased the scope and depth of data analyses. For instance, data collection method of purposeful sampling could also be used to obtain and understand the experiences of
female educational leaders in Bhutan in depth. While through attention had been paid in analyzing the data, the scope and depth of discussion of the research could be further explored and taken to a next higher level. The ethical issues in research are always questionable and issues of validity, reliability, anonymity, and confidentiality could pose a challenge when presenting findings.

Conclusion

Teaching is a male dominated profession in Bhutan and men outnumber women in both teaching and administration. Female educational leaders occupy only 11% of formal leadership roles and being in the minority, the choices of how to lead are not only limited, but are constrained, by stereotypical expectations and beliefs. Exploring the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders brought to light the accounts of women who have trodden the path that is less travelled by many other Bhutanese women. Their tales of how they assumed, maintained and excelled in leadership while still confronting gender issues, juggling family life and breaking culture resistance, recognize them as trailblazers and role models. While their progress is limited by the stereotypical beliefs, they identified their leadership as distinct and unique from men and they hold pride in crafting their own leadership despite the turmoil and confusion they go through within themselves in establishing the identity. In a nutshell, the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders constructed their own identity and have paved a path for future female educational leaders. Their stories are not only treasures of knowledge but they can serve as a launching pad for those who are inclined towards examining leadership from feminist perspectives. Insights I have gained from the narratives, knowledge I have acquired from literature, and lessons I have learned
from my own personal experiences as a female educational leader can be threaded together to construct a new image of me that I would like to see in others.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

Exploring the narratives of female educational leaders was a fulfilling journey. The experiences narrated by the participants not only revealed the status of some female educational leaders in Bhutan, but their experiences subtly revealed the tales of dispositions within the male-dominated system and the priorities men seem to set. Examining the experiences of these women empowered me to locate my own positioning within a male-dominated society, and I have realized that the narratives I have collected here and my own stories weave perfectly, becoming one seamless tale. It is our combined experiences that have become the essence of this study.

In the literature review, I evaluated leadership and examined that concept from feminist perspectives. The in-depth exploration of feminism and feminist theories in relation to female educational leaders’ voices enabled me to critique leadership concepts and reflect on my own leadership practices. Traditionally, leadership has been constructed from male perspectives within Bhutanese society. What is disappointing to me is the maintenance of this tradition by women in this research in ‘becoming one of the boys’. The enormity of the literature available about women and leadership is disproportionate to the number of women in leadership positions and Bhutan is no exception to this. The circumstance many women find themselves in has made me think that women are getting only lip service and there is still an immense amount of work to complete in order for women to successfully integrate into more leadership roles.

Although my literature review was assessed primarily from a Western context, and almost all the references are from the experiences of white women, the accounts of
the research participants echoed the voices in the literature. Gender and its related issues were the common threads that bound the different ethnicities of women together even though many examples were worlds apart. The experiences of Bhutanese female educational leaders and the connections with the literature revealed that gender continues to be a big challenge for many women all over the world.

Throughout my doctoral study, Connelly and Clandinin’s (2006) three-dimensional approach of examining temporality, sociality and place guided my understanding in interpreting the experiences and establishing meanings of the events. Rather than merely describing their experiences of what happened, I explored the narratives of Bhutanese female educational leaders from the vantage point of what it means by assigning meanings to their experiences. I also approached my data with the understanding that sociality, temporality and place are interconnected and interwoven (Clandinin, 2013) and past experiences influence present, and future experiences are shaped by present experiences (Dewey, 1938). In this study, fifteen female educational leaders shared their experiences of what it means to be a school leader and it was the stories of their constructed realities that grounded my analysis.

My hunt for research participants was noteworthy. I tried to explore the narratives of both private school and government school principals, however, the private school female principals whom I contacted refused to participate. I am still perplexed about what must have restricted them from sharing their experiences. The interest of the research participants from the government schools was enormous and the sincerity of their participation was demonstrated by their sharing of their experiences enthusiastically and honestly. As a middle class woman born and raised in Bhutan, I
could not detach my own experiences from their narratives and I felt the weight of their experiences as educational leaders in a male-centered society. While some participants were not concerned about what they shared, a few participants wanted their identity to remain confidential. The uneasiness expressed by those participants regarding the disclosure their identity made me contemplate the nature of my study and its impact on the system.

