ZEBRAS SHOWING THEIR STRIPES:
A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY
OF THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION AND GENDERING OF
WOMEN CSR LEADERS

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Dedication

This paper is dedicated to all the women “zebras” who show their stripes and dare to rethink what is possible. You know who you are.
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There were many moments during this journey when I hesitated to continue, and time after time my web of support gave me the encouragement and strength to persevere. Words cannot express my gratitude.

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Abstract

This thesis presents a feminist poststructuralist study of gender equity in the context of female corporate social responsibility (CSR) leaders in Canada. I draw on the poststructuralist theoretical and methodological approaches of critical discourse analysis and critical sensemaking to uncover how language and power dynamics create inequity through forms of texts. By problematizing seemingly neutral discourses, I locate the hidden discourses and discursive practices that are constructed through women’s perceptions of social interactions at the leadership level that may serve as discriminatory barriers toward women. Hence, I contribute to a small but growing body of feminist critical literature that calls for a need to change the current paradigms of CSR leadership.

This two-part study deconstructs texts in the Canadian newspaper press and then, based on interviews with female CSR leaders, examines the hidden discourses and enactment of power and influence, to distinguish specific processes that can lead to institutional change. The discourses presented in the newspaper articles in the last 40 years have consistently reproduced powerful organizational rules that set limitations on the behaviour and sensemaking of individuals. My analysis of the interviews reveals how individuals respond to well-established “rules of the game” with which they must contend. Despite operating within a gendered system wherein men’s power continues to be pervasive and persistent, the female CSR leaders interviewed all, either subtly or overtly, challenge discriminatory practices in their workplaces. Through engaging in micro-processes of resistance, they show strong sense of identity that translates into a strong sense of obligation to contribute to society in a meaningful way.
I offer a story that is empirically sensitive and reveals impressions and interpretations that, I hope, encourage the reader to pause and consider taken-for-granted biases, truths, and meanings that have silenced some voices and privileged others.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Overview of This Study

This thesis explores the topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR), a form of corporate self-regulation that aims to embrace responsibility for corporate actions and encourage positive impact on the environment and stakeholders (Carroll, 1979; Freeman, 1984; Gond & Matten, 2007), by bringing to the surface the hidden discourses that mediate the opportunities, as well as the voices and reflections, of female business leaders in the field. I embrace the feminist poststructuralist paradigm, and the theoretical and methodological frameworks of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Foucault, 1982) and critical sensemaking (CSM) (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010), to offer a more profound understanding of the interrelated influences of the relationship between power, language, and gender in CSR leadership. I draw on a line of theoretical work that examines the dominance and the privileging of masculinity within organizations and organizational discourses as a result (Acker, 1998; Calás & Smircich, 1991). More specifically, there continues to be a lack of literature on CSR that questions the dominant and hegemonic “gender-neutral” discourses (Marshall, 2007), particularly in Canada and in CSR (Bujaki & McConomy, 2010). I provide a gender-sensitive approach of examining both the prevailing and subordinate discourse of leadership, within the context of CSR, by examining the discursive processes and their impact on individuals’ identities. By doing so, I attempt to reveal the gendered nature of social arrangements and disciplinary power of discrimination and exclusion by destabilizing the status quo to create space for change through consciousness-raising (see Prasad, 2005).

The two central aims, in this dissertation, are to examine the discursive construction of gender
and CSR in Canada and to study the discursive processes and discriminatory practices that serve to gender CSR leadership and (re)create female CSR leaders’ sensemaking. In this two-part study, I deconstruct texts in the Canadian newspaper press and then, based on interviews with female CSR leaders, examine the hidden discourses and enactment of power and influence to distinguish specific processes that can lead to institutional change (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). I define “female leaders” as women who have administrative authority and are in a director-level or higher position with one or more direct reports. I chose to focus on CSR leaders because CSR has become an important and timely topic in business in recent years (and because I had access to respondents in this field). I identify well-established organizational rules that limit the progression of women leaders and show how many of them are like zebras showing their stripes: they resist discriminatory practices and hegemonic representations of masculine leadership on an ongoing basis, while embracing a values-driven approach to CSR toward imparting true social change (see Weaver, Trevino, & Cochrane, 1999).

