How Women Learn to Become Influential Directors on Nonprofit Boards

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Abstract

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This qualitative case study was designed to explore the ways by which women become influential board members in nonprofit organizations. To address this problem, four research questions were explored in order to shed light on the experiences of women on nonprofit boards.

This study is based on the following assumptions: (1) women who serve on nonprofit boards have the capacity to be role models and, as such, can empower other women to assume leadership roles; (2) women are motivated to serve on nonprofit boards because they see it as a catalyst for their own career growth and development; (3) due to 2nd gen bias and other underlying barriers, women have to work harder than their male counterparts in order to reach senior positions on the board; and (4) women are forthcoming in describing the challenges they have faced, and willing to share ways in which they overcame those challenges.

The women selected to participate in this study were all seasoned board directors who have been serving on nonprofit boards for a minimum of five years on a voluntary basis. The primary sources of data were in-depth interviews with 10 female board members, a focus group of 4 women who met the same criteria as the participants but who were not part of this study, and a document review of relevant material.

The primary findings emanating from this study were: (1) women who joined nonprofit boards had a passion for the mission and a desire to give back to the community; (2) women learned to become influential board members by working hard, while collaborating with their

board colleagues; (3) women articulated that the challenges they faced revolved around dissension among peers; and (4) women described overcoming these challenges by developing good relationships with board members and other stakeholders.

The principal recommendation resulting from this study is that training and development programs should be implemented for: women of all ages who seek a nonprofit board position; boards of directors of nonprofit organizations that aspire to improve the governance performance and interpersonal relationships within the board; and current board members who would take on a mentoring role. A “train the trainer” program for educators and executive coaches should be implemented in order to advance the performance of the board.

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P. L.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."
~ Ruth Bader Ginsburg (1933-2020), Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court

Nonprofit organizations allow people to work together to make a positive change in communities around the world. According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS, 2021), in the U.S. there are more than 1.5 million nonprofits, making a difference in people's lives by advancing the mission of the organization.

While nonprofits may differ in the type of mission, all nonprofits have a board of directors, composed of a group of people responsible for ensuring that the mission is being fulfilled. The nonprofit board is the common governance body of the organization, forming core responsibilities that include setting policy and making certain that the organization has adequate resources to carry out its mission (Hanberg, 2015).

For many years there has been a public discourse about the benefits of gender diversity on boards. Having women on boards is an issue of broad social importance, as board decisions affect the lives of millions of people, policies, and practices in the local and global marketplace (Rhode, 2019). Recent research shows that the contribution of female board directors is positively associated with future organizational performance, while improving gender-diverse CEO hiring and thereby contributing to a more equal and just society (Buchheit, 2020).

Although women's involvement as leaders in nonprofit organizations is on the rise, women are still marginalized and impeded in their advancement toward leadership positions, where they could shape, influence, and create value (Binder, 2019). Additionally, while there is

an increasing representation of women on boards, it is still difficult for women to be recruited for the more prestigious or "rich" boards (Love, 2017). Little is known about ways in which women get into the notable boards and how they become impactful leaders once they have joined the board.

Furthermore, research studies demonstrate that women are different from their male counterparts in terms of motivation for assuming a leadership role (Mesch & Pactor, 2016; Shaw-Hardy & Taylor, 2010). Since women identify themselves, first and foremost, as mothers, despite their success in an organization leadership role (Ragen et al., 2018), their motivation to serve on a board may be different from that of their male counterparts.

Problem Statement

There is a paucity of knowledge about the factors that motivate women to join a nonprofit board, how they achieve their goals and objectives on the board, and how they communicate with peers in order to advance the mission of the nonprofit organization. An increased understanding of how women who serve on nonprofit boards overcome the challenges they face, and how they position themselves as influential leaders, will better inform women who seek to take up the role of board director on a nonprofit board.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore with 10 women, who serve on non-profit boards, how they developed into serving as impactful leaders for social change and overcame obstacles in order to achieve the board's strategic goals and objectives.

Research Questions

1. What motivates women to seek positions on a nonprofit board?
2. How do women learn to become influential board members in order to achieve the organizational goals and objectives?
3. What challenges do women face as board members in a nonprofit organization?
4. How do women describe overcoming these challenges?

Approach

This interpretative qualitative study used one-on-one in-depth interviews as the primary means of data collection. These interviews were supported by conducting a focus group of women who serve on non-profit boards but who are not a part of the study. To achieve triangulation, the researcher also reviewed any and all relevant documents pertinent to the study. Full details of this approach will be found in the Methodology, Chapter 3.

Anticipated Outcome

It was hoped this study would yield a baseline of information as to how women who serve on nonprofit boards learn to overcome obstacles they face and succeed as strategic leaders in cause-driven organizations.

Assumptions

Women who serve on nonprofit boards have already established themselves as competent leaders and have a track record in leadership roles in other organizations.

1. Women who serve on nonprofit boards have the capacity to be role models and, as such, empower other women to assume leadership roles.
2. Women are motivated to serve on nonprofit boards because they see it as a catalyst for their own career growth and development.

3. Due to second-generation gender bias and other underlying barriers, women have to work hard in order to reach senior positions on the boards, which are traditionally male-dominated, such as president of the board, treasurer, or the nominating committee chair.
4. Women are forthcoming in sharing the challenges they face and are happy to inform the public about their experiences and lessons learned in becoming an impactful leader on nonprofit boards.

Rationale and Significance

This study sheds light on the personal experience of women who are seasoned members of nonprofit boards. The study participants shared challenges they have faced on boards, and what steps they have taken as board directors to overcome these challenges. This study allows for a rare inside look at the board dynamics of nonprofit organizations from a woman board member's perspective. This type of personal experience is not typically discussed in the literature. Therefore, the input that surfaced from this study is a valuable addition to the research in the field of women's leadership in nonprofit organizations.

This research should benefit anyone who is involved in nonprofit organizations by gaining a deeper understanding of the board dynamics from the woman board member's viewpoint. In particular, this research can inform young women who seek to serve on a nonprofit board and become influential leaders in nonprofit organizations. This research can potentially increase the confidence and self-efficacy among women who seek to develop their personal and professional paths as board members in cause-driven organizations. The candid and anonymous perspectives of seasoned women serving on nonprofit boards could serve as an educational tool in the field of nonprofit leadership.

The Researcher

I chose to focus on women serving on nonprofit boards because the nonprofit field has been close to my heart, personally and professionally, for the last decade. The experience and familiarity with nonprofit boards allowed me to conduct this research, to converse with board members, and to analyze the data in a thoughtful manner. Additionally, since I also have a documentary filmmaking background, I felt comfortable with the in-depth interview in a one-on-one setting. Finally, I am drawn to the field of female leadership in the nonprofit sector, seeking a better understanding of their "lessons-learned" as they contributed to the success of their organization. I salute women who volunteer their expertise, time, and resources for advancing the mission they believe in, and I trust that this research study could educate other women about ways to become impactful board members in nonprofit organizations. I feel honored to have had the opportunity to investigate this issue, while having a sense of responsibility to do so. I am especially grateful for the women participants in this study; because of the garden of wisdom they created, they have been graced with floral pseudonyms.

Definitions

A **Nonprofit Organization** is a business that has been granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) because it furthers a social cause and provides a public benefit.

A **Mission Statement** is a formal summary of the aims and values of the organization, explaining the nonprofit organization's reason for existence and goals in a single compelling sentence.

A **Board of Directors** is the governing body of a nonprofit. Individuals who sit on the board are responsible for overseeing the organization's activities. Board members meet periodically to discuss and vote on the affairs of the organization.

Board Committees are smaller groups with a tight focus on a particular issue, dividing the board of directors' work into manageable tasks that are handled in smaller groups. To get the best value from committees, boards should form as few committees as they need to address critical issues.

A **Governance Committee** is the most important committee of the nonprofit leadership. Its chief responsibilities are to determine the membership of the board and measure the quality of performance of the board as a whole and of the individual board members.

A **Nominating Committee** is a committee that acts as part of an organization's governance. This committee evaluates the board of directors and examines the skills and characteristics needed in board candidates. The nominating committee helps to recruit board members, develop policies, and takes the lead in board evaluations and succession planning.

A **Committee Chair** is responsible for facilitating committee meetings and reporting the committee's findings to the board. The committee chair may work with committee members to outline a timeframe of what they hope to accomplish at the very first meeting to keep everyone focused and on track.

Lay Leaders are volunteers appointed to a committee, board, or other volunteer group to help the nonprofit organization with an initiative. In the case of a board, lay leaders are key in making decisions for the wellbeing of the nonprofit organization.

Philanthropic Organizations are nonprofit nongovernmental entities that utilize donated assets and income to provide socially useful services. Community foundations, endowments, and charitable trusts are types of philanthropic organizations.

Fundraising is the legitimate process of collecting money by requesting donations from individuals and businesses as a voluntary gift or contribution for a specific cause. Nonprofit

organizations raise money, but they spend it to further their mission, not to benefit the donors or founders.

A **501(c) Organization** is a nonprofit organization in the federal law of the United States according to Section 501(c) and is one of over 29 types of nonprofit organizations exempt from some federal income taxes.

Form 990 is the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) form entitled "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax." This federal form must be filed annually by tax exempt organizations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I. Background: Key Differences of For-Profit vs. Nonprofit Board Governance

There are critical differences between for-profit and nonprofit boards that affect the nature of board governance. These differences also play a role when considering joining a board. Two of the most significant differences are the central role of the mission in nonprofit board governance and the volunteer nature of board service in the nonprofit sector. Adopted from the article "Nonprofit vs. For Profit Boards" (Epstein & McFarlan, 2011), Table 1 illustrates the key differences of For-Profit vs. Nonprofit Governance.

Table 1 highlights three sections: Mission, Finance, and Executive governance roles. While some governance principles overlap, the key differences that could affect women's motivations in committing to a nonprofit board role are discussed in this section.

The mission statement is the core of the nonprofit, and helping the organization fulfill it is the governance focus of the board: Without a mission and its accountability, nonprofit organizations would have nothing (Epstein & McFarlan, 2011). A mission statement describes an organization's fundamental, unique purpose. It communicates the value the nonprofit delivers, why the nonprofit exists, and whom it serves (Ibrisevic, 2017). The primary duty of a nonprofit board is to see that the mission of the organization is being implemented.

Table 1. Key *Differences of For-Profit vs. Nonprofit Governance*

FOR-PROFITS	NONPROFITS
MISSION	
Mission important	Mission very important
Financial results	Cash-loss generator may be the key service
Nonfinancial metrics important	Nonfinancial metrics of mission performance very important
FINANCE	
Financial metrics of performance P&L, stock price, and cash flow very important	Financial metrics of meeting budget and cash flow projections also important
Funds come from operations and financial capital markets	Funds come from operations, debt, grants, and philanthropy
Short-term goals very important	Deep focus on long-term goals (as long as cash is there)
EXECUTIVE	
Small board—paid governance	Often large board—volunteer governance
Few board committees	Often many board committees
Combined chair/CEO plus lead director	Nonexecutive volunteer chair, plus CEO

Source: Epstein & McFarlan (2011, p. 30)

In the nonprofit board member's handbook, *The Little Book of Boards*, Erik Hanberg (2015), an expert in nonprofit governance, states that while every board can differ in its activities, the primary responsibility of the nonprofit board is making sure the organization is following its mission. Being mission-driven is a key difference between a nonprofit and a for-profit board, and the mission is what grants the nonprofit its tax-exempt status: "If there were no mission, you would be just a regular business and you would be taxed accordingly" (p. 16). Therefore, when a board member presents a new idea, a new program, or a new service in a

board meeting, the nonprofit board first examines whether the proposition follows the nonprofit mission.

Another major difference between for-profit and nonprofit boards relates to the voluntary nature of the nonprofit board service vs. the for-profit board service, which is often a well-compensated position. In nonprofits, board members are not only volunteering their time and expertise but are also required to make charitable gifts to the nonprofit on which they serve.

The key differences between for-profit board governance and nonprofit board governance are taken into consideration when women join a board of directors. What do women seek when selecting a voluntary board position in a nonprofit organization? The next section will discuss the various reasons women commit to nonprofit board service.

II. Topic One: Women's Motivations to Join a Nonprofit Board

A. Passion for the Cause

Studies that examine women's motivations for getting involved with a nonprofit organization highlight the importance of the cause. It is important to identify a passion for the cause before seeking a nonprofit board role. One should ask herself what brings her joy, where she wants to see changes, and what mission and vision she would like to advance.

Esteemed philanthropist Jean Shafiroff (2019), who has been serving on many philanthropic boards, details expectations and requirements of nonprofit board member in her book, *Successful Philanthropy*. She explains that joining the nonprofit board requires the following expectations: having passion for the cause; making financial donations; engaging in fundraising for the nonprofit; expecting to share the unique life experience, knowledge, and ideas for the benefit of the board governance; engaging friends and colleagues with the organization;

having a good professional and personal reputation; and having the ability to collaborate with diverse board colleagues and team up with workers of the charity.

The expectations illustrate that there are many requirements for being a suitable nonprofit board member that go beyond the professional ensemble. A nonprofit board member is required to have passion for the cause, along with personal, professional, and material capacities. Having integrity is key, and being able to collaborate with many constituents is necessary. Since the nonprofit board is typically larger than a for-profit board and expands to committees (Epstein & McFarlan, 2011), the expectation of being a board member who is also a team player is vital for the nonprofit's success. Therefore, when a woman is joining a nonprofit board, she should be equipped with a variety of skills, capacities, and personal powers, along with her passion for the cause.

B. The Joy of Volunteering and "Giving Back"

A second fundamental motivational factor unique to a nonprofit board position relates to the fact that the service is voluntary. In contrast to the for-profit board position, which is typically financially well-compensated, serving on a nonprofit board pays no money. Furthermore, because of the philanthropic aspect associated with board membership in nonprofit organizations, the financial compensation for a board member is negative (Epstein & McFarlan, 2011). This means that a person who is considering joining a nonprofit board is motivated to serve despite the financial obligation and the need to invest one's time, talent, and personal resources in the nonprofit organization. Serving as a volunteer is unique to nonprofit board service, and it sheds light on the high motivation level that board members would have to serve on the board of a nonprofit organization.

In their book, *Women and Philanthropy*, Sondra Shaw-Hardy, Martha A. Taylor, and Buffy Beaudoin-Schwartz (2010) explain the joy women experience through philanthropic leadership, describing "the six Cs plus three Cs" (p. 43) of women's motivations for giving to a charity and volunteering for a nonprofit. Back in the 1990s, women's motivations were defined by six Cs: (1) Change—the motivation to make a difference; (2) Create—with the raising entrepreneurial spirit of women in bringing new solutions to problems; (3) Commit—through volunteerism in roles that they believe in; (4) Connect—with human faces of the community; (5) Collaborate with others—and often other women on projects; and (6) Celebrate—have fun together and celebrate women's accomplishments. These six motivational factors shaped the identity of women as they became more financially independent, more philanthropic, and more involved in nonprofit leadership positions.

In the 2000s, once women had been developing their identity as philanthropists and slowly but steadily had been getting on nonprofit boards, three new Cs emerged as motivational factors for women in seeking leadership involvement with charity organizations: (1) Control—taking more control of their lives, their finances, and their choices of involvement; (2) Confidence—becoming more confident as philanthropic leaders; and (3) Courage—having courage to challenge old ways and pursuing change proactively (Shaw-Hardy et al., 2010).

The nine Cs reflect the various motivational factors that women have in choosing to be invested in leadership roles in their communities, and the evolution of women into becoming more confident and daring leaders in nonprofit organizations, influential board directors, and role models for future generations, while realizing that serving on a board of a nonprofit brings much joy and satisfaction to their lives.

Finally, there is contemporary research on empathy that informs the joy of giving (Tempel et al., 2016), suggesting that people who get involved in charitable organizations have an empathic approach to others, a sense of gratitude, and a higher satisfaction rate about their own lives. Simply put, giving back to a social cause makes people happy.

C. Adding Value to the Board

Clearly, the board would seek a new member who would add value to the board, yet from the perspective of the person who considers the board position, the more she feels she could add value to the board, the more motivated she would be to consider accepting the board role. Research shows that people become leaders by internalizing a leadership identity and developing a sense of purpose (*Harvard Business Review*, 2019). Since internalizing a sense of oneself as a leader is an iterative process, women who seek a nonprofit board position must believe in their ability to add value to the board. Therefore, it is not enough for women to identify the board-ready skills and competencies they possess in a social vacuum; the context must support a woman's motivation to lead. One of the main reasons women feel incompetent to serve on boards is lack of access to professional development opportunities. Since men still go up the professional ladder faster than women, get paid more, get promoted faster, and are offered professional development opportunities more often than women (Love, 2017), joining a nonprofit board can serve as a great opportunity for women to gain professional executive experience.

D. Seeking Professional Growth

Women who are considering joining a nonprofit board may not have the executive experience, but they may have been previously involved with the nonprofit organization as volunteers, i.e., a committee member or a fundraising campaign leader, bringing in their set of skills, connections, and capacity to add value to the board. Serving on the board can be a natural

progression from volunteering for a nonprofit. Joining could be a great opportunity for women to come into an executive role and gain professional experience in governance, and since nonprofit boards are more open today to traditional and non-traditional career backgrounds (Berkhemer-Credaire, 2019), there is a great opportunity for women to advance their professional careers.

Furthermore, serving on a board could enhance one's public profile. Board members are displayed on the nonprofit website as the leadership team, tagged on social media, and serve as an active and visible part of every event related to the nonprofit organization. This type of public exposure develops a professional public persona for board members as key leaders and governance executives. Thus, one of the motivations for women seeking a nonprofit board position is building their self-brand. In her book, *Be Board Ready*, Betsy Atkins (2019) urges women to brand themselves online and in person:

> In the digital age, most of us have already built a personal brand, whether or not we've consciously thought of it that way … take an inventory of all the ways you've already presenting yourself publicly and look for ways to refine the messages you're conveying with a board role in mind. (p. 17)

Developing one's brand online and offline is crucial for women's professional development, particularly when seeking a board seat. Investing in one's digital "self-branding" could positively affect the professional image of women who seek a board position.

In sum, there is a variety of requirements and expectations for nonprofit board members, and there are multi-layered motivational factors among women who seek a board role in a nonprofit organization. Although every board is different, all boards seek effective teamwork and an outstanding governance performance. Does diversity on boards impact the performance outcome? What are the benefits of diversifying a board of directors? The next section discusses whether, and how, gender diversity on nonprofit boards benefits the nonprofit organization and the people it serves.

III. Topic Two: Diversity on Boards

A. Benefits of Diversity on Boards

Ideally, a board should be composed of people with diverse backgrounds and experiences to provide the greatest benefit to the company. That diversity also brings to the boardroom a variety of individual expectations, interaction styles, and worldviews, which can sometimes create challenges for board management (Laurie S. Pascal, Co-Program Director of Women on Boards at Harvard University, cited in Igoe, 2019).

Organizations are becoming aware of the internal and external benefits of diversifying the board of directors. Now, more than ever, boards have record numbers of women and ethnic minorities (Catalyst, 2018). However, although women's board membership is booming, women are still underrepresented in the U.S. boards of directors (2020WOB.com, 2020). The *Wall Street Journal* (2019) reported that female board members in the Russell 3000 index—which includes most public companies on major U.S. stock exchanges—increased from 15% in 2016 to 20% by the fourth quarter of 2019 (Feintzeig, 2019). This trend shows that, on one hand, there is a movement toward gender balance on boards. Conversely, women are currently assuming only 20% of public board positions, indicating that a great disproportion still exists.

Yet, women have higher representation on boards of nonprofit organizations. Alongside 20% female representation on U.S. public boards, women comprise 43% of the membership of U.S. nonprofit boards, while it drops to 33% of board occupancy in nonprofits with incomes of $25 million or more (Shankie, 2015). These data illustrate that the gender gap widens as the nonprofit organization becomes more financially powerful. This section explores the unique benefits of gender diversity of nonprofit boards—as demonstrated in the literature—along with elucidating the underlying barriers women board directors face. Finally, this section will discuss

research-driven strategies to support women board directors as they climb the professional ladder on the boards of nonprofit organizations.

B. The Impact of Gender Diversity on the Performance of the Organization

While most empirical studies highlight explicit performance benefits of a diverse board, some studies find that diversity on boards does not necessarily impact the performance of the organization. For example, Fredette and Bernstein (2019) conducted a survey study with 247 nonprofit boards to examine diversity through a critical mass lens, exploring the impact of boards' ethno-racial diversity on the nonprofit organization's performance; they found it is difficult to recognize when diversity might improve governing outcomes of the nonprofit board. Their research demonstrates an uneven correlation between diversity and performance for each governance activity, suggesting that further exploration of the effect of diversity in the boardroom on the organizational performance needs to be done, examining the complexities and nuances that diversity brings to governing groups. However, as articulated in the beginning of this chapter, even without clear evidence from the research that board diversity enhances the performance of the organization, there is still a growing interest among boards to enhance the gender diversity on the board, reaching a record high in 2019 in 45% women joining boards (ISS Analytics, 2019).

Theorists and practitioners explain the recent surge in women board appointments by discussing the perception of board diversity. Researchers state that diversity can offer organizations many benefits, including additional knowledge, fresh ideas and insights to aid problem-solving, better product positioning, enhanced strategic planning, new knowledge or opinions, and even additional accountability (Eisenstein, 2019). In their report, *Board Monitor*

U.S. 2019, Heidrick and Struggles (2019) assert that three factors have been driving the recent surge in gender diversity on boards:

1. More boards now make diversity a priority, intending to appoint diverse candidates as new board members.
2. Boards feel themselves being held accountable for their performance on diversity through initiatives such as a new law in California mandating female directors at public companies. There is an increasing feeling of the pressure from customers and the rising generation of employees to have a board with gender diversity.
3. Perhaps less demonstrably, the increased urgency in 2018 may also owe something to the #MeToo movement.

As noted above, the reasons for including more women on boards are multi-layered. Appointing women as board members derives not only from an intrinsic interest of the board, or from public pressure, but it is also a result of legislative action.

C. Legislative Action Increasing Female Representation on Boards

Laws can play a significant role in prompting board appointments of women. In her book, *Women and Leadership*, eminent legal scholar Deborah L. Rhode (2016) writes that one of the three strategies to increase women's representation on boards is to enforce it through legislation; the other two are increasing women's capacity for service and encouraging voluntary corporate diversity efforts. Rhode notes that legal strategies expand the pool of qualified members and level the playing field for their appointment, and the law plays a great role in reducing the obstacles to women who seek board appointments. In legislation, setting a quota for female representation on boards would likely motivate women to seek the necessary skills required for

effective board service, while creating a demand for educational institutions to develop new training programs for women who seek board positions.

