

YOUR STORY IS YOUR STRENGTH:
DEVELOPING AN ETHIC OF CARE THROUGH
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

by Jessica L. Gaffney

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my son, Noah and my daughter, Ireland. May you always find that your ability to care for others and the world around you helps make this world a better place for all. I love you both so very much!

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I would first like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Bernhagen, Dr. St. Maurice and Dr. Bork. I learned so much through this process, not just about education and leadership, but how to be a good mentor and leader. Dr. St. Maurice, the magic you are able to work as an editor continues to amaze me. More than your editing skills, I appreciate your wit and your kindness as you nudged me along and reminded me that the work I am doing is meaningful and necessary. Dr. Bork, jumping in late in the process, you never missed a beat. You instantly helped improve my work and quickly move me to the finish line. You were the sound, rational voice I needed. Dr. Bernhagen, the opportunity to learn and grow under your mentorship has been an experience that has forever changed me. Your no-nonsense approach to the process helped when things got tough. Thank you for being there the day the dot over the i broke me. When I wanted to walk away, you believed in me more than I could ever believe in myself.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how transformative-learning theory supported the development of an ethics of care among seven students participating in a women's leadership development program and how their learning can foster sustainability. Through a leadership program designed to infuse the development of an ethics of care into a general-education curriculum with transformative and feminist pedagogical techniques, participants were challenged to explore how their own experiences influence ways that they acquire knowledge and practiced care for others and the natural world. Data were collected through a process of narrative inquiry using a semi-structured interview format. Themes emerged through the use of storytelling that could help educators and administrators understand how to develop educational programs for women that support and value their unique experiences fostered by women's ways of knowing.

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Overview

Chapter 1 includes sections stating the problem and purpose of this study. A section defines terms. Sections on theoretical framework and positionality explain my background and why certain theories and approaches were used in this project. The significance section states outcomes that can be used by higher education administrators. Chapter 2 is a review of literature on ethics, transformative learning, and connections between these two concepts with sustainability education. Chapter 3 presents the context, purpose, and design of the study. The data plan for collection and analysis is described, and potential ethical issues, bias limitations and delimitations are reviewed. Chapter 4 shows findings. Chapter 5 concludes this study with a discussion of key findings and provides recommendations on how these findings can be used in future settings.

Chapter 1. Introduction

I am a doctoral student in the inaugural cohort of a first-of-its-kind professional doctoral (Ed.D.) program in the field of educational sustainability. Educational sustainability is a growing field of interdisciplinary study with the goal to enact sustainable change toward social, cultural, environmental, and economically viable communities, globally. To achieve this, the United Nations has set forth 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to target unsustainable ways our current systems, from large nations to small communities and villages, are living (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, n.d.). These 17 goals, agreed upon by all members of the United Nations, serve as an outline with specific strategies that focus on ending poverty and inequality, addressing climate change, improving health and education, and stabilizing and growing the economy. Just as a program in educational sustainability is interdisciplinary, so must be our work toward sustainable development. The interconnected topics of sustainability link environmental issues, highlighted in the media, with social justice and economic livelihood for “the ability to meet the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 8). To effectively meet the challenges of current unsustainable ways of living, focus can be placed on moral action and the important role that education plays in helping create a model that includes strategies to highlight social change and social justice (Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012).

Problem Statement

Underpinned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a continued focus on providing a quality education and focusing on gender equality, the purpose of SDG 4 is to promote equality in and improve the quality of educational systems. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) asserts that SDG 4 requires an

examination of how women are participating in education (i.e., access), and within education (i.e., content and context), practiced (i.e., delivery modes, and assessments), and through education (i.e., learning outcomes, opportunities in life and work) (UN Women, n.d.).

Robinson and Moraes Robinson (2014) defined sustainability as the quality of relationships within a system or organization and argue that recognizing the connections and lived experiences of the participants allows for a more authentic approach to sustainability. Their focus on “holonomics” is a new way of looking at our current systems and redefining these systems to focus more on four ways of knowing often displayed by authentic leaders: thinking, feeling, sensing and intuition (pp. 46-48). Although sustainability should and often does have a strong focus on the environment, a shift how we educate future leaders to embrace these four ways of knowing lead to sustainability (Willis, Steier, & Stillman, 2015).

Gilligan (1982) explored women’s moral development and an ethics of care as it relates to morality. Gilligan defined ethics of care as an alternative approach to moral development, more often displayed by women, or associated with feminine traits. Moral development, as established by Kohlberg (1981), was based on an ethics of justice that focused on autonomy and independence and was more commonly displayed by men and associated with masculine traits. Gilligan found that women’s abilities, whether innate or socialized, are first to care for others, and lead them to make decisions based on relationships and responsibilities. Intuition is evident as a way that women create knowledge and make moral decisions (Belenky et al., 1986) and supported by Robinson and Moraes Robinson (2014) as a way to lead for leaders to embrace sustainability. Belenky and her colleagues explored how an education system allows women to practice and grow these abilities, leading to change for themselves and others. They asserted that women should be exposed to learning that expands their knowledge to create, validates their

experiences, and promotes connected and relational ways of thinking and acting. In an educational setting that supports this type of learning, students can begin to challenge their previously held beliefs about women's role in society, thereby reconstructing ways they view agency women hold towards a sustainable future.

Purpose & Research Questions

Drawing from feminist theory and transformative-learning theory, and by examining the narrative that comes with the development of the ethic of care, the lives and experiences of women students participating in a Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) were explored.

Specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions:

- How does transformative-learning theory foster the development of an ethic of care for students participating in a leadership development program?
- How and in what ways does their learning foster sustainability?

A glossary of terms used in this study is in Appendix A.

Context

This study focused on a newly developed Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) at a small, non-profit, liberal arts university in the midwestern United States. The purpose of the study was to explore the use of transformative-learning theory in a general-education curriculum design to understand if it fosters the development of an ethics of care, a change of view of self, values, beliefs and characteristics, in regards to leadership skills, and how that equates to sustainability. The institute was designed to serve students transferring from two-year associate degree programs to bachelor's degree programs. The four-year institution has a rich history of serving associate degree transfer students through a robust adult education program. Through this unique collaborative program, entering students were exposed to a variety of formal and

informal learning opportunities that engaged them in a transformative learning process. These learning opportunities focused on growing their leadership skills and abilities through a relational caring lens, and, in turn, develop the skills necessary to address and implement sustainability initiatives in their homes, communities and places of work.

To truly embrace sustainability in higher education, both policy and practice need to be approached holistically to identify ways that true fundamental change can occur within the higher education paradigm (Sterling, 2004). The design of the Women's Leadership Institute looked at both policy, such as the transfer process, costs, support, and program design, along with the practice or curriculum and pedagogy. Through the use of transformative-learning theory, learning activities were designed to challenge students' previously held beliefs about women's roles as leaders and women's roles in society. Learning activities were designed collaboratively with instructors for the courses and me, as the director of the WLI. Activities focused on the use of storytelling and reflection with an emphasis on exploring previous life experiences of participants in the institute and opportunity to reflect on growth and change. This focus on change was imperative to also reach the goal of developing students towards becoming leaders who work toward a socially and ecologically just world. As Moore (2005) indicated, programs that focus on socio-ecological sustainability education "must be interdisciplinary, collaborative, experiential and potentially transformative" (p. 78). The design of the WLI included all these characteristics.

Theoretical Framework

When thinking about how to theoretically situate my research, the most logical choice was through a feminist lens, focusing on a postmodern view of knowledge creation that places subjective life experiences and influences from society and culture at the heart of creating

personal truths (Elichaooff & Frost, 2014). Grounded in the concept that power and resources are unequally distributed between men and women, favoring men, feminist theory seeks to explain and ultimately change the inequality that exists because of gender (Little, 2014). Feminism has existed since the 19th century, but the focus has changed throughout three distinct periods of time, often referred to as waves. For this study, the feminist theory I draw from comes from third-wave feminism, which concerns globalization and diversity (versus the early waves, which focused more on women's suffrage, work, and reproductive rights). Although feminist theory often takes as its focus the intersectionality of gender, race, and other identity characteristics, for this research project, this was not explored in detail, but may be present during the inquiry process. This project sought to capture the widely diverse experiences that each of the participants have had in their lives and share them in a way that is respectful of the context in which they were shared (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p.347).

As part of my feminist approach to this project, I am using feminine ethics of care to frame my analysis. Feminine ethics of care contrasts a more masculine approach to moral development that places emphasis on justice as a rational approach to morality; one that is consistent with "reason, mind and self" (Gilligan, 2011, p. 23). Men typically prefer a hierarchy, or order to systems, that establishes position and authority. A feminine ethics of care connects mind, body, and emotion, and applies this to decision making and building relationships. To look at the feminine ethics of care is to acknowledge and embrace qualities that are common for women. A system in which women thrive is one that is interconnected and reciprocal. Feminist theory helps us see that although there are differences, men and women are equal. One is not better than the other, and differences can occur, but differences do not equate to inferiority (Gilligan, 1982).

As we continue to live in a society that is based on patriarchal norms, exploration into the feminine ethics of care, for my purposes, remains placed in the feminist framework. I also sought to expand from considerations of an ethics of care being reserved for women and that of an ethics of justice is reserved for men. Rather, the ethics of care includes traits that are distinguishable by their more feminine and relational qualities and those of an ethics of justice that tend to be more masculine and identifiable by their attempts to seek what is right and autonomous (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). By adjusting our system to be more inclusive of both views and treat both approaches equitably, we can create a more inclusive world.

Although feminist theory is the overarching theory that guided my study, other theories that support a feminist pedagogical approach to education compliment it. Transformative learning, a subset of adult learning theory, also informed the development of the curriculum and the learning outcomes of the institute. Mezirow (2000) explained, in the theory of transformative learning, adult learners have experiences that challenge their previous worldviews, and through the educational process, learners grow, reflect, and change. Eventually this shift in meaning creates a more inclusive worldview (Mezirow, 1991). The outcome of transformative learning is ultimately to empower learners to change previously held beliefs and perspectives to create a more sustainable worldview (Moore, 2005). Social change can be addressed through various methodologies and approaches that include a focus on our relationships with each other but also our relationships with the natural world (Cranton, 2016). Historically, higher education has used content-based learning to provide learners the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to gain access to careers and opportunity (Dunn & Hart-Steffes, 2012). Transformative learning tends to go against norms of value-neutral education by requiring a more holistic, learner-centered approach to learning (Blake, Sterling & Goodson, 2013). A move to include social change and

social justice as part of the overall mission of higher education lays the foundation for a more interconnected system focusing on the environment, economy, and society. Transformative learning is best situated in settings where learners are safe and through the creation of a trusting relationship with the instructor and peers, can explore differing worldviews than those that they previously held.

Significance of the Study

There has been a great deal of research on access to education for women (Belenky et al., 1986; Clover, 1995; Fraser, 1989; Jackson, 1997; Merriam, Cafferella & Baumgartner, 2006), yet little research on improving our systems to be inclusive of women's lived experiences in education. Inclusion of women's ways of knowing and relational connections allows students the opportunity to redefine their own roles in society and to work toward societal transformation of the role of women. This research aims to position relational knowledge and diverse ways of knowing as central to pluralistic and sustainable educational strategies.

Transformative learning seeks to provide learners with the tools and opportunities to challenge previously held assumptions and to create a changed way of thinking and being (Mezirow, 1991, 1998, 2000; Cranton, 2006, 2016). As such, transformative learning is often used to promote sustainability in programs that focus on building agency towards a more sustainable future (Burns, 2011; Lange, 2018; Moore, 2005; Sterling, 2001, 2010). Kroth and Cranton (2014) explained that there is an abundance of stories that exist in education about the transformative experiences of students. As the SDGs make clear, to truly enact education as sustainability, it is important to not only include but elevate women's role in sustainability by transitioning current pedagogy to be more inclusive of women's voices and learning. This

research responds to that imperative by bringing together theories on transformative learning as well as those on best practices for adult education.

Research on transformative learning has typically been qualitative but has often been done through a retrospective interview process (Stuckey, Taylor & Cranton, 2014). Emergent trends in transformative learning research at this writing include the use of case studies and narrative inquiries. A great deal of research on transformative learning has been theoretical, but more research is needed on its practical application (Taylor, as cited in Moore, 2005). Given that the research has been limited in the practical application of transformative learning and research has proven to be time consuming (Moore, 2005), the smaller sample size, established program of the WLI and the use of narrative to gather learners' experiences could be important to future educators considering program design in higher education. This study aimed to provide actionable practices to foster transformative learning in higher education. Its future impact could foster the creation of equitable education systems that support women's ways of knowing.

This qualitative approach to understanding the use of transformative learning and its efficacy in an educational program designed for women, could likewise be used in a broader approach of action research for this study (Mills, 2018). In my role as director of the WLI, the creation and development of the program was my responsibility. Through the use of action research and the narrative inquiry process, I was able to look holistically at both the design of the program and the experiences of the students in the program to critically examine the effects the WLI had on students' lives and to build a stronger program for the future. I was also able to take a "reflective stance" (Mills, 2018, p. 17) on my own program development and teaching to make changes and improve for the future. This study could assist administrators and faculty in

designing programs and courses that better serve women students, ultimately fostering sustainability.

Positionality

The idea to establish the WLI began after a significant life experience that left me questioning my own ability as a woman leader. I have always been drawn to leadership positions where I can engage with team members and help facilitate growth and development within the team and individually. Using tools such as the StrengthsFinder 2.0 (Rath, 2017) and resources from organizations such as The Table Group and Heath Brothers, I have always believed that a dynamic, connected team could be a high-functioning one. After a change in administration at the higher education institution where I was working, I was demoted by a long-standing supervisor who did not agree with my style of leadership, and who had convinced the new president that I was an unfit leader because of the authentic and relational way I interacted with my team. Shortly after the demotion, a group of superiors at the institution, including the Provost and three Deans, approached the president to voice concern that he was misguided in his view of me and worked together to establish a new position for me: director of the WLI. In a follow-up meeting with the President, he shared with me that he was led to believe that, because I cared too much for the people I supervised, I wasn't holding them to a high standard of work. I had always known that by practicing my own leadership from a place of care versus power I would risk looking weak, and yet I found myself at a loss when accused of caring *too much*, something I never thought possible. At this point in my career and education I decided to focus my own research on exploring the program that I developed with transformative learning and an ethic of care as the driving framework. My exploration is a test to uncover how this type of program promotes change agency in women as relational leaders and how growth of these types of traits

might lead to a more just and sustainable world. By using my own personal experiences to motivate, create, and instill change, my hope was to help other women learn that leading from a place of care is not only important but *necessary* to create a more sustainable world.

As part of the significance of this study, along with my role as the director of the WLI, I incorporated a style of writing into this study called scholarly personal narrative (Bradley and Nash, 2012). This style of prose is not typical in scholarly writing, but it combines my professional experiences as a higher education administrator and as the program director of the WLI with my personal experiences as a woman and as a leader, allowing me to share my own story along with the stories of the student program participants. This approach is unique in that I at times use an *I* voice that is candid and personal while upholding the intent to remain academic in my style of writing.