In practice, corporations have come to realize that certain CSR-related initiatives, such as environmental sustainability, can reduce risks and have associated benefits including long-term cost reduction and positive public relations (e.g., Cetindamar, 2007; Dandago & Arugu, 2014). However, the same shift has not occurred when it comes to increased gender equity. Gender equity is recognized internationally as a human right, is an integral component of CSR, and is acknowledged as the key to economic, social, and democratic development in the 21st century by leading international organizations (Global Reporting Initiative, 2011; United Nations Global Compact, 2015). The World Economic Development Forum and the United Nations, among others, are calling for the advancement of gender equity and women’s empowerment as an important component of CSR and sustainability (United Nations Sustainable Development
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Knowledge Platform, n.d.; Women’s Empowerment Principles, n.d.; World Economic Development Forum, 2015). In response to such calls, CSR has only recently been used as a means to establish gender equity in organizations, with a variety of reporting initiatives through tracking equality progress by company, industry, and nation based on the data companies choose to report (e.g., Catalyst, 2004; Global Reporting Initiative, 2011; World Economic Development Forum, 2015).

I contend that the embedded language of CSR is duplicating established business practices, while failing to acknowledge how CSR itself might be gendered. Although both gender and CSR have received attention in academic research, they have rarely been studied together or in relation to how CSR has affected the plight of women (Karam & Jamali, 2013). When CSR research does consider women’s rights, the focus is typically on the underprivileged (see Gond & Matten, 2007; Grosser, 2009; Kilgour, 2007, 2013; Sarvaiya & Eweji, 2016). The discourse of CSR has been contested recently, with questions being asked about how it is being constructed and framed, and whether it is promoting normative, profit-driven business goals (Dobers & Springett, 2010). At the same time, the discourses that situate women in business have been challenged, particularly where the exclusion of women in leadership positions is concerned (Catalyst, 2004; Marshall, 2007). To assess the taken-for-granted (and often unintended) subtle underlying meanings that affect the socio-psychological sensemaking of women (Weick, 1995), discourses need to be examined as a function of both textual and structural (psychological and social) properties (van Dijk, 1988a, 1993, 1998a). By challenging the dominant, narrow conceptualizations of CSR and by showing how CSR is a gendered individual and social reality for female CSR leaders, I attempt to disrupt tacit ways of thinking about CSR and CSR
leadership, and open up opportunities for women to make unique contributions in the field (Billing & Alvesson, 1993; Marshall, 1984, 2007).

**Theoretical Positioning & Methodological Approaches: CDA & CSM**

To analyze the gendering of CSR and corresponding discourses experienced by female CSR leaders, critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Foucault, 1982; van Dijk, 1988a) and critical sensemaking (CSM) (Helms Mills et al., 2010) provide suitable theoretical and methodological foundations to examine the discourse that has led to the gendering of CSR leadership (see Grosser et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2017). Using CSM and CDA in combination acknowledges the complexity of an individual’s state of being, providing an inquiry that, with the exception of work by Thurlow (2007) and Thurlow and Helms Mills (2009, 2015) on the change process at a regional health centre and community college, remains ripe for further development as a mechanism for social change (Mills, 2008). These complementary approaches problematize our assumptions about CSR and leadership, and highlight a divergence between rhetoric and practice that serves to maintain structures of power (Kirby & Harter, 2001; Marshall, 2007).

I use Foucauldian poststructuralism (Foucault, 1982) as my theoretical framework due to Foucault’s theories related to power, knowledge, and discourse. I made this choice because it is consistent with my belief that we construct and reconstruct our world based on social interactions that are a result of power relations among individuals. Critical discourse analysis, inspired by Foucault’s (1972, 1978) work on ideology, power, and discourse, provides a radical critique of modernist thinking by challenging assumptions of objectivity and “neutral knowledge.” My understanding of discourse is in line with Foucault (1982), whereby he describes discourse as rules that define what is accepted as “reality” in a given society; it is thus linked to power due to
embedded social structures. Discourse is complex, “continually subject to modification” (Foucault, 1972, p. 8), and often dictated by members of more powerful groups and institutions (van Dijk, 1993). CDA focuses on power relations as institutionalized and taken-for-granted, seeking to uncover how power dynamics are expressed in context and perpetuated through discursive practices (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Prasad, 2005; van Dijk, 1993).