Advocates for setting quotas on women in the boardroom assert that it will bring society one step closer to equity on boards, while the critics against setting legal quotas claim that the law would not be effective for closing the gender gap and possibly would not be constitutional (Boden, 2020). Researchers who oppose setting a legal quota on women's representation on boards claim that mandating the board's gender composition through a legal policy is extremely controversial and can lead to people being chosen for their diversity rather than their talent (Betinna, 2019), which is the same argument that is used against affirmative action. Nonetheless, recent studies demonstrate that there is a growing awareness that diversity on boards is advantageous for the public image of organizations (Atkins, 2019).

In her book, *Winning the Board Game*, Betsy Berkhemer-Credaire (2019), the CEO of 2020 Women on Boards, describes the hard work of many women and men advocates in passing the historic vote on SB 826 in the state of California, a law that would require a minimum of one woman on a board of directors by the end of 2019 and, by July 2021, at least two independent women directors on boards with six or more directors. This law would add approximately 1,060 board seats for women by the end of 2021.

Berkhemer-Credaire (2019) describes the feeling of breakthrough at the time SB 826 was passed in the California State Assembly, making California the first state to enact a law mandating women on corporate boards:

> We won! Once again, the tally was only two votes over majority—but that's all it took to win. Another round of tears and jubilation burst forth in the offices of women business owners and supporters around the state. The emotion was high—I've never in my life felt the sheer exultation I felt at that moment. That was August 30, 2018, a date I will always cherish. It was a moment we thought would never come--and yet it did! (p. 13)

This description of victory after a prolonged legal process portrays that the struggle for gender equality still exists, and that when a milestone is achieved, such precedent can empower women and men around the world to take action toward a more just society.

The SB 826 law was named for August 26, which has a special significance as the same date that women won the right to vote in 1920. This law has had a ripple effect in the country, with states like New Jersey, Michigan, and Massachusetts proposing similar bills in their state legislatures. Nonetheless, there is opposition to this law and other laws that mandate gender diversity on boards, and some challenge this law, claiming that it is invalid and unconstitutional (Judicial Watch, 2019).

In summary, legislation is going hand-in-hand with the growing interest of boards in recruiting more women for the board, and many studies illustrate that board diversity improves economic performance, productivity, engagement, growth, and public reputation of the company (Hunt et al., 2015). However, as a result of the complex relationship between board diversity and performance outcome, researchers call for future research to be examined through the undertones and nuances of governance outcomes, as it may have an impact on governance performance under certain conditions.

For example, Buse et al. (2014) examined the relationship between board diversity and board performance outcomes in a sample of 1,456 nonprofit organizations. While their findings indicate that boards with more gender and racial/ethnic diversity will have more effective governance practices than those with less diversity, they also found that diversity improves board performance when the "diverse board members" are encouraged to participate fully through meaningful diversity policies and practices. Their research also found that nonprofit board performance is impacted by board diversity when the board behaves inclusively. Thus, in order

to improve the performance of the nonprofit organization, diversifying the board is not enough. The board must include women and minorities in the policy-making processes and exemplify inclusivity in the ongoing behavior on the board.

D. Women on Boards as Ethical Guard

The literature has mixed views about whether more women on the board would improve the ethical behavior of the organization. However, seasoned board members agree that the ethical standard starts at the top of the organization (Atkins, 2019), and that board members have a responsibility to lead by example through their ethical behavior (Chait et al. 2004). Boards of directors have the interest of seeking board members who would add to their board's ethical excellence.

The findings of a study that examined the role of women directors in enhancing the independence and effectiveness of boards (Tergesen & Couto, 2016), using data from 3,876 public firms in 47 countries, revealed that women directors send a positive signal to the public regarding a firm's ethical behavior. This study examined the role of female directors in enhancing the independence and effectiveness of boards, finding that female directors not only make boards more effective, but also deliver a positive message to the public about the organization and its leadership.

Critics of this view state that women representation on boards would not necessarily ensure the ethical behavior of the board:

> The idea that women will set improved standards of moral and ethical behavior for boards is based on the (faulty) assumption that when boards are made up of only men they will be morally and ethically lax. Surely that is a sexist view of men, based on notions of men as irresponsible risk-takers? (Peach, 2016)

Peach's assertion suggests that claiming moral superiority of women on boards creates a bias toward men board directors. However, one cannot ignore the cultural, political, and ethical context in which we live.

Current affairs in the past few years, followed by the global impact of the #Metoo movement, affect the leadership of organizations. Boards are more sensitive to their ethical behavior. Board policymakers understand that the board has a social responsibility role to model ethical leadership, while including women on the board can ensure an active leadership oversight that could avoid sexism or discrimination (Atkins, 2019). Atkins suggests that since the public has grown more skeptical and less forgiving to abuse of power on the top, boards that develop a culture of integrity and transparency while promoting diversity and collaboration will enhance a positive image of the organization. She adds that in today's media-saturated environment, boards cannot afford questionable ethical behavior and should integrate ethical standards into the organization's policies and board diversity.

In sum, gender diversity on boards has been getting a lot of attention in research in the past decade, with a slow, yet steady increase in women's representation on boards of directors. Boards are proactively seeking women board directors and are more receptive to nontraditional career experience. Nonprofit boards benefit from a variety of career experiences, including community organizing, writing, marketing, financial, or entrepreneurial experience (Temkin, 2013). As Betsy Berkhemer-Credaire (2019) states in her book, *Winning the Board Game*, there is no single pathway to boards. "It is the rich fabric of experience a woman weaves together and the leadership she develops throughout her career that lead to a director's seat" (p. 237).

Yet, even after assuming a board seat, women still have obstacles in advancing their role on the board. The next section discusses the types of challenges women face on nonprofit boards.

IV. Topic Three: Challenges that Women Face on Boards

> Women's leadership style—characterized by innovating, building trust and empowering followers—is ideally suited to today's business challenges. Tackle the obstacles to women's progress, and you'll increase your firm's competitive prowess. ("On Women and Leadership," *Harvard Business Review*, 2019)

The literature discusses three prominent challenges that make it difficult for women to reach their impact potential as board directors: peer pressure for assuming stereotyped roles on the board; lack of organizational support for women's professional growth; and the difficulty for women board directors to balance home and career demands (Love, 2017). This section will discuss these challenges, other obstacles women face in advancing themselves professionally, and the implications for women who serve on nonprofit boards.

A. Stereotyped Roles of Women on the Board

Serving on a for-profit or not-for-profit board can be quite fulfilling. However, obtaining a board position can be challenging, especially for women (Igoe, 2019). According to the literature, gender stereotypes are the most significant and influential attribute that form occupational images. Occupations are heavily shaped by images of people in an occupation rather than the tasks that occupation requires (Love, 2017).

The stereotyped perception of both men and women is a product of our culture. In most cultures, masculinity and leadership are closely linked: The ideal leader, like the ideal man, is decisive, assertive, and independent (Ibarra et al., 2013). Not only men see women in a stereotypical manner, but also women can perceive themselves in stereotypical terms. For example, a recent study found that women tended to characterize themselves as less assertive and less competent in leadership than they characterized others in their gender group (Hentschel et al., 2019).

Gender stereotyping exists in all cultures and classes around the globe. On boards, the leadership capacity is regarded as a male trait, where men dominate boards in numbers and a traditional approach to leadership is the standard, due to the older average age on boards—83.1% being over 40 and older as compared to 61% of the general population (Nonprofit Times, 2018). Thus, the gender gap between the traditional approach to leadership on nonprofit boards is enhanced by the male-dominance and older age of its members.

Co-founder of the largest private charitable foundation worldwide, Melinda Gates (2019) has devoted the last few decades to helping women advance themselves personally and professionally in their societies. In her book, *The Moment of Lift*, she describes barriers that women face in their societies:

> In workplaces around the world, women are made to feel that we aren't good enough or smart enough. Women get paid less than men do. Women of color get paid even less. We get raises and promotions more slowly than men do. We don't get trained and mentored and sponsored as much as men do. And we get isolated from one another more than men do—so it can take women a long time to realize that the bad fit we're feeling is not our fault but a fact of the culture. (p. 221)

Gates notes that the gender gap, and the stereotyped perceptions of women's ability to lead, exists in both Eastern and Western societies, in traditional and progressive ones, and in all levels of class and occupation fields. In order to overcome inequality in society, Gates advocates for philanthropic, programmatic, and educational development, particularly in so-called Third World countries, where many cultures value men's lives much more than women's lives, and women are still fighting for basic freedoms.

Furthermore, women are still perceived as the primary caretakers of children and the home. The social role of a woman is aligned more with parenthood than men. Women are at a drawback in the overload of demands coming from the home, cultural expectations, and the everyday balancing act between work, home, and family demands (Love, 2017). Therefore,

board colleagues may also expect women board members to attend to their families and claim that women do not have the appropriate availability and years of expertise it takes to be a seasoned board director.

Similarly, the literature identifies these qualities in failing to promote women, because they characterize women as passive, morally bound, and motherly-natured in male-dominated occupations (Love, 2017). For example, when women speak up during board meetings, they may be viewed as aggressive, in comparison to men speaking up. Atkins (2019) suggests that any board member should learn boardroom diplomacy techniques and effective communication methods before speaking up. She advocates for finding a mentor to guide the way. The next section will discuss the need for mentorship for women on boards.

B. The Need for Mentoring

In a study conducted by Ibarra et al. (2013), women cited lack of career tools as their largest problem. Women not only face gender bias, but also lack mentorship. The lack of mentorship and organizational support for women starts at an early stage in their careers (Love, 2017). Therefore, there are limited networking and mentorship opportunities available to women, in comparison with their male counterparts. Because of this, connections are less effective. Mentorship provided for men tends to include senior individuals who provide direct developmental opportunities (Ibarra et al., 2013). Meanwhile, mentorship for women is put on the back burner, or dismissed all together. Since career development opportunities, additional knowledge, and confidence are products of mentorship, women, once again, are at a disadvantage for professional development. While mentors influence career and personal development (Woolnough & Fielden, 2014), women who have less exposure to mentorship will have fewer opportunities to advance in their careers.

Although there is more openness for women from all walks of life to pursue a board position, there is still a need for women to overcome obstacles and underlying barriers in the way of their professional development on the board. Women need to recognize the value they may add to the board, even if they have a non-traditional career background, and develop a sense of confidence and self-esteem about their potential contribution to the board. Additionally, as demonstrated in this chapter, organizational support and peer mentoring are powerful tools for board education because they engage people and harness the individual and collective power of the board. Mentoring builds a trusting and meaningful board member relationship, as well as board cohesion, and ultimately promotes a more informed decision-making process (Zachary, 2017).

Finding a mentor can be difficult. According to Mackey (2018), following a few tips can make this task easier: (1) Look for allies everywhere in the organization. Often, coworkers share the same goal. Working together can be mutually beneficial. (2) Seek both men and women as allies. Equalizing gender imbalances requires the participation of all people. (3) Be an ally. Connect with coworkers at all levels of the company. This may lead to additional networking and mentorship opportunities. (4) Take advantage of mentorship programs. Many organizations offer mentorship opportunities for employees to network and break down departmental silos.

Another way to seek a mentor is by investigating connection outside of the familiar professional circle. Research suggests that mentorship opportunities are often available outside of the workplace and that looking for people who can offer guidance who are external to your organization is often extremely valuable (Turner-Moffatt, 2019).

Finally, theorists and practitioners highlight the importance of women helping women advance themselves up the career ladder. Peg Dunn-Snow (2019), in her article “How Do

Women Become Leaders," notes that if "real queens" have been women leaders who empower other women to become leaders, the new "real queens" are those who would also "help other women acquire their leadership crowns, and later, if the newly acquired crown should wobble a bit or go askew, today's real queens will help straighten and securely faster it back on through mentorship" (p. 18). Women should not be threatened by another woman's success. On the contrary, every time a woman helps another woman succeed, she serves a larger purpose of advancing women up the career ladder and modeling sisterhood and its positive outcome.

In conclusion, despite the challenges women face on nonprofit boards, more women than ever are getting on boards and becoming influential directors. This study investigates how women's voices are being heard within the board, and how they become key leaders in nonprofit organizations. The value of the findings goes far beyond the reach of women who seek a board position in a nonprofit organization. Women who have become seasoned board leaders set an example for future generations and plant a seed of confidence and support in the hearts of young girls. As feminist icon Gloria Steinem writes in her latest book, *The Truth will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off!* (Steinem & Baker, 2019), "The best way to cultivate fearlessness in our daughters and other young women is by example."

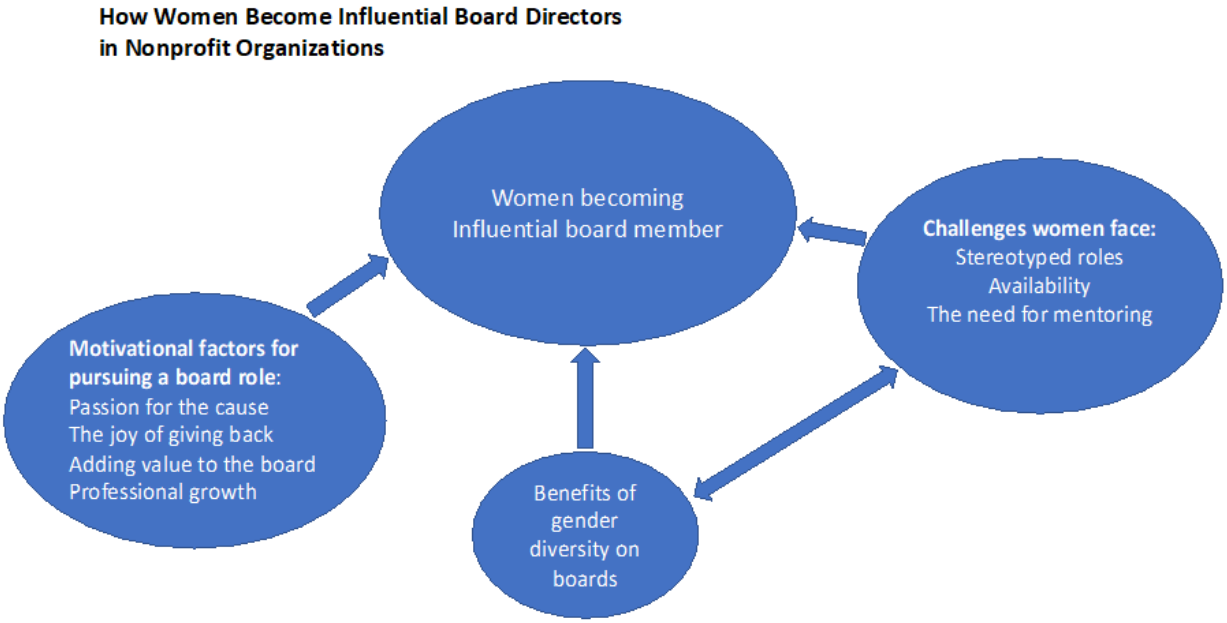
Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed in order to demonstrate an organizing structure for reporting this study's findings and data analysis. Furthermore, the conceptual framework became the source for data that were collected, providing the basis for a coding scheme (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The categories of the conceptual framework were directly related to the four research questions of the study and to the main purpose of this research—

investigating women's experience on boards, while shedding light on how they become influential board members in nonprofit organizations.

The theory-based principles that were presented for this particular study covered research on diversity on boards, focusing on the benefits of gender diversity on boards, motivation theory, and empirical research on women's leadership, specifically the challenges that women face on boards. The conceptual framework that guided this study is specified below in a graphic form:

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*



Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this research was to explore with 10 women, who serve on nonprofit boards, how they developed into serving as impactful leaders for social change, and overcame obstacles, in order to advance the mission and achieve the nonprofit organization's strategic goals and objectives.

To carry out this purpose and shed light on the above research problem, the following questions were explored:

1. What motivates women to seek a position on a nonprofit Board?
2. How do women learn to become influential board members in order to achieve organization goals and objectives?
3. What challenges do women face as board members in a nonprofit organization?
4. How do women describe overcoming these challenges?

This chapter includes the rationale for the research approach selected and descriptions of the information needed to conduct the study; the criteria for selection of the participants; and the plan and methods for gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing the data. Further, I provide an explanation for why the data collection methods chosen are the most appropriate to the study while, at the same time, indicating drawbacks and referencing the literature that supports my choices. In addition, I identify potential ethical issues that may emanate from the study, along with strategies for addressing or avoiding those issues. Likewise, plans for dealing with issues of trustworthiness are presented for verification and confirmability of the findings. The chapter

concludes with a summary of the major elements discussed and a description of the study's limitations.

Study Approach

Since the study is focused on the subjective, individual perspectives of its participants, a qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, strategy that employs a case study approach is best suited to carry out this research. The qualitative paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed and is what participants perceive it to be (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Maxwell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Tuli, 2010). Thus, the worldview that guides and supports the research strategy and approach is social constructivism, which asserts that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and … develop subjective meanings of their experiences … that are varied and multiple" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Locke et al. (2007) shared that qualitative research is used when researchers ask the question, "What's going on here?" (p. 96). Basic characteristics of qualitative research are conducive to this study's goal to explore *what is going on when women aspire to become an influential member of a nonprofit board.*

The case study method is one of the five primary qualitative approaches to inquiry identify by Creswell (2007). Johnson and Christensen (2008) describe it as *"*research that provides a detailed account and analysis of one or more cases*"* (p. 406). In this research, each participant was considered a mini-case within the larger context of a bounded system, that is, the boardroom on which each of the women in the study has a seat. The case study approach, within a constructivist frame, generally seeks to provide "thick," richly detailed, and vivid descriptions of settings, participants, and/or themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). These descriptions help readers understand the credibility of the accounts and the possible applicability to other settings or contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study of women board members who serve

on nonprofit boards seeks to produce the kind of dense, detailed reports that Creswell and Miller say are obtained through case study research.

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 10 women who currently serve on nonprofit boards. Participants were selected purposefully by seeking diversity in who they are and the type of board on which they serve. I sought participants who met the following criteria:

1. Participants serve on nonprofit boards that are registered in the United States.
2. Participants serve the boards on a voluntary basis.
3. Participants have served on nonprofit boards for at least five cumulative years.
4. Participants serve on nonprofit boards that have both men and women members.

I sent an invitation to prospective participants who met the above criteria by email along with an Informed Consent form for participants to review in advance of the interview. Each participant signed the form before her interview began. At the same time, I underscored in writing the voluntary and confidential nature of participation. In addition, at the end of the interview, each participant was asked to complete a demographic inventory and return it by the enclosed envelop directly to me.

The location of the interviews was selected according to the convenience of each of the participants. I anticipated that each interview would last approximately 60 minutes and would be audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Overview of Information Needed

To answer the research questions, four types of information were required: (a) contextual, (b) demographic, (c) perceptual, and (d) theoretical. Each of these sources is reviewed below.

Contextual Information

The common context for study participants was their individual experience, their education, and their professional board experience. I obtained contextual information about the policies, procedures, and operations of the respective boards on which the participants serve. These documents were reviewed and served to achieve triangulation.

Demographic Information

A demographic inventory was the means by which the researcher collected relevant factual data from each participant, including age, employment, names of nonprofit organizations, number of years of service on each board, and other data. As stated previously, I gave each participant an inventory for them to complete and asked that they return it to me via mail in a self-addressed envelope.

Perceptual Information

The needed perceptual information was gathered largely through one-on-one interviews that included the participants' current experiences on boards, the challenges they face, how they overcame those challenges, and opportunities that enabled them to influence other board members.

Theoretical Information

Conceptual information refers to the theoretical concepts found in the literature that provides the framework for this study. The selective review of the literature identified what is now known about the topic under study. The review of the literature also guided me in developing a framework for the interpretation and analysis of the research data and findings. The information from the literature further identified the pertinent informal and formal learning processes that board members engage in as they carry out their work. As is characteristic of case-

study research, a review of the literature continued throughout the study; that is, it was ongoing throughout each phase of the study.

Research Design Overview

The following steps were taken to conduct and complete this study of women who serve on nonprofit boards:

1. **Research Topic Determination:** This topic was appealing for me, as I have been involved in nonprofit boards for the past 20 years. The deeper I delved into board members' experience in becoming impactful leaders in nonprofit organizations, the more I realized that this multi-layered topic was under-researched. I believe that seasoned board members can inform the future generation of nonprofit leaders about the challenges they face and how they overcome them, educating other women how to become impactful board members. Finally, I was intrigued to explore the unique experiences of women as they gained financial independence and involvement in the growing landscape of nonprofit organization leadership.

2. **Literature Review:** I conducted a thorough review of the scholarly literature with respect to the problem areas so that the research could be situated in the context of what is known, while drawing upon that existing knowledge in designing the research. The process helped illuminate the categories that derive from the research questions and comprise the dynamic conceptual framework of the study.

The literature I reviewed falls into the following broad areas: women's role in nonprofit organizations; gender diversity and leadership; motivational theory (intrinsic and extrinsic); types of challenges that women face as board members; how they overcome obstacles; participatory culture and collaborative approaches to leadership.

3. **Sample Participants:** I identified participants by asking colleagues, associates, and friends to refer me to women board members who fit the criteria. Additionally, I posted on relevant social media channels a call for participants. Finally, I pursued specific participants who could enhance the diversity within the participant pool.

4. **Proposal Hearing:** The proposal hearing took place in November 2019, followed by its submission to Office of Doctoral Studies at Teachers College, Columbia University.

5. **IRB Approval:** Immediately after I received approval and acceptance from the proposal hearing, I submitted the required documents to the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval.

6. **Letter of Invitation and Consent:** Following IRB approval, I contacted the potential interviewees (see Step 3) by email to determine their willingness to participate. To all who responded affirmatively, I sent (a) a formal email of invitation, outlining the purpose of the study and details concerning the length, location, and possible dates/times for the interview; and (b) an Informed Consent Form that explained participants' rights and protections and described the purpose and data collection methods for the study.

7. **Demographic Inventory:** Confirmed participants, who had formally agreed and consented to be part of the study, were asked to complete a Demographic Inventory at the end of their interviews. They were able to mail back their completed inventories in self-addressed envelopes, which I provided.

8. **Document Review:** In preparation for the interviews, I collected from each confirmed participant a current résumé and solicited various documents relevant to women who serve on nonprofit boards, including the website review of the relevant nonprofit organizations.

9. **Primary Interviews:** In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 women who serve on nonprofit boards. I endeavored to conduct all of the interviews in person and electronically recorded the sessions, with the participants' acknowledgement and permission. For each participant, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix E) aligned with the research questions.

10. **Interview Transcription and Coding:** All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after each interview. The recording and transcript review and coding processes, which are described below under "Data Analysis and Synthesis," were carefully followed as data collection proceeded and as I began the process of sorting and analyzing the interview data.

11. **Focus Group:** Following completion of the interviews with participants, I conducted a focus group with four women board members who met the same criteria as the participants but who were not part of the study. While I introduced the topic, I did not take part in the discussion or facilitate it in any way. Rather, I served as an observer. For the focus group, I applied the same transcription, review, and coding protocols as those described for participant interviews.