Since beginning the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point's doctoral program in Educational Sustainability in August of 2017, change has been an ever-present theme in my thoughts and my learning. To fully accept and move through the process of change, and educate others on it, it is important for me to identify first who I am, and secondly what I believe. These understandings increase my awareness of my philosophical beliefs, worldviews and shortcomings to create a more conducive environment for engaging in further learning and research. I am a 40-year-old, White woman. I am a mother of two, a wife, an academic professional, and a human being. I have a professional background in mental-health counseling and administration of adult-education programs. I grew up in the midwestern United States and have never formally lived outside of this region. Growing up, I attended parochial school and was a baptized member of the Roman Catholic Church. As I have grown older, I have found that my adult beliefs do not always align with formalized religion. Rather, I have realized my

connection to a humanistic belief system, placing value on reason, hope and compassion instead of in a divine being. In my academic and professional background in the field of mental health, the theoretical approach that I most closely aligned with was cognitive behavioral therapy: helping clients understand their rational and irrational beliefs and how this understanding could help them deal with emotional and behavioral concerns (Ellis, 1962).

As I continue my work in adult education settings, I have become increasingly aware of the combined importance of cognition and emotions in the learning process, and I place value on the learner as a whole person. As O'Neil (2017) stated, "recent findings in neuroscience confirm holistic and transformative-learning theories that have long argued that the body and emotion play a critical role in the learning process" (p. 272). The connection to mind and body, cognitive and emotional aspects of learning, reinforce my belief in holistic learning as a theoretical framework and help me understand my approach to the learning process. This understanding guides my work in creating and promoting transformational learning experiences.

Acknowledging experiences of the learner prior to, during and following education, allows me to respect the differences of each individual learner. I also believe that education does not need to occur only in formal settings, rather it can be informal or nonformal as well.

To fully develop my positionality, it is important to acknowledge my femaleness. As shared earlier, I am a mom and wife, but I am also a daughter, a sister, a best friend, and a feminist. I embrace the role of a matriarch in a world that is still predominantly a patriarchy, and I rely on the voice of moral reasoning and intuition to guide me in my ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). I understand that with my current status as a middle-class, white woman, I have the privilege of having my story heard through this research and through my role in society. In this position, it is important to use this role to ensure that

other's stories are heard and that these stories can help define the future of our educational system.

My epistemological view is one of relativism, or that truth is relative to the learner and their life experiences and understanding of the world. I also believe that life experiences are different for men and women and affect their learning process in different ways. When approached with conflict, I reason within the morality of responsibility and care, seeking understanding versus judgement and looking to use collaborative dialoguing to come to consensus. Education, through a lens of feminist pedagogy, means we should encourage all learners, male, female, transgender and gender non-conforming, to respect the needs and understand the voice of each learner as an individual who brings unique experiences to the learning process (Jackson, 1997). Education encourages social transformation leading learners to a revised view of themselves that enables them to approach their lives in more sustainable ways. Education professionals should embrace a role of co-learner, not authoritative figure. By dismantling hierarchy in the classroom, and focusing on the relationships that exist, education and educators can focus on the human and experiential part of learning expanding knowledge beyond just content. As a student and a future sustainability educator, recognizing my connection to the philosophies of humanism, feminism and holism helps to shape my theoretical framework and approach to education and the learning process. Whole person learning theory, transformative sustainable learning and feminist theory build my belief system and ground me in who I am, what I believe and why. Understanding of this guides me to a level of awareness that enhances my experience as an educator and allows me to create a learning environment that is open and conducive to the learning process for all learners.

Summary

Education that supports sustainability needs to promote gender equality that allows women to explore the feminine moral trait of an ethics of care and connect it to leadership development. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore a Women's Leadership Institute designed using transformative-learning theory and to understand the impacts on the participants' changing views of gender, society, and themselves as a result of the institute. Using a feminist lens and transformative-learning theory as the theoretical framework supports a qualitative approach to research that examined participants previous experiences in education and society to determine if change occurred and how this change can foster sustainability.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This review of literature is in five sections. The first section explores the gendered history of the Western education system. The second defines a feminist approach to ethics and learning. The third section reviews studies of differences between ethics of justice, which are more masculine approaches to moral development, and an ethics of care, which are more feminine. The fourth section is an overview of transformative-learning theory, including both the history and current application in higher education. Finally, the fifth section reviews studies of women's life experiences.

Gendered History of the School System

The western school system, one that is rooted in individual success (Carson & Wilson, 1984), or hierarchy, instead of a collaborative systematic approach, was established by men, for the education of men (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). Dualistic and centric thinking perpetuates a system of hierarchy and domination in our school system (Martusewicz et al., 2015). In the early years, women were only allowed to access the institution of school to learn to read and write script to ensure their religious studies. It wasn't until the industrial revolution, when men entered the arena of business and economy, that women were charged with the education of children to uphold religious teachings but also to ensure that children were taught to be good citizens. White women were trained in Common or Normal Schools in the profession of teaching and other professions that were typically reserved for women such as nursing and social work. Women were paid less for doing the same work as men and not allowed to marry or have children of their own. Often, people believed that women were not able to be intellectually challenged as this would take their energy away from the ability to bear and nourish children.

This form of dualistic thinking about education, and the role of educators continued through the 1960's as a second wave of feminism began and with this brought new laws such as the Title VII of Civil Rights Act and Title IX of the higher education act of 1972 that made illegal different treatment of individuals based on gender in schools that received federal funds. This law led to women asserting equity in social demands including equal access to economic and educational opportunities or equal pay for equal work. Although curricula have improved, sexism continues today and is evident in STEM fields where the numbers have been stagnant since 1990, highlighting that though the laws may have changed, socialization through education continues to encourage women towards pink-collar careers (Martusewicz et al., 2015).

Sex stereotyping and bias in K-12 schools and higher education curriculum and pedagogy became apparent during the transition of women entering formalized education and still exists today. Research in this area uncovered what is commonly known as syntax of sexism (Martusewicz et al., 2015, p. 176). Hidden within lessons is the language and exchanges used in unconscious gender socialization and carried out in everyday teaching. Boys are socialized to assert a specific sense of masculinity that is more aggressive and demanding. Girls are often quieter and therefore receive less of the teacher's time and attention. Girls begin to falter academically, and boys learn that they are entitled to attention for their work and matter more.

The addition of women's studies as a degree, available coursework in higher education specific to women in history, and supports for women on college campuses through programs that provide child care, counseling and additional grants for parents, strive to provide access to and focus on equality in higher education (Long & Brookings Institution, 2017). Schools and other educational sites continue to provide a prime opportunity for challenging hierarchized culture and teaching new ways of seeing and being in the world. Critical reflection, open

communication, and a disruption of old, outdated patterns need to happen in education to lead us to a more sustainable, ecologically just world (Martusewicz et al., 2015). Education today needs to provide all learners, regardless of gender, the opportunity to think critically and act autonomously in an ever-changing world that is requiring people to be able to cope and thrive in times of uncertainty (Wals, 2011). This type of schooling includes that of higher education, public and private, two- and four-year universities and colleges.

Feminist Approach to Ethics and Learning

Women's approach, or a feminine approach, to ethics and learning tends to be relational and focuses on ensuring people are well cared for (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; hooks, (1994). This approach opposes a more male-dominant or traditionally masculine way of approaching learning and leading, which is to ensure that justice is upheld and that rights are protected. As work continues to address sustainability worldwide, particularly to meet the sustainable development goals (SDGs) established in 2016, continued focus on providing a quality education and focusing on gender equality is of increasing importance (UNESCO, 2017). The current western education system, more specifically our secondary and post-secondary systems, were developed by men, to educate men and "to give women an education 'equivalent' to men's" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 6). Traditional (masculine) pedagogy, which tends to emphasize the role of the instructor as the authoritarian and relies on a transmissive approach to teaching and learning, has impacts on women in education by implicitly limiting opportunities for women's ways of knowing to be part of a richer educational environment (hooks, 1994, *passim*). To become inclusive of all learners' needs, institutions of higher education need to look for opportunities for curricula to be expanded or opened to include experiences of women. Goldberger (1996) said, "We are witnessing (and participating in) a crisis

of knowledge and authority in academe wherein the traditional description of what we do is questioned from many sides" (p. 32). Our current ways of living have proven unsustainable, and by examining our education system to explore how we can change the way and why education occurs, educators can begin to set the stage to reach the SDG's and "ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development..." (Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, n.d.). This type of curriculum change may include an examination general education coursework, new degrees or programs that support degree completion and a restructuring of the education system to eliminate gender disparities.

Feminist scholars such as Gilligan (1982) and Merchant (2005) stated that women address both ecologically and socially unsustainable practices by exposing these practices, but also by offering solutions with thorough consideration of nature as it is connected to humans. As Gilligan (1982), explained, it is necessary to understand that moral problems are the same as relationship problems, whether human to human or human to earth. Strength is required to fix relational problems. She said that this strength "requires a kind of courage and emotional stamina which has long been the strength of women" (1982, p. xix). Exploration into how women's life experiences and emotional connections to relationships with others and with the natural earth can help educators develop curriculum and improve learning outcomes that allow "women [to] develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 229). This holistic approach to learning is one that O'Sullivan (in Cranton, 2016, p. 38) explained cannot be individual, but rather needs to be systemic. Moral development is more than just knowing what is right or wrong, or good or bad. It is used daily by humans to address ethical issues and dilemmas. To address the unsustainable ways our society is currently

living, moral development needs to be thoughtfully fostered and curriculum modified to improve learning outcomes and incorporate learning activities to address sustainability.

Ethics of Justice Versus an Ethics of Care in Moral Development

Until the 1980s, Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1958, 1981) studied moral development through a masculine lens that tended to focus on independence, autonomy, and hierarchy (Gilligan, 1982, pp. 18-22). Studies such as the Heinz dilemma (Kohlberg, 1958) presented participants with a moral dilemma involving stealing a lifesaving medication to save a partner or not stealing and potentially letting their partner die. Throughout his years of research, Kohlberg identified six stages of moral development that include obedience, self-interest, conformity, law-and-order, social contract orientation and universal ethical principles (1958, 1981, *passim.*). In his original dissertation research, Kohlberg used the Heinz dilemma with a sample of 84 boys that were followed over the course of twenty years (as cited in Gilligan, 1982, p. 18). Later in his research, when his samples included women, Kohlberg found that female participants provided responses that he did not place in or found delayed in one of his developmental stages of moral development (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987, as cited Woods, 1996, p. 377). His findings raised issues about moral development from a caring or feminine, relational lens (Gilligan, 1982, ch. 1).

Gilligan sought to explain the gendered difference in moral development by replicating the Heinz Dilemma with two 11-year old students, a boy (Jake) and a girl (Amy) (Gilligan, 1982, ch. 2). Jake's responses followed the same trajectory as Kohlberg's previous findings, and he responded in a way that provided a logical, just approach to solving the dilemma. Amy responded by explaining how she would work to establish a relationship with the pharmacist holding the medicine and explain the need for the drug and work through the relationships the couple held to determine what their approach should be as a couple to secure the medication.

Through the act of relationship building, Amy sought to demonstrate a need and built a story that connects the pharmacist with her care for her partner and expanding on or even strengthening the relationship between the husband and wife. She did not immediately decide by considering what is right or wrong or considering any rules that exist, but rather sought a solution that was based on connection and care.

Gilligan (1982) identified two different approaches to solving moral dilemmas and found patterns in the ways men and women participants responded to the same Heinz Dilemma that Kohlberg (1958) posed in his research. She found that men participants tended to answer from a perspective which Gilligan referred to as an ethics of justice (*passim*). In this approach, which tends to be more masculine, morality is based on the concept of rights, hierarchy, and respect. Female respondents approached morality in a way that indicates an ethics of caring and responsibility towards others or a more relational approach (Gilligan, 1982, *passim*). So, whereas in the above example, Kohlberg would not be able to place Amy in his schema, but Gilligan sees it as a sophisticated negotiation of relationships among the various parties. She explained that the feminine traits of care and connection are the same that place women as “slower” to develop in Kohlberg’s model, consistently falling within Stage 3 of Level 2 of development (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18). This stage named “Good Boy, Nice Girl Orientation” is part of the conventional level which connects moral development to relationships and implies that we act morally to avoid disapproval from others (Kohlberg, 1981). Gilligan critiques the implications of Kohlberg’s work:

Only if women enter the traditional arena of male activity will they recognize the inadequacy of this moral perspective and progress like men toward higher stages where

relationships are subordinated to rules (Stage 4) and rules to universal principles of justice (Stages 5 & 6) (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18).

Gilligan challenged Kohlberg's findings over four decades ago, but her work remains relevant as more is done to ensure that gender data gaps are addressed in applying previous theory to today.

Since Gilligan's work was first published, one criticism has been that her conclusions reinforced stereotypes of male and female development and gave little acknowledgement to the spectra of traits across both genders. Stereotyping all women as nurturers and all men as logical thinkers has been shown to be a false dichotomy (Fraser, 1989) and allows little movement between these two poles. Fraser, a professor of political and social science, has written extensively about social justice issues and critiques ways that liberal feminism has only enhanced that power and privilege that still exists in a hierarchical society today by emphasizing advancement for middle-class, white women, to reach and achieve what men already have (Gutting & Fraser, 2015, para. 2). This narrow view of feminism needs to be expanded and empower women. Woods (1996) questioned whether moral development is a social construction or biological feature (p. 381). Woods also asked whether Kohlberg's and Gilligan's research made generalized assumptions about moral development by focusing on primarily White, urban, and middle-class participants (Woods, 1996, p. 382). Other criticism includes the idea that ethics of care and ethics of justice are evident in both men and women, and that both may be employed by either during different types of dilemmas (Flanagan & Jackson, 1987). These critiques of ethics of care and moral development are important to consider as part of this research project. Having an awareness of these critiques allows the research to be positioned to examine the traits of care and justice as commonly seen feminine and masculine traits displayed by both genders, not gender specific as a man or woman's traits. Additionally, looking at the traits along a

spectrum, one that is at times situational in leadership settings, removes the idea that only women will display an ethic of care and promotes the idea that this spectrum exists for any leader. As society continues to deepen its understanding of gendered differences, the relevance of Gilligan's work remains today. Although Gilligan's work has been researched widely and applied in a variety of careers, such as nursing (Sease, Felton & Parsons, 1987), management (Miller, Kark, & Zohar, 2019), and organizational development (Joseph, 2016), additional research should be done to address criticisms of Gilligan's work and expand on it.

Ethics of Care Beyond Moral Development

Held (2006) expanded the ethics of care beyond one-on-one relationships and applied it to political, social and global awareness that engages current needs and issues. Held explained that the relevancy of care now includes "medical practice, law, political life, the organization of society, war and international relations" (2006, p. 9). This expansion also implicates sustainability directly: she discusses how an ethic of care, when expanded beyond family and friend relationships, can create inclusive global relationships that foster peace and respect for others' rights. An ethic of care also positively changes our environment as we learn to connect the ethics of care to our natural world (2006, p. 168).