Whereas CDA can be seen as a theoretical approach that helps understand the consequences of the sometimes “hidden” reflective process of individuals operating within the broader context of power and inequalities, CSM provides the methodology and techniques through which discursive and discriminatory practices can be revealed (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010). CSM is my primary methodological approach, which I use to analyze my selection of newspaper articles as well as the interviews (chapters 6 and 7 respectively). As Mills (2008, p. 29) notes, “Critical sensemaking has the potential for feminist research because it provides the means to trace the psychological processes that lead to the creation of gendered sub-structures and it has the capacity to explain how discriminatory practices become acceptable over time.” More specifically, CSM is a heuristic for organizing how people come to understand their experiences, enabling me to account for agency by focusing on social psychological influences as individuals create meaning of discourse and make their own decisions accordingly. Rather than being products of discourse, individuals produce, maintain, or resist the discursive process (Helms Mills, 2003; Mills, 2008; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). The CSM framework is based on the interaction of Unger’s (1987a, 1987b) formative context, Mills and Murgatroyd’s (1991) organizational rules, Weick’s (1995) sensemaking and Foucault’s (1978, 1979, 1980) notion of discursive practice to provide a reflexive approach to problematize knowledge claims from the perspective of the individual (informants’ sense of events and also the researcher’s) (Helms Mills
et al., 2010). In addition to CSM, I use thematic analysis based on van Dijk’s (1988a, 1988b) framework for news analysis discourse to add structure to my analysis of the newspaper articles and shed light on the greater societal and political context.

**Research Objectives & Process**

The objectives of this research involve examining how the dominant discourses around female CSR leaders are manifested and how they are socially constructed and (re)produced in their daily lives through interactions with others (see Foucault, 1972; Helms Mills, 2003; Wodak, 2001). My corresponding research objectives are as follows:

(RO1) Explore whether and how the discursive construction of CSR is gendered through CSM and CDA. *How has the newspaper media discursively framed women in CSR leadership in the last 40 years? How were today’s taken-for-granted perceptions created and how are they maintained?* (Chapter 6)

(RO2) Analyze what structural (e.g., macro-level context and meso-level organizational rules) and psychosocial (e.g., micro-level sensemaking) discourses influence individual sensemaking of gender and CSR. *How do these discourses come to be, how are they maintained, and how are they subject to change? What historical, organizational, and individual interactions are at play, and how do they contribute to the exclusion of women within this field?* (Chapter 7)

(RO3) Understand the relationship between CSR discourse and the identities of gendered women in leadership positions. *How do these women relate to, incorporate, or resist conceptions of gender into their identities?* (Chapter 7)
Tackling my first research objective involves examining how CSR is constituted, through what Marshall (2007) contends is a seemingly gender neutral (but highly masculinized) discourse. Characteristics associated with “femininity” are typically described as being communal or expressive, while those relating to “masculinity” are agentic or instrumental (Lindsey & Zakahi, 1998). Though these labels do not necessarily relate to the intrinsic qualities of men and women, they are culturally associated with the categories of “male” and “female” (Bem, 1974). Assuming a critical perspective, I consider how representations of CSR have been historically constructed from broader, masculinist business discourses. I explore how the dominant CSR discourse (over the last 40 years) of the Canadian newspaper media (re)produces power-based gendering processes and differences in the field. The focus here is on revealing power relations at work by establishing discursive boundaries around how individuals imagine their experiences and what can be done within their social reality (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

The examination of newspaper articles frames my analysis of the interview data and reveals how women leaders discursively make sense of their experiences as corporate social responsibility leaders in the Canadian business context. To address the second and third objectives, my interviews with female CSR leaders explore the gendered constructions of their identities that can position them in society. I explore how female leaders both create and recreate their identities using sensemaking, as well as discursive processes derived from the social context. I connect these sensemaking elements to macro-, meso- and micro-levels of analysis respectively.¹

Identity is a central focus of my analysis, as it is at the core of understanding diversity (Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Discourses shape how people are constructed—as different or similar—based on

¹ My adoption of the labels is consistent with the distinctions between the three levels by Frynas and Stevens (2015, p. 485): “the micro level (involving psychological bases among individuals), the meso level (involving relational issues among organizations) and the macro level (involving wider political, economic, and social dynamics).”
social and historical contexts rather than difference that is internal to the individual (Holvino & Kamp, 2009). Specifically, CSM allows me to focus different levels of analysis to understand how individuals create meaning of CSR discourse by producing, maintaining, or resisting the discursive process.

**Contributions of This Dissertation**

Given the objectives of this study, as well as its positioning within the gender diversity and CSR fields, potential contributions of this research include building on the work of Thurlow (2007) and Thurlow and Helms Mills (2009, 2015) by using CDA and CSM in combination, applying the multi-level method of CSM, approaching CSR through a poststructuralist feminist paradigm, and providing a critical reading of historical narratives that have informed the status of women in business today.