Narratives can recognize power differences between men and women in society and in schools (Regan & Brooks, 1995) and my study exposes the inequality and power imbalance between men and women in Bhutan. Since the research is grounded on the epistemology of constructivism, and an interpretivist theoretical underpinning, the validity and reliability of my research rests on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the participants/data/narratives unlike empirical research that would rely on the production of scientific knowledge gained through direct observation, testing and measurement (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The five themes of (1) inadvertent leadership, 2) gender is the paramount challenge, 3) situational leadership, 4) community role model, 5) liberal feminist were highlighted in my dissertation and have shed light on some intriguing concerns about what it means to be a female educational leader in a male-dominated society. Also discussed were the negotiations these women must make in defining their own understanding of leadership from feminist perspectives. Shouldering the role of negotiator has put Bhutanese female educational leaders in a complex situation where they neither belong to conventional nor modern concepts of leadership. Participants held
cultural, patriarchal and gendered expectations responsible for the complexities they endure.

Another remarkable discovery was that although the participants were not fluent with feminist theories and the works of feminism, their thoughts and actions corresponded with liberal feminism ideals. While the concept of feminism and feminist theories have evolved over time and liberal feminist model may seem antiquated, especially in context to the West. The fact that Bhutanese female educational leaders identify themselves as liberal feminists seems to rests on Bhutan’s policy of isolation until 1960s. Bhutanese female educational leaders’ beliefs are grounded in liberal feminism and their perception of leadership can be used as a reference point to delve deeper into developing leadership from a developing feminist perspectives. Although feminism in Bhutan seems to be at an infant stage, I am certain that over time, the understanding of feminism would evolve. Their narratives provide a good starting point for women to ruminate on leadership roles, deciding whether or not they should continue with the current practice and mimic their male role models, or innovate their own leadership practices in a way that really expresses a female perspective. Rethinking leadership is essential. If Bhutan does not move forward we might be stranded in the traditional mind set of leadership as legitimate authority and managerial control (Regan & Brooks, 1995) for decades. Love, care, nurturance, and compassion are the language participants used in describing themselves as female educational leaders and their language conflicts with the traditional administrative language of power, control and hierarchy. How do we integrate the two different languages? This study proposes a new form of much needed understanding and negotiation.
While this study is the first of its kind in the Bhutanese context for female educational leaders, there are a couple of other studies on gender in Bhutan that have been conducted, most notably by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) in 2013. That research suggested various approaches in promoting gender equality. Acknowledging the NCWC study’s findings and its recommendations are imperative for change to take shape, and implementing the recommendations demand integrity and righteousness from policy and decision makers. Often, in Bhutan, recommendations are overlooked and policies seem to impede change and development. Instead, policies and practices that empower women must be strategized in such a way that they complement and supplement each other to determine the best approaches to creating an enabling environment that includes consultation with women. My recommendations for promoting female educational leaders are practical and are drawn from the rich experiences of my participants.

By bringing out the experiences of Bhutanese female educational leaders, I have prepared the ground for future researchers who are interested in embarking on a study of female educational leadership research. Using my study as a baseline, I expect that additional educational research may be completed that will eventually create a society that is more receptive and accepting of women’s way of leading.
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APPENDIX A

**Interview Questions**

The primary question guiding my research is: what are the narratives of female educational leaders in Bhutan? A secondary question is: what are the challenges and opportunities of these women in their career path to leadership? In order to seek out data for my research questions, I will ask the following questions from the participants:

**Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**Personal/professional Information**

1) How many years have you been teaching? What do you teach?

2) How many years have you been a principal?

3) Who inspired you to take up a leadership role?

4) How many years have you been a principal in this school?

5) Describe this school in terms of size, community, and other attributes important to you?

**Leadership Information**

1) What does the term leadership mean to you?

6) What are the core values you hold regarding leadership?

2) How do you describe yourself as a principal?

3) How does your staff define your leadership?

4) What do your students think of your leadership?

5) What does the community think of your leadership?

7) What type of leadership do you practice?
Feminism

1) What does the term feminism mean to you?

2) How does feminism influence your daily life?

3) To what degree are Bhutanese women aware of feminist theory?

4) How would you describe feminist educational leadership?

5) What do you feel are the main tenets of feminism?

6) What feminist thought do you believe in?

Feminist leadership

1) How would you describe feminist leadership?

2) What makes feminist leadership distinct from conventional leadership?

3) What advantages are associated with feminist leadership?