An ethics of care does not mean selflessness, but emphasizing relationships, giving place and value to all who are involved (including the self). For example, Gilligan writes (2011), "Caring requires paying attention, seeing, listening, and responding with respect. Its logic is contextual, psychological. Care is a relational ethic, grounded in a premise of interdependence. But it is not selfless" (p.23). Noddings (1984) defined care in a way that emphasizes the importance to relationships, both the one caring and the one being cared for, particularly in educational settings. Noddings (1984) indicated that caring about something or someone can also

exist, but she insistently distinguishes between caring ‘for’ and caring ‘about,’ stressing her position that caring about something is too easy. She said, “We cannot love everyone. We cannot even care for everyone, and we do not need to love in order to care for” (p. 112). Noddings also explains that both men and women have the capacity and ability to provide care and that this care is not voluntary, but rather exists because of relationships to others. Therefore, caring for happens between people who are already familiar with each other, such as a student and teacher or a parent and child.

This reciprocal approach to caring is one of existentialism, or one that empowers the caretaker with a sense of responsibility to act rather than wait for others. Noddings is careful to explain that her approach “does not imply that all women will accept it or that men will reject it; indeed, there is no reason why men should not embrace it. It is feminine in the deep classical sense – rooted in receptivity, relatedness and responsiveness” (1984, p. 2). She defined caring as value or an act that is based on personal relationships, and she indicates that caring can only take place in “circles and chains” (p. 46) of connectedness.

Noddings is a strong advocate of updating our current pedagogies to include ideas of relationships and caring (Noddings, 1984). Her own philosophy of education supports that the process of teaching itself is an act of caring. A caring teacher must be able to see and understand what the student sees and move forward together with the student in a phenomenological approach to teaching (Noddings, 1984). Care is a feminine trait that can improve our current education system both in what and how we teach.

Women’s Ways of Knowing and Being

Gilligan (1982, 2001, 2011), Noddings (1984, 1992), and Held (2006) related moral development to a gendered approach to epistemology and ontology. In Belenky et al. (1986), the

authors expanded on their research and sought ways to explain not only how women know, but also what they value about the process of learning and knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986). 135 women participants ranging in age from 16 to 60 and representing diverse demographic categories including race, age and socioeconomic status, comprised the sample for the study that ultimately revealed the following feminine ways of knowing (p. 11-17).

Additionally, participants represented participation at a variety of educational institutions including a women's college, a progressive rural college, a private liberal arts college and an inner-city community college. As Belenky and her colleagues reported data on relationships, self-image, morals, ethics and personal growth, they were introduced to a cognitive construct of procedural knowledge and developed five distinct epistemological perspectives for women, as follows:

- (i) Silence;
- (ii) Received knowing;
- (iii) Subjective knowing;
- (iv) Procedural knowing; and
- (v) Constructed knowing (*passim*).

Silence is described by the authors as a way of knowing that is limited only to the concrete world of authority surrounding the woman. She is unable to think freely or autonomously and relies on others to speak for her (ch. 1). Still relying on others to provide their knowledge to them, received knowers listen to authority as the holders of truth. Their thinking is dualistic, with no gray areas (ch. 2).

As subjective knowers, women's sense of intuition becomes present. Believing in authority as the beholder of truth, women start to listen and watch, ultimately relying on their

own experience to become their source of knowledge (chs. 3 & 4). Procedural knowing was split by the researchers into the constructs of either connected knowing, or a more empathetic and receptive way, versus separate knowing, a more critical and detached way of knowing (ch. 5 and 6). The final, highest level of knowing is constructed knowledge in which women question previously held assumptions and challenge their own growth to develop their sense of self (ch.7).

Moving through this series of stages of knowing (Belenky et al., 1986, *passim.*), allows exploration into the ways that women learn and apply their learning to their personal and professional lives. As women participate in education and continue personal growth in and outside of the classroom, their ability to not only see the world around them but begin to question and embrace the opportunity for change becomes stronger.

Relationality as Social Sustainability

Some scholars (Spretnek, 2011; Sterling, 2010; Orr, 2011) have asserted that schooling has for many years been fragmented in both content and the human connection established through relationships. Higher education specifically tends to focus on teaching content, transmissively, to educate students for careers (Davidson, 2010; Jickling & Wals, 2008). Teaching this way has led to a separation of both interdisciplinary content and the connection of humans (Spretnek, 2011). Relationships in schooling exist between teachers (faculty and instructors), administrators, parents and students. Effectiveness of these relationships is determined by a relational trust that is built by an awareness and engagement in the following areas: respect, personal regard, competence in core role responsibilities and personal integrity (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). “We are touched by what we touch. We are shaped by what we shape. We are enhanced by what we enhance” (Berry, 1999, p. 81). It is not as important as who is in the relationship, rather relationships and relationality are important because they help define

what it means to be human and how to care for and be cared for (Swanson, 2005; Noddings 2003).

Beyond the importance of interpersonal relationships, sustainability education expands to include the relationality of the environment, economic issues and social issues. (Griswold, 2017). Creating an environment in school that allows learners to explore relationships with others and the natural world is one way to teach ecojustice or social sustainability in the college classroom (Griswold, 2017). As Orr (2011) stated, “It is not education, but education of a certain kind that will save us” (p. 238). This kind of education includes the ability to forgo the idea of human dominance and transition to an understanding and respect of human’s relationships with each other and the natural world.

Holistic Learning as Feminine

Feminist theory, through its approach to challenging previously held views of feminine characteristics as inferior, can “shape a deeper understanding of the role of emotions in the development of moral knowledge” (Dirkx, 2008, p. 14). Feminist theory has also helped connect the holistic approach to learning with Goleman’s idea of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence reinforces that learning is a human process that needs to include rational and emotional ways of knowing and recognizes both feminine and masculine ways as equally important. By acknowledging individual life experiences in education, we grow our own capacity to connect to others and develop an awareness of our feelings and care for others (Dewey, 1938). Taken together, feminist ethics of care and emotional intelligence lead learners to alternative ways of knowing that go beyond science and reason.

Other theories that support these alternative ways of knowing include holistic experiential learning (Heron 1992; Yorks, & Kasl, 2002), embodied learning (Merriam, Cafferella, &

Baumgartner, 2007; Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1992) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981, 1991, 2000; Cranton, 2006, 2016; O’Sullivan, 1999; Dirkx, 2008). These more connected, or holistic approaches to learning address some of the concerns that Gilligan brought forth regarding moral development. During the period of moral growth in adulthood, previously held self-concepts of strength and resistance are quieted, and women often “experience a dislocation of self, mind, and body, which may be reflected in eating disorders, low leadership aspiration, and self-effacing sexual choices” (Sander-Staudt, n.d.). Feminist theories of experiential learning are exhortations. As Belenky (1986) said, “Every woman, regardless of age, social class, ethnicity, and academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought and needs to know it right away” (p. 193). The exploration of a feminine, relational approach to morals and ethics of care supports a pedagogical approach to a more holistic style of learning that supports women’s epistemology. Connecting ethics of care to theories of moral development is still relatively new, and additional research is needed to take into consideration the needs of diverse learners or those that don’t fall into traditionally feminine or masculine ethics.

Transformative Learning Theory

Adult learning theory seeks to help educators, both in formal and informal settings, understand how to design programs to serve the unique needs of adult learners. In 1980, Malcom Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy, but never fully developed the theory, which focused specifically on how adults learn. Andragogy identifies adults as self-directed learners and places the responsibility for development of their educational journey directly on the individual learner (Knowles, 1980). Adults seek to understand the “why” of learning, and there is great emphasis placed on experiential and cooperative education (Knowles, 1980, 1984). Since Knowles’s original ideas that adults learn differently than children, other seminal authors have

taken the time to explore and develop approaches to and theories of adult learning (Cranton, 2016). Many of these approaches to adult learning also differentiate by gender (MacKeracher, 2004, in Cranton, 2016, p. 6). Consistent with previously stated approaches, adult women tend to learn with a more relational approach, but men fall more into an autonomous learning style; one that fits the model outlined by Knowles (1980). Experiential learning connects adults to the experiences in their lives so that they can process and learn about the world around them (Dewey, 1938). By connecting course content in traditional subjects such as math and science to more pragmatic activities, such as gardening and cooking, learners find themselves in a position of learning that is explicitly relevant to their own lives (Hickman, 2009, Gaffney & O'Neil, 2019). This type of education can create connections outside of formal settings and build relationships with the world outside the traditional classroom.

Building upon aspects of andragogy and experiential learning, Jack Mezirow developed an adult learning theory to encourage learners to think about previously held beliefs and understanding about the way in which the world works and to then undergo a transformation in these beliefs (Cranton, 2016). Working in the field of adult education for the past 12 years, I always intuited that there had to be a theory to explain why and how adult learners learn differently from how children learn. It wasn't until three years ago, when I began learning about education as sustainability, that I first learned about transformative learning. Transformative learning allows learners to experience the discourse related to changes to their previous understandings and worldviews (Cranton, 2016; Dirkx, 1998; Taylor, 2008; Taylor, 1998). The theory of transformative learning was first introduced by Mezirow (1981) through a qualitative study he completed researching the needs of women who returned to education after stopping out for an extended period. Although his theory is informed by others such as Kuhn (1962), Freire

(1970) and Habermas (1971, 1984) who all had established theories that informed and aided him, Mezirow established his own theory (Dirkx, 1998; Kitchenham, 2008; Taylor 1998).

Transformative learning theory created, for me, an answer to the question I was seeking regarding the way adults learn and how they apply their education through a course of action and how to use education to enact change to be more inclusive to their own needs and those of others.

Mezirow (1996) later defined transformative learning as “the process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 162). Since Mezirow first introduced the theory of transformative learning, revisions to the theory have occurred, and others have developed his framework to include a variety of theoretical lenses and ways of assessing its efficacy (Kitchenham, 2008). Transformative learning today continues to be an underdeveloped theory and research is only beginning to address the gaps in the literature that exists.

Mezirow explained, in his theory of transformative learning, that adult learners have experiences that challenge their previously held worldviews, and that through an educational process, learners grow, reflect, and change. The outcome of transformative learning is ultimately change of the learners’ previously held worldviews and the social action that happens because of this change (Christie et al., 2015; Cranton, 2016; Kitchenham, 2008; Stuckey, Taylor & Cranton, 2013;). Eventually this shift in meaning creates a more inclusive worldview (1997). Change can be addressed through various methodologies and approaches that include a focus on our relationship with each other but also our relationship with the natural world (Cranton, 2016; Merchant, 2005). Change is necessary to lead to sustainability as our current ways of living are not sustainable. Work towards sustainability needs to include change. Using transformative-

learning theory in education can help lead to this change (Sterling, 2010). The use of transformative-learning theory has grown in the past decade in adult education, but many adult educators still rely only on Knowles's andragogy to build adult education programs, thereby missing the opportunity to include social change and justice into curriculum, which would ultimately lead to sustainability.

Essential requirements of the transformative learning process include individual experience, critical reflection and dialogue (Taylor, 1998, as cited in Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). In addition to these requirements, Mezirow (1995) defined the following ten phases of transformation that learners progress through during transformation:

1. A disorienting dilemma;
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame;
3. A critical assessment of assumptions;
4. Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change;
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationship and actions;
6. Planning of a course of action;
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
8. Provisionally trying out new roles;
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (p. 50).

These phases established the process of transformation that Mezirow determined were experienced by his subjects during his initial qualitative research (1981). The first four phases

include an actual occurrence of an event or dilemma that happens immediately following. The last six phases outline what happens after the learner has revised their previously held assumptions (Cranton, 2016, p. 16). It is important for educators use these phases to inform future development and implementation of transformative-learning theory in their practice (Christie et al., 2008) and to create learning outcomes to test the theory (Stuckey, Taylor & Cranton, 2013). The “disorientating dilemma” that Mezirow first identified in his phases of transformative learning is often the first moment when learners are challenged with viewing their previously known perspectives in a new way based on an experience (Mezirow, 1981). Once this is experienced, the learning environment needs to be conducive to reflection and provide the learner the ability to make meaning of their experience (Mezirow, 2000; Mälkki, 2012). These phases were initially identified by Mezirow but have been repurposed or reinterpreted by other researchers in more recent application and development of the theory of transformative learning.

Mezirow used parts of Knowles’s ideas of andragogy but reinterpreted the components for application in his own theory (Cranton, 2016, p. 17). Both Knowles and Mezirow supported the notion that learners are self-directed, but their uses of this term was very different. Knowles defined a self-directed learner as one that takes responsibility for their own learning and sets the course for how and when learning occurs. This definition does little to explain the change of previously held assumptions that many adult learners undergo during the process of learning. Mezirow defines a self-directed learner as a student who “participates freely in dialogue to test perspectives against those of others and modify them accordingly” (in Cranton, 2016, p. 17). This definition of self-directedness allowed Mezirow to connect self-direction in learning to the idea of challenging previous knowledge. Mezirow’s originally developed theory was “linear and rational” (Irving & English, 2011, para. 5). This opposes more feminine characteristics of

relational and connected learning and in the more recent years, Mezirow has identified the place of the role of relationships and emotion in the learning process (Mezirow, 2000; chapter 12).

Storytelling

Storytelling can be defined as a way to communicate, “through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real and imagined, that we inhabit” (McDrury & Alterio, 2002, p. 32). In education, the use of storytelling can be a powerful tool to a *way to knowing* and supports learners as they discover and create meaning around previously discussed *ways of knowing*. More specifically, in education about moral development, storytelling plays a significant role in allowing learners to recall past life experiences and provides the opportunity to recount decisions that were made and reflect on the learning that occurred because of the decision (Tappan & Brown, 1989). When faced with a moral dilemma on what is ‘right’ in situation, humans can recall times when similar decisions needed to be made which can support their decision. This process allows a learner to create authorship or authority for their own moral development and empowers the learner to express and own their perspective while claiming responsibility for their actions (Tappan & Brown, 1989).

This approach to storytelling in moral education relates to both Gilligan’s ethics of care (1982) and Belenky and her colleagues (1986) ways of knowing through separate and connected knowing. Separate knowing often involves doubt over what is right and women who are separate knowers often avoid conflict and debate, or critical discourse with peers (Belenky et. al., 1986). Connected knowing comes from a place of care, relationships and personal experience (Belenky et. al., 1986). Storytelling can be a tool used to build authority for separate knowers and encourages connected knowing through shared experiences.

Storytelling and reflection in transformative learning promotes perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1981) by first providing the learner an opportunity to become aware of previous assumptions and views of relationships and of the world (Tappan & Brown, 1989). Giving space in transformative learning experiences for sharing of narratives or stories to occur, reflection on those prior experiences and then an opportunity to connect with peers and learn from each other through discourse and reflection can promote transformation or change.

Transformative Learning Theory and Sustainability

To understand how change on a personal level can lead to social change, I turn to Bateson's (1979/2002) work to help explore transformative learning and its potential outcomes. Sterling (2010) applied Bateson's work as a foundation for education as sustainability but delved deeper than Bateson did into the concept of change by considering three levels, or orders of change that can occur (p. 22-25). Bateson's levels of learning as used by Sterling can be summarized as follows:

1. "Doing things better;"
2. Doing better things;" and
3. Seeing things differently" (Bateson, in Sterling, 2010, p. 23).