12. **Inter-rater Reliability:** In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings and mitigate potential bias, I asked two colleagues to code to a sample interview against the coding legend and compared their results against mine for consistency.

13. **Data Analysis:** Data collected through interviews, document analysis/reviews, and demographic inventories were analyzed, coded, and synthesized individually and collectively. In light of the emergent data and findings, I continuously modified and used the conceptual framework as a guide for sorting and analyzing the data. As the process proceeded, I wrote and

kept memos chronicling the ideas, observations, and assumptions that I would use in making judgments about the meaning of the evidence.

14. **Presentation of Findings, Analysis, Conclusions, and Recommendations**: When the data collection and the coding phases were satisfied, I proceeded to formulate and present the findings in a clear, concise, and objective fashion that followed and addressed the research questions. I included illustrative quotations and data summary tables that helped "tell the story" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 109) of what was discovered.

Following the presentation of findings, I will provide the results of the analysis, describing and explaining patterns and themes that were uncovered in the data. I will synthesize them holistically so that they may be considered in light of the study's overarching purpose, problem, and research questions and their place within the context of the existing literature.

The final step in the process is the formulation and writing of Conclusions and Recommendations that showcase the reasoning process and convey to readers an understanding of the study's impact and implications. The recommendations are based on my own experience in conducting and concluding the study and include specifics about how and by whom future actions may be taken.

Methods of Data Collection

The following methods were deployed in this study: (1) interviews; (2) a focus group; and (3) document analysis. The use of three methods is a part of the strategy to enhance trustworthiness of the study results. This is the purpose of triangulation, whereby multiple data collection methods are used to corroborate the data collected on one particular topic to see if various research methods with different strengths and weaknesses can "support a single conclusion" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 102). Specifically, Stake (2010) defines triangulation as "using

additional data to check or expand one's interpretations" (p. 221). Below, the methods of the study, including their respective strengths and limitations, are described. A more in-depth overview of the role of triangulation will be presented in a later section on trustworthiness.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with women who serve on nonprofit boards were the primary method of data collection. The interview protocol aligned with the three research questions previously identified. The interview protocol, consisting of 12 open-ended questions, was designed to elicit the participants' perspectives on their role as leaders serving on nonprofit boards.

As Creswell (2014) noted, pilot testing is critical "to establish the content validity of … an instrument and to improve questions [and] format" (p. 161). Furthermore, Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted that pilot interviews "help in understanding oneself as a researcher," and "piloting also helps the researcher find ways to eliminate barriers such as resistance to tape recorders and mistrust of the researcher's agenda" (p. 96). As a result, the interview protocol and interview guide were pilot-tested with three women who currently serve on profit boards. The observations and feedback solicited from the pilot interviews were incorporated in a writeup and presented to my adviser and second reader at our meeting on November 8, 2019. Also, this experience helped the researcher practice her active "listening" skills and allowed the participants to express themselves in sharing their experiences.

All interviews followed a semi-structured format. The in-person interviews were held at a mutually convenient location for both the participants and myself. Based on the pilot interviews conducted, it was expected that interviews would last approximately one hour. After obtaining each participant's permission, the interviews were recorded for transcription, which was completed immediately after each interview.

Conducting interviews in qualitative research has strengths and weaknesses. Yin (2014) notes that some of the strengths of interviews are that they are targeted on the research topic and also can help the researcher gather insightful information. This helped accumulate the perceptions and meanings of the women in this study. It should be noted that I intended to ask specific questions during the interviews that would shed light on the topic. Yin reports that interviewing is not without its liabilities. The researcher has to watch for "bias due to poorly articulated questions" but also "response bias" (p. 106) as well as the participants' reflexivity, as the participants may feel compelled to answer the questions in what they perceive as a pleasing way to the researcher.

Focus Group

One focus group was convened. The participants of the focus group were four women who currently serve on nonprofits boards, according to the above-mentioned criteria. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the purpose of a focus group is to encourage varied viewpoints on a topic. That is, the goal is not to reach consensus or solutions "but to bring forth different viewpoints on an issue" (p. 150).

The focus group session was held through Zoom and lasted 60 minutes; with the participants' permission, it was digitally recorded for transcription, review, and analysis. As with the interview participants, focus-group participants were assured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected. At the same time, I reminded the participants that their views would be shared only with others in the room and they should keep confidential what they heard during the meeting. I also assured the participants that the data from the group would be presented in the findings anonymously. In conducting the focus group, my role was described as observer/moderator wherein I introduced the topics and kept time. There were two topics, each

taking one-half hour. The first topic was sharing and discussing challenges that they face and the second topic covered ways in which they approach these difficulties and overcome challenges on the nonprofit board.

Like in-depth interviews, focus group interviews also have their strengths and weaknesses as a data collection method. Kreuger and Casey (2000), as cited in Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), discussed how focus groups can "(a) elicit a range of feelings, opinions, and ideas; (b) understand differences in perspectives; (c) uncover and provide insight into specific factors that influence opinions; and (d) seek ideas that emerge from the group" (p. 123). However, focus groups have also been criticized. For example, researchers are reminded to be wary of *groupthink* (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Additionally, the researcher has to display strong facilitation skills, while trying to manage the conversation and solicit data at the same time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), otherwise the content collected may not provide complete responses to the interview questions.

Document Review

Document review were combined with interviews and the focus group as part of this study's triangulation strategy. Documents are an important contributor to this strategy because they cover a variety of sources, such as newspaper and magazine articles and websites (Robson, 2011). Marshall and Rossman (2011) note that document analysis is "potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting" (p. 160). Therefore, I reviewed various and relevant documents (i.e., newspapers, journals, websites, social media posts, blogs, podcasts, mission statements, brochures, newsletters, testimonials and publications) to assess whether the documents confirmed or disconfirmed any data collected by either the interviews or the focus groups.

According to Robson (2011), an advantage to including document analysis as part of qualitative studies is that the documents are permanent, allowing for "re-analysis." Additionally, the review of the documents is "unobtrusive" in that researchers "can 'observe' without being observed" (p. 356). However, unto itself, document analysis has some inherent flaws. For example, it is possible that the objective of a document being reviewed is not fully aligned with the objective of the research in which it is being included, creating the potential for it to be taken out of context. As such, I had to remain vigilant and mindful in conducting document analysis about the contextual features of documents included in the study in order to keep this component of the case study as transparent as possible.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Following the data collection from the interviews and focus group, all data were transcribed. Informed by impressions from the document review, the transcripts were reviewed for relevant patterns that relate to the research questions and purpose of the study (Boyatzis, 1998). Using the conceptual framework as a guide, I performed manual coding to organize and categorize the data. To conduct inter-rater reliability, two Teachers College peers reviewed the coding scheme and coded two interview transcripts to identify inconsistencies in interpretation. Any disagreements were discussed and reconciled to arrive at a unanimous agreement. This process yielded changes to the coding method and structure that were then applied to the entire dataset.

Ethical Considerations

Important ethical issues regarding research typically pertain to voluntary participation, informed consent, the risk of harm, confidentiality, and anonymity. The highest ethical standards were applied throughout the research process in order to protect each participant's rights and

interests, including during reporting and dissemination of data. Each of these elements of ethical integrity is reviewed below.

Informed Consent

This process included the following steps. I solicited written informed consent from each of the participants, both before the interviews and the focus group.

Anonymity

All "names and or other identity characteristics" of the participants have been kept confidential (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 124). Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to be used during the study and beyond. To enhance institutional privacy, a pseudonym for each of the nonprofit boards on which participants serve was also assigned.

Confidentiality

The data collected from the interviews, the focus group, and the document review notes and analysis were stored in an electronic, password-protected folder to which only I have access.

Data Retention and Deposition

Finally, following Teachers College's (TC) procedures, I submitted the study for review by the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) and adhered to its guidelines for conducting research with human subjects. My dissertation advisor, Professor Marie Volpe, also guided me regarding these matters during this research project. The data will be shredded and subsequently disposed of three years after my doctoral graduation.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Researchers have the responsibility to ensure that the data and their interpretation are credible and, therefore, trustworthy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) originally used the terms "credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability" to

explain the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 40). Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) focus on credibility, dependability, and transferability as constructs to evaluate "trustworthiness in qualitative research" (p. 116). The section below overviews the specifics of each strategy that have been deployed to enhance trustworthiness of this study's findings.

Credibility

Rodwell and Byers (1997) described credibility as conducting a number of activities over time to find commonality amongst constructions. They noted that "prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefings, and member checks" (p. 117) all help establish credibility. Credibility was assured by allowing space for diverging opinions in the focus group and discouraging *groupthink*. By pilot testing three interviews, I gained experience in curtailing *reflexivity* during the interviews and worked on my active listening skills, while being mindful not to interrupt the participants when they were talking. In addition, I used multiple methods (i.e., triangulation) to test the information gathered. Each participant engaged in a prolonged interaction with the interviewer during the interviews and as part of the informed consent process.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the replicability of the protocols of a study so that another researcher can accurately recreate the study (Yin, 2014). To achieve dependability, the researcher has to work like an auditor so that future researchers can "arrive at the same results" (p. 49). To establish dependability, I transparently documented the exact procedures followed. Dependability was further established by taking measures to achieve inter-rater reliability. In particular, two peers coded two of the interviews against the coding legend, and a follow-up

discussion was held to reconcile any discrepancies so that consensus could be achieved. Finally, the practice of triangulation by including in-depth interviews, a focus group, and document review aided with the dependability of this study.

Transferability

Transferability means the degree to which findings can be applied to other contexts. To achieve this, a researcher must give highly detailed descriptions of time, place, and culture for the reader (Rodwell & Byers, 1997). To achieve transferability, rich accounts of the location of the research and the culture of the institution were produced. This thick description will allow future researchers to make judgments about the transferability of the results to varying environments. Finally, my advisor aided with the *trustworthiness* of this study by acting as part of the "external auditors" to certify the rigor of the inquiry (Rodwell & Byers, 1997, p. 119).

Limitations of the Study

All research is limited in some fashion (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For instance, one limitation is that, as a woman who works closely with nonprofit boards, I may have an innate bias. As such, it was unavoidable that my own beliefs about the factors that influence women in leadership roles on boards would come into play. Therefore, I was committed to be ever cautious with respect to my own biases.

Maxwell (2005) contends that an important concern for qualitative researchers is how the "values and expectations [of the researcher] influence the conduct and conclusions of the study" (p. 108). This was handled by disclosing personal beliefs and biases, and through documenting any changes in thinking in a journal throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Participant reactivity can be considered a study limitation. Participants may be concerned with how they and the boards on which they serve will be portrayed in the literature. Participants may also attempt to provide answers that they perceive the researcher is seeking. In turn, this threatens the trustworthiness of the data.

Finally, another limitation deals with how self-reported data may contain biases or is unreliable (Creswell, 2012). To address this, participants were assured that their responses and identities would be kept confidential by removing their names from the data and replacing those names with pseudonyms. Also, the data were kept in a secured password-protected folder on a computer accessible only to me, and any paper copies kept in a locked cabinet also only accessible by me. Furthermore, a comfortable environment for participants to share their honest and authentic views was created to build rapport (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) and convey a non-judgmental environment with "no one right way" to answer a question.

Chapter Summary

The sections of this chapter establish the rationale for the methods selected and the specific protocols that were conducted to gather data to robustly attempt to provide answers to this study's four research questions. In addition, clear steps to maintain the ethical integrity of this research were taken to protect the contributing participants. By transparently establishing such measures, the final research document can be deemed trustworthy so that it can make a viable contribution to the literature on the topic and the practice of women's experience on the nonprofit board in the future.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this research was to explore with 10 women, who serve on the board of nonprofit organizations, how they became influential directors and how they overcame obstacles, in order to achieve the organization's strategic goals and objectives.

The research questions for this study were:

1. What motivates women to seek positions on a nonprofit Board?
2. How do women learn to become influential board members in order to achieve the organizational goals and objectives?
3. What challenges do women face as nonprofit board members?
4. How do women describe overcoming these challenges?

This chapter provides a discussion of the four key findings that emerged following the in-depth interviews with the study participants. Supporting comments from focus group participants have been embedded in the Findings Chapter in order to reinforce the research findings.

The four major findings uncovered through the data collected in this study are presented below:

1. All participants (100%) indicated that their passion for the mission and their desire to give back to the community were primary motivators for them to seek a board position in a nonprofit organization.
2. An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) said they learned to become influential board members by working hard—above and beyond the call of duty—while collaborating with board colleagues.

3. A strong majority of participants (80%) reported that the primary challenge they faced centered on dissension among peers.
4. An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) described that they overcame challenges faced by building personal relationships and persistently engaging in dialogues with peers.

Finding #1: Motivational Factors for Joining a Nonprofit Board

Table 2. *Outline of Finding #1*

FINDING #1

All participants (100%) in this study indicated that their passion for the mission and their desire to give back to the community were primary motivators for seeking and accepting a board role in a nonprofit organization. Women who serve on nonprofit boards stated the following reasons for undertaking the board position:

A. Passion for the mission (10 of 10, 100%)
- I care about the cause
- I see a real impact on people's lives
- I have had a good experience with the organization in advancing its mission

B. Desire to give back to the community (10 of 10, 100%)
- Giving back to the community is my social responsibility
- It goes hand in hand with my values
- I believe in social justice - I choose to do what is right

C. Being asked to serve (9 of 10, 90%)
- I was approached by a well-respected individual
- It was suggested that my specific expertise would benefit the board

D. I knew that I could add value to the board (8 of 10, 80%)
- I select board service according to where I can contribute most
- I am willing and able to fulfil the role, including monetary contributions

E. Professional development, prestige and contacts (5 of 10, 50%)
- Unique networking opportunities
- Prestige and reputation of the organization

F. Seeking a community (4 of 10, 40%)
- I wanted to connect with new people outside of my work
- The social activities were appealing

1A. Passion for the Mission (10 of 10, 100%)

All of the women board members who participated in this study (10 of 10, 100%) described their passion for the mission as a primary motivator in joining the nonprofit board. Thus, caring for the cause of the nonprofit was an essential part of the participants' decision to serve on the nonprofit board.

I Care About the Cause

All of the study participants expressed their genuine care for the mission of the organization. For example, Marigold described the pivotal role the mission plays in one's decision to serve on the board, now more than ever. She said:

> In my eyes, you have to be passionate about the organization's mission. I think that's key, especially today, that people in our society have too many demands. It has to be something that will go to the top of the priority list for you as an individual because if you have 10 things on your time and this isn't something you're really interested in, you're just not going to be involved. It has to be something that you will be passionate about so that you will personally feel like you'll make the time for it. That's number one.

As indicated by Marigold, before committing to nonprofit board service, one should make sure that she cares about the mission of the organization and would like to invest in advancing that mission as a top priority.

Similar to Marigold, Lily stated that understanding what cause you care for is essential. She described her thought process prior to joining the board:

> What is your passion? You give it your all when you figure that out. After you identify your passion, figure your way into the organization. You have to see what the culture is.... You're not going to thrive on a board if the vibe doesn't work for you. I've always believed in just following your passion and what you're good at.

As described above by Lily, who has been serving on nonprofit boards over 20 years, a passion for the mission should be the primary motivational factor for pursuing a board seat, but it should not be the only consideration.

I See a Real Impact on People's Lives

The study participants also attributed their decision to join the board to seeing a meaningful impact on people's lives. For example, when Heather's pursuit of the board role was linked to her desire to nurture the future generation of professionals in her field of work, particularly female and underserved teens, she indicated that the nonprofit's mentoring program appealed to her as it had made a real difference in their lives, providing them with the opportunity for a better future. Heather described the impact of the nonprofit's activities on people's lives with pride and enthusiasm:

> This organization is introducing young people to the profession—76% are minority students. It's almost like a feeder; you're introducing high school students to the industry. I think that when you are able to reach people at a younger age, they're able to see that in their future. It's pretty critical that you believe in the mission of it…. You have to have a fundamental interest in it.

As described above, Heather recognized the prominence of the organizational mission in impacting people's lives, and that motivated her to assume the board position on a nonprofit that mentors high school students in underserved communities by real-life professionals.

Likewise, Jasmine recognized the difference that the summer camp had made in the lives of the participants. Since Jasmine has always been passionate about elevating underserved youth through the arts, she was impressed by the difference it made on the lives of the participants. She recalled her reaction during her first site visit:

> I was so moved by the program. I thought, I can't believe that you've taken 100 kids. You are giving them your best teachers, your best musicians, and you are working with them in creative ways. It was stunning! I said, "I want to help an organization that cares so much about kids who are at risk."… I think it really helps if you have a passionate interest or a tie to the reason why this program exists.

After her visit to the summer camp, Jasmine decided to get more involved with the organization, and soon after, she joined the board.

Likewise, Dahlia also saw a real impact of the nonprofit organization on children's lives prior to joining the board. When she heard about the boarding school located in her birth country, which supports talented "at-risk" youth through K-12 education, she felt connected to the mission, even though she had not been familiar with the school. Dahlia felt an immediate connection to the cause, which nurtures youth for excellence, particularly immigrant students. She described her thought process leading to her joining the board, based on the impact the nonprofit makes on the lives of children of immigrant families:

> I liked that the organization supports schools in [name of country]; I thought that I need to know more about what this organization is doing before joining the board. I went to [country], I went to visit the school, and I learned much more. I met with some staff and the directors there. I met with the person who is responsible for the entire operation, and I loved what I heard. I think that this school saved the lives of so many children, so many new immigrants, who had nothing and very little chance of succeeding without this education and support that they had from this school.

Following her visit to the school, Dahlia returned to the United States and accepted the board position. For Dahlia, witnessing the impact on people's lives in person was a key factor in her decision to join the nonprofit board.

Similarly, Scarlet visited the program site and observed the kids who participated in the nonprofit program on their graduation day. She spoke about the way the program impacts not only the children, but also their parents. Scarlet described a pivotal moment in the graduation:

> I saw these kids are doing their one-on-one tutoring. They were all focused, the tutors and the kids, preparing for the graduation day. Then, a young guy came in who was the father of one of the children, he looked like a young man who would not care; but he was there to cheer on his kid for graduating this program ... that moment where he (the father) came in and he was so proud and supported his kid and the progress that he had made over the year in the program, I found that a great moment. I realized this program is important for both the children and the parents.

For Scarlet, it was a moment of satisfaction, realizing that the nonprofit is making a real difference in people's lives. This moment empowered Scarlet to deepen her involvement with the nonprofit organization, focusing on advancing children's education and racial equality.

Therefore, witnessing the impact that the nonprofit makes on people's lives was a motivational factor in the study participants' decision to join the nonprofit board.

I Have Had a Positive Experience with the Organization in Advancing Its Mission

An overwhelming majority of women board members who participated in this study (90%) indicated that they already were well familiar with the organization and had a positive experience in advancing the mission before joining the board. For example, Magnolia had been a participant and a patron of the nonprofit for many years, advancing African American art. She asserted that every person who is seeking a board role should make sure she is familiar with the organization and committed to it before devoting herself to such a demanding role. She described the decision-making process of joining the board:

> You have to find the value for yourself. What is it about this particular thing that touches you in such a way that you actually want to give it your time, your resources, your imagination, your ideas, your commitment?... I was already a member of a group in this organization, which was basically an arts advocacy group. We did a lot of arts education for the members, a lot of gallery visits. You get to know artist things, things with the museum. It was great! So when I was asked to join the board and focus on raising funds to contribute towards the museum's acquisition of work by African-American artists, I was flattered and delighted to take on that role.

As described above, Magnolia and other study participants illustrated that their deep caring about the cause was the top motivational factor in assuming the board role. Their decision-making process included seeing the impact of the organization's programs and activities on people's lives, as well as having had a positive experience with the nonprofit prior to joining its board.

1B. Desire to Give Back to My Community (10 of 10, 100%)

All of the women board members who participated in this study (100%) described their social desire to give back to their communities as a primary motivator in joining the nonprofit board. Some attributed their desire to serve their community to their personal and family values, while others suggested that the decision to give back to their community came about as they

developed professionally and financially and were able to afford the time, expertise, and monetary commitment required from a nonprofit board member. The categories that emerged as motivational factors in joining the nonprofit board, in an aim to serve one's community, are described below.

Being Able to Contribute Back to the Community is My Responsibility

The study participants combined their passion for the mission with their desire to support their communities when making a decision to join the nonprofit board. For example, Lily was seeking to make a difference in society by promoting women's health issues. She has been committed to increasing awareness of women's health issues through her professional job and in her personal endeavors. For Lily, mothers supporting other mothers is a gratifying way to give back to American women. She described her sense of responsibility in giving back to the community of mothers and babies:

> I have children, I care about children, I care about the health of American women, so I have been following the organization. I knew the organization and its impact on our society. I just didn't know it as intimately before I was on the board. I felt very comfortable there. There was a comfort factor and there was tremendous satisfaction.

Through describing her board involvement, Lily expressed her social responsibility to American women, mothers, and a healthy continuity for generations to come. She added that serving on this board is a great role model for her daughters.

Likewise, as a former teacher and executive director of a community center who believes in the power of education, Dahlia is committed to giving back to society through her board service. Dahlia accepted the board position of a nonprofit that provides excellent education to underserved children, addressing their unique needs and gaps. She described her ability to give back to the community of immigrants:

> When I visited the school, it really took me back to the 50's when lots of immigrants came from North Africa, and from Iraq, and were settled in very rural locations. My

> family also immigrated to [name of country], and now I was living in [big city] with a nice career, and I was able to give back. I felt that this is a worthwhile organization and this is something that I definitely can put my energy towards, bring people and help support it financially.

Getting involved with the school as a board member addressed the social responsibility feeling that Dahlia had toward serving immigrant families through excellent education. Furthermore, serving on a boarding school board reminded her of her own family experience and her home values. Such childhood memories and home-bringing have also been a major consideration in assuming a board role among the study participants.

It Goes Hand-in-Hand with My Values

The study participants who expressed their desire to give back to their community as their social responsibility also mentioned that this type of commitment was learned at home and throughout their lives. For example, Kerria, the youngest participant in this study, recounted that she has been serving on committees and boards since she was a young girl. She said that her faith and family values had been the main influencers on her decision to give back to her community through board service. She described the impact of her upbringing and home values on her decision to serve on nonprofit boards:

> There are so many worthy causes that you can get involved in, but the most important ones for me is where you show people that you care. My work life was very fulfilling, but I knew that I could do more as a person to bring goodness into the world, and part of it comes from my religious faith, and part of it comes from my family background. My parents were always volunteers with our church, and with the Girls Scouts, Boys Scouts, coaching baseball teams, so joining boards for me has opened up my scope of seeing what other people are like, and it showed me how you can harness your own talents and other people's talents to make a difference in your community.

As suggested by Kerria, giving back to the community has been a natural endeavor, one that aligns with her core values.