The first contribution, with respect to the literature, is based on coupling CDA and CSM to study the gendering of CSR and corresponding discourses experienced by female CSR leaders. The combined use of CDA and CSM allows me to explore how the discursive construction is gendered in the CSR field (RO1) while focusing on how their identities are constructed through gendered processes (RO3). Few studies have used these two frameworks in combination (e.g., Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009, 2015), and none has focused on gender and CSR leadership within the Canadian context, to my knowledge. I aim to provide a unique depth of analysis using CSM, as a heuristic, by providing a historical overview of the discursive construction of gender and CSR over time, as well as insight into women’s experiences themselves. My intended contribution is therefore centred on the use of CDA and CSM, as theoretical and methodological foundations, to locate the hidden discourses and problematize our assumptions to further our
understanding of how discursive processes and structures of power shape and reify social perceptions as well as the identities of women over time (Kirby & Harter, 2001; Marshall, 2007). Using these complementary approaches foregrounds the role of social context and agency, while considering processes of resistance, adding an important component to CSR and gender scholarship that is currently missing (see Grosser, 2009; Grosser, Holgersson, Knights, & McCarthy, 2013; Grosser & Moon, 2017; Marshall, 2007, 2011; McCarthy, 2017).

Second, by addressing the structural and psychosocial discourses that influence the individual sensemaking of gender and CSR (RO2), this study responds to the need for methods that incorporate multiple levels within which a firm can be conceived to be embedded. This is missing in most literature on inequity in organizations (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994; Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010) and in the field of CSR (Aguinis & Glavas, 2013; Aguilera et al., 2007; Haski-Leventhal, Roza, & Meijis, 2015; Frynas & Stevens, 2015). The use of CSM as a methodology helps bridge the gap between different levels of approaches by considering power, dominance, and inequity between groups and language, discourse, verbal interaction, and communication. The study of text at the micro-level can therefore reveal the macro-structure context it is produced in; likewise, context is understood from the text (van Dijk, 2009). In this sense, discourse shapes reality by allowing us to see how power emerges historically and how resistance to power can be the basis for individual and collective action (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

I seek to bridge individuals’ micro, individual-level sensemaking (Weick, 1995) with dominant organizational rules at the meso-level (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) and broader, macro-level societal discourse (Unger, 1987a, 1987b) around CSR leadership. In short, through the use of CSM, this study provides insight into the micro-meso-macro connection that links social structures, institutions, and organizational rules with individual cognitions and perceptions.
The third contribution to the literature is with respect to my feminist poststructuralist research paradigm, which draws out and highlights the traditionally marginalized voices of female CSR leaders: “A major contribution of poststructural feminism can be found in its transformation of subjectivity into a fluid phenomenon that can actually be changed” (Prasad, 2005, p. 166).

Though some scholars have provided critical feminist perspectives on CSR (e.g., Coleman, 2002; Marshall, 2007; Pearson, 2007), despite large numbers of women working and studying in the field of CSR, limited insights have been articulated in research and practice to date (Grosser, 2009, 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2017; McCarthy, 2017). Furthermore, critical management studies (CMS) scholars have recently pointed to how dominant academic and corporate-level instrumental versions of CSR as a construct have hegemonic underpinnings that prevent critical reflexivity in the field (e.g., Henderson, 2001; Banerjee, 2007). I aim to affect change by showing how CSR leaders are constituted within a masculinized discourse (R01) and how individual sensemaking of gender and CSR is influenced by various levels of analysis (R02).

More specifically, this empirical research study includes interviews with female CSR leaders whose voices are largely absent from the CSR literature to date. Studying discursive practices within the feminist, poststructuralist tradition allows me to detect not only dominant discourses, but also the “hidden” gendered notions of CSR to identify whose interests are served and whose are marginalized as legitimizing practices maintain structures of power, hegemony, and resistance (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Foucault, 1972; Kirby & Harter, 2001). I suggest that “invisible” discrimination persists (Acker, 2004; Gregory, 2003) largely as a result of unintended and taken-for-granted assumptions of participating individuals and institutions. As suggested by Rivoli and Waddock (2011), what may begin as unheard-of CSR initiatives can become accepted as public expectations as the baseline for acceptable corporate practices. Hence, this explicitly
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feminist research study theorizes about “how gender provides the subtext for arrangements of subordination” (Acker, 1990, p. 155) and helps bring to the surface gendered notions of CSR toward changing the embedded assumptions, expressed as discourses, around gender in organizations. My feminist poststructuralist approach therefore adds to the limited critical feminist CSR research to date by challenging dominant constructions of CSR and leadership, as interpreted and understood by organizational actors, that maintain the status quo of exclusion in organizations.