As Sterling outlined, by reaching the third order of change, we can shift the paradigm of the way things have been and start to redefine and change moving forward. Challenging the way things have existed, in this case, a transition from a patriarchal society to one that is more equitable and values women, likely faces initial resistance due to longstanding traditions and current paradigms of education (p. 29). However, using reflection and dialogue, central aspects of both Mezirow's phases *and* transformative learning, educators can guide learners through the discourse of learning to a place of recognition and understanding.

Mezirow's concepts were greatly influenced by other influential educators, such as Freire, who developed similar theoretical concepts but posited them with a different lens. Before Mezirow, Freire (1970) developed a similar theory that set about raising the consciousness of people to see and understand systems in their own lives that may be causing inequalities or oppression. They could then understand, challenge, and break out of the system that is the cause of their oppression (Dirkx, 1998; Kitchenham, 2008). Freire had great influence on Mezirow (Kitchenham, 2008). Two ideas common to their respective theoretical approaches are that transformative learning needs to focus on the relationships that learners have with others, and that these relationships influence understandings of their worlds (Dirkx, 1998, pp. 2-3). Both theories confront adult learners with dilemmas and apply the use of various pedagogical approaches that challenge learners to think about more than just the content they are learning, but also seeks to foster an environment conducive to change of learners' worldviews.

Gendered Views of Transformative Learning

Though situated as an adult learning theory, gender perspectives also exist within transformative-learning theory. Feminine and masculine ways of developing morals and ethics differ in poignant ways. McIntosh (2005) reiterated that it is difficult for us to know if these differences are biologically based or socially constructed. Although the underpinnings of why differences exist are unknown, it is important to recognize that women, for centuries, have been socially charged with a caretaking role. Traditional gender roles in many cultures place women as the reproducers and producers for their families, fostering an inherent ethics of care toward the earth and the environment. In a matriarchal sense, when the safety of women's homes, children and ability to reproduce are threatened, women respond in a way that values what Merchant (2005) called "care, love and trust" versus those that are more traditional like "rights, rules and

utilities” (p. 196). Through a transformative learning framework, women’s experiences in caring for others can be embraced and used to challenge their previously conceived notions of what women should be and how they should act, lead and live to bring about change. This framework points to a more sustainable, just global community. A change in perspectives allows women to ascribe new values and possibilities to their future roles in a sustainable culture. By providing the opportunity in education for women to expand on their own views and experiences of an ethics of care, they can shape how they treat each other and the environment.

A feminist approach to transformative learning must contend with patriarchy and the educational system that follows from and sustains it, which is built on hierarchical power and androcentrism. Those systems construct knowledge and truths (Lange, 2017; Foucault, 1982). Education that is truly transformative gives students the space to develop other traits such as empathy and caring, while recognizing that these traits too have a critical and valuable place in society. Chin (as cited in Pantan, 2016) explained, women who go through a transformative process and in turn become transformational leaders themselves bring forward the “principles of inclusion, collaboration and social advocacy” (p. 23) values that are critical to a sustainable future. Feminism challenges patriarchy and poses dilemmas for educators and students of all genders.

Sustainability and Leadership

A great deal of emphasis can be placed on the role of leadership in this movement towards sustainability. It must include a care for our current children and be forward looking to future generations (Swanson, 2015). Leaders are uniquely positioned to set the tone and agenda for sustainability and creation of programs specifically designed to explore this role for women set the foundation for the development of the Women’s Leadership Institute. A 2015 study looks

at women entrepreneurs and their connection to success in their businesses to the community and planetary implications of their business (Clark, 2015). Clark found that gender played a significant role in the participants leadership style as the women participants described their approach to leadership as “relational, caring, communicative and empowering” (p. 216). Wheatley refers to this as “living our interconnectedness” (2007, 204).

What values and ethics do we need our leaders to display to help guide towards sustainability? “Sustaining life and sustaining the Earth is a tremendous responsibility for humanity. Leaders play a role in how the homeostasis is to be maintained” (Swanson, 2015). To focus on leadership for sustainability, one must have an understanding or awareness of themselves as a leader first, and then be able to connect themselves to the broader system around them (Schein, 2015). Feminist theory has helped bridge the understanding that reflection can “shape a deeper understanding of the role of emotions in the development of moral knowledge” (Dirkx, 2008, p. 14) and Goleman’s idea of emotional intelligence helps with the concepts that learning is a human process and that in this process there needs to be both rational and emotional ways of knowing. It is through the experience of education that we learn an awareness of not only our feelings, but an understanding and empathy towards those around us. As Bregman (2018) said “treat people with empathy, care and good humor that will make them feel happier, more connected and more productive” (p.87). This idea is supported by Noddings “circles and chains” (2003, p. 46) which implies that this positive action starts with the leader but radiates outwards to all members of the team.

One of the goals of leadership is to be change agents and inspire change in others (Swanson, 2015). “Leadership becomes less positional and more prevalent as a shared human characteristic” (p. 99). Wheatley shares “We need leaders who recognize the harm being done to

the planet through the dominant practices that control, ignore, abuse and oppress the human spirit. We need leaders who put service over self, stand steadfast in crisis and failures, and who display unshakable faith that people can be generous, creative and kind.” (Warrior for the Human Spirit Training 2019). A step towards sustainability requires leaders who are ready and positioned to lead. This type of leadership requires a sound understanding of themselves and an ability to sustain themselves as this type of leadership is not easy.

Women’s Life Experiences

Sterling (2003) suggested that higher education institutions must understand the interconnectedness of the system of education and the natural world around us and must “recognise the spiritual, affective, imaginal and practical aspects of learning, as well as the cognitive” (p. 343). Harding (n.d.), through his reflections on some of Aldo Leopold’s (Leopold & Meine, 2013) writings supports that deep and spontaneous experiences often connect us to the environment and world. Life experiences are transformative in ways that make possible conversations about sustainability.

Education as sustainability needs to address the four roles identified by Sterling (2001): to improve socialization, to train for vocation, to promote individual growth, and to transform society and create more sustainable world (2001). Creating an environment that is built on authenticity, trust and acceptance enhances relationships between educators and learners that allow transformative learning to occur in a safe space (Cranton, 2016; Knowles, 2005). Authenticity in an educator’s role has five distinct characteristics according to Cranton. These are self-awareness, awareness of others, relationships, context and critical reflection (Cranton, 2016, p. 88). Additionally, authenticity is key in transformative learning as educators must be tuned to the individual learning process but also be able to guide towards social change and

reform (Cranton, 2016). In transformative learning, the role of the educator can take on a variety of forms and can be quite complex, depending on the type of learning that occurs. Four common roles include facilitator, instigator, coach and assessor (Fenwick, 2001). Although each role is different, and timing for each may depend on learning activities and desired outcomes, they share some common themes, which Fenwick explained as follows:

1. Engaging learners in concrete experience as a starting point for building new knowledge;
2. Creating conditions for educative dialogue during and after the concrete experience;
3. Encouraging learners' focused reflection at different levels; and
4. Providing support, as experiential learning can be confusing, emotionally challenging, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable for learners (p. 18).

As Fang (2013) pointed out, since experiential learning is important in sustainability as it engages other types of learning beyond the cognitive domain to include the affective and psychomotor domains, the idea of turning the campus into a laboratory is important. This includes the learning that happens inside the classroom and being intentional in setting up a campus culture that allows for hands-on, practical application of concepts learned. Intentional experiential learning opportunities set up students to carry this learning into real life application when they return home or enter their workplace.

One of the first steps in creating a campus community that integrates sustainability into the curriculum and across the educational environment is to appropriately train faculty and staff to be inclusive of the concepts of sustainability (Fang, 2013). This can include the provision of speakers, retreats with emphases on developing curriculum, or collaboration with other university faculty and staff with more experience. To use the principle of sustainability as a way

to change a system, we would be selling ourselves short by only focusing on creating sustainability in a stand-alone course versus integrating it throughout a system, essentially modeling what we hope to accomplish in the world.

Transformative learning can be challenging to the learner as it causes discomfort. The facilitator must be open to new ways of learning and be prepared to re-examine how teaching and learning have typically been approached (Sterling, 2010). However, if we are to truly embrace education as sustainability, educators need to be open to a new way of educating that pays as much attention to the content that is being taught as to the process of learning, ensuring that it is interdisciplinary and holistic.

Summary

At their inception, Western school systems were created to educate men for the purpose of work. A feminine approach to school and learning is one that is relational and holistic rather than purely content driven and hierarchical. An ethic of care is a way to address unsustainable ways of living. Care can be developed in higher education by changing our current pedagogy and curriculum to include gendered differences. An approach to teaching care and connectedness is through the use of storytelling. Leadership has long been viewed through a masculine lens, placing importance on leadership traits that are historically more masculine. To create space in education for women to develop their own leadership style, emphasis is placed on feminine leadership traits like care and relationship building. This development of authentic leaders connects to sustainability. One way to create this change is through transformative learning theory.

Chapter 3. Design & Methods

This qualitative study took place at a Women's Leadership Institute (WLI). The WLI was established at a small, non-profit, liberal arts institution in the midwestern United States and was designed to serve students transferring from two-year associate degree programs to bachelor's degree programs. The institution has a rich history of serving associate degree transfer students through a robust adult education program. Through this unique collaborative program, entering students were exposed to a variety of formal and informal learning opportunities that engaged them in a transformative learning process and focused on growing their leadership skills and abilities, in turn, developing the skills necessary to address and implement sustainability initiatives in their homes, communities and places of work. As director of this newly established institute, I was positioned to work directly with students in the program. I also was the administrator who developed this program and did direct recruitment of the participants in this first cohort. Work was done with two adjunct faculty members prior to the first cohort beginning to expand knowledge of sustainability, transformative learning, and ethics of care. Specific attention was paid to creation of learning activities that fostered an environment conducive to building relationships with peers and instructors and allowed for sharing of personal narratives, or storytelling, to occur.

Design

The design of this study followed inductive logic in action research (Mills, 2018) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative inquiry a researcher gathers data by connecting participants' stories to their life experiences. In my work with adult students over the past eighteen years, storytelling is not only an integral part of sharing history, but also connects them with me in an emotional and relational way. In my participant role at the WLI, I have

established relationships with students in the program, creating a subgroup that has agreed to share stories of their experiences in education and to explore how general education coursework, with specific learning activities designed to explore how women construct knowledge and view their roles in society, has impacted their lives. My work positioned me to include my own experience with the history and planning of the institute, the curriculum design and intended outcomes and places me in an “insider status” (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 210) with participants.

Giving voice to women who have previously had their stories excluded from research recognizes these stories is important to social justice movements and creating change (Hesse-Biber, 2014, p. 7). Specifically, in research on transformative learning, gender has all but been ignored since Mezirow’s original work in 1978 (Irving & English, 2011). Research that involves a specific practice or is praxis-oriented is also a common methodology of studies that look into social justice, or in the case of this project, socio-ecological sustainability (Lather, 1986). Research as praxis is also a common form a feminist research and reciprocity between the researcher and research participants builds upon the idea that relationships can build trust and create a more dynamic setting for stories to be shared (Lather, 1986; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Action research and narrative inquiry both collected data about relationships.

Method

I gathered information from participants in a series of up to three in-person, semi-structured interviews, each 60 to 90 minutes long. Interviews were designed to capture narratives of their experiences as students in higher education and participants in the WLI. Within their narratives, participants included information that they deemed important. Participants were given instructions to answer questions in ways that they found comfortable. Responses included both short and long narratives or sharing of class assignments.

Setting

This study was conducted at a university in Wisconsin. When establishing the WLI, one of first tasks was to create a robust board of advocates, with connections to the university, that would help define and develop the goals and objectives of the WLI. This work helped administrators and faculty collaborate with board of advocate members to address the questions of why this work is important and establish what we hope to accomplish with this program (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013). The board of advocates worked together to create the following mission statement:

WLI provides a unique, learner-centered academic experience that prepares students across Wisconsin to advance professionally, perform effectively and succeed in baccalaureate coursework. Through a transformative learning process, learners are empowered to demonstrate self-advocacy skills and to articulate a clear vision for their academic and career goals.

When creating this mission statement, work was done to ensure that the mission of the WLI was cohesive with the organizational mission of the institution (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013) and the president and executive vice president of the university, along with a president of one of the partner technical colleges, were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the mission statement to ensure continuity of mission.

In addition to creation of a mission statement, specific program objectives were defined. The purpose of the program objectives is to provide for all stakeholders “clear statements of the specific results to be achieved through education and training programs” (Cafferella & Daffron, 2013, p. 69). When developing the program objectives, focus was placed on both educational and operational objectives (Knowles, 1980 as cited in Cafferella & Daffron,

2013). Educational program objectives place emphasis on the results that participants experience through their participation in the program. Operational program goals are more internal guidelines that help administrators of the program define the organization and functioning of the program while also defining the ways to address continuous improvement. The specific educational program objectives for the WLI learners were as follows:

- To facilitate student's examination of issues facing women and advance careers towards leadership positions;
- To introduce practical strategies for performing effectively in the workplace;
- To support PTK members envisioning bachelor's degrees following graduation from an associate degree; and
- To provide a unique academic experience that prepares students for bachelor level coursework. Students will experience a reflective journey as they create written projects focused on women's leadership experiences.

Operational program objectives for the WLI included:

- To raise \$60,600.00 to fund spring and summer 2019 courses;
- To create unique learning activities for courses;
- To expand awareness of WLI to 16 technical colleges and high-volume corporate partners;
- To create a plan to expand eligibility (e.g. UW Colleges Associate Degree graduates, high volume referring corporate partners, WTCS associate degree 2.5 GPA and higher);
- To create a comprehensive marketing and recruitment plan;
- To create informal non-credit bearing learning opportunities;

- To recruit at least 50 students;
- To complete a SWOT analysis after Course 2 completed; and
- To analyze and revise business plan for FY 2021.

Goals and objectives for the WLI were developed to provide clarity to participants, administration, and key stakeholders. They were constructed with input from these parties as well. Having these goals and objectives established and published helps provide clarity and purpose to the WLI and supports the intended outcomes of the program.

To address the formal learning outcomes of the WLI, two courses were identified that were part of the university curriculum. These courses were offered to current technical college students as part of a seamless transfer plan to assist students in transitioning into a bachelor's degree program. Since these courses were already established, with approved course learning outcomes, a meeting with Dean of the College of Fine Arts and Humanities, was integral in defining appropriate courses, but also to engage in dialogue in establishing a plan to revise learning activities to be inclusive of the program objectives of the WLI, while maintaining the integrity and intent of these established learning outcomes (personal communication, August 6, 2018). The courses and descriptions are:

- GEN 112 - Composition II: Argumentation and Research (Semester Hours: 3)

Through a series of assignments, including a lengthy college-level research paper,

Composition II builds upon the skills developed in GEN 110 - Composition I: Academic Writing. Students learn how to construct logical arguments based on reliable evidence.