I Believe in Social Justice: I Choose to Do What is Right

The study participants who felt a social responsibility to serve also described their sense of social justice. For example, Magnolia described going back to her hometown every summer and giving back to her community as "the right thing to do." She described her perspective about giving back through supporting the underserved community members in her hometown through food pantries that she organizes every summer with her friends and neighbors:

> I grew up understanding that you support what you believe in. You can't always give money, but you can give service, you can give your time, you can give your ideas and you can help raise money to help others. Every year we have a birthday party. In the entrance to the birthday party you bring canned goods, and we take it to the local food pantry. Oh, they love it. August comes and they know that this is going to be something festive and that it is going to help people in the community. We don't even know these people. I mean, we're "The Summer People." This is something that we feel like we want to do for our community.

As described by Magnolia, serving the less fortunate ones in the community through social activities is the right thing to do, and she finds creative ways to do it through community-driven festivities, making philanthropy a part of people's social life.

Another example for choosing to do "what is right" is Rose, who picks her boards very carefully, according to her opinion about social justice, since she is aware of the time, the work, and the monetary contribution that are expected of a board director. Therefore, she joins boards where she feels extremely passionate about the social responsibility of her service. For example, after hesitating initially about serving her trade association board, as it was poorly managed, she decided to join the board that advances her field of practice, because she felt the social need to help advance her profession. She described her reasons for joining this board:

> I decided I will help my professional trade organization. I have never wanted to be a part of it because I think it's so poorly run, and it gives us a bad name. But I met somebody, and I liked her. She was becoming the incoming president, and I thought, "She is like me. She'll just get the job done." After thinking about it, I offered to join the board. For me, being on this board is like community service. I felt that it was the right thing to do.

Despite Rose's critical approach to the way the nonprofit is being managed, she decided to join out of social responsibility to her field of practice.

In conclusion, all of the participants felt passionate about the mission, while wanting to give back to their communities. Although each participant may have defined "my community" and "doing what is right" differently, all of the study participants were focused and eager to make a difference in the lives of others through their proactive board service.

1C. Being Asked to Serve (9 of 10, 90%)

An overwhelming majority of the participants (90%) were asked to serve on the board—by a friend they knew who recommended them, by a colleague, or by a fellow supporter of the nonprofit organization. The women board members suggested that they considered joining the board once being invited to serve by a specific individual they respected.

I Was Approached by a Well-respected Individual

All of the study participants who described being asked to serve were approached by a well-respected individual who had been a part of the board composition—a board member or the organization's Executive Director. This goes hand-in-hand with the notion that in the last few decades the board recruitment process has changed—it has become more structured and transparent, and board directors are invited to join the board, rather than apply for a seat (Berkhemer-Credaire, 2019; Shafiroff, 2019).

For example, Rose, who initiated communal events in her home after the 9/11 attacks in order to cultivate a cross-cultural dialogue among people who live in her area, described being approached by a well-respected board member of an organization that has the mission to educate and advocate on issues of vital importance. She said:

> I got a reputation for doing these meetings all over the area, and people really loved it. I had Christians and Jews and Muslims coming together. They would come into my

> house. The board member from the [nonprofit] came to me and said, "Would you like to run these gatherings through us? We've heard it's great." I said, "This is not my thing. I'm just doing it because I don't know how else to cope with the 9/11 situation." Then they said, "We'd like you to join the board." That's how it started.

After Rose started her own grassroots program initiative, while demonstrating that she can be a proactive, engaging, and impactful lay leader, she was asked to join the board of a well-respected nonprofit organization. Rose accepted the invitation and joined the board. Furthermore, she later became the president of that board.

Likewise, Jasmine described being asked to serve on the board of a prestigious organization that focused on Arts Education. She recalled the "evolution" process of her involvement with the organization before being approached by a board member, who asked her to join the board:

> I think the more I talked about it [the nonprofit organization], the more I attended events and the more I spent time with this musical director, the more I got involved. It was a slow process in a way. It was an evolution, until someone from the board approached me and said, "Would you like to sit on the board and be able to play a more substantial role in the growth and development of this organization?" It just made sense to do that!

For Jasmine, the work of the nonprofit was already an integral part of her social and cultural life, so when she was being asked to serve, she joined with pleasure. Having said that, when her personal life situation changed and she was no longer able to pay the expected annual board dues (which she described as "substantial"), she had to step down from that board service. This is a reminder that most nonprofit boards pursue members who are not only interested and skillful in serving on the board as board members, but also have the financial capacity to make monetary contributions to the nonprofit organization on an annual basis.

A few of the study participants (20%) who described being asked to serve mentioned that their decision to join the board was heavily affected by the person who had asked them to join. They said they were inclined to seriously consider the invitation because of that person, who

asked them to serve. For example, Dahlia described that she considered joining the board more seriously, given the respect she had for the person who approached her:

> I was approached by a person whom I know, and I like, who asked me to join the board. I didn't know much about the organization, I really didn't, but it depends who asks you. So I said, "You know what? I'm very busy doing so many things, but since *you* are the one who is asking me, I will consider." I think that many times it's about the person who asks you to join the board.

Dahlia was inclined to consider accepting the board role because a board member—a known philanthropist and businessperson who was well-respected in the community—approached her personally on behalf of the board. She was flattered by this individual approaching her, and she accepted his invitation after learning more about the organization and the board. Dahlia is still serving on that board.

It Was Suggested that My Specific Expertise Would Benefit the Board

All of the study participants who indicated that they were asked to serve (90%) described that their unique experience and expertise were needed on the board and would benefit the governance performance of the organization. For example, it was suggested to Lily, who was pleasantly surprised by the invitation to serve on the national board of a major nonprofit that focuses on health issues, that her expertise in a health magazine as its Editor-In-Chief would improve the board's performance, and that her ability to present out-of-the-box ideas would be greatly appreciated. She recalled the conversation with the Executive Director of the organization, who approached her with the invitation to join this board:

> I truthfully did not realize that the head of the [nonprofit] valued my input as much, but apparently she did. She said, "Good ideas are the lifeblood of an organization." She asked me to join the national board. I asked obviously what commitment it entails—and I just decided to go for it. It turned out to be a really spectacular experience.

Lily explained that when she was approached to serve on the board, in her early 40s at the time, she was a bit nervous that she would not have the appropriate "deep pockets" as did other senior

board members. However, she then added that she learned that contributions to the board come in many forms, and a monetary contribution is one type, while relevant experience and specific expertise are critical for the governance success of the nonprofit organization.

Another example is Heather, who said that when she was approached to serve on the association board, the board member who approached her mentioned that her professional background would be beneficial for the nonprofit on the governance level. She described the synergy between her day job and her board service:

> There was great synergy between the two organizations—the nonprofit that mentors youth at risk and the company I work for, as both focus on celebrating the field of [name of field]. They reached out to me and said, "You can contribute from your experience. Why don't you join our board of directors?" So yes, it was a no brainer.

Heather was pleased to be asked to serve on a prestigious association board that she had already been familiar with through her career. She added that her board service enhanced her professional image and performance, and vice versa, her professional expertise benefitted the board and the nonprofit organization she served.

Similarly, Iris, an academic, educator, and author with decades of experience in nonprofit board service, was asked to join the board so she could contribute from her expertise as an educator. Iris knew that her experience in educational program development, along with her familiarity with the community served by the nonprofit, were appealing factors for being asked to join the board. She described being asked to serve by her colleague and friend, the only educator on the board:

> She was the only educator on the board. She thought that it would be useful for the board to have more educators. She recommended me to the board. I was also closer to the program side than any of the other board members, so it made sense.

Iris emphasized that every nonprofit board needs to pursue diversity of expertise for the board. Seeking more diversity on the board will be discussed later in this chapter, addressing the third research question about challenges on the board described by the study participants.

Finally, Magnolia described being approached to serve on the board as a media journalist covering art and culture. She recalled being asked to contribute from her wealth of knowledge in the field:

> I wasn't really thinking about it. Someone approached me and said, "We have this group, and we basically advocate for African American artists. I know you're interested in art, and that you know everything about Art. We can use your expertise. Would you like to join?" I didn't know everyone in the group, but I knew some people. I thought, "Well, okay, we'll see." I went to a couple of meetings, just to see if I really would like it, and I decided to join.

Magnolia added that her ability to sample a board meeting before making the decision to join the board is not typical. Usually, the decision of whether to join a board should be made before entering the boardroom.

In summary, woman board members described that being asked to serve on a nonprofit board is not only flattering, but also indicates that the board has gone through a screening process and has specifically identified that person. Some described being invited to join the board as a "call to serve" with great privilege and responsibility, one that should be taken seriously.

1D. I Knew that I Could Add Value to the Board (8 of 10, 80%)

A strong majority of participants (80%) indicated that they joined the board because they believed in their ability to add value to the board. The belief that they could contribute to the board in a meaningful way motivated them to join the board.

I Select My Volunteer Service Carefully According to Where I Can Contribute Most

Study participants indicated that since their time and resources are limited, they like to join boards where they feel they could contribute most. For example, Rose described her decision-making process when selecting to serve on a nonprofit board:

> To me, that is incredibly flattering and I'm very honored to be asked to serve on many boards. I choose carefully because I feel I do have to give some philanthropy. Since I don't have that much money to give, I want to give from my executive experience where it matters to me and can make a real difference for the organization. When I think I can have an impact or I think something's being [done] wrong, I'm very interested because I think I can make a difference.

Therefore, before accepting a board service invitation, Rose examines the organizational needs and decides whether it would be a good fit, and a beneficial service for the organization. If she does not feel she can make a real difference on a leadership level, she will not join that board. When she feels her unique executive experience could create a transformation within the organization, she is more inclined to join the board.

I Was Willing and Able to Fulfill the Role and Expectations, Including Monetary Contributions

The study participants who described that their expertise would benefit the nonprofit were also aware that they could fulfill the role of a board member, including making the suggested donations to the organization. For example, Marigold said she was able to provide the annual board dues to the charity. She also mentioned that her involvement as a volunteer tutor, before joining the board, was "joyful" and "relaxing." Later she realized that she was ready to take a more meaningful role as a board member. She described her evolution from a tutor volunteer to the chair of the board's strategic planning committee:

> I was able to do cell sheets and show graphs to the Executive Director [before joining the board], so she was able to present her results. The board was impressed, and they wanted my skill in strategic planning, so they asked me to join the board and lead the process. I said, "Well, I did strategic planning for a large corporation, I can do this!"

With time, Marigold realized that she was able to apply her professional expertise to the board and that her unique expertise benefitted the governance performance of the board.

Likewise, Jasmine felt that her expertise in education would be beneficial to the board of a major organization with the mission to further the pioneering vision of its artistic founder through performances, community programs, training, and education. She shared her perspective about adding value to the board through one's expertise:

> I think some knowledge and expertise in the area of the organization is really important. Because they knew that I was getting my doctorate in higher education, I was invited to participate and lead some things at their programs that dealt with kids' art education.

As illustrated above, a nonprofit board has a variety of needs. Rose summarized that every board member has the responsibility to know the added value she is expected to bring on to the board. She said:

> Board members are not a number, and they're not just a seat. They were identified to serve and to recruit others, and they have to remember, "Why was I recruited?" If you don't know, find out. What [skills] do you feel are the best match for the organization? How do you think I can best contribute? Think about that before you join the board.

In summary, the study participants asserted that being clear on the value that each person would bring to the board is important, while communicating about the expectations prior to joining to the board would be advantageous for an effective board service.

1E. Professional Development, Prestige, and Contacts (5 of 10, 50%)

One-half of the study participants (50%) described that a major motivator in joining the board was the opportunity for their professional development, making new connections and benefiting from the prestige associated with serving on the nonprofit's board of directors. Women board members described their board service as an opportunity for developing their personal and professional network, alongside the opportunity to brand themselves as a social

leader and a philanthropist. Finally, nonprofit board service was described by the study participants as a valuable piece of the résumé.

Professional Development and Networking Opportunities

The participants who spoke about the opportunity to grow professionally through their board service also noted that people volunteer to serve on a nonprofit board when it is a win-win situation. Most of the study participants suggested that, on the one hand, board members volunteer their time, money, and expertise for the benefit of the organization, and on the other hand, the service works best when the board members "get something out of it." Although one half of the study participants noted that the prestige associated with serving on this board and the reputation of the organization were appealing, it was suggested that this motivational factor was generally secondary. Women who were seeking professional development through their board service were able to articulate the type of skills and experience they had sought in joining the board.

For example, Scarlet mentioned that she decided to join a board that could enhance her business skills:

> The reason I got involved is I was interested in joining a proper board. One, because I wanted to give back, and two, I thought I could get some skills that I could not get during my day job through board services, as well as broaden my network…. I wanted to get some strategic skills, governance skills, [and some] understanding [of] how to steer an organization and vision. I was trying to gain a little bit more business skills, financial acumen—how to read financial statements and how to take responsibility.

Scarlet was very clear on her professional development goals and was well familiar with the potential growth opportunities associated with that specific board service. Indeed, she confirmed that throughout the years she was able to gain new business skills, which supported her career advancement.

Prestige of the Role and Reputation of the Organization

One half (50%) of the study participants described being "flattered" to serve and belong to such a prestigious board of a reputable organization.

For example, Magnolia was asked to join the board of a famous museum. She pointed out that being associated with a reputable art institution was a motivator in her decision to assume the board member role. She described the reasons for joining the board:

> I would say, probably certainly the prestige of it. Yes, I would say that's not the total reason. My reasoning is I really want to promote the work by African American artists. That was my interest, but I consider myself happy and lucky that I'm affiliated with such a wonderful institution.

Furthermore, some of the study participants mentioned that serving on a prestigious board gains appreciation among their friends and colleagues. For example, Heather described the synergy between the association board and her workplace:

> I like the fact that I work for an organization where the members in my workplace were supporting that cause. Now I can actually promote that here at work, and hopefully bring in more firms to mentor the high school students who are being serviced by the nonprofit…. The payback is that I have met people who then we've reached out to say, be a judge for our excellence program. That's a great synergy. That really works!

For Heather and other study participants, the professional growth opportunities alongside the prestige of being part of an exclusive board of directors were incentives that drove their decision to join the board.

1F. Seeking a Community (4 of 10, 40%)

Some of the study participants (40%) described that being part of a board gave them a sense of community, which was a motivational factor in their decision to pursue the board role.

I Wanted to Connect with New People

Some women board members were seeking a new community to be a part of, outside their daily routine of work and home. Thus, they selected the board of a nonprofit that has

multiple opportunities to connect with new people who share the same interest. These study participants had already participated in the social activities of the organization and felt a sense of belonging to its community prior to joining the board.

For example, Kerria explained that, as a working professional in a big city, she felt alienated and looked for a new community outside of her work. She described the nonprofit organization, as well as its board, as her "happy place," where she can escape her everyday work routine and relate to like-minded people. She said:

> [Name of city] can get pretty lonely. You get very busy in your job, running around all day, but you don't really have a sense of belonging to a community that would look out for you and enjoy your company outside of the everyday routine. I was looking for a group of friends with similar interests outside of my work.

For Kerria and other study participants, joining a specific nonprofit board was a way to meet new friends and to develop new relationships.

The Social Activities Were Appealing

The study participants who were seeking a community also mentioned that they were drawn to the social activities of the organization. Their past experience with the social programs of the organizations motivated them to get more involved and eventually become board members. For example, Scarlet described her appreciation to the social nature of the organization. She described the social activities organized by the executive director:

> Ellen [pseudonym for the Executive Director] is amazing because she's really into the idea of community. When we have small fundraisers, she'll show up. You might not always raise as much money, but you will have a hundred people on a rainy day coming together to an event. It's about connecting people.

For Scarlet, the social aspect of the programmatic activities was particularly appealing in her decision to join the board of directors.

In conclusion, all of the study participants indicated that their caring for the cause and their social desire to give back to their community played a pivotal role in their decision to serve

on the board. For most, it was a combination of factors that inspired them to take action, including the opportunity for self-growth, developing their network, and the social benefits. However, the study participants also mentioned that the "real work" began once they got on the board. The next section describes the findings for the second research question, detailing how the study participants described becoming influential board members within the board.

Finding #2: How Women Become Influential Board Members

Table 3. *Outline of Finding #2*

FINDING #2

An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) indicated that they learned to become influential board members by doing more work than required, while collaborating with peers.

A. Doing the board work—more than required (9 of 10, 90%)

- I took the work seriously and participated in board committees
- I worked intensely on getting things done, even on the weekends
- I invited my friends to join events, activities and asked them to donate

B. Collaborating with peers (9 of 10, 90%)

- I embraced open and respectful communication with my board colleagues
- I listened actively to peers and welcomed everyone's opinion
- I understood that a board needs to be in consensus and therefore I was flexible

C. Daring to speak out authentically (7 of 10, 70%)

- I was not afraid to voice my opinion even when I had opposition
- Being authentic and transparent is crucial for productive teamwork

D. Research and preparation for board meetings (6 of 10, 60%)

- I did my homework, prepared for meetings and visited program sites
- I discussed agenda items ahead of time with relevant peers

E. Informal Learning -- by observing, listening & mentorship (6 of 10, 60%)

- I learned a lot from others
- I had an open-door policy with my mentor

F. Formal education (4 of 10, 40%)

- Taking a course or a training program

2A. Doing the Work—More Than Required (9 of 10, 90%)

An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) indicated that they learn to become influential board members by doing the job, beyond the required work. The participants expressed that they did a lot of work in order to succeed as a nonprofit board member, including proactive participation in board committees, organizing programs and activities, participating in events, fundraising, and friend-raising.

I Took the Work Seriously and Participated in Board Committees

Marigold shared that in order to become an influential board member, she had to work above and beyond by taking on an initiative and leading it. She added that a board member can become instrumental by chairing a board committee, participating in various committees, and championing a specific program. Marigold described her viewpoint about the work of a board member:

> I really do believe that if you're on a board, you have to be willing to pick up responsibilities either as a support officer or as a committee chair and to be able to lead something, sometimes beyond the call of duty.

Marigold continued by giving examples of the many responsibilities she has been taking on as a board member, and later as President of the Board of Directors.

Similarly, Scarlet described how doing more work than expected had deepened her engagement with the nonprofit organization. She detailed the type of work she had been doing as a board member:

> I worked on the strategy. I worked on the governance. I worked on some other projects when they had it. I worked on recruitment. I felt that I was engaged. There's a lot of site visits, and that's how you'd see the benefits for the kids.

Scarlet emphasized that doing the work beyond expectations, including site visits, developed her impact as a board member. Overall, women board members indicated that getting proactively

involved in multiple facets of the organizational activities had deepened their connection with the community served by the nonprofit and their commitment to serve.

I Worked Intensely on Getting Things Done, Even on the Weekends

As mentioned, the women board directors in this study reflected on the load of work and personal commitment of becoming an influential member on a nonprofit board. They indicated that this type of work is part of their everyday life, including during evenings and throughout the weekend. For example, Heather recounted her workload as a new board member:

> It really is commitment. It is. I've spent, like weekends at some point reading high school scholarship applications. You can either just sit there and attend the board meetings and leave, [be]cause of your busy life, or you could sit there and be like, "Oh, I can actually send in names and help out. I think I better do that."

For Heather, becoming an influential board member meant responding to needs within the board immediately, as much as possible, at all times. She said that the more personally invested board members are in the nonprofit's programs and activities, the more likely they will make a difference within the organization.

Finally, Dahlia noted that the most effective board members are the ones who are "doers." She explained that board members who "walk the walk" will become more impactful. Moreover, they will become role models for their board colleagues. Dahlia added that it is important to make your peers aware that you are doing the work. She detailed her becoming an influential board director through being "a doer":

> I'm a doer. I don't sit still and wait for somebody to do it for me. Since I'm a doer, I was elected now to be vice-chair and I'm very involved in everything that's going on. I met with the director, and we had a very long conversation. I look at the money because I'm very familiar with budgets. Yesterday, I met the assistant director, and we sat down and reviewed next year's plan and budget, so I'm very involved. I believe that good board members are doers…. People need to feel that you're contributing to the board, and I'm not talking only financially.

Therefore, according to Dahlia and most other women board directors, becoming an influential board director requires a lot of work and commitment. Understanding the type of commitment associated with this role is an essential part of an effective board service.

I Invited My Friends to Join Events, Activities, and Asked Them to Donate

Finally, the study participants described that working alone is not effective and that part of the work on a nonprofit board member is engaging family members, friends, and colleagues—fundraising and friend-raising. For instance, Jasmine said that in order to achieve her goals and objectives as an impactful board member, she has been engaging her friends and family to contribute to the organization in support of the cause. She described the extent of her outreach:

> I would participate in all of its activities. It was also a financial commitment. I supported all of the events, and I invited my friends to join and make a monetary contribution to the organization.

Jasmine emphasized that an influential board member would be able to encourage philanthropy among anyone she knows. She said that engaging social circles is essential for making a difference in people's lives.

2B. Collaborating with Peers (9 of 10, 90%)

An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) indicated that they learn to become influential board members by collaborating with their colleagues. The study participants noted that being a team player is pivotal for succeeding on the board.

I Embraced Open and Respectful Communication with Board Colleagues

The study participants emphasized that every major decision should be made in a collaborative spirit by initiating an ongoing dialogue with board colleagues in a respectful manner, in and out of the boardroom. For example, Rose described the value of being "board-driven" in the decision-making process:

> To me, it's about sharing of ideas intelligently in robust, respectful dialogue. That's a really important part of board leadership.... We would say we're "board-driven." I don't go off and create programs or pursue initiatives without going to the group and saying what this is, what it's about, and this is how it works; this is how it will be done, and what it will cost, and can I get your approval? Once I have their approval, then I can move it on.

As described above, major group decisions should be formed through a respectful dialogue, in a collaborative spirit.

I Listened Actively to Peers and Welcomed Everyone's Opinion

The study participants also elaborated on the various qualities of being an effective team-player. For example, Iris described that in order to have a fruitful decision-making process within the board, everyone needs to feel included in the conversation. She shared her perspective about making her board colleagues feel included in the discussion:

> I can't succeed without the board participation. That's basically the case in all these different boards that I've been a part of or committees that I've chaired. I mean, it's a group, not just one person. You want to be sure that you make people feel included, that their ideas are important. They probably think of things that you haven't thought of, and they have perspectives that you don't have.

Iris, who is a Ph.D. educator, suggested that listening to one another and learning from each other is a crucial part for developing as a board member and becoming an influential leader.

I Understood that a Board Needs to Be in Consensus, and Therefore I Was Flexible

Furthermore, the study participants indicated that being an effective team player requires being flexible and understanding that your opinion will not always be accepted by others. For instance, Marigold described her perspective about the value of being flexible with peers:

> You have to be a team player—sometimes your opinion will carry and other times you're somebody else's opinion may be in conflict with yours, but you have to be supportive of whatever the board goes for.