Following Foucault (1972, 1982), my fourth and final contribution to the literature involves acknowledging the past that has shaped the present-day discourse of women leaders in CSR. Using CSM and CDA, I explore how the media has discursively constructed and helped maintain taken-for-granted perceptions around women in CSR leadership in the last 40 years (RO1). By writing in a historically conscious way (Clark & Rowlinson, 2004; Rowlinson, 2004), I provide a “critically reflective version of the good society, or inform debate between alternative versions of that society” (Jacques, 1996, p. 9). The bulk of organizational research has been criticized for assuming that organizations are universal and unchanging in time and location, lacking “humanistic thinking” (Zald, 2002, p. 381). Likewise, scholars’ examinations of journalism history observe that journalism has traditionally reflected a dominant male perspective and neglected issues pertaining to women and gender (Dicenzo, 2004; Freeman, 2011). Recently, there has been some attention in academia toward the history of corporate social responsibility (e.g., Carroll, 2008; Delton, 2014; Hack, Kenyon, & Wood, 2014; Husted, 2015), but there is no extant research, to my knowledge, that examines the context of the narration of what has happened, particularly where women’s voices and experiences are concerned. Dominant discourses that are continually reproduced in society become understood as legitimate
knowledge (Mills, 1995), while other, excluded texts can limit understanding. As Boje (2008) notes, attention needs to be paid to “third narratives,” which require us to read between the lines to find the missing emergent story, left out “inadvertently and sometimes by defectors, on purpose” (p. 131). A critical reading of historical narratives will help disclose some of the silences, absences, or exclusions and reveal dominant discourses that structure the way reality is perceived (Mills, 2002; van Dijk, 1988a). In short, by examining a selection of newspaper articles from the last 40 years, I seek to reveal excluded knowledge that has contributed to stereotypical representations of women and the gendering of female leaders in CSR.

I begin the remaining sections of this chapter with a discussion that explains why I have chosen female CSR leaders in the Canadian private sector as the focus of this study. Next, I justify my reflexive, feminist poststructuralist perspective. I then discuss my research process. Finally, the subsequent chapters of this dissertation are outlined.

**The Macro Context of Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender in Canada’s Private Sector**

In the poststructuralist tradition (Foucault, 1982; van Dijk, 1998a), sensemakers are situated within a broader present and historical context. To provide context around the first aim of this study (to explore whether and how the discursive construction of CSR is gendered), and to help build a case for the second aim of this study (to analyze what structural and psychosocial discourses influence individual sensemaking of gender and CSR), I briefly discuss some of the recent political and societal discourses that influence the sensemaking processes of Canadian female CSR leaders.

Besides my own proximity to and accessibility to Canadian CSR leaders, due to my work-related
experience in industry and academia, I have chosen CSR in Canada as a focus of study because it presents a unique position. Canada, and particularly Alberta, has a thriving yet somewhat controversial industrial sector (as a result of recent international media interest in Alberta’s oilsands). Responsible business practices are supported by the federal government in Canada based on the business case logic (Global Affairs Canada, 2014; Industry Canada, 2011) that participating in CSR results in productivity and economic gains (Waddock & Graves, 1997).

There have been a number of initiatives on the part of the Canadian government to provide the structural systems, including legislation and governmental programs that have, at surface level, promoted gender equity and supported the promotion of women in leadership. The Canadian government sees the commitment to women’s rights issues as an integral component of responsible business practices both domestically and internationally. Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (2015) upholds Canada as a world leader when it comes to the promotion of gender equality, noting that it is a human rights issue as well as an essential component of sustainable development. Yet, in 2009 in Canada, even though women made up almost 50 per cent of the workforce and were more educated than men, women comprised 37 per cent of managerial positions and represented only 31.6 per cent of senior managers (Ferraro, 2010).

When it comes to salary, the gender pay gap in Canada increased between 1981 and 2001 (Delacourt, 2010). Furthermore, in 1996, the Canadian Advisory Council Status of Women was dismantled (Cuthbert Brandt, Black, Bourne, & Fahrni, 2011). Ten years later, in 2006, the Conservative government shut down most of the Status of Women in Canada offices, claiming that women’s and men’s issues do not need to be separated ("Tories Shutting Down the Status of Women Offices," 2006). Since then, the Canadian government has been criticized by advocacy groups for the systematic erosion of the status of Canadian women since 2004. At the same time,
Canada’s international rankings of gender disparity at the UN and the World Economic Development Forum have been steadily declining (Delacourt, 2010). There appears to be some incongruence in Canada between the non-discriminatory intent of women’s equity and the gender disparity that persists, which makes studying the discourse of women in CSR leadership so valuable.