Students develop proficiency with basic practices of research, including evaluating, integrating, and documenting source materials, narrowing a topic to a research question, and communicating results to different audiences.

- GEN 312 – Core II: Gender Studies: Biology, Culture, and Performance

(Semester Hours: 3) One of the central questions of the human condition is explored in this course: how does biological sex influence the performance and perception of gender and sexual identity? Students will analyze the biological and sociological debates about gender that have persisted throughout history and across cultures through a combination of class discussion, historical study, formal presentations, and written work. Texts are as diverse as the topic, covering formal gender theory, sociological research, biological and evolutionary arguments, personal narrative, art, literature, and film.

The design of this program was intentional to use both adjunct faculty and full-time faculty as instructors for the above courses. In using a learner-centered approach, the instructor must be “diagnostician, provider of an instructional environment, and facilitator of growth” (Schiro, 2013, p. 140). It is important for the instructors to demonstrate their humanness during this process to facilitate an open, honest environment that is built on a foundation of trust and acceptance. Additionally, this approach is key in transformative learning as learners must be in-tune to the individuals learning process but also be able to guide towards social change and reform (Cranton, 2016). The setting enrolled 15 students initially. 12 students remained enrolled at the time of the study and of the total 15 students, 13 were women.

Participants

At the onset of the Women’s Leadership Institute, a total 16 students were enrolled. Fourteen of the students identified as women, two as men. Enrollment was not limited by gender as I believed that the learning that would occur could benefit all learners regardless of gender. Thirteen of these students persisted to the second class in the series. One man and two women

left the program for either personal or academic reasons. Of the 13 students that remained in the second course of the series, all were invited to participate in the interviews for this study

I reached out to all students via email message (See Appendix B) and they also were made aware of the opportunity when I visited the in-person or remote class sessions to discuss and answer any additional questions. Students were asked to contact me via email or phone if they were interested in participating. A total of seven women volunteered (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender
Jellus	n.r.*	Female
Ellie	58	Female
Evelyn	19	Female
Karen	26	Female
Kay	n.r.*	Female
Lauren	n.r.*	Female
Lisa	50	Female

* no response

Participants were communicated with via email to establish a date, time, and location for the interviews to take place. It was also established that if the interviews lasted longer than an initial 90 minutes, a follow-up interview would be scheduled. Six interviews took place on regional campus, one took place at the main campus location.

Data Collection

Story data were collected in semi-structured, in-person interviews with participants along with shared artifacts to illustrate their stories. The semi-structured interview items (Appendix B) were adapted from Belenky et al. (1986, p. 231), and used with permission (Appendix C), I chose to use these questions for two reasons. The first is that this book and these questions were instrumental to me during my own education in challenging my own previously held assumptions about my place in this world and the way that I think and learn. This book was

assigned reading during my master's program, a time when I was challenging myself as a young mom and new professional to excel in an educational program in a helping profession. The experience of using this book in my own educational program was transformational and has resonated with me in my own professional development and view of the world around me. The second reason is that, although much has changed in the world since this book was first written in 1986, education - and particularly higher education - remains virtually unchanged. Therefore, the questions are still relevant today.

Part of my decision to use a semi-structured interview was to allow for space and time for storytelling to occur and to honor the stories the participants shared with me. Although many of the stories had light-hearted parts describing relationships with parents, children and loved ones, stories were also filled with challenges and adversity that included substance abuse, divorce, sexual and physical abuse, and poverty. Trust and safety were key during the interviews. Both are typical in a feminist inquiry. This trust existed because of my role as action researcher and as the director of the Women's Leadership Institute. I recruited each of the participants for the program and had a previously established relationship with each because of this process creating a purposeful selection of participants, not random. This resulted in a purposeful selection of participants versus a random selection. This relationship with participants prior to recruitment and during the research process should be viewed as both a strength and limitation. Safety was established by holding the interviews in a quiet location, towards the back of the center away from all other staff offices and classrooms. During the interviews, the door was closed, and it was reiterated to participants that they did not have to answer any questions or did not have to share any information they did not feel comfortable sharing. During interviews, participants

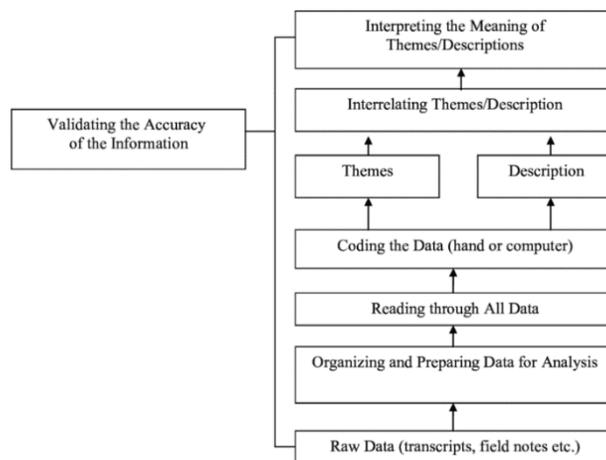
requested to not answer or to skip questions and come back later. This did not impact the quality of the interviews or the data shared.

I audio-recorded interviews using NoNotes.com, a mobile application designed for transcription, on an independent recording device controlled by me. Each interview was transcribed word-for-word by NoNotes.com. Upon receiving the transcription, I reviewed the transcription alongside the recorded interview to check for accuracy. I sent participants transcripts of their interviews via their university email addresses. Participants reviewed, clarified or remove text from the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed Creswell and Creswell's (2018) seven-step, interactive and inductive process (Figure 1). Data were organized through a "bottom-up" matrix (p. 186) that allowed me to organize interview and artifacts into narratives that were supported by the literature.

Figure 1. Analysis Sequence



The figure walks through the steps to validate the accuracy of the data that was gathered during the interview process. Step one was to gather the raw data. Step two included organizing the data for an efficient analysis. After this, the data was read through completely prior to coding the

data. A decision was made to code the data by themes rather than descriptions. In step five, interrelated themes were identified prior to the last step of interpreting the themes.

After receiving my completed transcripts, I sent them to each participant for review of accuracy and to remove any identifying information they did not want included. After contacting the participants, I then read through the transcripts and created a qualitative memo that identified initial themes that were noted. I coded my interviews using analysis software, NVivo (12, 2019). An initial first attempt at coding allowed me to do preliminary coding and transition my qualitative memo to a codebook (Saldaña, 2013). A codebook was then created (Appendix D). Themes emerged through analyses of frequency (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). A return to my literature strengthened my themes as I looked for connections and supporting literature of the initial themes that emerged. This process of analysis led to six themes presented in Chapter 4 which are listed . The first five themes are listed in order of frequency of occurrence. The final sixth theme discusses support for the program and was not included in the frequency count, rather included as a final theme to explore the design and outcomes of the program.

Ethics & Trustworthiness

Others may recognize participants through the details of their interview responses. I took steps to minimize this risk by assigning pseudonyms and allowing participants to review transcripts.

Because of the narrative inquiry process, participants can share details of their experience based on their own comfort level of sharing (Creswell, 2013, p. 92). Participants were not required to share any details they are not comfortable sharing or including in their interview. Participants could, however, experience some discomfort if they have had an uncomfortable experience in education and their interview causes them to remember.

It is important to note that in addition to completing current CITI training, the I earned a master's degree in counseling and hold certification as a nationally certified counselor (NCC). With these credentials, there is an inherent understanding of appropriate ethical behavior that is always to be upheld by me. Although understanding this is not a counseling relationship, the skills I have gained through schooling, practice, continuing education and credentialing will assist me in engaging in the narrative inquiry process in an ethical and legal manner. This study was approved by University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point Institutional Research Board (IRB) and the Lakeland University IRB (Appendix C).

My role in relationship to the participants was as the director of the leadership development program in which participants were enrolled. My role was not directly involved in the coursework the participants were completing and I had no influence on grading of current or future courses. Both courses had assigned faculty as instructors and evaluators. As the director of the-institute, I had responsibilities to ensure that all participants were following established student code of conduct for the university. During this study, all disciplinary and academic matters were addressed by my immediate supervisor.

A narrative inquiry involves storytelling, but participants were not required to share any stories they did not approve. To establish controls for bias, participants reviewed transcripts of their interviews, a procedure to ensure content validity called member-checking (Burke & Jimenez Soffa, 2018; Creswell, 2018). Participants redacted transcripts and were given pseudonyms.

Delimitations & Limitations

The delimitations for this study were that it included only participants of the Women's Leadership Institute. All participants either had earned or were close to earning an associate's degree from a local technical college and had indicated intent to continue for a bachelor's degree.

Limitations of this research include a small sample size, due to both the nature of the narrative inquiry and the population of the cohort of the institute. I did not include any other demographic qualifiers for this research including race, income or age. For the purpose of this study, these were not deemed necessary demographics to include, but could hold value for future research. Sample included a purposeful selection of participants versus a random selection which is an additional limitation as this may not be reflective of a representative nature of a random sample. Additionally, my role as the developer of the institute, director at the time of recruitment for this project and researcher did increase the potential for bias. The unique role is one that also needs to consider the reciprocity of the relationship between the researcher and the subjects and also how this could impact the research process and the learning that occurs from the data (Lather 1986, p. 263). All participants had a previously established relationship with me which created familiarity and trust when sharing their stories during the interview process. Attention needed to be paid to check for understanding during interviews and allow for member checking to occur after the interviews to prevent bias from occurring.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore using transformative-learning theory in a leadership development program that created opportunity for learners to strengthen their ethic of care through formal and informal learning opportunities and ultimately see how this can lead to sustainability. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format focused on a

narrative inquiry or allowing the learner to tell their story. Using this qualitative approach, participants could share details on previous educational experiences and their current participation in the program and how this may have changed to own view of their role as women in society. Data were coded and analyzed according to six themes developed from literature. The first five themes are listed in order of frequency and the sixth theme was included to explore overall support of the program as expressed by the participants. Themes include how participants worldviews changed through their participation in the program, care and the importance of relationships, gender differences in leadership, empowerment, and program support for the Women's Leadership Institute.

Chapter 4. Findings

This qualitative study examined a Women's Leadership Institute that was established as a pipeline from an associate's degree program into a bachelor's degree program for students interested in learning more about themselves as leaders, developing their leadership skills and foster sustainability within our world. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How does transformative-learning theory foster the development of an ethic of care for students participating in a leadership development program?
2. How and in what ways does their learning foster sustainability?

This chapter includes a profile of each participant taken from the stories they shared during the interview process. These background data shaped changes that occurred during their participation in the Women's Leadership Institute. The following section presents themes that were found in interview and narrative data. These themes are consistent with the theoretical model and literature review. They include stories about changes in worldviews, care, relationships and being your authentic self as a leader.

Participants' Life Stories

Jellus

Jellus was a foreign exchange student from Haiti. This is her second time living in the United States as an exchange student. The first time she earned her associate's degree in early childhood education, and this time she is working on a business degree and transferring for a four-year degree in business administration. Between her two exchanges, she went back to her home in Haiti and worked in a school for a while in a position her uncle helped her secure. Jellus recalls the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 as being a significant life moment for her. She lives with her mom as her father had passed when she was a small child, and her two

brothers. Watching her mother struggle after losing everything in the earthquake motivated Jellus to pursue further education after high school so she can secure a good job and help her mom financially. Her plans include using her education and business degrees to open a school in Haiti that focuses on curriculum of primary subjects but also integrates the ability for children to follow their dreams and pursue their interests like singing, sports or the arts. She stated that this type of learning gave students the opportunity to change their perspectives on life because they will have richer experiences. Jellus joined the Women's Leadership Institute in hopes of pushing out of her comfort zone and being able to get out of her shell in group settings. After her participation, she said she felt more confident but also had learned a great deal about gender differences and her own self as a leader and as a woman. She said that this experience had given her new sense of independence she wouldn't have gotten "back home" because of cultural differences.

Ellie

Ellie was a 58-year-old woman with four children and 13 grandchildren, all of which she is very proud of. This is her fourth time attempting to complete a college degree, as she has had to stop out for many personal reasons along the way. Ellie was in foster care twice as a small child and eventually moved in with her biological grandparents until she entered seventh grade because of her mother's substance abuse, mental health issues and unstable relationships. Her biological father left when she was young. At that time, she moved back in with her biological mother to help care for her younger siblings because she felt it was part of her responsibility. Ellie got pregnant, married young and had a couple bumpy first years of marriage. When she was 27, her husband died in a car accident and she became a single mom to her four children. During that time, she attempted to complete her associate's degree but found

the struggles of single parenthood and finances too difficult to manage in addition to school. She also became the caregiver for her own mother and grandmother while they both battled terminal illnesses. In 2015, due to an injury on the job, she was able to go back to school and is now graduating with two associate's degrees. She was considering transferring for her bachelor's degree and originally joined the Women's Leadership Institute for the opportunity to take bachelor's level coursework. She also said the experience had been "building her back up again."

Evelyn

Evelyn was a 19-year-old dually enrolled student working concurrently on her associate's degree and bachelor's degree in substance abuse counseling and psychology. She works a full-time customer service job. Evelyn described herself as shy and empathetic, emphasizing that family is the most important relationship for her. Growing up, Evelyn said she never felt like her family subscribed to traditional gender roles and her parents never discouraged her from participating in activities that were deemed more socially appropriate for boys, like soccer. Both her mom and maternal grandmother were nurses. She said that was why being empathetic and caring were so important to her. Evelyn said that being the youngest student in the Women's Leadership Institute allowed her to learn from the life experiences of the other students. She said that much of what they have experienced in life, particularly as it relates to having children, marriage and workplace experiences, she hadn't yet experienced. Evelyn planned to continue for her master's in counseling so she could work as a licensed counselor.

Karen

Karen first became a mom when she was a senior in high school. She is currently 26 years old and a single mom to two boys. Following high school, she worked at a local fast food restaurant until she decided to leave work and go to school full-time to work on

an associate degree in health information technology. She had recently graduated and transferred to work on her bachelor's degree in business administration with an emphasis in leadership. After having children young and having to “grow up quick” she found motivation wanting a better life for her children and as well as to provide for them. Karen described herself as hardworking and independent. She said she was usually pretty confident but also found being a woman sometimes had her questioning her confidence because she feared her confidence could come off as abrasive. At the same time, she said she hid gentler feelings, so she did not risk being viewed as soft. Karen worked full-time at a daycare and liked to focus her position on training other employees in leadership skills. She joined the Women’s Leadership Institute so she could learn more about leadership and use that in her future career.