Therefore, for the overwhelming majority of the study participants, the success of the board is a direct derivative of an open dialogue, listening to one another, while demonstrating flexibility as a team member.

Finally, Magnolia described her opinion about group collaboration as one of the most important aspects of board leadership. She explained that that every activity could be better achieved as a team, and that every nonprofit program is best implemented as a community:

> I just believe in group activity, in groups coming together. I believe strongly in that. I think that's the best way to accomplish anything. The way I've always done it: get a group together, have an event, and everybody contributes. It's becoming more and more of a community activity. Anything we need comes from the community and everyone comes together. It takes a village, it takes a lot of people, and everyone's got to have a skin in the game. The more people are part of something, the more successful it will be. That's what I learned.

Magnolia is an enthusiastic advocate of a community-driven, collaborative approach to nonprofit leadership, and with that perspective, she has become an influential board member in the past 25 years.

In sum, the study participants recognized that collaborating with peers while embracing community-driven participation is a good formula to becoming an influential board member in a nonprofit organization.

2C. Daring to Speak out Authentically (7 of 10, 70%)

A strong majority of participants (70%) described that speaking out authentically is an effective way to become an influential board member and that having an open communication within the board is beneficial for productive teamwork.

Being Authentic and Transparent is Crucial for Productive Teamwork

The study participants explained that daring to speak out "your truth" is an imperative trait of a nonprofit board director. Dahlia described that honesty and transparency are important qualities for the board functionality. She said:

> You need to say what you think in an honest way. I think people need to know that what you say is really what you think, and you don't have one in your mouth and one in your heart. When you're not honest, it's because you are afraid to put things on the table, and the board will not function well. You need to be upfront. You need to be sincere and if you don't like something, you need to say, "I don't like it." I was never reserved.

For Dahlia, being upfront, honest, and transparent contributes to a successful board service.

Likewise, Scarlet proclaimed that being straightforward pays off. She explained that taking the time to explain your opinion to the board "is helpful in terms of setting a different tone for the board." For Scarlet, making people think outside of their comfort zone is beneficial for the board's governance performance. She said:

> I think now and then making people think about things differently, even though they don't want to, has a benefit. I think some of those people think I'm probably just a pain, but at the end they did do what I said and were happy about it.

Scarlet suggested that taking the time to explain your view and ideas to your peers not only pays off strategically, but also encourages people to think outside the box. She said that "challenging the status quo is a good thing."

In conclusion, the strong majority of the study participants, who described the importance of voicing opinions authentically, regarded being upfront as an important element in learning to become an influential board director.

I Was Not Afraid to Voice My Opinion, Even When I Had Opposition

The study participants indicated that confidence in oneself is a valued attribute for a board member, and that as long as people have mutual respect for one another, expressing one's opinion will be appreciated and welcomed by peers, even when they oppose your view.

For example, Rose spoke of trusting yourself and sharing your input as an essential part of the board's performance. She affirmed that "it is the reason that board members have been invited to be on the board in the first place, to share their input." Rose added that board members

should express their opinions regardless of how their colleagues may react, a practice she defined as "courageous." She said:

> I think courage is a huge part of leadership—courage to fail, courage to be able to go out and say what you think and listen to the response, as well. It's not just saying what you think and walking away. I always say, "Look, I need to be heard. I don't need to be right." I don't think necessarily what I'm sharing is absolutely the only thing, yet I think it's a good enough idea that I want to share it, and people can then react, or tell me why they think it's wrong.

For Rose, being courageous in speaking your mind authentically is an indispensable part of being an influential board member.

Similarly, Jasmine advocated for speaking one's mind on the nonprofit board. She recalled that "when I had something to say, I would speak up." She added that even when her opinions were not popular within the board, she did not hesitate to express them. Therefore, the majority of the study participants explained that it is not only advantageous to share one's views and opinions on the board, but it is also one's duty to do so.

2D. Research and Preparation (6 of 10, 60%)

A majority of the study participants (60%) indicated that they learned to become influential board members by carefully preparing for board meetings and learning about the organization through research, site visits, and careful preparation. They reviewed the agenda and the attachments prior to the board meetings, and they prepared their feedback in advance.

I Did My Homework, Prepared for Meetings, and Visited the Program Sites

The study participants described their preparation by various actions—by researching the programs and the agenda items one by one, by visiting program sites, and by speaking with relevant people outside of the board. For example, Scarlet described making "site visits" where the mentorship programs took place. She went as far as Ecuador to learn more from the

community about the programs and observed program recipients' reactions to their mentors. Scarlet explained the importance of research and preparation through in-person site visits:

> It was important for me to experience the program and talk with the community. After my visit I decided that it was better to make our program better, rather than getting bigger, and I presented it to the board. I think that's a focus of mine, strategic thinking, learning about the program and the community through site visits, and thinking about true impact, before we go further.

Likewise, Dahlia described the importance of research and preparation as a way to become an impactful board member. For example, before a board presentation, she would work thoroughly on her proposal, including budget and projections. She described the importance of advance preparation for the board meeting, especially when proposing a new program:

> People listen when you come well-informed and prepared, and when you talk about things with your head, not with your feelings…. I started a program for children with autism. Very expensive program. I got a grant to start this program, but it didn't cover all of the expenses for this program. We had about 30 children ready to start the program, which was good for our community, but the program was costly, and we didn't have the money to run it. When I brought the idea of starting this program to the board, I came with a presentation and a plan that I prepared to detail, along with a budget and ideas for funding in the long term. They listened and took it seriously.

During the board meeting, Dahlia demonstrated that there was a real community need for this new initiative, and she identified potential funding partners and sponsors. She concluded by saying, "When you do your homework and you present it in a knowledgeable way, the board appreciates it, and people go with you." This program was accepted by the board and later became a great success in serving children with autism in the community.

Similarly, Iris mentioned that research and preparation for board meetings are important in becoming an effective board director. Iris described that she was taking the time, outside of the boardroom, to make strategic connections that would benefit the organization's programs:

> That's been something that I could do. I've been able to bring in connections from some of the other projects that I do that improve our programs. I can be helpful on issues that involve diverting resources or any difficult things to deal with on a programmatic level, assessment or program structure.

In conclusion, the majority of the study participants described that doing their research and preparation has been instrumental in developing them into a successful board director.

2E. Informal Learning—By Observation, Listening, and Mentorship (6 of 10, 60%)

A majority of participants (60%) indicated that they learned to become influential board members by observing others and/or by being mentored by a seasoned colleague, a close friend, or a parent.

Active Listening, Observation, and Learning from Others

The study participants proclaimed that becoming an influential board member required observing the group dynamics, while learning from others. For example, Jasmine described how it had helped her grow as a board member, especially in the beginning of her board service:

> When I don't know something well, I tend to sit back and be more of an observer until I feel like I understand what's going on—to know the culture, begin to understand the dynamic, some of the power, the interplay between power structure and who makes a decision. With all these different players, where they fit in, who's respected, who's not, whose opinion matters, whose opinion doesn't matter as much.

For Jasmine, observation of the board dynamics is a fundamental phase in the self-growth process of a nonprofit board member.

Likewise, Rose described how approaching the board service with "a learning mindset" was essential for her professional development within the board:

> If you don't have experience, you're there to learn. You're not going to come in like a bull and you're trying to show up to say, "Hey, I'm here." Come with a learning mindset. You're here to grow, to absorb—but don't hold back either because everybody who's chosen, in my opinion, should know that they were chosen for a reason.

Rose was encouraged to develop a balance between observation and self-expression. She said that mastering this balance comes with practice. Additionally, Rose added that self-awareness is another advantageous trait for a board director, one that helps in reaching that balance between

observing others and self-expression. She said that "self-awareness is a trait of leadership, and it is one of the key traits."

Furthermore, the study participants mentioned that informal learning can be manifested in many ways, and it was noted that since board service is a group effort, where one gets to meet many people from different facets of life, it is a great opportunity for personal and professional growth. Lily praised the collective talent she had encountered within the board, and how much one could learn from peers. She said, "Those board meetings were structured in a very smart way. The expertise that people bring is key. You can learn from everybody you meet."

In summary, the study participants described that much of the informal learning was taking place through interaction with board peers, in and out of the boardroom.

Open-door Policy with My Mentor

In addition to learning from one another in various settings, some of the study participants shared that they were guided by a mentor who was very familiar with the board role. In some cases, they learned about board service from a parent and grew into the role organically; in other cases, their mentor was a seasoned board member. The mentor was a person familiar with the nonprofit board who had a trusted relationship with the study participant.

For example, Scarlet described that the president of the national association board was kind enough to guide her through her regional association board service. She described that the "open-door policy" with her mentor gave her the confidence she needed, while guiding her in her professional development on the board. She said, "He had a very strategic way to how he approached projects, and I could give him a call and consult with him anytime."

In summary, the study participants learned from one another—some did so organically, while others had a trusted mentor for guidance.

2F. Getting Formal Education (3 of 10, 30%)

In addition to informal learning, some of the study participants (30%) described that pursuing formal education was a key factor in their professional development as a board director. For instance, Heather described a formal training program she had pursued before accepting the board director role:

> I needed three years until I was ready to serve on the board. Three years in the job got me more acquainted with the association board and its programs. Then I pursued a certificate program. It took me about a year to get certified for association board service, and then I felt like I had more of the groundwork. I realized that I needed the education on how boards are structured, what's the governance, and what's the importance, what are some of the legal ramifications and the antitrust, and things that you just need to know, so I went and did the training. It was very helpful.

Heather noted that the formal training was a valuable step in developing the confidence and skills she would need as a board member.

Moreover, the study participants who pursued formal education described it as a specific program. For example, Marigold decided to take a two-day training course, specifically on strategic planning for nonprofit organizations. She recalled:

> I said, "Let me look to see what kind of resources are available." There was this two-day course, so I went. They had a book; they had a process. I learned a lot from this course, and then I led the strategic planning process for the board.

Although most of the study participants described joining the board after they had already become seasoned professionals, those who proactively pursued a formal training course had felt that it was instrumental for their professional development on the board.

Finally, some of the study participants mentioned that their educational degree(s) came in handy. For example, Jasmine declared that her Ed.D. degree study has been helpful in developing her confidence and skills as a board member, a board chair, and founder of a nonprofit organization. She said:

> The process of going back to school and completing my doctorate and actually doing academically well, changed how I felt about myself. That was an important aspect of going forward. I developed confidence in myself. Also, I learned to find my own voice in a better way and to speak up. I think the courses I took, the research I did—learning how to read in a more critical analytical way, how to write, all contributed to how I lead my life today and how I moved forward with projects. I think that [Name of University] actually acted as a launching pad and enabled me to take on different roles, such as starting this organization.

Jasmine stated that her doctoral education has been instrumental in providing her with the understanding, the skills, and the confidence to take action and pursue her dream to launch her own nonprofit organization, supporting a cause that is close to her heart.

In conclusion, while most of the study participants described that becoming an influential board member derived from doing the work, more than required, while collaborating with peers, some of the women described how the informal and formal education assisted their self-growth on the nonprofit board.

Finding #3: Challenges They Face

Table 4. *Outline of Finding #3*

FINDING #3

A strong majority of participants (80%) reported that the primary challenge they faced centered on dissention among peers. Study participants described their challenges in the following way:

A. Dissension among board colleagues (8 of 10, 80%)
- I got a lot of opposition and it affected me
- One person would dominate board meetings
- Uncomfortable peer pressure to donate more

B. Leadership transition that burdened the board (7 of 10, 70%)
- Departure/replacement of Executive Director
- Departure/replacement of Board Chair
- A changing board composition: new people come in and create new dynamics

Table 4 (continued)

C. Not enough diversity on the board (7 of 10, 70%)
- Gender diversity – it is difficult to recruit women board members
- Racial diversity – still a challenge across the board
- Age diversity – need to bring in younger people

D. Maintaining interest and involvement of peers (4 of 10, 40%)
- Keeping board members involved over time
- Some people get on the board but do not do the work

E. Overwhelming volume of work (4 of 10, 40%)
- Serving on the board is hard work
- If others do not do the work, I would do it

F. Not being taken seriously – mostly on an earlier board (3 of 10, 30%)
- The decisions were made prior to the board meeting without my input
- I was perceived as "the wife"/"the daughter" and my feedback wasn't welcomed

G. No challenges (1 of 10, 10%)
- I have never confronted a challenge that I could not resolve

3A. Dissension Among Board Colleagues (8 of 10, 80%)

A strong majority of the study participants (80%) described their challenges within the board as related to disagreements with board colleagues, sour relationships, or peer pressure that created tension. Furthermore, the study participants suggested that this tension leads to a dysfunctional board, and to frustration.

I Got a Lot of Opposition and It Affected Me

The study participants described sub-groups that were being created within the board, which caused tension within the board. Some of these "cliques" became adversarial, while others

caused group support without the authentic expression of the individual members. For example, Jasmine described her experience on various boards:

> Very often, you'll find that you get little cliques within a board of people who like this person, they don't like this person. I'm sure there are cliques of people who didn't like me and didn't like what I was doing. I was fighting against it all the time with people who didn't approve of the job I was doing. It was exhausting.

Jasmine talked about the dissension accelerating during a difficult period of time when she—as President of the Board—had to deal with a major lawsuit related to the nonprofit. She recalled not getting the support she needed from her colleagues, and, eventually, she resigned.

One Person Would Dominate Board Meetings

Another facet of the dissension among peers was a derivative of a powerful board member who would dominate the discussion in the boardroom, alongside colleagues who avoided confronting that person. Specifically, Rose stated that she occasionally encounters individuals who are used to controlling conversations at their workplace and personal lives—a leadership style that she described as a misfit on nonprofit boards. She said:

> I was running a committee, and one woman was very difficult. She would come to every meeting, and she would disrupt everything. I think she's really smart and has a lot to offer, but the way she offered her information was problematic. It would shut down the meeting, and it would cause chaos. You couldn't get anything done!... You've got to serve the organization in its best interests. It's not about your best interest! When I come to a board meeting, I don't have a personal agenda. The agenda I have is for the organization's success.

Rose argued that every board member should place their ego aside and think about the benefit to the organization. She said that when board colleagues hesitate from stopping a dominant person from destroying a discussion, it can deepen the disharmony within the board, while harming the governance performance of the organization.

Uncomfortable Peer Pressure to Donate More

In addition, some of the study participants who described the dissension among peers as a challenge indicated that certain board colleagues could cause an uncomfortable peer pressure, especially when persuading others to make monetary contributions. For example, Scarlet noted that she had felt pressure to make higher donations from peers. She described her discomfort:

> The leadership on the second board that I was on was not open to understanding or hearing other sides. It definitely affected my relationship with other board members and the staff. It seemed like people were interested in money above all else. There was too much peer pressure to just fund the organization.

Scarlet expressed that she was disappointed in her colleagues for putting up with the peer pressure of the founder and focusing mainly on fundraising, creating a competitive environment on the board. Therefore, Scarlet eventually resigned from that board and joined another nonprofit board that focused less on fundraising and more on programmatic leadership.

Likewise, Kerria shared that dissension among board members was often based on socioeconomic gaps and that board members tend to be less critical of peers who contribute more money to the nonprofit. She described the tension that may be caused by the different socioeconomic status within the board:

> I had someone on my board who comes from much larger means and is always ready to spend a lot of money on things, sometimes on things that I don't think we need. We have to be financially competent and make good reports every quarter, every year, and demonstrate that we're spending the money wisely. I am more liable to use elbow grease and work through a problem than throw money at it, and I think that especially in New York City there are a lot of wealthy people on boards; they think that if they just put money at a problem, they can solve it very quickly.

Kerria added that the socioeconomic gap is a recurring challenge that causes dissension among peers. However, she also said that her peers and she find ways to resolve their differences peacefully. Kerria concluded that being on a board, especially on a diverse board in a big city,

requires everyone to accept socio-economical gaps and to remain open-minded when approaching a challenge.

Finally, Iris recalled that in her earlier board experience, decisions were made by a few people. She talked about the frustration this exclusion created:

> We used to get a 200-page document that was so detailed and so laden with sort of medical jargon, that unless you were a doctor, you might not be able to read that part. We would get it a short time before the board meeting. There was no way that we could actually be informed as to make decisions. We could not weigh in our input. We were expected to go with the recommendations of the senior staff. It was frustrating.

Iris continued by explaining that this type of governance was not legal and not ethical, and that "ultimately, it's caught up with them after a state did an investigation and people got fired, and so that's an example of bad governance." As Iris pointed out, when a few people call the shots for the entire board, the members can feel dis-valued, and the organization's governance performance will be impaired.

In conclusion, almost all of the board members described dissension with their peers as a challenge that occurs in longtime board service. While some of the study participants were left with a sour taste and unresolved tension, others managed to overcome it peacefully.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the study participants expressed that dissension among peers has not been a challenge on every board. They explained that if the dissension was not resolved overtime, they would resign and move to a board with less tension.

3B. Leadership Transition that Burdened the Board (7 of 10, 70%)

A majority of the study participants (70%) indicated that their challenge was related to a major leadership transition, typically the departure of the Executive Director.

Departure/Replacement of the Executive Director or the Board Chair

The study participants suggested that when the executive director of the organization is being replaced, it burdens the board with great concern and uncertainty, particularly if the

context of her/his departure is controversial. For example, Jasmine shared that two nonprofits had a leadership transition of the Executive Director while she had served on the board, which created chaos for the entire board while compromising the reputation of the organization. She described this "terrible experience":

> We had a definite breakdown on the board. We had a terrible experience. We had to put the executive director on administrative leave. It was a horrible, terrible experience for me. I was fried. I was spending over 20 hours a week on this organization, while I had my own foundation to run. There was no joy in it for me. During that time, we went through two new Executive Directors. One turned out to be a total nightmare, even though his credentials checked out well, and the other one was not a good fit.

Jasmine's unfortunate experience with the major leadership transition illustrates that it is quite difficult to overcome such a leadership crisis and to find the right replacement. This experience affected Jasmine personally, and she eventually resigned from this board.

Furthermore, the study participants indicated that a departure of the Board Chair is typically easier to handle than the departure of the Executive Director, especially when it is an expected transition, i.e., the end of her/his term. The study participants explained that a board chair is elected within the board, while an executive director requires a much longer and more complex search process, including a nominating committee and, most likely, the involvement of an executive search firm. Therefore, the departure of the executive director, who manages the day-to-day activities and supervises the staff, was described as the bigger challenge.

A Changing Board Composition: New People Come in and Create New Dynamics

Some of the study participants indicated that leadership transitions within the board can change the group dynamics, not always for the better. For example, Marigold joined the board when it was composed of her longtime friends and neighbors, eventually becoming President of the Board. However, when her longtime peers retired or moved away, she felt that the emerging

board composition changed the group dynamic and communication structure within the board. She described her dissatisfaction with the current board:

> The board has a very different composition right now, and I don't feel the level of community in the board that I did before. I think there are people with different agendas. It's a difficult environment right now. I don't know if I'll run again, quite frankly. I have two more years of service.

As illustrated by Marigold, changing the composition of a board can affect the experience of the individual members, especially after years of effective teamwork with familiar colleagues, who were also personal friends. Marigold hinted that she was considering resigning from the board.

Alternatively, Iris expressed a positive approach to the challenge of a major leadership transition. She said that every time she had experienced a leadership transition challenge, the board members' ability to overcome this challenge created a great sense of purpose. She described her experience:

> We had some difficult things to deal with. Programmatic structure was being assessed, and we also needed a new Executive Director. We had a search committee; this was me and two others; I was chairing it. We used a search firm that I knew personally from [Name of Ivy League University]. We chose an Executive Director; he's still there. I think there was a thoughtfulness to how we managed the determination of somebody, and how we brought somebody else on board … we talked a lot, and we also had many conversations with the staff.

Iris felt proud in successfully managing a major leadership transition with a positive outcome, while collaborating well with her peers. Therefore, while a strong majority of the study participants described a leadership transition as a challenge that left them with a sour taste, for some it was an uplifting experience.

3C. Not Enough Diversity on the Board (7 of 10, 70%)

A significant majority of the study participants (70%) described their challenge with lack of diversity on the board. That diversity was described as gender diversity, age diversity, socioeconomic diversity, or racial diversity. However, all of the participants who talked about

this challenge asserted that nowadays there is more diversity on boards and more awareness of its benefits for the organization. Chapter 2 of this dissertation describes in-depth the literature review regarding the benefits of diversity on boards.

Gender Diversity—It is Difficult to Recruit Women Board Members

Some of the study participants (4 out of 10, 40%) described that gender diversity was a challenge. For example, Rose described an earlier board that she co-founded with her husband, which was male-dominated. She recalled being regarded as "the wife of" the director:

> I was involved heavily, but I had no role and no voice on the board. Because I was very young and scared to promote my ideas over my husband's. I was taught not to do that. I would whisper in my husband's ear: "Tell them this, tell them that, do this, do that," which was ridiculous!

Rose added that women have come a long way as board directors, yet there is still the inherited social position of being more accommodating and less assertive.

Likewise, Heather spoke about the challenge of lack of gender representation on the association board, claiming that there are "not enough female executives" in her field who would be invited to serve on the association board. She said:

> It is hard to find women board members because the industry is male dominated. If you're looking for board members at the highest level in these companies, there's fewer women, but if you look at the overall firm, you might see that there are many women in the workforce. I think there's just fewer at the upper level, suitable to serve on this board…. We as women have a responsibility to other women and to bring about this change. Why? It better serves everyone—women would be a good addition to the board, with a better diversity of thinking, and will also make women have that opportunity.

By advocating for more women on a male-dominated board, Heather is committed to pursuing more gender-balanced boards of directors.

Racial Diversity—Still a Challenge Across the Board

Some of the study participants who described diversity as a challenge (6 of 10, 60%) noted that there is a lack of racial diversity on boards and that there should a proactive

recruitment of racially diverse board members. For instance, Jasmine said that adding people of color would allow for a better connection with the community served by the nonprofit. She said:

> We look for "the different" board members. I'd like to have more diversity on our board. I don't want just an all-white, vanilla kind of board because those aren't the people we serve.

Jasmine asserted that diversity on boards makes the board more effective and more socially just. She concluded by saying that diverse boards are also more appealing to foundations, who seek to fund nonprofit organizations with a diverse leadership.

Similarly, Scarlet expressed her commitment to racial diversity and described that as an ongoing challenge. She defined it as a two-fold struggle—finding the right fit and advocating for that person with peers. She said:

> Racial diversity is very important, because we are serving a community that is mostly people of color. I am actively looking for African American women to join our board. I asked my friend to join, but she was tapped out. I also had some people fight me on this. There was a lot of push-back from some board members when I suggested bringing a young woman that was already a tutor in the organization.

Scarlet added that she would continue advocating for racial diversity within the board. Overall, the study participants described their passion for increasing women's representation on boards.