Research suggests that female CSR leaders face systemic barriers to employment in the field. Even though more women leaders are linked to greater CSR (Catalyst, 2011a), with the exception of sectors of CSR focused on philanthropic giving, leading academic and industry figures in CSR and sustainability are men (Coleman, 2002; Marshall, 2007, 2011). It is apparent that the CSR profession is experiencing an increasing gender gap in both pay disparity and job level like that of the larger workforce (Heaney, 2014). More specifically, in 2011, less than one-third of chief sustainability officers in U.S. publicly traded companies were women, and there was a 20 per cent pay gap between men and women at the highest level of sustainability (Weinreb Group, 2011). In 2014, a scant 19 per cent of sustainability officers at a director level were women and women social responsibility leaders earned 76 per cent of what their male counterparts did (Allen-York, 2014). Such statistics provide sufficient reason to question the efficacy of the gender imperative within the CSR profession where, somewhat ironically, women’s rights issues are a central concern (e.g., United Nations Global Compact, n.d.; United Nations Human Rights, 2011). As a result, recent calls have been made for a more “gender-sensitive approach to social responsibility” (Grosser, 2009, p. 302) in gender organizational studies (GOS) to address some of the social aspects of business, including gender equity and diversity, which are now acknowledged as key issues in the workplace and in CSR (see also Grosser et al., 2013; Grosser & Moon, 2017; Grosser, Moon, Freeman, & Nelson, 2013;
My focus is on private sector companies because the term corporate social responsibility is commonly regarded as the private sector contribution to sustainable development (while recognizing that government and civil society also play important roles) (Institute for the Study of Corporate Social Responsibility – Ryerson University, n.d.). The private sector also has an increasingly important role in employment (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2008; Moon, 2002, 2004; Rhodes, 1996), employing large numbers of people around the world (accounting for 64 per cent of total employment with the public sector representing 20.6 per cent and self-employment representing 15.4 per cent [Palacios & Clemens, 2013]). However, compared with public sector organizations, the private sector has been slow to promote women (and minorities) (Palacios & Clemens, 2013). “The gender wage gap and sex segregation of the labour force are aspects of the ‘economy’ or the ‘market’; some, perhaps most, of the practices and processes that create these inequalities occur in work organizations” (Acker, 1998, p. 195). Canada is no exception; the private sector realizes a higher gender pay gap than public sector organizations, and private sector women executives and CEOs are much less satisfied with the representation of women in senior positions (Canadian Board Diversity Council, 2014). The private sector is also powerful; it is taking over responsibilities that governments previously held (e.g., through deregulation) (Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2006), resulting in governments’ role going from “rowing” to “steering” (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, p. 25). Hence, leadership in the private sector plays an important role in shaping culture and society, particularly where women are concerned (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009; Martin, 2003).
In summary, despite recent initiatives to promote and protect women’s rights and gender equality, these efforts fail to adequately address institutional obstacles that prevent adequate representation in the private-sector workforce and in CSR leadership in particular. The language of CSR has become established, with the dominant voices being those of white men in higher-level CSR positions (Marshall, 2007). As Marshall (2007, p. 168) observes, as CSR takes shape, we are “doing replication” and duplicating mainstream business forms and embedded ways of doing business: “…Women and men are often differentially placed to work within the emerging dominant logics of CSR.” The result is limited potential for women to influence discourses or create new meanings in the field (Billing & Alvesson, 1993; Marshall, 1984, 2007). Though Rees (2005, p 558) notes we need to identify “the ways in which systems and structures infringe those rights and cause that disadvantage in the first place,” I contend that we need a new way of approaching the problem of discrimination, one that goes beyond legislation and governmental “solutions.” I believe we must first understand women’s individual and shared experiences toward uncovering the social norms and attitudes that lie at the heart of inequity. Only once these mechanisms are understood can we begin to counteract them and “create the necessary conditions for women to be able to make distinctive contributions” (Nielsen & Huse, 2010, p. 25).