Kay

After finding out she was losing her job at a local mill, Kay decided to take advantage of a federal grant that provided her the funds necessary to pursue an associate’s degree at a local technical college. The experience of losing her job was important, albeit difficult at the time since it provided her the opportunity to pursue something new in life. Near the end of her associate’s degree she worked as a marketing intern and with that experience decided to transfer and pursue a bachelor's degree. Kay was an active archer and participates in her local archer club as co-president. She taught archery classes to children in hopes of extending her love of the sport to younger generations. In addition, Kay participated in many hobbies that were important to her and that she deemed at “traditionally male-dominated,” like bow-hunting and gun hunting. Kay described herself as a someone who is funny, determined, a bit sassy, open-minded and a procrastinator with good intentions. Growing up, Kay’s family was very religious and adhered to strict rules about gender roles within the family. She said she felt like the message

she received about being a woman was that you could dream all you wanted but you were “going to have to settle...and become a housewife.” Prior to losing her job at the mill, she said she had to work in a job to earn money, never realizing a career could be something you enjoyed. Kay joined the Women’s Leadership Institute when she became aware of the opportunity because she said that she had wasted a great deal of her life being miserable and did not want to miss out on opportunities when then presented themselves.

Lauren

After encouragement from her adult son, Lauren decided after 30 years out of school to return and complete the associate’s degree she had previously dropped out of so she could balance being married and a new mom. Lauren shared that education was important to her own mom who encouraged her to go on to college after high school. At that time, Lauren didn’t see the value in a college education, but that changed when she watched her son excel through his own bachelor’s and master’s degrees. She was transferring for her bachelor’s because she said it would bring her additional stability and the opportunity to help people. Lauren described herself as shy and didn’t always speak up for herself when she should. She said she was a great listener who loves to hear other people’s stories. Lauren joined the Women’s Leadership Institute in hopes of learning skills she can get out into her community and truly become a leader in her community.

Lisa

At this time of this study, Lisa was 50 years old and had been working on her associate’s degree on and off since 1997. She worked approximately 60 hours a week in supply chain management; a field she said is very male dominated. She had always dreamed of moving up the ladder in management, hoping to one day become a CEO, but just in the last few

years found herself changing that direction and wanting to move into a role where she could be teaching or taking care of others. Lisa described herself as a “mixed bag of people” and said that who she is on the inside isn’t always reflected on the outside. On the inside, she described herself as kind and trusting, maybe a bit too trusting, but that on the outside people see her as solid, determined, straightforward and sure of herself. She said that the way she presented herself to others wasn’t how she feels which is always struggling and questioning herself. She explained that in the past she wasn’t too kind, but that life experiences had changed her, making her softer. Growing up, starting around age 10, Lisa had to start providing care for her two younger brothers while her mom worked on a law degree. She had tough relationships with both of her parents. Her father died when she was young. She also took care of aging parents and was the primary-caregiver for her mother when she became ill. After an experience at work when she was told “people fear you” Lisa reflected on how her experiences have made her disconnect emotionally, so she worked to change this image of herself. She recently was married and had a great relationship, which she said wouldn’t have been the case years ago. She stated that she is “so much happier now than I was.” Lisa joined the Women’s Leadership Institute because it was a great opportunity but also because she knew it would open her up to thinking more about herself and others.

Themes

The following themes were found in the data and supported by the literature review and are ordered in frequency of occurrence in codes. The first theme is change of worldview. This theme emerged from data coded as change of worldview or society, change of participants’ views of self, others and change of their views on gender and was frequently coded. The second and third themes, respectively, were importance of care and relationships. A fourth theme was

gender differences in leadership. The fifth theme was empowerment. The sixth theme was participant support for the programmatic design of the WLI and was not included in frequency counts but was explored as the final theme to support the action research intended as part of the research. The following sections provide details of each theme.

Theme 1: Changing Worldviews

A desired outcome of transformative-learning theory is that the learners will demonstrate a revised or new worldview based on their experiences. This revision of worldview includes changing views of themselves and for the purpose of this study, changes in their views of gender. This was evident in participants' interview responses. Change was also evident in course activities and learning experiences that altered ways that participants viewed others and viewed society. See examples in Table 1.

Table 2. Change of Worldview

Code	Example
View of Self	"I lived and learned through it and that's the hugest thing it's like okay how can I do this better instead of ... in the past I would really just really be tough on myself. I mean it's almost to the point of bullying yourself it's when you have low self-esteem, or you let those insecurities kind of dominate your thinking and or dominate your feelings."
View of Gender	"I guess I thought I kind of knew about gender, but this has opened my eyes and made me think outside the box. Everybody has an identity that they identify with and it's not always the same as the next person. It's not always male or female, check the box. It gives a person the opportunity to be free to express themselves without being judged for who they are."
View of Society	"I think it has because I saw things – not I saw but, like, I learned things from their point of view, like, a girl in my class, she's from a different country. How they view of things over there compared to here I was like, what are they thinking, like, this is – not what they're thinking but, like, it's just so different from here. Now I think about it, it makes sense. Hearing her, like, how different – what you learned here from the other

Code	Example
	country was like, it's kind of interesting that, like, your beliefs are changing now since you've been here. I thought that was interesting."
View of Others	"I had never really looked at it like that. I always, I was that other person that was like, "Oh, that's just not right." (referring to judgement of others) But who am I to judge? It's okay to be whoever you identify with, that it's your decision, not mine. Either you accept it or you don't. I mean acceptance doesn't hurt anyone. Being kind to someone doesn't hurt either. You don't know who you help by being kind, so yeah, made me come out of that box that I was in like, "No, that's not right."

When designing the curriculum for the Women's Leadership Institute, a common conversation between myself and the faculty involved creating learning activities that allowed students the opportunity to explore previously held views of themselves and compare to who they are now. This happened during the first class, when students read *Educated* by Tara Westover (2018) and selected ideas from the book to research and connect to their own experiences. Some of the ideas that students selected included religion, homeschooling, and parenting. This activity allowed students to discuss with each other views that they previously held and to engage in critical discourse while challenging these beliefs in a safe environment. All seven of the participants reported that they had a change in the way they viewed themselves through their experience in the Women's Leadership Institute.

All seven participants reported that they had changes in their view of gender during their participation in the WLI. Seven participants also reported that they had changes in their view of society. Six of the seven participants reported a change in their view of others over the six months of their participation in the WLI.

Change of some type was reported by all participants and supported the overall theme of change of worldview. This theme was coded a total 188 times in all seven interviews.

Theme 2: Care

Coded a combined total of 105 times throughout the seven interviews, care was the second dominant theme that arose while analyzing the data. This theme was coded into two subcategories, care of others and care of self (Table 3).

Table 3. Care

Code	Example
Care of Others	“When I first met my boyfriend, shortly after we started dating, he actually had a history of drug use and he had relapsed. And so, I felt responsible for doing some taking care of him, but I definitely didn't have to, you know what I mean? I've never been in a position where I had to, I've been in some positions where I chose to do some taking care of, but I'm beyond that. Not really. And that was mostly just stressful, like not like, because like he's also an adult and also had to do his own things. And so, it's not like a child where you're like, do what I say and like let me change your diaper or stop kicking.”
Care of Self	“I think sometimes as a mom I struggle to put anything that I want above what they want. Anything that I need above what they need. I feel sometimes there is a feeling of I need to take care of you and you need clothes on your back, you need food in your belly, you need all of these all come less. And I think is sometimes it's hard as a mom to even think about bringing yourself forward a little bit to be like, “Hey, I need to take care of this for myself.” So, the decision came down to this is going to be better for you in the long run. I know I need to sacrifice time with you now. But I really kind of came around that it is the perfect time.”

For this theme, care of others was the most frequently coded with 88 total references supporting the concept that care tends to be a dominant feminine trait of leadership as demonstrated by the participants of the WLI.

All seven participants talked at length about caring for others. These stories were either set in the past, when some of the participants like Ellie and Lisa talked about having to care for siblings during times their mothers were unable to do so. Or set in the present tense where participants Lauren and Karen talked about caring for their own children. Jellus related her ideas

of care of others to her career choice sharing first that she wanted to be a pediatrician, but now is pursuing her degree in education so she can open a school in Haiti. Kay talked at length about helping her boyfriend through a struggle with addiction and her role as his caregiver and the choices she had to face. Although not as prominent as the theme of care of others, the care-of-self code showed that participants' references to it were in relation to going back to school, completing degrees, and learning how to give priority to their selves. Care of others or care of self was evident in all seven participant interviews and supports the theme of care.

Theme 3: Relationships

The third theme that was identified from the interview transcripts was the importance of relationships in the participants' lives (Table 3).

Table 3. Relationships

Code	Example
Mothers & Other Mothers	"My mom is like my best friend and even I look back on it now and I see us, like in my teenage years fighting, butting heads all the time. But I still learned a lot from her so I really, really value that relationship that I have with her because there are plenty of people around that don't have a mom or don't value their relationship with their mom and you only get one of them."
Instructor & Other College Support Staff	"I think the thing that sits with me the most from my classes is that every instructor wants to see you succeed."
Peers	I think the opportunities and collaborating, I learned so much from the students almost just as much from the instructors and are different variations and hearing different- perspective, that's a huge thing and I think the stepping stones to believing in yourself and growing in confidence huge, it's so huge, and I think- if I look at emotional intelligence and the growth of- you know, from when I began...there is- the camaraderie, that's going to be another part you know, like cheering women on, and then also another part is- I can't remember, it's- by pulling all these pieces together and stuff and I

Code	Example
	feel like, being a part of this can- can be the culture to really fly with that and to really affirm that in ourselves but also in me, myself personally.”

The most mentioned relationship was one that participants had with what I defined “Mother and Other Mothers”. Often, if participants did not have a strong mother role model, they would talk about another woman who was influential in their lives the way a mother would be. These relationships often helped define how the participants viewed themselves and gender. Additionally, participants talked at length about influential college administrators and faculty that have helped them access and succeed in education, a task many had not previously been successful doing. The last group of relationships discussed focused on those relationships with peers, either in the Women’s Leadership Institute or not. The below sections explore these relationships more.

All seven participants shared stories about their relationships with their mothers. In the data, the frequency of synonyms for this theme was notable. Table 4 shows the frequencies that these words appeared in the interview transcripts, equaling a total of 529 synonyms for a mother or other mother.

Table 4. Frequencies

Synonym	Frequency
Godmother	5
Grandmother, Grandma	117
Mother, Mom	286
Aunt, Aunts	15
Friends	106

Just as important as their relationship with their mothers and other mothers, participants talked at length about relationships they have with key college support staff and faculty or instructors they've had during their college experiences. Six of the seven talked specifically about their faculty in the WLI. In their interviews, they reported that having someone push them when they began to doubt themselves and support them through the challenges that come with college was important.

Lauren defined future women's roles as follows: "I think women can change the culture that we live in nowadays. Educate others in diversity and inclusion." She described this connection as "a sisterhood."

Relationships come in a variety of forms. Some are biological, such as mothers and grandmothers and some are situational, such as college administrators and faculty. Regardless of type, relationships were identified by all participants as key to their understanding of themselves as women and success as students.

Theme 4: Gender Differences in Leadership

All participants spoke about gender differences and their learning about a spectrum of male or female traits (Table 5).

Table 5. Gender Differences

Code	Example
Gender	"I say the one thing that I view different is in leadership roles because I didn't really think about it before. I wasn't like going to be a leader...but now that...I think about it, like, we talked more, like, woman – females typically have this style and males simply have this style but we read an article that was saying like, that each characteristic is different in a different environment and that kind of opened my mind, like, okay, like, it's situational. It's not, like, women are this way. It's like, you switch your skills to situations you're in. I think I learned...it was like men are more strict in this kind of stuff and female are more like empathetic in this kind of stuff...okay, you can't just have one or the other. It made me think, like, what a leader is now...I guess I never really thought about gender playing a role in it before."

Karen and Lisa shared a slightly different view as they reflected on how they have adjusted their own leadership styles to appear more masculine. Karen stated “I think over the years being in leadership roles especially working under men, coming out soft can actually be viewed as weak and unsuccessful. That’s just what I felt in the past and I think as I’ve gotten older that I just keep that with me a lot. So, I feel that I have to be a little bit more aggressive or abrasive in that respect.” Both reflected that they feel more confident in their own leadership skills and abilities knowing that the feminine traits of leadership they have hidden before are not only valuable but necessary today.

Instead of viewing feminine traits of leadership as a weakness, participants reported a new understanding of leadership traits that are found on a spectrum and emerge situationally. Coded a total of 28 times, this theme was the fourth frequent theme.

Theme 5: Empowerment

Another notable theme to emerge is one of empowerment. Throughout the interviews, six of the seven of the participants shared how their experiences in the WLI helped them feel empowered and find their voices (Table 6).

Table 6. Empowerment

Code	Example
Empowerment	“I think women aren’t afraid to speak up for themselves anymore. They’re up for the challenge. If there is something they feel is right, they will speak up about it instead of just letting something be said and whether it’s right or wrong, going with the flow. So I think in a way, we’ve been empowered to just speak up, and sometimes people take it the wrong way, as aggression, but no.”

Figure 2 shows how various statements from the participants all lead back to the root word of empowered. The branches show empowerment on a personal level such as “I can” and “speak up,” a relational level “how women can be,” and a change level “men, too”. This demonstrates

the impact their participants learning experiences had on multiple levels and the interconnectedness of the responses.

Figure 2. Word Tree of Empowerment



Empowerment was identified as an experience or outcome of six participants of the WLI and considered in a variety of ways including personal and encompassing of all women. This theme was coded 11 times in six of the seven interviews.

Theme 6: Support of the WLI

All participants were asked to reflect on their experience in the WLI, and all shared positive comments (Table 7).

Table 7. WLI Support

Code	Example
WLI Support	“Both the classes really are more so critical thinking. More so than it would be like taking a, let's say History class or even English class where it's really more structure and memory in learning. These classes make you think more and develop I think you as a person and a female and a leader. So, I think those are sticking with me.”

Participants were told very little about the design, innovation or anticipated outcomes of the program. Despite not knowing full intended learning outcomes, all seven participants described their experiences and learning in the WLI as supportive of the learning objectives of the institute defined by me, the director and the board of advocates.

As a newly designed and launched program, participants were asked about their experiences in and their support for the WLI. Their responses created the last theme, support of

the WLI. Coded a total of twenty-two times, I did not include this in order of frequency as many of the statements of support for the WLI occurred in other themes in addition to support for the program.

Summary

This chapter shows findings from analyses of interview data collected from seven participants in a women's leadership institute. Six major themes were found, coded in order of frequency and are as follows:

1. Change of worldviews including self, gender, society and others;
2. Care of others and care of self;
3. Relationships;
4. Gender differences in leadership;
5. Empowerment; and
6. Support of the program

Participants' responses documented their experiences as women in education, in society and in the institute.

Chapter 5. Conclusions & Recommendations

Drawing from feminist theory and transformative-learning theory, and by examining the narrative that comes with the development of the ethic of care, the lives and experiences of women students participating in a Women's Leadership Institute (WLI) were explored.

Specifically, this study sought to address the following research questions:

- How does transformative-learning theory foster the development of an ethic of care for students participating in a leadership development program?
- How and in what ways does their learning foster sustainability?