Age Diversity—Need to Bring in Younger People

Some of the board members who described diversity as a challenge (3 of 10, 30%) talked about a "reverse age diversity" challenge within nonprofit boards, describing the need to include younger members. The study participants said that since nonprofit boards require time, experience, and money, they naturally attract more mature individuals. For example, Magnolia said that "I think it's important for young people, early-careers in their 30s, let's say, to start looking at board engagement." She sees veteran board members like herself responsible for nurturing the next generation of board leaders. As a mother and grandmother, she expressed her pride in her family's cross-generational involvement in nonprofit leadership roles:

> My stepdaughter is an executive director and has a board that she has to report to. My son has served on the [Name] Board. My stepson does a lot of volunteer work. If you think about it, my granddaughter who's 16 is a founder of the chapter in her high school. We're all in it!… As a young person, you expand your networks, while the organization gets the younger generation of people involved. It is good for everyone!

As Magnolia described, starting at a younger age is advantageous for both the individual and the organization, yet the boards that she has been serving on lack the age diversity.

In conclusion, the study participants described a diversity challenge on boards, as well as their commitment to increasing the diversity on boards in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age.

3D. Maintaining Interest and Involvement of Peers (4 of 10, 40%)

Some of the study participants (40%) described that maintaining the interest and involvement of their board colleagues has been an ongoing challenge within the board.

Keeping Board Members Involved Over Time

Some of the study participants said that since the nonprofit board consists of volunteers, it is difficult to demand their involvement. For example, as a longtime board member and chairperson, Jasmine said that she had witnessed people who get on the board and not always stay involved. She described this challenge:

> I think it's really hard to get board members to focus and to be actively involved at times, especially on a volunteer board. The demands of the board or the requirements of the board are competing against the requirements of someone's professional life, personal life, need to earn money, take care of family—whatever those other stressors and obligations are. I think there is a challenge of maintaining interest and involvement.

Jasmine suggested that people who are passionate about the cause would be more motivated to be involved, and their passion empowers others to follow suit, yet not everyone has the same interest to invest their personal resources in the organization.

Some People Get on the Board but Do Not Do the Work

In addition, some of the study participants explained that some board members get on the board but would not do much work. This challenge would deepen over time, as the study

participants suggested that keeping the board members interested over time is another layer of this challenge. For example, Marigold said that board members should realize that not everyone will follow up on achieving tasks. She suggested for board members to be ready to do someone else's work, when necessary. Marigold explained her approach to this challenge:

> There are two things to be considered: One—is be careful who you give a responsibility to; be careful that they're going to be able to do it, number one. Will they do it? Do they have time issues? Do they have a job where they travel a lot and they have three kids? Do they have health issues, or do they have too many other things? Then, number two is to know that you may just have to do some things yourself if you'd like it done.

Marigold indicated that when board colleagues do not do their task, she would address it herself. She said that over time, this would not be an ideal situation, and the uneven distribution of work might increase tension among peers.

3E. Overwhelming Volume of Work (4 of 10, 40%)

As mentioned above, some of the study participants described taking more work on themselves. By the same token, some of the study participants (40%) described the overwhelming workload as a challenge in serving on the nonprofit board.

Serving on the Board is Hard Work

The study participants said that serving on the board is hard work. For example, Marigold described that when the demand for the program offered by the organization grew, the board's workload increased tremendously, and it was hard to handle. She proclaimed that "we were a victim of our own success, and we became too busy." Finally, she suggested that the board should support the organization's growth gradually, with an increase of its resources.

If Others Do Not Do the Work, I Would Do It

In addition, some of the study participants described the unequal distribution of work among peers, deriving from different perspectives on the duty of a board member. For example, Kerria described how a few people may do most of the work. She explained:

> I am the type of person who would prefer to organize an event myself with the help of one or two people, but I know that some of the board members are more used to paying for others to do the work, and do not roll their sleeves. This type of outsourcing is not always in our budget, so a few of us end up doing a lot of the work.

For Kerria, organizing the nonprofit's events is part of the job of a board member. Yet, when it gets to be too much work on a few people, it can become overwhelming.

3F. Not Being Taken Seriously—Mostly on Earlier Boards (3 of 10, 30%)

A minority of the study participants (30%) indicated that they did not feel appreciated on the board and that their input was not being taken seriously. However, the study participants mentioned that this challenge took place on earlier boards.

The Decisions Had Been Made Prior to the Board Meeting Without My Input

A few women board members described how on certain boards, most of the decisions were made before the board meeting. They felt that they were occupying a seat, yet their opinions were not being taken into consideration. For example, Scarlet described feeling frustrated when the board asked her for money but never considered her input regarding other matters. She said:

> The second board I was on, the only thing they care about is the fundraising. They couldn't find time to discuss strategy. I took over the strategic planning task, but no one ever really cared until I raised my hand and said, "We're doing nothing" to try to get people to focus on it, including the executive staff. I was annoyed. I was like, "Why am I here?" To be honest, with the second board, that's probably why I resigned.

Scarlet expressed a situation where she had felt that her life experiences and expertise were not being utilized. Eventually, she resigned and joined a board where she felt more valuable.

I Was Perceived as "the Wife" / "the Daughter" and My Feedback Wasn't Welcomed

A few of the study participants (20%) described that on their early board service, they had felt that their appointment was more of a formality, i.e., being offered a board seat as the wife of the director of the nonprofit or the daughter of a famous human rights activist. These women described their frustration, realizing that their input was not sought after and that they were asked to obtain a seat on the board because of their name. Moreover, some of the participants spoke about the imbalance in a male-dominated board, and that women are generally more accommodating and less aggressive in voicing their views. For example, Rose talked about the "female mentality" and its manifestation in a group discussion. She said that women were expected to be more accommodating, thereby shying away from expressing their opinion. She described her view about the gender-driven challenge:

> Early on, I would definitely apologize. I still see this a lot. Women are very apologetic before they start talking. Men never start with that apologetic tone. Women have been taught to set the stage for everybody to be comfortable. Less so today, depending on the board and the person.

In summary, a few of the study participants described not being taken seriously, mostly on earlier boards. However, these women added that this imbalance has been changing, and with time and experience, women's input is not only being taken more seriously, but women are getting higher leadership roles on boards.

3G. No Challenges (1 of 10, 10%)

A minority of the study participants asserted that they did not experience any challenges on the board, and that every road bump could be addressed with strategic communications.

In conclusion, the study participants expressed a variety of obstacles that they faced on the nonprofit board, particularly dissension among peers and the transition of leadership. Additionally, women board directors articulated that the lack of diversity, maintaining interest of

peers, and a work overload were also some of the challenges they had faced on the board. However, in most cases, the board members overcame these challenges. The next section illustrates ways in which the study participants described overcoming the obstacles they have faced on the nonprofit board.

Finding #4: How They Overcome Challenges

Table 5. Outline of Finding #4

FINDING #4

An overwhelming majority of participants (90%) described that they overcame challenges faced by building personal relationships outside of the boardroom and by engaging in a dialogue with peers.

A. Pursuing dialogue with peers in and out of the boardroom (9 of 10, 90%)
- It is all about being a strategic communicator
- Building a trusting relationship with peers is key
- Persistence in peaceful conversations

B. Confidence in self / apply expertise (8 of 10, 80%)
- People listen when you speak from experience
- Everyone has a role on the board related to their expertise
- Voicing your opinion is your duty as a board member

C. Engaging others to take action (6 of 10, 60%)
- I encourage the community to take action
- I ask board colleagues to help out
- I invite my family and friends to participate

D. Resigning from the board (5 of 10, 50%)
- I was not happy any longer, so I decided to resign from the board
- I think it is time for the younger generation to get involved

E. Think outside the box (2 of 10, 20%)
- I raised new ideas and to my great surprise they were often accepted

4A. Pursuing a Dialogue with Peers in and out of the Boardroom (9 of 10, 90%)

An overwhelming majority of the participants (90%) described overcoming the challenges they faced by pursuing a dialogue with their board colleagues in and out of the boardroom. Furthermore, the study participants stated that nurturing such interpersonal relationships with their peers is an essential part of their role as a board director. They described productive ways for approaching board-driven challenges, based on friendly and respectful conversations, active listening, and strategic communication skills.

It is All about Being a Strategic Communicator

The study participants suggested that having strategic communication skills is instrumental for confronting obstacles within the board. For example, Heather described how she approaches challenges in the same way that she would approach them in her professional work—through interpersonal conversations. She said, "In a professional environment you just have to talk it through, talk it out, figure it out; it's the same thing."

Another example is Scarlet, who described her approach to difficult situations through an open dialogue with her peers. She emphasized the power of discussion:

> I believe in discussion. I may not win; I lose a lot of the time. I don't care. I would like to approach things with a discussion and have an open dialogue, or figure out the right way, making sure that committees are working appropriately. Those discussions are key!

Therefore, for the study participants, cultivating discussions with their collogues, while creating a culture of open communications, has been useful for overcoming challenges.

Building a Trusting Relationship with Peers is Key

Furthermore, the study participants indicated that it is critical to develop trust among board colleagues. Some explained that building trust can be done through recognizing each

other's achievements—in person and during a board meeting. For example, Jasmine described the board as a community of people who should keep "cheerleading" one another. She said:

> It's a lot of talk and trying to be a cheerleader and say, "Thank you so much. A lot of the success of this year is due to you." There's a great deal of pride and a great deal of satisfaction that we've been able to do something that has such a positive impact. I think that building trust through interpersonal conversations is important.

Jasmine added that being genuinely interested in one another is beneficial in building authentic and trusting relationships.

Persistence in Peaceful Conversations

The study participants also described the value of persistence in cultivating peaceful conversations as a useful strategy to overcoming challenges. They emphasized that board members who are less confrontational would be more effective in developing such trustworthy relationships, while becoming more "likable" to their peers. For example, Marigold described the benefit of being an amicable peer. She recalled:

> I was asked to be board president because when the founding president left in turmoil, quite honestly, they wanted somebody who was non-controversial. I think people felt I could do the job, and I was non-controversial! I get along with everyone on the board, and we can have peaceful conversations.

Marigold stated that since the nonprofit board is composed of different types of people, a non-confrontational dialogue is effective for making progress on the governance level, leaving ego out of the dialogue.

In the same way, Magnolia said that being able to converse with peers in a persistent manner is crucial for succeeding on the board:

> You keep asking and talking to people. Persistence is a part of it. You have to just keep going until it happens—as a journalist, I was often told, "No," but you keep talking with people; there's always a way! I think it was Oprah who said, "If the answer is no, you're not talking to the right person." I believe in that.

Magnolia stated that she finds ways overcome challenges through persistent, yet peaceful conversation with peers. She advocated for addressing problems through friendly discussions.

As described above, the study participants illustrated the importance of cultivating an ongoing dialogue with their board colleagues, while building relationships that are based on trust, respect, and peaceful conversations.

4B. Confidence in Self / Apply Expertise (8 of 10, 80%)

An overwhelming majority of participants (80%) indicated that believing in oneself was helpful when facing challenges as a board director. They talked about how relying on their past experience, while applying their expertise had been useful in overcoming challenges.

People Listen When You Speak from Experience

The study participants said that board members are expected to speak from their experience, while applying their expertise to achieving the goals and objectives of the nonprofit. For example, Marigold described that her corporate experience had been guiding her decisions. She explained:

> I worked in a corporation. I always had goals that had to be achieved. I am very goal-oriented. I am a person who doesn't start out and say, "We have a blank page of where we'd like to go." I'm a person who says, "This has to be done within six months. Here's the goal, and my objective is to get to that goal with a particular time frame." People listen when you talk from experience.

Therefore, Marigold's professional experience had given her both the confidence and the tools for approaching difficult situations and overcoming obstacles.

Similarly, Kerria relied on past experience as an event planner when being asked to organize the holiday party for the nonprofit. She said:

> You don't have to reinvent the wheel, simply rely on your experience. If you've done an event in the past, take good notes, so you don't have to work as hard when you present it again. For instance, I told you about the Christmas party. I've run 5 or 6 of them now. The board knows that I know how to organize our fundraising parties!

Kerria expressed her pride in developing a reputation for being a great event planner and felt confident about assuming that role every year, based on her experience.

Everyone Has a Role on the Board Related to Their Expertise

The study participants also suggested that every board member is being recruited "for a reason"—to fulfill a role on the board, and therefore should apply their expertise, as needed. Additionally, the women board directors described the value of knowing what expert knowledge and services each member is expected to deliver to the board, in aiming to make progress. For example, Rose talked about the importance of articulating and understanding the role expectations before joining the board. She said:

> Board members are not a number and they're not just a seat. They were identified to serve, and they have to remember, "Why was I recruited?" If you don't know, find out. You should ask, "What do you feel from my skills best match your organization? Why did you want me? How do you think I can best contribute?" Think about that as you do your work on the board.

Therefore, the study participants suggested that being clear about each member's professional expertise would provide more effective and harmonic teamwork. This type of clear communication is beneficial for success on a nonprofit board.

Voicing Your Opinion is Your Duty as a Board Member of a Nonprofit

Furthermore, the study participants indicated that applying one's expertise is the board member's duty and responsibility. They talked about learning from one another through modeling a behavior of generosity, proactive behavior, and confidence in one's expertise.

For example, when joining the board, Heather was impressed by the confidence of Florence, a senior board member, who served as her mentor on the board. Heather talked about Florence's approach to problem-solving with admiration and respect. She described Florence as a professional and assertive expert, who encouraged her to approach issues with confidence in herself. She said:

> Florence is a woman engineer who had years of experience behind her; she knew the business. She was high up in her firm, and she was used to going toe-to-toe with anyone on any subject matter, anything. She served on this board, and she was a leader who, when you went and sat down with her, when you explained all the issues, she would sit there and make decisions. Yes, honestly! Some people aren't like that. She would sit there and be like "On this, I would do this; on this, I would do this." You'd walk out the door with confidence, and you'll be like, "Oh I totally know what I'm doing now!"

Therefore, believing in themselves, while applying their experience and expertise to challenges they have faced as board members, has been a useful strategy for many of the study participants.

4C. Engaging Others to Take Action (6 of 10, 60%)

The majority of the study participants (60%) described ways in which they engage others to help out and take action in order to achieve the organization's goals and objectives.

I Encourage the Community to Take Action

For example, Magnolia talked about engaging the members of the community to take action. She described how she encourages the community to be proactive in developing and organizing the nonprofit's programs and activities:

> I run to people all the time and say, "Why don't we do something for the community? Why don't we revive this program?" Everybody would say to me, sure, let's do it; and that's how I get everyone involved.

Therefore, Magnolia is a firm believer in the power of the community in achieving the goals and objectives of the organization. She said that the community is her "go to" place for most of the tasks related to the nonprofit programs and activities, while approaching her board colleagues for help with internal governance tasks.

I Ask Board Colleagues to Help Out

In contrast, some of the women board members said they prefer to ask their board colleagues for help, particularly when it involves the need for financial support. For example, Heather talked about engaging her peers on the board to make charitable gifts in support of a project she led for the nonprofit. She said:

> If I'm working on something, I'm asking them to support an initiative, to have an action committee. I say, "We really need your support." For some people on the board, since it's personal money, it's much harder to write that check. I realize that engaging them takes a lot more. I send them a list of contributors, and I say, "Okay, we're doing so well, we got 50% participation of the board," and "Could you please sign on, bring a check at the next board meeting, so we can reach 100% participation?"

Heather asserted that asking her board colleagues to join the group effort is essential for making progress on the board, while overcoming obstacles.

I Invite My Family and Friends to Participate

A majority of the women board directors (60%) described that they were overcoming obstacles by inviting their family and friends to participate in the activities, and to donate in support of the cause. For example, Jasmine described the importance of inviting her family and friends to the fundraising events of the nonprofit. She said:

> The success of the event is contingent on people's involvement, whether it's selling tickets, showing up, sharing ideas. This is all volunteer work. What I try to do is to earn people's gifts of time, of energy, of money, talent. I hope it will encourage people to want to continue or do more!

As the co-founder and the board president of the nonprofit, Jasmine said that she is feeling responsible for engaging others to participate in the activities of the nonprofit, while modeling that behavior to others.

4D. Resigning from the Board

One half of the study participants (50%) asserted that if the challenges are too deep and when other coping strategies have not been working, they would resign from the board.

I Was Not Happy Any Longer, so I Decided to Resign from the Board

For example, Jasmine indicated that after a longtime legal struggle with the executive director of the organization, she was frustrated and exhausted. Therefore, she decided to resign. She said:

> I took a lot of heat from people on the board who didn't necessarily like how I was handling the case, but no one else was getting involved, either. I resigned from the board. I resigned from chair-womanship, and then I resigned from the board.

The women board members described that resignation does not happen quickly, and not on every board. Rather, on rare occasions when the challenges and the hardship continue over time, without a realistic resolution, they find a way to resign or simply not renew their board service agreement for another term. For instance, Rose said, "I didn't renew when I was asked to renew." She explained her decision to resign from the board:

> There was lack of effectiveness, lack of efficiency. I can't stand for it. I'm a big stickler for time. I want meetings to end and start on time. I think they have to respect time. Younger boards have long meetings, and they go on and on until they come up with the right outcome. When I was younger, it was nice to be around the table and nice to talk. As you get busier, you don't have time for that. I won't take on a board like that anymore.

Rose explained that with maturity and experience, her expectations of board efficiency increase, and she will not stay on boards that are not performing up to her standards.

I Think It is Time for the Younger Generation to Get Involved

Some of the women board members mentioned that they felt it was time to vacant the board seat to the younger generation. For example, Marigold shared her hesitation with an upcoming renewal of her board presidency:

> I'm not sure if I'll even run for the board again. If I don't want to be board president, I definitely don't want to run for the board because I've been president for 10 years. I'm not going to stay on this board as a non-president. It's going to be a difficult situation. Listen, 10 years is a long time. In a couple of weeks, I'll be 71; it may be time for a younger person to step up.

In conclusion, resigning from the board or choosing not to renew the service agreement is a personal decision. While the reason may be different from one woman to another, it was common that all of the study participants who chose to resign from the board did so after years of

vital board service. Finally, some of the study participants who resigned from one board would join another board that was a better fit for their aspirations.

4E. Thinking Outside the Box (2 of 10, 20%)

A few of the study participants (20%) mentioned that their ability to think outside the box enabled them to overcome challenges.

I Raised New Ideas, and to My Great Surprise, They Were Often Accepted

For example, Lily mentioned that she had a reputation of thinking outside the box and coming up with good ideas. She said that board peers asked for her opinion when they hit a roadblock. She recalled:

> I always felt comfortable on that board. Part of it was because of the smaller meetings that they clearly wanted to hear what people thought, they were always presenting ideas. They asked me, "What do you think?" To my great surprise, they liked my ideas and implemented some of the initiatives that I came up with.

Lily added that having her original ideas embraced had given her "tremendous satisfaction," suggesting that it felt good to be a contributing board member.

In conclusion, the study participants described effective ways to overcome challenges by building personal relationships, in and out of the boardroom, while cultivating an ongoing, open dialogue with peers. Moreover, encouraging others to participate in the various roles, while applying one's expertise with confidence and enthusiasm, was instrumental in overcoming challenges and achieving the nonprofit's goals and objectives.

Summary of Findings Chapter

This chapter illustrated four major findings that were presented by the study participants. The findings were articulated according to the four research questions. Data from individual interviews, supported by the focus group and document review, revealed four major findings: (1) Women board members described their passion for the cause and their desire to give back to

the community as the primary motivators for seeking and accepting a role on the nonprofit board; (2) women learned to become impactful board members by doing the work—more work than required—while collaborating with peers; (3) women board members reported that the primary challenge they faced centered on dissension among peers, among other challenges relating to inter-personal dynamics; and (4) women board directors described that they overcome these challenges by developing personal relationships, in and out of the boardroom, and by engaging in an ongoing and peaceful dialogue with their board colleagues.

In order to seek higher-level meaning from her findings, each research question was aligned with the major finding statements. Following that process, I proceeded to analyze the major findings through answering the principal question of the study: How do women become impactful board members of nonprofit organizations? The answers to that fundamental question became the analytic categories that were used to frame the findings for the next chapter—Analysis and Interpretation of the Findings.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Interpretation, and Synthesis of Findings

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with a group of 10 women who serve on nonprofit boards their perceptions of how they learned to become influential board members in nonprofit organizations. By better understanding the factors that motivated them to seek a board seat, while exploring the challenges they faced and how they overcame these challenges, I hoped to uncover the ways in which women become impactful board directors. It was anticipated that this study would yield insights into how women learn to become influential board members in nonprofit organizations, as portrayed by the experience of the study participants—seasoned board members with substantial experience in identifying challenges and sharing how they have overcome obstacles on the board.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What motivated the women to seek a position on the nonprofit board?
2. How do women learn to become influential board members so they can achieve the organizational goals and objectives?
3. What challenges did women face on the nonprofit board?
4. How did women describe overcoming these challenges?

These research questions were addressed by the Findings, presented in Chapter 4.

The finding statements were depicted from data captured through in-depth interviews, supported by the focus group and document review. The one-on-one interviews were conducted with a pool of women board members, presenting a snapshot of the female experience on the nonprofit board. In order to extract a higher-level meaning of the findings, I identified two

analytical categories, which guided the analysis, the interpretation, and the synthesis presented in this chapter. These analytical categories—(1) passion for the mission, and (2) building relationships with peers—are introduced in Table 6 and will be discussed thereafter.

Table 6. *Relationship Between Research Questions and Findings to Analytic Categories*

Research Question	**Major Findings**
What motivates women to seek positions on the nonprofit board?	All women (100%) indicated that their passion for the mission and their desire to give back to the community were primary motivators for seeking and accepting a board role in a nonprofit organization.
How do women learn to become influential board members?	An overwhelming majority of women (90%) indicated that they learned to become influential board members by working hard, while collaborating with peers.
What challenges do women face as nonprofit board members?	A strong majority of women (80%) reported that the primary challenge they faced centered on dissention among peers.
How do women describe overcoming these challenges?	An overwhelming majority of women (90%) described that they overcame challenges faced by building personal relationships outside of the boardroom and by engaging in a dialogue with peers.

Model developed by Dr. Marie Volpe (2011)

As demonstrated above by Table 6, women become influential board directors by (1) having a passion for the mission; and (2) their ability to build relationships with peers. These two analytic categories will be further discussed in this chapter according to the categorical groupings of the participant pool.

Analysis

In transcribing, reviewing, coding and presenting the findings, three participant categories were identified among the sample population. The participant population was separated into groups that reflect the dissimilarity of women's approach to overcoming

challenges they faced on the board. This section will analyze the study findings according to the three participant categories —The Migrators, The Peacemakers, and The Risk Takers.