Feminist leadership practices

1) Do you feel that feminism influences your leadership practices? If so, how?

2) When have you felt most like a feminist educational leader? (Narrate an event)

3) When have you felt the least like a feminist leader? (Narrate an event)

4) Do you observe any challenges/opportunities with regard to feminist leadership?
APPENDIX B

Letter Seeking Approval to Collect Research Data

The Director General

Department of School Education

Ministry of Education

Thimphu, Bhutan

Subject: Seeking approval to conduct educational research

Sir,

I am Karma Dema, Principal of Yangchengatshel Lower Secondary School, currently a third year PhD student in the Faculty of Education at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree, I am required to undertake research, analyze data, and write a dissertation. The title of my dissertation is Narrative Inquiry Based Exploration of Life Stories of Female Educational Leaders in Bhutan and it is reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick, Canada.

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of female educational leaders and bring it to light the perception of leadership from feminist perspectives. The aim of the study is to examine the opportunities and challenges of female educational leadership. In my attempt to explore the experiences of female educational leaders, their challenges and opportunities in a male dominated profession, I have adopted the narrative inquiry paradigm by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as its methodology. To assist me in my methodology and search for these answers, I intend to interview female educational leaders from three different districts as my research
participants and they will be selected through purposeful snowball sampling where researcher intentionally select individual or sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. Their participation in my research will contribute to understanding of women’s place in the Bhutanese society and it will help women leaders in locating their awareness of themselves as female educational leaders and thereby contribute in defining and redefining educational leadership concept.

Thus, I am writing this letter seeking your approval to interview female educational leaders from three different districts for my doctoral research. Should you have any questions concerning the study, please contact me at (506) 259-2403 / kdema@unb.ca or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Ann Sherman at (506) 471-1520 / shermana@unb.ca. If you wish, you may also contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, UNB at (506) 447-3294 or by e-mail at dwagner@unb.ca.

Sincerely,

Karma Dema

PhD student, UNB
The District Education Officer,
Dzongkhag Administration,

Subject: Permission to interview principals for research

Dear Sir,

I am Karma Dema, Principal of Yangchengatshel Lower Secondary School, currently a third year PhD student in the Faculty of Education at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree, I am required to undertake research, analyze data, and write a dissertation. The title of my dissertation is *Narrative Inquiry Based Exploration of Life Stories of Female Educational Leaders in Bhutan*. My research proposal is reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick, Canada. I have also received approval from the Director General, Department of School Education, Ministry of Education, Bhutan and it is attached herewith for your information.

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of female educational leaders and bring to light the perception of leadership from feminist perspectives. The aim of the study is to examine the opportunities and challenges of female educational leadership. In my attempt to exploring the lived experiences of female educational leaders, their challenges and opportunities in a male dominated
profession, I have adopted the narrative inquiry paradigm by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as its methodology. To assist me in my methodology and search for these answers, I intend to interview female educational leaders from your district as my research participants. Their participation in my research will contribute to understanding of women’s place in the Bhutanese society and it will help women leaders in locating their understanding of themselves as female educational leaders and thereby contribute in deconstructing educational leadership concept. I have not identified the schools in your district and request your recommendation as to who should participate for my study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will take place outside school hours. I intend to use one-on-one interviews to collect research data.

Thus, I am writing this letter seeking your approval to interview female educational leaders from your dzongkhag for my doctoral research. The study will be conducted from December 2014 through January 2015. Should you have any questions concerning the study, please contact me at (506) 259-2403 / kdema@unb.ca or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Ann Sherman at (506) 471-1520 / shermana@unb.ca. If you wish, you may also contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, UNB at (506) 447-3294 or by e-mail at dwagner@unb.ca.

Sincerely,

Karma Dema
PhD student, UNB
A Letter of Information and Invitation to Participants

To: ………………………………..

………………………………

December 15, 2014

Subject: Request to participate in the study

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am Karma Dema, Principal of Yangchengatshel Lower Secondary School, currently a third year PhD student in the Faculty of Education at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, Canada. In partial fulfillment of the requirements for my degree, I am required to undertake research, analyze data, and write a dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is *Narrative Inquiry Based Exploration of Life Stories of Female Educational Leaders in Bhutan* and it is reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University Of New Brunswick.