I gathered information from seven participants in a series of up to three in-person, semi-structured interviews, each 60 to 90 minutes long. Interviews were designed to capture narratives of their experiences as students in higher education and participants in the WLI. The following themes found in these data were supported by the literature review. The first five themes were coded in order of frequency and the sixth theme, support for the program was intentionally listed as the final theme as specifically looked at the support for the program from the participants. The first theme was transformative learning that fosters a learning environment where change can occur. This theme emerged from data coded as change of worldview or society, change of view of participants views of self, others and of their views on gender. The second and third themes were importance of care and relationships. A fourth theme was gender differences in leadership. The fifth theme was theme, empowerment. The last theme was participant support for the programmatic design of the WLI Institute.

Discussion

The following five themes were key findings in this project.

1. Intentional design of transformative learning experiences can change students' worldviews, including views of gender, self, society and others.
2. Relationships with faculty, peers and key administrators are important to student success.
3. Students who participate in leadership program such as the WLI feel empowered. This empowerment can foster sustainability as they realize their revised worldviews and work to instill change.
4. Change of a system is that is deeply rooted in patriarchy and tradition is difficult.

Achievement of SDG 4, improving the quality of educational systems and promoting quality in higher education needs to provide access for learners to participate in programs that are content based, but also facilitates the moral growth and development of learners. As women enter education at different places in their development, experiences and beliefs, this type of approach allows their experiences to be recognized and explored. However, in order to truly focus on education as sustainability, it is important to not only include but elevate women's role in sustainability by looking to transition current pedagogy to be more inclusive of women's voices and learning through transformative learning. Through the use of transformative learning theory and the programmatic design of the Women's Leadership Institute, participants were provided the opportunity to engage in transforming their views of their roles in society and strengthening their position as social change agents through completion of general education courses that have incorporated learning activities that address this growth.

Theme 1, Change of Worldview, supported the use of transformative learning theory to change the worldviews of participants in the Women's Leadership Institute. Many of these changes identified came from a change in how participants were taught to view gender as children. This was often based on household religious views or specific to the role models they

had as young children. The curriculum allowed the students to explore their views of gender by connecting to what is happening in society today and to think about how their view of gender has changed from when they were younger. These experiences didn't only happen in the Women's Leadership Institute, but during their college careers. Many of the participants shared experiences in college that changed the way they view themselves, but also identified that they are just now being given the chance to reflect on that because of their participation in the institute. In addition to changing views of themselves and of gender, many of the participants talked about how their participation in the Institute courses has led to a change in the way they view society (Belenky et al., 1986, Mezirow, 1981, 1990).

Theme 2, Care, demonstrated a deep connection to the work of Gilligan (1982, 1994), Held (2006) and Noddings (1984, 2005) in supporting the strong connection between women and care as it relates to moral development. Whether it is care for children or loved ones, care for motivating others to succeed or pursue their goals, or caring for those that have nothing to give in return, but because it is the right thing to do, care for others was proven to be important to all participants. Noddings suggests that a change in pedagogical approaches that support care for learners, teachers and others will help create stronger school systems leading to a more stable, sustainable world (2005).

The experience of connecting with others helped normalize participants life situations and realize their leadership goals are not only achievable but necessary. Theme 3, Relationships, supports one of Brooks's key ideas that providing the opportunity for women to connect, share stories and learn from each other is the essence of transformative learning for women (2000). The use of a cohort model and instructors, a director and advisors who remained a part of the students' full experience in the WLI, demonstrate the need for transformative experiences to

occur in a safe, trusting environment (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Fenwick, 2001). Women who build on these relationships and go through transformative processes together turn to playing an active role in building a more just and collaborative society focused on socio-ecological sustainability (Panton, 2016; Spretnek, 2005; Burns, 2011)

Gender differences and common characteristics of leadership exist on a spectrum. Theme 4, *Gender Differences in Leadership*, supported that the spectrum isn't one of good versus bad or right versus wrong. Rather the spectrum exists to display characteristics commonly associated with gender and that regardless of the gender someone identifies with, there are times when all humans move fluidly along this spectrum. With the patriarchal foundations of western society, and the resulting social pattern in which traits typically valued in leadership positions are those that are most commonly associated with men, it was imperative that learners recognize this spectrum and value a range of leadership traits. The concept of a spectrum was introduced to students in the second class as their assignments included reading *Same Difference: How Gender Myths are Hurting Our Relationships, Our Children and Our Jobs* (Barnett, 2004). Students also participated in class activities that were constructed after the reading the book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (Tannen, 2007). These books and assignments led students to a place of reflecting on their experiences and perspectives relative to the spectrums that exist surrounding masculine/feminine traits. Students could articulate times when a more feminine approach to leadership, one that is relational and caring (Gilligan, 1984; Clark, 2015), is more necessary or effective than one that is just and hierarchical.

Theme 5, *Empowerment*, was consistent with research on change and sustainability education that supports the use of transformative learning theory leading to sustainability (Sterling, 2011; Orr, 2005). Storytelling is a tool that provides learners to share their narrative

and make sense of their lived experiences. This process promotes empowerment and was supported by the participants and they shared how important they found it to be to share their stories and led to their understanding of how to use their experiences to better their future. Empowerment was seen both on a personal level in the participants, where they identified that their participation in the institute helped them find their own voice and on a broader scale where some shared their desire to bring their learning to their communities and allow for others to share in their realization of empowerment. Education that is sustainable needs to focus on changing learners' previously held views, helping reshape a new worldview and then empowering action with this new view.

Theme 6, Support for the Program, showed that participants had a positive experience in the program. Since this project was participatory action research to help inform me as the director, one of the findings looked at how participants felt about the design and efficacy of the program. The acknowledgement that the learning that occurred during their participation expanded beyond content-based learning and reached into the areas of critical thinking and change supports the model of the WLI. Participants were told very little about the design, innovation, or anticipated outcomes of the program. Yet, what they described as their experiences and learning supports the educational program outcomes as defined by me, the director, and the board of advocates (Table 8).

Table 8. WLI Outcomes

WLI Educational Program Objectives	Student Support of Objectives
To facilitate student's examination of issues facing women and advance careers towards leadership positions;	"I just think that it is a great experience to be recognized and know that you have a voice too in this world. Like a lot of times, you always see the picture of a woman struggling but with being part of women's leadership institute, it's much more than that. There are women out there that's doing it where they are CEOs of companies or leaders in different professions. It's not always men."
To introduce practical strategies for performing effectively in the workplace;	"My goal had always been, I always wanted to be a CEO. But that's changed now. I think the longer I'm in my career the less I want to really do that. What's more important to me is teaching. Giving the people that work for me or work with me really the ability to be the best that they can be. And if I can do that that's more important to me. I don't really need the fame of being an executive. Now it's more so how well do I do. How well do I make their lives better?"
To support PTK members envisioning bachelor's degrees following graduation from an associate degree; and	Six of the seven participants plan to continue their education into bachelor's level coursework. One student was undecided at the time of this research.
To provide a unique academic experience that prepares students for bachelor level coursework. Students will experience a reflective journey as they create written projects focused on women's leadership experiences.	"I can go to any situation, pretty much talk to anybody, which just once in a while it's like I don't know... what is it that's what I'm afraid of? I would like to do more of all of that and kind of share- share my story... I think the women's leadership institute will definitely help with that...I didn't even voice before, now it's getting better."

Education that is sustainable needs to address the four roles identified by Sterling (2001): to improve socialization, to train for vocation, to promote individual growth, and to transform society and create more sustainable world (2001). Curriculum should support the development of self-knowledge (Schwab, 1969). In a learner centered ideology, curricular objectives focus on individual learners' growth as a foundational concept (Schiro, 2013). This design is consonant with sustainable education practices that are designed to value and support women. Formal and

informal learning opportunities set the stage for learners to grow and flourish in an environment that supports them as a whole person. Arguably, a learner centered approach goes against a more traditional approach in higher education of a scholar academic ideology (Schiro 2013). A typical university shares standard roles that are consistent across the academy that focus on transmissive content learning, but not social change. These traditional roles include “research, community outreach, technological innovation and knowledge creation” (Moore, 2005, p. 78). Faculty are traditionally experts in their disciplines and have been trained to create curriculum and courses that transmit or transfer this information to students. This type of knowledge stewardship structure, commonly seen in institutes of higher education, focuses on keeping disciplines separate and focused on specific content. Traditional higher education institutions lead to an organization of education experience around disciplines and professional preparation, rather than using an interdisciplinary approach that allows for the transfer of knowledge in an environment that is responsive to the learners’ needs. Educators not only teach the content but also train and expose students how to work and be professionals in that specific discipline (Moore, 2005; Schiro, 2013).

The Women’s Leadership Institute was designed with the intent to bridge learners’ experiences and paths from an associate’s degree into a bachelor’s degree. The design included intentional use of transformative learning theory and supported Fenwick’s role of the facilitator in the program to engage, create safe conditions, encouragement of reflection and provision of support to the learners (2001). Findings support that future program design of similar type of leadership development programs for women should be incorporated into already required coursework. Any additional requirements either credit or non-credit bearing places an undue burden on learners (financially and time). This type of program can be intentionally woven into

general education curriculum and uphold established course learning outcomes while developing additional learning outcomes based on development of leadership skills and exploration of women's lived experiences. An example of this is using a required research and writing course. Students may be required to explore various types of writing including narrative in which they share personal stories based on a prompt from instructor design to elicit stories of experiences as women in leadership positions. Another assignment could focus on researching common traits of leaders or trends of leadership based on gender. Students would still learn the fundamentals of research and writing while focusing on a theme of women in leadership throughout the course.

Instruction for the program should be done by faculty with a genuine interest in development of leadership skills and the ability to create a safe learning space where students are able to share past experiences and learn from each other, not just the instructor. Instructors need to recognize that there is a great focus on relational learning and provide opportunities to connect peer to peer or peer to instructor. Development in this type program is not a matter of right and wrong, rather is individual for each learner and will be different based on past experiences and current place in life. The instructor also needs to be creative in finding ways to incorporate themes of leadership and ethics of care into their coursework as many instructors will be experts in the content they currently teach, but this program will ask them to expand beyond this content to a more interdisciplinary way of teaching.

Opportunities for self-reflection and discourse are two key concepts to consider when implementing transformative learning in a program like the WLI. It is important that both are included in the design. Creating opportunities for learners to share their stories leads to the ability to reflect on previous life experiences and then process through new learning (lenses) which is important for learning and change to occur. In higher education this can be done in a

variety of ways such as journaling, specific assignments with prompts to elicit self-reflection or meetings with small groups or instructor to discuss ideas, concepts and new realizations.

Discourse occurs when learners are provided a safe place to share their views, either previous or current, and feel safe to question or challenge each other without fear of argument or retaliation.

Allowing discourse to occur improves student's ability to problem solve, think critically and come to a place of understanding of other's experiences and views. This connects to relational learning by allowing learners the ability to grow relationships particularly with peers that have a different background than theirs.

Lastly, it is imperative when developing and implementing this type of program to find support within the institution. A program such as a WLI needs to have institutional support and understanding of the goals of the institute. It cannot be viewed as a money-maker or way to generate or increase enrollments at the institute. The institution (administration) needs to understand that the outcomes of such a program will not be immediately seen and that the impact of this program on students will be felt and seen on an individual basis before it is realized on a broader scale with community impacts. The goals for this type of program should be to help learners understand and develop an ethic of care and that approaching moral questions, such as those questions that occur as a leader by approaching the questions from a place of care, can foster sustainability.

Conclusions

How does transformative-learning theory foster the development of an ethic of care for students participating in a leadership development program? If an ethic of care is realized and understood to add value to the world, women can start to expand this care to address the necessary change to create sustainable ways of living on a global scale. We cannot really address

major sustainability crises without tapping into the fundamental ideas of caring for others, or without connecting with others. Women are especially equipped to do this through a feminine approach to moral decision making supported by an ethics of care, though that capacity has been given little room in traditional educational structures. In a gendered and patriarchal educational system, to effectively serve women, curricular ideology must make ample room for women's ways of knowing and the ethics of care; and for learning processes to be truly transformative. Through the process of sharing stories, creating social connections and reflecting on their own views and actions to address social inequities, women are able to reshape their narratives and create authority and practice authenticity, to create new paths forward, make impacts on their communities and social systems, and to define new sustainable ways of living. Through intentional construction of curriculum and facilitation that values women's relational experiences and feminine ways of knowing, and careful assessment that the learners are ready, learners were brought through a transformational learning process that respectfully engaged and valued their lived experience, challenged previous paradigms, and laid the foundation for their participation in telling their story to help create a more just and stable society.

How and in what ways does their learning foster sustainability? By engaging and empowering women through education, communities can increase their capacity and their strategies for reaching the sustainable development goals. If we only expect students to learn straight from books versus bringing in lived experiences and having opportunities for more experiences connected to the learning, how do we expect them to connect what is happening inside the classroom to the whole world? Educations should be a medium, the connection point, between experiences and living a globally fulfilled life. When I see students struggle to connect what they are learning to the world around them I often wonder what the point of that learning is

for them? If they cannot connect with, what value does it add to their life? Orr also supports the need for university faculty and administrators who can “role model integrity, care and thoughtfulness” (Orr, 2011, p. 244). These types of role models as necessary to student growth and success were supported in theme 3, relationships. To have a global citizenry that is able to adopt sustainable practices, SDG’s 4 & 5 need to be met. One way to achieve this is by reforming our education systems to be more intentionally transformative, especially for women.

As women continue to experience emotional growth, they have broader awareness and impact on building economic stability. Their care for others drives initiatives to address a wide range of social problems, including access to healthcare, education, and basic life necessities such as clean water and food. The maternal instinct, importance of care and relationship building could help create a system that engages in caring for Mother Earth to address climate change and protect the environment. All these ideas together help address the needs of now while creating a more sustainable system for our children, generations of the future.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research project did not intentionally focus on the intersectionality of race and class, rather the lived experiences of participants in a Women’s Leadership Institute. The ideas of this intersection surfaced in many of the interviews and further research on this connection could strengthen much needed research in the areas of women and transformative learning.

Additionally, understanding the role of emotions, or affective learning, as part of the transformative learning process would help educators understand how to create educational programs that support women’s experiences in college.

A final area of further research would be to look at how a program such as the Women’s Leadership Institute could continue to support and engage participants after their transfer into a

bachelor's degree program and throughout their coursework. After I completed research, the university underwent restructuring and my position as director of the WLI was eliminated. The program design was changed and no additional programming for participants of the WLI was considered. Had the program continued, a focus on additional opportunities for the participants to continue engagement and learning could have included a professional mentoring program with community and business leaders, additional informal learning opportunities, a peer mentoring program, or a capstone course towards the end of bachelor's level coursework to advance learning and transformation. While these ideas were not able to be explored with this program, it is recommended that these considerations be included for future design of similar programs.

Strengths and Limitations

This study contributes to the growing research on the use of transformative learning as it relates to sustainability. Transformative-learning theory has been criticized for the difficulty of effective application in educational settings (Christie, Carey, Robertson & Grainger, 2015). There has not been one cohesive definition of transformative learning and differing views impact how it is practiced in education (Taylor, 1998). Additionally, educators often use differing approaches in formal education settings to provide learners the opportunities to engage in civil discourse and safely explore their beliefs, values and feelings about topics (Mezirow, 1998). Transformative learning has been proven to be “complex, uncomfortable, and time consuming” (Moore, 2005, p. 84). While my own research on transformative learning was part of my doctoral program, I also had to translate this knowledge and use of the theory to the instructors of the courses in the Women's Leadership Institute. Not having a cohesive definition to work from and working collaboratively to come up with ways to use transformative learning in the courses was challenging. Finding literature specifically on transformative learning theory and women was

difficult. Since Mezirow's initial study in 1978, little recent work has been done to continue to expand on his initial work specifically focusing on women (Irving & English, 2011).