Participant Categories

In their in-depth interviews, the study participants spoke openly about their experiences on nonprofit boards. Women board members described the various factors that motivated them to join the board, how they learned to become influential board members, what challenges they faced, as well as the strategies that guided them in overcoming these challenges. After carefully transcribing, reviewing, coding, and presenting the findings, three participant categories were revealed, categorizing their board service: The Migrators (20%), The Peacemakers (30%), and The Risk Takers (50%). While these categories are typically separated, there can also be an overlap.

These three participant categories will be described below in the context of the categorical ways in which women approached challenges they faced during their board service, and how they dealt with ongoing and uncomfortable situations within the board.

The Migrators

The Migrators are women board members who move from one board to another until they find the right fit. Once they join a board on which they feel comfortable, they "settle in" and invest their personal resources with passion and intention. The Migrators seek a sense of belonging to the board.

The Migrators value a board that is compatible with their leadership style. They look for a board composed of like-minded people and inter-personal dynamics that resonate with theirs. Therefore, the Migrators do not feel fully committed to a nonprofit board until they feel synchronization between their persona and the board's composition. Since finding a good fit is

their priority, the Migrators will not hesitate to transition to a different board when challenges they face are not resolved over time.

The Peacemakers

Unlike the Migrators, the Peacemakers are women board members who will not leave the board when challenges arise. Once they get on a board, they are devoted to it. If there is dissension among peers, the Peacemakers approach their colleagues calmly in the hope of defusing the tension and resolving the conflict. The Peacemakers thrive in a predictable and stable environment, thus encouraging maintenance of the status quo.

Unlike Risk Takers, the Peacemakers are excellent listeners. For them, engaging in the process through meaningful conversations is just as important as the outcome. Therefore, they invest time in getting to know their peers in and out of the boardroom. The Peacemakers believe in a collaborative approach to governance, and they take pride in being effective team players.

Much like the Migrators but unlike the Risk Takers, the Peacemakers shy away from controversy. Since they believe in forming one complete unit as a group, the Migrators do not insist on implementing their own vision when faced with resistance.

While the Migrators may resign from the board when they are disturbed by a recurring controversy, the Peacemakers do not consider quitting the board. Rather, they are willing and able to demonstrate flexibility with an ability to compromise, aiming to reach a consensus. Therefore, while the Migrators see themselves first as individuals, the Peacemakers perceive themselves as a part of a collective, with a deep appreciation for overcoming challenges through open discussions, in and out of the boardroom. The Peacemakers contribute to the harmony of the board, and they do not “rock the boat.”

The Risk Takers

In contrary to the Migrators and the Peacemakers, the Risk Takers tend to be vocal, dominant, and authoritative. They feel confident in their seat and do not hesitate to speak their mind, regardless of the opposition. They voice their opinions in and out of the boardroom with passion and persuasion, while not being necessarily sensitive to other people's emotions.

The Risk Takers are used to getting their way—in businesses, in the family, and in the community. Unlike the Peacemakers, the Risk Takers do not accommodate other people's direction when it is different from their own. Rather, they engage in persuasive conversations with their peers, encouraging colleagues to follow their direction.

Unlike the Migrators and much like the Peacemakers, the Risk Takers are loyal to the organization. Thus, they will address challenges they face on the board. However, while the Peacemakers focus on interpersonal dynamics, the Risk Takers care primarily about the board's performance. They are focused on the governance outcome. Therefore, the Risk Takers emphasize reviewing plans, analyzing budgets, and discussing projected business scenarios.

Finally, unlike the Peacemakers, the Risk Takers invest their energy in enrolling others to follow their vision, believing that their courageous approach to leadership will promote prosperity and growth. The Risk Takers have an entrepreneurial spirit, and they are drawn to adventure. When their leadership style is appreciated by their peers, the Risk Takers could gain power on the board, being nominated for top positions, i.e., a committee chair or the president of the board.

Table 7 below presents evidence that enabled the researcher to assign participants to the respective groups.

Table 7. *Evidence Table of the Participant Categorical Groupings*

Participant Category	Participant Name	Comments
The Migrators (20%)	Heather	Heather said that since serving on a nonprofit board is a voluntary position, she feels that she has the 'luxury' of seeking a service that would satisfy her needs. When there was a recurring challenge, she moved to a different board.
	Scarlet	Scarlet expects her peers to appreciate her views as an experienced board member. When a specific board was not governing according to her expectations, she resigned and looked for another board with a different approach to governance.
The Peacemakers (30%)	Marigold	Marigold is happy to be considered "non-controversial". She says that people do not like to deal with controversial peers. She takes pride in being instrumental in conflict resolution. She described helping one another do the work quietly, suggesting that board colleagues should help each other get the work done.
	Iris	Iris finds ways to make connections between people in aim to address the board's goals and objectives. She engages her personal friends and professional contacts, while avoiding interacting with people who create tension. She described her collaborative approach to chairing the search committee for a new Executive Director by engaging her peers in a dialogue.
	Margarita	Margarita prefers to turn to the community for help. She believes in empowering everyone to participate with an open mind. She is inclusive and treats everyone with respect. She said that there is no challenge that cannot be resolved through peaceful conversations.
The Risk Takers (50%)	Rose	Rose speaks her mind even when she has opposition. She said that a board member's duty is to voice their opinion and to speak from their experience and expertise, despite what anyone else would think about them. She also said that becoming an influential board director takes courage.
	Dahlia	Dahlia dares to initiate new programs despite its financial risk. She researches and prepares presentations, while working persistently on enrolling her peers to follow her vision. Dahlia explained how she was instrumental in transforming the nonprofit's financial position and reputation through her proactive leadership approach.
	Kerria	Kerria is the youngest participant in this study (under 30 years of age) who has been volunteering in nonprofit organizations since she was a young girl. She described initiating tough conversations with her peers, persuading them to get out of their comfort zone and consider new strategies.

Table 7 (continued)

Participant Category	Participant Name	Comments
The Risk Takers (50%) (continued)	Jasmine	Jasmine assumes unpopular major leadership positions and often finds herself "alone" in overcoming organizational challenges. She feels responsible for finding ways to resolve problems on the board. She described confronting her peers with rough news. She has an entrepreneurial spirit and described starting a new nonprofit organization from scratch.
	Lily	Lily likes to propose new ideas for the nonprofit. She flourishes on board committees with "smart CEOs", while contributing to the conversation. She speaks her mind, particularly when it comes to her expertise. She described being pleased when her "out of the box" ideas were successfully implemented.

As illustrated above in the three categories, 20% of the study participants have been identified as "The Migrators"; 30% of the study participants have been identified as "The Peacemakers"; and 50% of the study participants have been identified as "The Risk Takers."

While each study participant was identified in one specific category, it is important to note that there may be an overlap, and that over time, the same participant could "move" from one participant category to another. This type of sequential "move" is particularly common when transitioning from being a "Migrator" to becoming a "Peacemaker" or a "Risk Taker" after finding a board that is well-fitted to the individual.

Analysis of the Major Findings by the Participant Categories

The Migrators (20%)

The Migrators: Passion for the Mission. As demonstrated by the findings, women assume a board role in a nonprofit organization when they feel passionate about the mission, while having a desire to give back to their community. Although the Migrators have passion for

the mission, they are also aware that being an effective board member requires more than passion for the cause. For the Migrators, passion for the mission is one element in a variety of considerations related to a successful board service. Other than their deep care about the cause, the Migrators look for boards that are compatible with their personal goals and aspirations, composed of like-minded people, and that function well. Thus, the Migrators will advance the mission more vigorously, once they are settled on a board of their liking.

The significance of finding a good fit with a board is in sync with the literature, which suggests that board members perform better when they feel valuable and useful on the board (Atkins, 2019). Moreover, philanthropists who are involved with charitable organizations would have three elements of connection with the nonprofit: a meaningful *linkage* to the organization, the *ability* to contribute, and an *interest* in the work of the nonprofit (Tempel et al., 2016). Therefore, though passion for the mission is a central component for all of the study participants, it is not the sole motivational factor for the Migrators.

Furthermore, various researchers who explored board leadership stated that serving on a nonprofit board is both a privilege and a responsibility. People who pursue board service seek a board role that gives them a sense of purpose (Moody & Breeze, 2016). In a scientific study carried out in partnership with the Center of Creative Leadership (2017) on "what women want" from organizations when serving in leadership positions, a key finding was that women want to find their calling, along with leadership opportunities and the support required to make these opportunities successful (Clerkin, 2017). Women who seek a role on the board look for a board that fits their goals and aspirations, particularly when seeking a position on a nonprofit board, where the service is voluntary. Hence, the Migrators weigh their passion for the mission together with other considerations when accepting a seat on the nonprofit board.

The Migrators: Building Relationships. The study participants identified as the Migrators expressed their discontent with their board dynamics. For example, some described the board chair dominating the meetings, while others said that some board members like to be a board member on paper, but not do put in the effort, creating an imbalanced distribution of work. Additionally, some of the Migrators stated that their opinions had not been taken seriously, especially on "earlier boards," and that they had not felt valued by their colleagues. Given their frustration, the Migrators chose to resign from the board and find another board of directors in which they would feel respected. Consequently, the Migrators do not take the time to invest in relationship building before committing to a board of their liking. After finding the right fit, the Migrators then could invest in developing interpersonal relationships with their peers.

The literature on Nonprofit Management emphasizes that in order to be a successful board member, one has to be fully devoted to the service. In his book, *Boards that Excel*, Professor B. Joseph White (2014) writes about understanding the role of a board member. He describes the best board directors as those who have "stewardship thinking" (p. 27). By understanding that board service is work that has many privileges, including the privileges of service, membership, protection, and respect, the board member also has a responsibility to govern with integrity, while acting in ways not in one's self-interest (White, 2014). White's concept of board leadership sheds light on the Migrators' approach to seeking the most suitable board of directors before committing to building relationships with peers. The Migrators take the role seriously and prefer investing in such connections when they have a sense of belonging to the board. Therefore, after finding the right fit and becoming more committed to serving on the board, the Migrators may convert into a Peacemaker or a Risk Taker.

The Peacemakers (30%)

The Peacemakers: Passion for the Mission. The Peacemakers have a passion for the mission. They devote themselves to advancing the cause. The Peacemakers perceive the mission of the nonprofit as the driving force of their service, guiding their way in becoming an impactful leader. The Peacemakers are extremely motivated by the mission of the organization. Therefore, they regard the need to overcome obstacles as their duty.

The notion of the mission being a central component of the nonprofit board service is discussed in the literature. In *The Little Book of Boards*, Erik Hanberg (2015) writes that the primary role of the nonprofit board is "to ensure the nonprofit is following its mission" (p. 15). The Peacemakers take this responsibility very seriously. They select the board based on its mission, and they proceed to advance the mission with passion and devotion.

The Peacemakers: Building Relationships. The Peacemakers have great interpersonal skills, and they are usually able to put their ego aside for the sake of making progress as a collective board. Since they aspire to harmonize the board of directors, the Peacemakers learn to become masterful in conflict resolution. While the Migrators view relationship-building with peers as a secondary priority, the Peacemakers see peaceful relationships as the foundation of a functional board. Therefore, the Peacemakers take pride in being "a people's person" and invest their energy in cultivating relationships with peers.

Additionally, as the nonprofit board is typically composed of people from different walks of life, it is important for the Peacemakers to model their value of acceptance and respect. The literature conveys that women's unique life experiences in human-driven situations make them naturally talented in cultivating peaceful relationships with different individuals. In her book, *Winning the Board Game: How Women Corporate Directors Make THE Difference*, Betsy

Berkhermer-Credaire (2019) asserts that women bring a unique understanding of life experiences to the board, including experience in crisis management, suggesting that women are naturally talented at being team players. Thus, as demonstrated by the literature, the multiple roles of women in society—at home, at work, and in the community—train them to master relationship-building with fellow board directors.

The Risk Takers (50%)

The Risk Takers is the largest analytical category among this study's participants. As this study called for women who have been serving on nonprofit boards for at least five years on at least two boards, it naturally identified women who have been practicing the board director role for a long time. This could be one interpretation for developing confidence and experience, leading to a more confident and assertive approach to nonprofit board leadership.

The Risk Takers: Passion for the Mission. As mentioned, the Risk Takers "rock the boat." They voice their views with passion and persuasion. Much like the Peacemakers and the Migrators, the Risk Takers are passionate about the mission. However, in contrast to the Migrators, who may resign from the board when challenges arise, the Risk Takers find ways to overcome the challenges and remain loyal to advancing the mission. In order to excel on the board of directors, the Risk Takers believe in being proactive and daring to take risks.

The benefits of a bold approach to leadership are discussed in the literature. In her book, *Dare to Lead*, Professor Brené Brown (2019) calls all leaders to step up and lean into courage. She describes research-based ideas that demonstrate how people who dare get better results and more respect from their peers. Brown's concepts for courageous leadership include the need to "rumble with vulnerability" over the hurdles, the need to respond differently to our fears, and the notion that being a courageous leader empowers others to take risks, while developing a culture

in which people feel safe, seen, heard, and respected. Therefore, approaching nonprofit board service in a courageous way, while practicing respectful communications, can be an impactful way to serve on the nonprofit board.

Finally, researchers assess that courageous leadership is a trait that women can embrace easily, given their experience in managing complex family ties, initiating events, and organizing communities. According to new research (Sager, 2021), women have more power than ever in making the purchasing decisions in the household, while selecting philanthropic involvement for the entire family. Hence, as women gain more socio-economic power, entrepreneurial practice, and executive experience, they also develop more courage to think (and act) outside of traditional expectations.

The Risk Takers: Building Relationships. Since the Risk Takers do not place interpersonal relationships as their top priority, they typically do not invest in building relationships with peers. However, since they are motivated by their ambition to enroll others to follow their lead, the Risk Takers learn to become strategic communicators. For best results, an effective board member who is a Risk Taker would surround herself with Peacemakers, who master relationship-building. The Peacemakers take the multiple perspectives of their peers into account and dissipate tension, while the Risk Takers focus on implementation, dealing more with governance strategies and less with interpersonal dynamics. By modeling a collaborative approach, the Peacemakers can mentor the Risk Takers on creating a balance between voicing one's opinion and listening to others.

In sum, it takes both Risk Takers and Peacemakers to succeed on the nonprofit board. In their book, *Women on Board: Insider Secrets to Getting on a Board and Succeeding as a Director*, authors Nancy Calderon and Susan Stautberg (2014) encourage female board members

to take calculated risks while nurturing relationships with other women. They state that "the world needs more women directors who are courageous with candor" (p. 243). The authors affirm that women are particularly good at negotiating conflicts and rebuilding bridges, thereby suggesting that mastery of human relationships comes naturally for women, whereas leading with courage takes more effort.

The following section describes the interpretation of this study's major findings through the lens of the participant categories.

Interpretation

The main question this research explored is the ways in which women learn to become influential board members in nonprofit organizations. Two major findings emerged from this study: Women become influential directors by (a) having a passion for the mission, and (b) building relationships with peers. Following the analysis of the major findings through the three participant categories—the Migrators, the Peace Makers, and the Risk Takers—I will further explore the major findings of this study by interpreting each participant category.

The Migrators

"If the shoe doesn't fit, must we change the foot?"

~ Gloria Steinem

Writer, Political Activist, and Feminist Organizer Gloria Steinem (1983) suggested that instead of changing oneself, women should look for the environment that serves as a good fit for them. Women should find a place where they feel comfortable and content. The Migrators look for the "shoes" that fit their "feet": They seek a board where they can feel a sense of belonging and a sense of purpose. Since the Migrators are connected to their inner self, they find it easy to migrate to a new board without apologizing or defending their move. If they are not

satisfied with an existing board, the Migrators seek a better match for their personal goals and aspirations, exercising their freedom of choice.

This approach to life does not come from a place of being self-centered, but from a state of self-awareness, self-validation, balance, and security. The idea of feeling connected to oneself can be studied through the Theory of Self-Efficacy, developed by Psychologist Albert Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997). Bandura's renowned theory refers to people's beliefs in their capability to exercise control over their own functioning and the events that affect their lives. The sense of self-efficacy is fundamental for people's motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment (Bandura, 1977). The Self-Efficacy Theory is related to human motivation, as it implies that people will perform the task better when they believe in their own ability in achieving the task, thereby applying the Self-Efficacy Theory to leadership. High self-efficacy affects one's ability to face challenges competently and make better personal choices. Hence, women who feel comfortable on a board and believe in their ability to contribute to the board's governance will likely become successful directors. Once the Migrators feel content in their seat and welcomed by trusted colleagues, they will also invest more time and energy in achieving the tasks involved with their role and cultivating relationships with peers.

The Migrators have probably developed their self-efficacy throughout their lives—as children and throughout their adult careers. Creating a strong sense of self, while being able to discount peer pressure and overlook social and cultural expectations, takes both confidence and practice, as well as perseverance, strength, and support. Thus, the Migrators have been supported to pursue their dreams by their parents, educators, and mentors.

In sum, the Migrators have probably had a support system of role models with a feminist approach to life. By the time the Migrators assume a board role, they must have already

developed their ability to stand strong for themselves, expecting the board to welcome them into an experience of self-growth and flourishing.

The Peacemakers

> "You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together we can do great things." ~ Mother Teresa

The power of synergy has been celebrated for centuries. The definition of the noun "synergy" is "a mutually advantageous conjunction or compatibility of distinct business participants or elements, such as resources or efforts" (Merriam Webster). The Peacemakers believe in the power of the collaborative, and they know how to play the role of the successful team player.

The Peacemakers learned early on that a fruitful collaboration requires active listening, acceptance, and flexibility. They may have learned early in their careers that it is not beneficial to step out of line, and that being an effective team player is advantageous and desired in most groups. Since the Peacemakers flourish in an environment of consistency and stability, they invest in interpersonal relationships and learn how to become amicable with their peers.

On the nonprofit board, the harmonious nature of the Peacemaker makes her the ideal member for serving as the mediator in stressful social situations. The Peacemakers learned through their life experience that people's emotions are as important, if not more important, as the outcome. Thus, they believe in the process and in their capability to overcome challenges associated with dissension among peers through the facilitation of human interaction.

Furthermore, the Peacemakers are interested in their image in society. Since they understand that their reputation as an effective team player is advantageous, the Peacemakers establish themselves as successful collaborators in and out of the boardroom. According to Atkins (2019), there is a great significance for aspiring board members to develop their own

network, while branding themselves on social media. As we live in "a global village" (McLuhan, 1964), saturated with multiple media connections, the public image that is being portrayed can become a part of one's identity, influencing future connections. Therefore, since the Peacemakers are sensitive to their public reputation, they also learn how to brand themselves as harmonious team members across multiple media platforms. The role of the Peacemaker, who is able to socialize and work with anyone on the board, becomes a part of their identity, reaching far beyond the boardroom.

Since the Peacemakers apply empowering communications in their conversations with colleagues, they have learned the power of words. Facebook COO, Author, and Activist Sheryl Sandberg (2013) explored gender inequality in the workforce in her book, *Lean In*, where she provided guidance for compassionate communications with her peers, embracing the collaborative approach to communications. In a 2017 interview, Sandberg talked about the power of "we" as a supportive approach to interact with peers, especially when someone is experiencing hardship:

> I learned the power of the word 'we.' Not saying to people, 'You are going to get through this,' but 'We are going to get through this.' That is such a different message, because it makes people feel less alone…. 'We' changes that. (Schnall, 2017)

As Sandberg suggested, compassionate communications have a great impact on developing relationships, while creating a sense of belonging. Therefore, when the Peacemakers model compassionate communication, their peers can feel closer, more open, and secure. It builds trust among the board peers.

In sum, the Peacemakers are masterful in interpersonal relationships. However, they do not venture out of their familiar zone. They thrive on equilibrium, balance, and stability, unlike the Risk Takers, who seek movement and adventure.

The Risk Takers

> "Courage is when you stand up for what you believe in when it's not always easy and you get criticized for it. It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I'm not going to shut up." ~ Madeleine Albright

In 2020, the first female US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, spoke about the importance of women to express their opinions, loud and clear, despite opposition. As a history-making diplomat, college professor, and author who became a feminist icon, Albright suggested that women work long and hard to reach their leadership positions, and their audacity should be celebrated. Much like Albright, the study participants who were identified as Risk Takers have learned that sharing their views with confidence could benefit the board.

Research validates that self-confidence is a beneficial trait for leaders, as it inspires positive energy among peers and the courage to change (Folkman, 2019). Albright and numerous women who worked long and hard to reach influential positions in society know firsthand the value of overcoming obstacles by taking risks. As women have been working hard throughout history to break the glass ceiling of gender equality, they may feel that they have a responsibility to serve as role models for future generations. Therefore, the Risk Takers perceive their board role as an opportunity to make impact, while modeling self-expression.

Furthermore, the Risk Takers talked about learning from their past mistakes, thereby being fearless of failure. Some of the study participants claimed that these lessons served as the jumping board for the next leadership challenge. As "Shark Tank" TV Personality, Businesswomen, Author, and Founder of the Corcoran Group, Barbara Corcoran (2018), tweeted, "All my best successes came on the heels of failures. Every Failure has an equally big upside if you are willing to stay in the game." Corcoran suggested that if the Risk Takers have

the stamina to stay in the leadership role, their daring approach to leadership will pay off. Hence, the Risk Takers view their failures as a valuable experience in their journey.

Additionally, since the Risk Takers focus more on the governance outcome and less on people's emotions, they advocate for authentic communications, regardless of how they may affect their peers. For the Risk Takers, being authentic is a personal virtue and an organizational advantage. Being honest and transparent has probably been a value in their home and throughout their career.

Finally, courageous leadership may be particularly beneficial in nonprofit organizations, as social change requires bravery. Changing the status quo, while helping people in need, requires hope, resilience, and courage, as it is difficult to break out of familiar social structures and cultural behavior.

In sum, this chapter analyzed the major findings of this research study through three participant categories—the Migrators, the Peacemakers, and the Risk Takers. Although each category differs in its approach to leadership and interpersonal relationships, it also has the shared interest of advancing the mission of the organization. The nonprofit board benefits from having both Peacemakers and Risk Takers, who may have different approaches to interpersonal dynamics, yet remain loyal to the organization. Although the Migrators are not as loyal to the nonprofit, they can instantly convert to being a Peacemaker or a Risk Taker after they find a board of their liking. Ultimately, every study participant had the vision, the talent, and the goal of becoming an influential director on the nonprofit board.

The next section will revisit the assumptions made in relation to this research study, examining each assumption and discussing its validation.

Revisiting Assumptions

This research study presented four assumptions about the study participants. In this section, each assumption will be revisited and discussed in light of this research study.

Assumption 1

> *Women who serve on nonprofit boards have the capacity to be role models and, as such, empower other women to assume leadership roles.*

This assumption proved to be true. Since the study participants were willing and able to provide input from their vast experience as board directors, they have the competence to serve as role models, while empowering women to seek leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. As the criteria of the study participants included being a member of a nonprofit board for at least five years, and serving on at least two different boards, there was a natural selection of women who are seasoned board directors.