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of female educational leaders and bring to light the perception of leadership from feminist perspectives. The aim of the study is to examine the opportunities and challenges of female educational leadership. In my attempt to explore the lived experiences of female educational leaders and their challenges and opportunities in a male dominated profession, I have adopted the narrative inquiry paradigm by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as its methodology. To assist me in my methodology and search for these answers, I intend to interview female educational leaders from three different districts as my research participants selected through snowball sampling. Their participation in my
research will contribute to understanding of women’s place in the Bhutanese society and it will help women leaders in locating their understanding of themselves as female educational leader thereby contribute in defining and redefining educational leadership concept.

Since you hold vast lived experiences and stories of performing as an educational leader in a male dominated profession, I have selected you as one of the participants through the recommendation of District Education Officer. The participation is strictly confidential because I have selected only few participants from the list recommended by DEO. In addition, your participation is totally voluntary and you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for any reason.

The 30-40 minutes one-on-one interviews will be scheduled at a suitable location and time convenient to you. The interviews will be audio taped to ensure that no information is lost and also recorded in a field book as support in the event that the audio recording does not work. Your responses shared with me will remain strictly confidential. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only I will know your identity as a participant. I will not identify participants by name, place of residence, or specific school affiliation. However, I may identify responses by job role since my study intends to report differing responses from district education officers, principals, and teachers.

All audiocassettes, field notes and transcribed data will be protected in a locked cabinet, and data stored in a computer/laptop will be secured by creating security password known only to me. The research findings will be made available to you after completion through email. You will also have an opportunity during the data analysis to
check the accuracy of my perceptions and understandings of your responses. You can check and approve transcripts, and edit your contributions as you wish.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study. The expected benefits associated with your participation are the rich narratives about your experiences as a school leader. Your participation will deepen our understanding of female educational leaders and their position in a Bhutanese society. Your involvement in this study will help in reconstructing the very essence of leadership from feminist perspectives. In particular, you will be asked to share your leadership stories and experiences; challenges and opportunities in your leadership profession.

Should you have any questions concerning the study, please contact me at (506) 259-2403 / kdema@unb.ca or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Ann Sherman at (506) 471-1520 / shermana@unb.ca. If you wish, you may also contact Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, UNB at (506) 447-3294 or by e-mail at dwagner@unb.ca. If you agree to participate in this study on the above terms, please sign the consent form attached. Thank you for your time and consideration for this request and I look forward to working with you on this study.

Sincerely,

Karma Dema

PhD student, UNB
APPENDIX E

Participant’s Consent Form

Statement of Consent

I have read the above description of the research project and the researcher has clarified my queries to my satisfaction. I understand the purposes of this research and my role as a research participant. I ____________________________(please print), agree to participate in this study.

__________________________ _______________________
(Participant’s signature) (Date)

***********************************************************************

To the best of my ability, I, Karma Dema have explained the purpose, objectives, and the nature of this study to _______________________________, and I have clarified all of his/her queries about the research topic.

__________________________ _______________________

To the best of my ability, I, Karma Dema have explained the purpose, objectives, and the nature of this study to _______________________________, and I have clarified all of his/her queries about the research topic.
CURRICULUM VITAE

Universities attended (with dates & degree obtained)

2012-2017  PhD candidate, University of New Brunswick

2008-2009  Master of Education, Leadership & Management, St. Francis Xavier University

1996-1999  Bachelor of Education (Social Studies), Samtse College of Education, Bhutan

Publication:


Professional Development:

- Documentation of Learning, Saint John, NB, 2013
- Cultural Construction of Childhood, UNB, NB, 2013
- Philosophy of Education, UNB, NB, 2012
- National leadership trainer on Instructional Leadership and Differentiated Instruction, Bhutan, Ministry of Education, 2011
- ICT Integrated Teaching, Singapore, 2011
- Trainer of Trainer on Life Skills Education, Thailand and Bhutan, 2004-2008
- Curriculum writing for Non Formal Education, Bhutan, 2011
- Education in Emergencies, UNICEF, Bhutan, 2011
- Cultural Diversity in Education, St FX, NS, 2009

Professional Experiences

- Lower secondary school principal (pp-viii) school principal, 2008-2012
- Developing and implementing curriculum, policies, school administration and management, community development and relationship, human resource management
- Grade V English and grade VIII science teacher, 2010-1012
- Grade VIII geography teacher, 2010-2012
- Grade IX and X social studies teacher, 2000-2007
• Promotion of literacy program through an introduction of reading week, poem recitation, writing club, extempore speech, Tuesday tales, dramatization and reading theatre