The sample size of participants in this study was small due to the overall size of the first cohort in the Women's Leadership Institute. As indicated prior, my role as the developer and director of the institute may have caused some skewing of data. Additionally, following the study completion, the university changed that structure of the institute making the ability to replicate the same study difficult to impossible.

Summary

This qualitative study looked at the personal narratives and experiences of 7 participants in a Women's Leadership Institute. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, these narratives were explored, and experiences in education and the institute through the use of transformative learning were looked at to better understand how their participation in the program assisted their development of leadership skills, particularly an ethic of care in moral decision making. Conclusions include the following: First, all participants in the study agreed that their experiences in the Women's Leadership Institute changed their previously held worldviews including how they viewed gender, society, themselves, and others. Secondly, there was a strong consensus that the program, or similar programs should continue or be created to serve the needs of women in higher education. These programs should include opportunity in the classroom for women to share lived experiences, connect with each other and instructors, to build authority and reshape views towards their roles in society as leaders. Third, the participants all demonstrated that care and relationships with and for others is a foundational feminine characteristic that was instrumental in understanding and finding confidence in their stories of who they are. Finally, by creating a safe space in education for women to explore this narrative,

safely challenge previously held assumptions and learn their own strength as leaders, they feel empowered and educated to go into the world and create their own change.

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Appendix A. Glossary

- **Change:** Throughout this study, the word *change* is used in reference to social change.
- **Ethics of care:** A relational approach to moral development that supports caring and relationships with others as a universal quality displayed by humans.
- **Ethics of justice:** Focused more on autonomy and rights of individuals, this approach to moral development is hierarchical and fair.
- **Feminine:** Focused on the natural qualities of a woman or individual typically associated with women.
- **Feminist:** Focused on equality, particularly between men and women
- **Masculine:** Focused on the natural qualities of a man or individual typically associated with men.
- **Sustainability:** Although various definitions of sustainability exist, for this research the operative definition derives from the United Nations Bruntland Report, (1987) that defined sustainability as follows: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In higher education, a move to include social change and social justice as part of the overall mission of higher education will lay the foundation for a more interconnected system focusing on the environment, economy and society; the foundations of sustainability.
- **School:** School is used instead of education. School provides a more narrow definition and allows the researcher to distinguish education that is occurring in a school setting.
- **Women:** The terms *woman* or *women* are used throughout this study instead of the term *female*. Because the term female can be used to describe any species, the use of the word woman allows the reader to assume intent of this study is for human purposes.

Additionally, women/woman is also a more inclusive term that allows for inclusion of individuals who identify as a woman but are not biologically female.

Appendix B. Protocols

Interview Items

Section A - Background information gathering:

1. Tell me a little about yourself and where you are at in life right now.
2. What experiences are important to you over the past few years?
3. What matters to you? What do you care about, think about?

Section B – Self-Descriptions (Gilligan)

1. How would you describe yourself to yourself? If you were to tell yourself who you really are, how would you do that?
2. Is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself in the past? What led to the changes? Have there been any other turning points?
3. How do you see yourself changing in the future?

Section C – Gender

1. What does being a woman mean to you?
2. Do you think there are important differences between women and men?
3. How has your sense of yourself as a woman been changing?

Section D – Relationships

1. Looking back over your life, what relationships have been really important to you? Why?
2. How would you describe those relationships?
3. How do you think the other person would describe the relationship?
4. How has the relationship changed, and how do you account for the change?
5. Have you had a relationship with someone who helped you shape the person you have become?
6. Have you had a really important relationship where you were responsible for taking care of another person? How would you describe that?
7. How important was that in your life?

8. How would you describe your mother? Your father?
9. Has your view of your parents been changing?
10. And how would you describe each of your children (if any)?

Section E- Real Life Moral Dilemma (Gilligan)

1. Everyone has had the experience of being in situations where they had to make a decision but weren't sure what was the right thing to do. Could you describe to me a situation where you weren't sure what was the right thing to do?
2. What was the situation? What was the conflict for you in the situation?
3. In thinking about what to do, what did you consider? Why? Were there other things that you thought of in trying to decide what to do? How did you weigh each alternative?
4. What did you decide to do? Why? What happened?
5. Looking back at it now, did you make the best choice? Why or why not?
6. Thinking back over the whole thing, what did you learn from it?

Section F – Education

1. What do you think will stay with you about your experiences here in the Women's Leadership Institute? What about college in general?
2. Has being in the Women's Leadership Institute changed the way you think about yourself and the world?
3. In your learning here, have you come across an idea that made you see things differently? Or think about things differently?
4. What has been the most helpful to you in school?
5. Are there things that the Women's Leadership Institute doesn't provide that are important to you?
6. Are there things you would like to learn that you don't think you can learn here?
7. Looking back over your whole life, can you tell me about a really powerful learning experience that you've had, in or out of school?

Conclusion

1. What will you and your life be like in fifteen years from now?
2. Are there any other questions that I should have asked you, that would have thrown some light on these issues I am interested in, that is, women's lives and women's learnings?

Note: Adapted from (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997; Appendix A. This researcher is not using the interview items in section G and H of the interview schedule.

Appendix C. Invitations & Consents

Invitation to Participate

Greetings Cohort 1 and participants of the Women's Leadership Institute,

As a member of the Women's Leadership Institute at Lakeland University I am hoping you might be willing to participate in an interview with me during the upcoming months. I am currently working on a research study as part of my doctorate degree through the University of Wisconsin –Stevens Point. The focus on my study is on women students who are part of a program that is built on transformative-learning theory and the impact it has on their development of the way they lead and care. I hope that the results of my study will better inform faculty and staff at Lakeland University, and other institutions, about the experiences that women students have while in college. I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in my study.

If you are willing to participate in a series of interviews, not more than 3 interviews total, lasting approximately 60 – 90 minutes each, please email me directly at GaffneyJL@lakeland.edu or JGaff121@uwsp.edu. Interviews will take place at a Lakeland University campus center, or at another location of your choice. The information you provide will be published in my dissertation, however, information you provide will be confidential. You may choose from a list of pseudonyms so that your name will not be identified. Additionally, I will delete any reference to information that will identify you or others you might mention during the interview.

If you are interested, please email me as soon as possible, but no later than [INSERT DATE]. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation upon signing the informed consent document the day of the first interview.

Thank you for considering my request.

Jess L. Gaffney
Director, Women's Leadership Institute
Lakeland University

Informed Consent to Participate in Human Subject Research

Jessica Gaffney, director of the Women's Leadership Institute at Lakeland University and a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point in Educational Sustainability, would appreciate your participation in a research study designed to learn about the experiences female students have in college and how application transformative-learning theory develops an ethic of care in students. You are being asked to voluntarily participate in a series of no more than three interviews. Your participation is completely voluntary. The benefit of this study is to gain an understanding of creating learning experiences for women in higher education that will inform faculty and administrators to create programs that support women.

As part of the study the researcher will ask you to participate in several in-person interviews, not to exceed three, between July and September of 2019. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed upon location, preferably at a Lakeland University campus center. This researcher will audio-record the interviews and have interviews transcribed word-for-word. This researcher will provide you with the transcription of the interview via your Lakeland University email account and you will have the opportunity to clarify any statements at that point. Upon completion of the interviews, this researcher will provide you with a summary of the major themes that emerged.

There is not anticipated risk to you as a result of your participation in this study other than the inconvenience of the time to complete to interviews. You could, however, experience some discomfort if you have had an uncomfortable experience in education and your interview causes you to remember this. Others may recognize you through the details of your interview responses. This researcher will take steps to minimize this risk. You will be asked to select from a list of pseudonyms to be identified as throughout the study. In addition, during data analysis this researcher will choose pseudonyms for any identifying information that you disclose during your interview. You will have the opportunity to remove text from your interview during the review of your interview transcript. Information that would identify you as a participant will only be known to this researcher and it will be kept on a password-protected computer throughout the study. After the study has concluded, the information will be destroyed. It should be noted that during the process of transcript review, participants will receive a copy of their interview transcript which will include their pseudonym. You should take precautions to protect the contents of the interview transcription while it is in your possession to protect your anonymity.

Although there may be no immediate benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study, it is hoped that the researcher will gain important information about the experiences women students have in classes specifically designed the explore the ethic of care through a transformative learning process that will be of future value to society and sustainability.

This information could be obtained through various other methods including surveys or class observations, the nature of interviews supports the inquiry process for this research. You may also choose not to participate as an alternative.

If you want to withdraw from the study, at any time, you may do so without penalty. Any information collected on you up to that point would be destroyed. Before you sign this consent form, please ask any questions you have.

Once the study is completed, you may receive the results of the study. If you would like these results, or if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact:

Jess Gaffney
Women's Leadership Institute
Lakeland University
W3718 South Dr.
Plymouth, WI 53073
(920) 565-1047 ext. 3200
GaffneyJL@lakeland.edu

If you have any questions about your treatment as a participant in this study or believe that you have been harmed in some way by your participation, please write or call:

Dr. Anna Haines, Chair
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of Wisconsin Stevens Point
TNR 0205
2100 Main St.
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-2659
ahaines@uwsp.edu

Although Dr. Haines will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

I have received a complete explanation of the student and I agree to participate:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix D. Permissions & Approvals

From: Generic, permissions (US) <permissions.Generic@hbgusa.com>
Sent: Monday, April 8, 2019 10:35 AM
To: Gaffney, Jessica L <jgaff121@uwsp.edu>
Subject: RE: Women's Ways of Knowing permission request

Hi Jess,

Thank you for reaching out. We have no issue with this usage as long as your project has no commercial value and the below described use does not change. Please note that we do ask that you use our credit line when applicable:

From *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Mary F. Belenky, copyright © 1988. Reprinted by permission of Basic Books, an imprint of Perseus Books, LLC, a subsidiary of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

All my best,

Brittany Shear

Rights Intern

Hachette Book Group

53 State Street, 9th Floor | Boston, MA 02109

From: Gaffney, Jessica L <jgaff121@uwsp.edu>
Sent: Monday, April 01, 2019 4:22 PM
To: Generic, permissions (US) <permissions.Generic@hbgusa.com>
Subject: Women's Ways of Knowing permission request

Greetings,

Attached is a permission request form for Women's Ways of Knowing. I am requesting to use the Appendix A, interview schedule, in my current doctoral research. I wasn't sure if this was the correct form to complete, so if not, if you would be so kind to send me the appropriate process/contact, it would be appreciated.

If additional information is needed, please let me know.

Respectfully,

Jess Gaffney MS, NCC

Doctoral Student

UW-Stevens Point Educational Sustainability



June 14, 2019

Dear Ms. Jessica Gaffney:

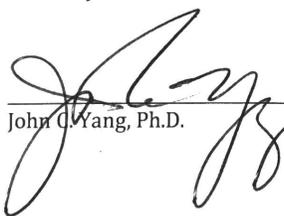
This letter is to inform you that the institutional Review Board (IRB) has granted you site permission to conduct your research titled "Your Story is Your Strength: Developing an Ethic of Care Through Transformative Learning" at Lakeland University's main campus and its Fox Cities Center.

The approval of your study is active for a period of one (1) year from the date of this letter. Should you not have completed the data collection for your study within this time frame, you will need to apply for an extension through the Institutional Review Board. You are expected to adhere to the procedures as outlined in your proposal. Any changes in procedures, protocol, or the consent form will require the approval of the IRB. You are also expected to notify the IRB in the event of an injury or problem with subjects participating in the study.

As the primary investigator, you have primary responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects and for complying with the provisions of the institutional review board. Additionally, you are expected to retain the raw data, including but not limited to, signed consent forms, for at least three years beyond the completion of the research. These data should be stored securely as indicated in your protocol. At the end of the three year period, you are responsible for shredding the documents.

Best wishes on the completion of the research project. Please contact the IRB if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



John C. Wang, Ph.D.

Chair of the Institutional Review Board

6/5/19

Principal Investigator: Lindsay Bernhagen

Protocol Number: 2019-25-05-24

Protocol Title: Your story is your strength: developing an ethic of care through transformative learning

Protocol Approval Date: 5/24/19

Protocol Expiration Date: 5/23/24

Review Category: Exempt 2

UWSP FWA: 00017591

Dear Dr. Bernhagen,

The above-referenced human-subjects research project has been approved by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee. This approval is limited to the activities described in the approved protocol, and extends to the performance of these activities at each applicable site identified in the application for IRB review. In accordance with this approval, the specific conditions for the conduct of this research are listed below, and informed consent from subjects must be obtained as indicated. Additional conditions for the general conduct of human-subjects research may be detailed below.

Additional Conditions:

All individuals engaged in human-subjects research are responsible for compliance with all applicable UWSP Research Policies. The Principal Investigator is responsible for assuring all protocol personnel review and adhere to applicable policies for the conduct of human-subjects research.

The IRB maintains an official protocol file for each study to meet the University's regulatory obligations for record keeping. Principal Investigators are responsible for maintaining all records related to the protocol, and are required to share with the IRB. The IRB is not responsible for maintaining study documents for researchers.

Your project approval expiration date is listed above. Exempt protocols have an automatic 5-year approval period. As a courtesy to you, and to reduce administrative burden, the IRB will request an annual update from the Principal Investigator on the status of this study. It is your responsibility to inform the IRB if the project is complete or still in operation. If the study needs to remain open after year 5, you must submit a new protocol. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled subjects. When you plan to close your study, submit a Protocol Closure Form to irbchair@uwsp.edu.

No changes are to be made to the approved protocol or study documents (i.e., consent forms, surveys, etc....) without prior review and approval of the IRB. To modify an existing protocol, complete the Protocol Modification Form and submit to irbchair@uwsp.edu.

If there are any injuries, problems, or complaints from participants, you must notify the IRB at irbchair@uwsp.edu within 24 hours.

If you have any questions, please contact me. Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anna Haines".

Anna Haines, Ph.D., IRB Chair
ahaines@uwsp.edu 715-346-2368

Appendix E. Codebook

Code	Theme
Care of others	Care
Care of self	Care
Change of view of society	Change of Worldview
Change of view of self	Change of Worldview
Change of view of others	Change of Worldview
Change of view of gender	Change of Worldview
	Collaboration
	Disorienting Dilemma
	Empowerment
K-12 vs. College Content	Education
Institutional challenges for women (entry and participation)	Education
Critical Thinking skills	Education
Gendered views	Leadership
Emotional Intelligence	Leadership
College administrators	Relationships
Family	Relationships
Friends and Classmates (peers)	Relationships
Instructors (Professors and Faculty)	Relationships
Mothers and "Other Mothers"	Relationships