Assumption 2

> *Women are motivated to serve on nonprofit boards because they see it as a catalyst for their own career growth and development.*

This assumption turned out to be partly true because a major finding of this research study demonstrated that the primary motivational factor for women seeking a role on a nonprofit board is their passion for the mission and their desire to give back to the community. Therefore, seeking professional growth was not the primary motivator for women to join the nonprofit board. However, professional growth, prestige, and networking were addressed by 50% of the study participants as motivational factors for seeking a board role. Furthermore, the study participants indicated that their experience as board members contributed to their self-growth. Therefore, by gaining experience as board directors, the study participants were able to appreciate their service as part of their professional development.

Assumption 3

Due to second-generation gender bias and other underlying barriers, women have to work hard in order to reach senior positions on the boards, which are traditionally male-dominated, such as president of the board, treasurer, or the nominating committee chair.

This assumption held to be partly true. The study participants shared that they had been "working hard" throughout their lives to reach leadership positions in society, particularly in male-dominated environments. Some of the study participants indicated that they had felt the constant need to prove their success to themselves and to others. Furthermore, some of the women board members stated that it has been difficult to recruit other women to join the board, as there were fewer women in key positions due to generations of gender inequality and stereotyped roles of women. Some of the study participants added that when they nominated a female board member, they received resistance from their male counterparts on the board, who preferred nominating their friends and colleagues who held more senior professional positions. However, once the study participants established themselves as influential leaders on the board, they could be nominated for senior positions, i.e., the president of the board, giving this assumption partial validity.

Assumption 4

Women are forthcoming in sharing the challenges they face and are happy to inform the public about their experiences and lessons learned in becoming an impactful leader on nonprofit boards.

This assumption held to be true, as the study participants seemed to be thrilled to share from their experience. During the in-depth interviews and the focus group, the study participants were candid about the challenges they had faced, while providing their input about ways in which they had overcome these challenges. They were especially straightforward since they were assured that their identity and the name of their nonprofit organization would not be revealed.

Generally, the study participants spoke openly about their involvement on their board, aiming to empower others to learn from their experience.

Contributions to the Literature

This research study adds a contemporary perspective and a new knowledge base to the existing literature. First, this research informs the field of Women Leadership. Since it provides an inside look into women's experience on nonprofit boards, the research study adds an understanding of governance strategies, qualified by female leaders.

Second, the research study contributes to Bandura's work on Self-Efficacy Theory, discussing women's perception of the ways in which they learned to become influential board members, incorporating their confidence in the belief in their ability to accomplish tasks. Learning about Self-Efficacy from the female perspective on cause-driven boards could expand the scope of the existing Theory of Self-Efficacy.

Third, this research study contributes to the knowledge base on group dynamics and team interaction, as it reveals specific challenges encountered in the group and a detailed description of ways to overcome these obstacles. Thus, this work can be added to the literature exploring Participatory Leadership and Relationship Theories. Moreover, since nonprofit board service is a role that entails interdisciplinary skills, including strategic communications with peers, the research study can be examined through social-behavioral concepts related to Behavioral Psychology.

Finally, this research study contributes to the field of Women in Philanthropy. As women gain more socio-economic power in society, while positioning themselves as impactful board directors, the understanding of the female approach to cause-driven governance could shed light on how women advance social change in America and around the world.

In sum, this research study explored the female experience on the nonprofit board through in-depth interviews with ten seasoned nonprofit board members, employing multiple themes from various disciplines as lenses, including Women in Philanthropy, Self-Efficacy Theory, Relationship Theory, Behavioral Psychology, and Participatory Leadership.

The next section will explore my reflection on my journey of scholarship and professional practice as an executive in the field of Nonprofit Management.

Researcher's Reflections

Women's experience on nonprofit boards has been a part of my life's journey since 2004, the year I gave birth to my oldest son. When I became a mother, I realized that I was part of a bigger community of new parents, who look for a sense of belonging, while navigating life in the big city, away from my homeland. I also felt the need to connect to other parents like myself who grew up in Israel, yet were raising children in the New York metropolitan area. Thus, I started organizing a community of parents in a major community center in Manhattan, developing family programs on Sunday afternoon with the help of a committee of lay leaders, who were mostly mothers. We formed a hands-on team, and we developed weekly family programs on Sundays for Hebrew-speaking families. It was a great pleasure despite the challenges of commitment and resources. Following our successful pilot year, I was offered a paid officer position to run this program and develop other experiential programs for families. I accepted it, realizing that my career was shifting from educational technology to nonprofit leadership. I started working with boards, especially mothers who were also passionate lay leaders in the community.

As I continued to be fascinated by the generosity, wisdom, creativity, and impact of the female lay leaders on the community through the creation of educational activities for the entire

family, I decided to navigate my doctoral research to women's experience in volunteer leadership. Throughout my literature review and in-depth interviews, I learned how multi-layered board service can be, alongside its rewards. I was also enthralled by the wealth of knowledge of the interviewees about board leadership, as well as their eagerness to inspire other women to learn from their experience. I felt that they wanted to tell the world that serving on a nonprofit board means being a part of something bigger, pursuing one's values with a sense of purpose.

I was also encouraged to explore motivational factors of women to volunteer on nonprofit boards by a particular class I took at Teachers College on Motivational Theories in Education. I learned that confidence and self-efficacy have much to do with people's choice to take on a leadership challenge. As I matured personally and professionally, I dared to "dream big" and felt I can accomplish anything I want if I believe in my ability to do so. My parents championed my dreams, especially when it came to higher education. They believed in me. My dad was ever-present, even after he had passed away, with an intellectual curiosity and his caring for others, and my mom, a Ph.D. psychologist, taught me the balancing of career, family, and self-growth.

After my father's illness and passing, my divorce, and a juggling act between parenting, my career, and academia, I almost gave up the pursuit of a doctorate. When I saw three women, about my age, celebrating their Ed.D. graduation, I asked them their secret for completing their dissertation while raising children and having a full-time job. They pointed me to a dissertation navigation class with Dr. Marie Volpe, who became my advisor.

When Dr. Marie Volpe entered my life, I realized that my journey would be shifting to a new path of hope and possibilities. She demonstrated leadership, great humor, dedication, integrity, and academic excellence that guided and empowered me. Once I regained confidence

in my ability to succeed, I also created the path for completing my dissertation, while enjoying every step of the way. I got inspired by women who lead for change, and I learned to become an active listener throughout the data collection process. I felt that pursuing dreams is wonderful.

I am excited to join the community of female scholars and leaders of nonprofit organizations, changing the world one board at a time.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with 10 women who are seasoned members of nonprofit boards their views of how they learned to become influential board directors. The motivational factors for women to seek and accept the board role have been uncovered, along with their description of challenges they faced and the implementation strategies they used to overcome these challenges. This study yielded insights articulated by the female board directors into ways they became impactful leaders in nonprofit organizations.

The four major findings, analysis, and interpretations led to the following four conclusions.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1

Without motivation and passion for the mission, women are not likely to be successful on the nonprofit board.

Since all of the study participants (100%) indicated that having a passion for the mission was their primary motivator for seeking and accepting the board role, caring about the cause is a key component for their decision to join the board and invest their time and effort in the work of a board director. Moreover, the study participants stated that since this role is a voluntary position, it entails a high level of commitment for advancing the mission of the nonprofit organization. Therefore, without having passion for the mission, women are unlikely to become successful board members in nonprofit organizations.

Conclusion 2

The willingness and the ability to go above and beyond the demands of the job are required for becoming an influential board director.

The study participants stated that the nonprofit board role is demanding, one requiring multiple skills, dedication, and hard work. They described that going above and beyond the call of duty has been vital for their professional development as board members. Therefore, being prepared to proactively put in the effort is required for succeeding on the board. The work includes implementing the strategic plan, collaborating with peers, active participation in board committees, participating in events and activities of the organization, contributing to the organization, fundraising, "friend-raising," and carefully preparing for board meetings.

Additionally, since the nonprofit board is typically composed of people from all walks of life, board members should be ready to apply their unique expertise as needed, creating an environment of trust and mutual support. Therefore, approaching the board role with readiness to go above and beyond the demands of the job is required for its success.

Finally, as serving on a nonprofit board is a public position that plays a vital role in society, providing critical services in building healthier communities, the willingness of the board member to exert herself becomes an example for others, thereby exemplifying her as a role model who "walks the walk."

Conclusion 3

Issues of dissension need to be resolved in order to have good relationships on the board.

Since a strong majority of the study participants (80%) reported that the primary challenge they faced centered on dissension among peers, it is concluded that a major responsibility of the board member is to do her best to resolve the dissension before it affects

governance of the board. The more one is aware of ways to proactively overcome disagreement among peers, the better are the chances to address it effectively and thereby cultivate positive relationships among the board members. Thus, addressing disagreements is essential for developing a fruitful collaboration with colleagues.

Conclusion 4

Building personal relationships internal and external to the organization is critical to becoming an influential board director.

An overwhelming number of the study participants (90%) described overcoming challenges by building personal relationships with peers in and out of the boardroom. Engaging in an ongoing dialogue with peers is not only advantageous for the organization's success, but also essential for an individual's professional development as a board director. Board members who learn to apply their strategic communications skills in peaceful conversations position themselves as active listeners and effective team players. Therefore, board members who invest their time and effort in developing personal relationships with peers can become influential leaders in nonprofit organizations.

The next section will unfold the recommendations for future research and educational practice, based on this research study.

Recommendations

Based on this research study, the researcher proposes four recommendations, three of which describe educational program development. The three educational programs are focused on a specific group, which will be the target audience for each program, while the fourth recommendation focuses on future research. The three groups addressed in the recommendations are women who seek a board role; men and women who are currently serving on a board; and

educators who aim to coach others on becoming influential board members. Below is a description of each recommendation.

Recommendation 1: Women Who Seek a Position on a Nonprofit Board

This recommendation addresses women of any age who seek a board role in a nonprofit organization. This educational program will be tailored for women who would like to be recruited for board service. The following learning goals will be considered:

- Becoming knowledgeable about how nonprofit boards work and what they look for in their search for new board members
- Understanding the role of a board member, particularly in the first year of service
- Learning how to select the right board
- Developing effective communications strategies for getting recruited for the board
- Practicing meeting conversations with relevant executives, board directors, and members of the nomination committee
- Learning about ways of becoming influential board members, especially during the first year of service

Recommendation 2: Men and Women Currently Serving on Boards

The second recommendation is tailored to men and women who are already serving on a nonprofit board, yet would like to deepen their understanding about ways of becoming an influential board director. This recommendation focuses on the professional development of board members, with the following learning goals:

- A deeper understanding of fruitful board governance —what strategies are beneficial and how to implement strategic plans, along with evaluation and assessment of the performance of the board

- How to serve as a mentor for junior board members
- Community outreach plans aiming to empower new lay leaders, while identifying potential board members
- A better understanding of the board's dynamics and the role of interpersonal relationships within the board
- Learning about challenges that board members face and effective ways to overcoming these challenges

Recommendation 3: Educators and Executive Coaches

This recommendation is for a "train the trainer" program, developed for educators and executive coaches who would like to serve as facilitators and mentors. Program participants will learn how to create a safe space for the board members to have an open conversation about their relationships with their peers, with an ability to reflect and transform their experience as a leadership group. The following learning goals will be considered:

- How to create a balance between the board member's individual goals and the effective teamwork that is required to succeed as a collaborative board
- Facilitating methods for sharing circles, encouraging active listening, communication, and reflection, while addressing frustration and tough issues
- Ways of developing trust and mutual respect among board members, despite difference in opinion
- Developing short- and long-term goals that are realistic, practical, and empowering for all of the board members
- Ending a board retreat with a renewed sense of hope, energy, purpose, and confidence in future teamwork

Recommendation 4: Future Research

Future research should be conducted on the theme of the female experience on nonprofit boards, drawing from the experience of seasoned board members. First, as this research involves a limited pool in one specific region, it should be expanded to a bigger pool and to other regions and countries, reaching new cultural and geographical populations.

Second, similar research can be conducted on men, exploring the male experience on nonprofit boards. It would be interesting to compare the genders, investigating similarities and differences in the themes that emerge.

Finally, since nonprofit management is becoming an academic field of research and practice, future expansion of this research can uncover new themes related to social and organizational theories in the emerging sector of nonprofit leadership.

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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation - Interview Participants

To: **NAME**
From: **Pazit Levitan, Ed.D Candidate**
Teachers College, Columbia University
Date:

Greetings.

My name is Pazit Levitan and I am a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University in NYC. I am conducting a research study, exploring women's experience as board members in nonprofit organizations. I am looking to interview women who have been board members in U.S. nonprofit organizations for at least 5 years. The interviewees I am looking for have been board members in at least 2 nonprofit boards, which include both men and women board directors.

I am emailing to ask if you would like to meet with me in person or through facetime and be interviewed about your experience as a board director for my Ed.D. research and dissertation. The interview will take about one hour of your time. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous.

If you are interested, please email back to me at pl2239@tc.edu, and we will schedule the interview at a mutually-agreed upon place and time – in person or through a facetime phone call.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through email (pl2239@tc.edu) or by phone: 646-202-3866.

Thank you for your time.

Pazit Levitan
Ed.D. Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Appendix B: Letter of Invitation - Focus Group Participants

To: **NAME**
From: **Pazit Levitan, Ed.D Candidate**
Teachers College, Columbia University
Date:

Greetings.

My name is Pazit Levitan and I am a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University in NYC. I am conducting a research study, exploring women's experience as board members in nonprofit organizations. I am looking to have a focus group with 4-5 women who have been board members in U.S. nonprofit organizations for at least 5 years. The focus group participants I am looking for have been board members in at least 2 nonprofit boards, which include both men and women board directors. They will discuss among themselves two questions for one hour (discussing 3 questions). I will not participate in the focus group discussion. I will observe it, and audio-record it.

I am emailing to ask if you would like to participate in the focus group through a web-based focus group software (zoom conference call or FocusGroupIt.com). The focus group participation will take about one hour of your time. Participation is completely voluntary, and your answers will be anonymous. Although I will use pseudonyms, I cannot guarantee confidentiality. All participants will be asked to respect each other's privacy.

If you are interested, please email back to me at pl2239@tc.edu, and we will schedule the focus group for a date and time that fits you and the other focus group participants.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through email (pl2239@tc.edu) or by phone: 646-202-3866.

Thank you for your time.

Pazit Levitan
Ed.D. Candidate
Teachers College, Columbia University

Appendix C: Consent Form for Interview Participants

TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
525 West 120th St. New York, NY 10027
212-678-3000 | www.tc.columbia.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: *"Women's Experience on Boards"*
Interview Consent
Principal Researcher: Pazit Levitan
646-202-3866, pl2239@tc.edu

INTRODUCTION You are invited to participate in this research study called *"Women's Experience on Boards"*. You may qualify to take part in this research study because are over 18 years old, have served on at least two different nonprofit boards of directors in the U.S., with a minimum of five years of board service, and those boards included both men and women. Approximately 17 people will participate in this study and it will take 1 hour of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE? This study is being done to gain a deeper understanding about board experience from women board directors' viewpoint, and to serve as an educational tool for professional development programs for women who seek a board position in nonprofit organizations.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed face-to-face by the primary researcher, Pazit Levitan, who is a doctoral candidate at Teachers College, Columbia University. During the individual interview you will be asked to discuss your experience as a board member on nonprofit organizations. This interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio recording is written down (transcribed) the audio recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour. You will be given a pseudonym or false name in order to keep your identity confidential. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon space, at a date and time that is convenient for you.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss issues that you experienced on the board. You do not have to answer any questions or share anything you do not want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel

concerned that things you say might get back to your board colleagues. Your information will be kept confidential.

The primary researcher is taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study. Participation may benefit the field of women in nonprofit leadership.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY? You will not be paid to participate. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS? The study is over when you have completed the individual interview. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you have not finished.

PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY The primary researcher will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio recording will be written down and the audio recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym.

For quality assurance, the study team and/or members of the Teachers College Institutional Review Board (IRB) may review the data collected from you as part of this study. Otherwise, all information obtained from your participation in this study will be held strictly confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. or State law.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED? The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your identity will be removed from any data you provide before publication or use for educational purposes. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the primary researcher.

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CONSENT FOR AUDIO RECORDING Audio recording is part of this research study. You can choose whether to give permission to be recorded. If you decide that you don't wish to be recorded, **you will not be able to participate** in this research study.

_____I give my consent to be recorded _____
Signature

_____I **do not** consent to be recorded _____
Signature

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

__I consent to allow written and/or audio-recorded materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____
Signature

__I **do not** consent to allow written and/or audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

_____
Signature

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The primary researcher may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial below to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

The researcher may contact me in the future for other research opportunities:

Yes _____ No_____
Initial Initial

The researcher may contact me in the future for information relating to this current study:

Yes _____ No_____
Initial Initial

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If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the primary researcher, Pazit Levitan, at 646-202-3866 or at pl2239@tc.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Marie Volpe at fb87@tc.columbia.edu.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 10027, Box 151. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read the Informed Consent Form and have been offered the opportunity to discuss the form with the researcher.
- I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix D: Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

TEACHERS COLLEGE
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INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: "*Women's Experience on Boards*"
Interview Consent
Principal Researcher: Pazit Levitan
646-202-3866, pl2239@tc.edu

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__I **do not** consent to allow written and/or audio-recorded materials viewed outside of Teachers College, Columbia University

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Initial Initial

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- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at the researcher's professional discretion.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the researcher will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- Identifiers may be removed from the data. De-identified data may be used for future research studies, or distributed to another researcher for future research without additional informed consent from you (the research participant or the research participant's representative).
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form document.

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study:

Print name: _____ **Date**: _____

Signature: _____

Teachers College, Columbia University
Institutional Review Board
Protocol Number: 20-133
Consent Form Approved Until: No Expiration Date

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Research Title: *"Women's Experience on Boards"*

Principal Investigator: Pazit Levitan, Ed.D. Candidate, Teachers College, Columbia University

Interview Script and Research Questions:

VERBAL SCRIPT

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The purpose of this interview is to get your feedback about your experience as a member on a nonprofit board.

The underlying assumption is that women like you, who serve on nonprofit boards have the knowledge and expertise to inform people about the experiences of women who serve on boards of nonprofit organizations. That is why I am talking with you today.

I would like to remind you that to protect your privacy and the privacy of the nonprofit organizations for which you serve(d) as a board director, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw your participation anytime during the interview.

The interview will last about one hour, and I will audiotape it to make sure that it is recorded accurately.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(RQ1 What motivates women to seek position)

- Tell me about how you initially get involved with this organization
  - What prompted you to be involved in the organization?

- Can you talk about why it is you became a board member?
  - There are so many cause-driven organizations, why did you choose to serve on this particular board?

- Did you seek the board position or were you sought? What strategies did you take to get on the board?

(RQ2 How do they learn to become influential board members)

- Can you talk about your journey on the board - what did you do to become a part of the decision-making process?
    - Can you tell me about how you get your voice heard?

- Please tell me a bit about the board dynamics and how you fit in during a board meeting.
    - How do you advance your ideas and opinions during the board meeting?

- What attributes make an ideal board member, according to your experience?

(RQ3 Challenges they face)

- Can you tell me about what are some of the things that stood in your way when you tried to gain recognition on the board?

- Can you recall a situation that made you frustrated with the board? Please describe.

(RQ4 Overcoming challenges)

- What do you do when you get a strong opposition?

- How do you gain support from your peers?

- Can you tell me a time when you felt that you really made inroads (progress) on the board? What was your take-away from that experience?

- What are you most proud of in looking back at your board service?

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group (Verbal) Script and Questions

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

The purpose of this focus group is to get your feedback about your experience as a member of a nonprofit board.

The underlying assumption is that women like you, who serve on nonprofit boards have the knowledge and expertise to inform people about the experiences of women who serve on boards of nonprofit organizations. That is why I am talking with you today.

I would like to remind you that to protect your privacy and the privacy of the nonprofit organizations for which you serve(d) as a board director, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms.

I also note that I cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw your participation anytime - before or during the focus group.

The focus will last about one hour. You will discuss three questions and I will observe. I will not participate in the discussion. I will audiotape it to make sure that it is recorded accurately.

Do you have any question for me before we begin?

Let's begin.

- Can you talk about your journey on the board - can you tell me about what are some of the things that stood in your way when you tried to gain recognition within the board? (25 mins)

- What did you do to overcome these challenges? (25 mins)
    - What do you do when you get a strong opposition?
    - How do you gain support from your peers?

- What attributes make the ideal board member, according to your experience? (10 mins)

Appendix G: Frequency Table – Finding #1

RQ1: Motivational factors for seeking a board position						
Participant	**Passion for the mission**	**Desire to give back**	**Being asked to serve**	**I can add value**	**Prof. development, prestige**	**Seeking a community**
Dahlia	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Heather	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐
Iris	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Jasmine	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Kerria	☑	☑	☐	☐	☑	☑
Lily	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
Magnolia	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Marigold	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Rose	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Scarlet	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
	100%	**100%**	**90%**	**80%**	**50%**	**40%**

Appendix H: Frequency Table – Finding #2

RQ2: How they learned to become influential board members						
Participant	**Working hard**	**Collaborating with peers**	**Speaking out authentically**	**Research and preparation**	**Observing, listening and mentorship**	**Formal education**
Dahlia	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Heather	☑	☑	☐	☐	☑	☑
Iris	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐
Jasmine	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
Kerria	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Lily	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐
Magnolia	☐	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐
Marigold	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑
Rose	☑	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐
Scarlet	☑	☐	☑	☑	☑	☐
	90%	**90%**	**70%**	**60%**	**60%**	**30%**

Appendix I: Frequency Table – Finding #3

RQ3: Challenges they faced							
Participant	**Dissension among peers**	**Leadership transition**	**Not enough diversity**	**Maintaining interest**	**A lot of work**	**Not being taken seriously**	**No challenges**
Dahlia	☑	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐
Heather	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☐	☐
Iris	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐
Jasmine	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐
Kerria	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Lily	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐
Magnolia	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☑
Marigold	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐	☐
Rose	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐
Scarlet	☑	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐
	80%	**70%**	**70%**	**40%**	**40%**	**30%**	**10%**

Appendix J: Frequency Table – Finding #4

RQ4: Overcoming challenges					
Participant	**Pursuing a dialogue**	**Confidence / apply expertise**	**Engaging others to take action**	**Resigning**	**Think outside the box**
Dahlia	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Heather	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Iris	☑	☑	☐	☐	☐
Jasmine	☑	☐	☑	☑	☐
Kerria	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Lily	☐	☑	☐	☑	☑
Magnolia	☑	☑	☑	☐	☐
Marigold	☑	☑	☐	☑	☑
Rose	☑	☑	☑	☑	☐
Scarlet	☑	☐	☐	☑	☐
	90%	**80%**	**60%**	**50%**	**20%**