Although the importance of women in leadership and CSR has been highlighted in government, academia, and society, the discourse that continues to shape the role of these women fails to be addressed. It is for this reason that a number of feminists have been drawn to the feminist poststructuralist perspective.
Research Paradigm: A Reflexive, Feminist Poststructuralist Perspective

CSR, like most underlying management assumptions, draws from the functionalist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) that privileges narrow masculine managerial interests (Banerjee, 2007); CSR is therefore arguably “gender-blind,” failing to recognize the relationship between management and gender (Gond & Matten, 2007; Marvin, Bryans, & Waring, 2004; Prasad, 2005). My approach is consistent with the poststructuralist feminist perspective, which emphasizes a commitment to improve women’s lives and to help eliminate inequalities (White, Russo, & Travis, 2001). I am concerned about the (re)production of the dominant CSR discourse of private sector firms and seek to disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions that perpetuate the exclusion of women in leadership. Feminist poststructuralists believe this can be addressed by questioning “positive” knowledge and “facts,” by focusing on the relationships between texts or topics (Wodak & Meyer, 2009), and by being highly sensitive to issues of power and control (Foucault, 1979, 1980; Prasad, 2005). By embracing a feminist poststructuralist perspective that involves a discursive examination of prevailing discourse and discriminatory practices, “truths” can be destabilized and the gendered nature of social arrangements can be revealed (Prasad, 2005).

Adopting a reflexive approach, I seek to “reflect upon conventional ways of knowing … (and) challenge our assumptions … by exhibit(ing) a sensitive awareness to subtlety and nuance” (Hughes & Kerfoot, 2002, p. 473). Correspondingly, I engage participants in the active process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), but I am also immersed in my own sensemaking as a result of my personal experiences as a female leader. I recognize that my interviews involved meaningful interactions with the research participants in which both of us shared the realities of our lives, and that my interpretation of the data will be imprinted in the analysis. To protect the integrity of
this study and to be consistent with my poststructuralist positioning, I acknowledge that there is no one objective truth and will strive continually to reflect on my own narratives as I interpret the stories of the informants.

In the context of my own experiences, like many of the women in this study, I often felt like the “other” (different from the “always-already-masculine subject” [Butler, 1990, p.25]) at the executive table. At one point, fairly early in my career, I was the only female vice-president in a technology company made up primarily of male engineers. As I look retrospectively at the experience, I realize that I made sacrifices regarding who I am in order to play the game. My identity work—my understanding of myself in relation to the world around me (Weick, 1995)—drew on a plurality of discourses. I looked for salient cues within the social context and enacted behaviour that was consistent with what I perceived to be expected of a female executive. At the time, I narrowly defined myself as a “feminine leader” while subscribing to a “masculine ethic” of traits, assumed to belong to men, that are needed for effective management (Kanter, 1977, p. 22). For example, I accepted being on call at all hours of the day, and even played soccer with “the guys” to appear to be a participative member of the team. (I don’t like to play soccer!) At executive meetings, rather than asserting my own voice, I often found myself deferring to the more dominant (male) CEOs. I realize now that, by behaving in a manner I felt was socially consistent with my sex, I actively produced and maintained the status quo. I participated in a “disciplinary regime … by (referring) comparative measures that have the 'norm' as reference” (Foucault, 1977, p. 193) and helped support existing power relations in that organization. My identity work was established by constantly navigating being feminine or masculine depending on what I thought was appropriate in a given circumstance. (In hindsight, it was exhausting.)
I have come full circle since that experience (one’s sense of personal identity is fluid, after all), and believe that agency of the individual has a place in negotiating structural power relations in the workplace (see Alvesson, 2002; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Through this study, I reveal subtle (and not-so-subtle) exclusionary processes women leaders experience that can be career-limiting. Feminist poststructuralism is therefore a useful perspective for the study of women in CSR, providing a foundation for the theoretical and methodological approaches of CDA and CSM with which to analyze how individuals make sense of discursive practices they are experiencing (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Linstead, 2010). My analytic process is briefly described below.

The Research Process: Thematic Analysis & Interviews

In accordance with Foucault (1982), studying a subject historically is necessary because it helps us understand the discursive process of past views informing current, taken-for-granted perceptions. Tracing what has been written about women leaders in CSR across time through texts is a discursive practice itself and allows conclusions to be drawn about current representations. News media articles are selected as the texts under investigation not only due to the pivotal role the mass media plays in influencing expectations and behaviour in business (Koller, 2004), but also because the media has been criticized for stereotypical portrayals of men and women in business (Basow, 1992; Durham & Kellner, 2006). To study the formation of established gendered rules and practices that affect how women filter, enact, or resist discriminatory practices, I adopt a two-phase research design: (1) a thematic analysis of Canadian news media articles published in the last 40 years to determine how the discourse of women in CSR has evolved through time, and (2) a series of interviews with nine women who
are CSR leaders in private organizations in Canada to uncover how they make sense of the discursive practices they experience.

**Structure of This Dissertation**

The remainder of this thesis, is as follows. Chapter 2 outlines extant CSR and leadership literature in industry, government, and academia, and how this study is positioned within the critical literature. I then discuss my feminist poststructuralist paradigmatic positioning and relevant feminist poststructuralist studies on leadership in CSR and how this study contributes to this line of research.

Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the theoretical positioning of Foucauldian poststructuralism used for this study. I outline why its focus on power and privilege on the (re)production of discourse is a unique approach to the study of gender and CSR.

Chapter 4 describes my methodological framework, critical sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010), and its four key elements. I then explain why a gender-sensitive, CSM approach to CSR extends extant related research. I close the chapter by describing my own reflexivity that guided how this research was conducted.

Chapter 5 outlines my two-phase research design that includes a thematic analysis of historical to present-day newspaper articles and personal interviews with female CSR leaders. I present two frameworks and provide details on the process I used for thematic analysis of the newspaper articles (research phase one) as well as how CSM was used for data analysis to develop and conceptualize themes revealed in the interviews (research phase two).

Chapter 6 contains a critical, discursive examination of the narratives extracted from newspaper
articles from the past 40 years to explore and help reveal the historical construction of knowledge about women leaders in the context of CSR. Following Helms Mills and colleagues (2010) and van Dijk (1988a, 1988b), I focus on texts and subtexts to analyze dominant and more subtle newspaper constructions of women (CSR) leaders, to reveal silences, absences, and exclusions.

Chapter 7 critically makes sense of the data gathered in the interviews using the CSM framework (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Phillips & Hardy, 2002), and probes beneath the surface to understand how meaning is constructed as women make sense of their experiences as CSR leaders.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter of this thesis and provides a discussion of the results and implications of this study. I review this study’s theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions toward social change, discuss its limitations and recommendations for future research, and close with my final reflections.
CHAPTER 2. UNPACKING THE DISCOURSE ON CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & GENDER

The purpose of this chapter is to locate my research in the CSR and leadership literature, within the fields of critical and feminist studies. I begin this chapter by introducing CSR and its relevance in industry and government, particularly where women and equity are concerned. I then discuss related academic CSR research and explain why mainstream studies and approaches to CSR fail to adequately consider the experiences and reactions of individuals to organizational practices and the broader context in which they are embedded. The second part of the chapter focuses on relevant feminist critical research where I describe the feminist perspective and distinguish between “sex” and “gender.” I then describe my feminist poststructuralist paradigmatic positioning, which frames my research as a process that is concerned with finding “truth” that is discursively situated within power and knowledge relations (Alvesson & Wilmott, 1995; Foucault, 1977). Finally, I discuss relevant feminist poststructuralist research on leadership and CSR and close the chapter by discussing how this study’s positioning contributes to the literature.

The topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained importance and popularity in the last 30 years and is at the top of political, economic, and social agendas in today’s society (Barkemeyer, 2009; Grosser, 2009; Grosser et al., 2016; Matten, Crane, & Chapple, 2003; Nielsen & Huse, 2010). As noted in a recent Economic Times article, “Corporate social responsibility is moving from the fringes to the mainstream of corporate consciousness” (Gosh, 2013, para 1). Corporate social responsibility is defined by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2011, p. 6) as “the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees … and society at large to improve
their quality of life.” CSR involves allocating corporate resources on a discretionary basis with the goal of both improving social welfare and enhancing relationships with stakeholders who are business, government, or society (Barnett, 2007). At the core of the notion is the inclusion of social imperatives and social consequences of business success (Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2006).

While proponents of CSR advocate it represents a powerful business tool through which businesses can contribute to sustainable development, critics of CSR argue that the institutionalization of CSR is deconstructed and deemed flawed and co-opted by economic interests (e.g., Baden & Harwood, 2013; Balkan, 2004; Banerjee, 2003a, 2003b, 2014; Bansal, 2005; Cheney, Conrad, Christensen, & Lair, 2004; Dobers & Springett, 2010; Gherardi, 1994; Hahn, Preuss, Pinske, & Figge, 2014; Littlewood, 2015; Marens, 2008; Nielsen & Thomsen, 2007; Prates, Pedrozo, & Silva, 2015; Shamir, 2004, 2005, 2008; Whelan, 2012). The reliance on the false separation between ethics and economics in CSR ignores the ethical “sense of helping people to cope with the world or to create better organizations” (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p. 128; see also Banerjee, 2007). Attracting much debate and controversy, CSR is clearly an “essentially contested concept” (Moon, 2003, p. 2) that largely ignores important issues, such as gender, with widely accepted conceptions serving to limit CSR toward serving as a vehicle for transformative change (Crane et al., 2008; Matten & Crane, 2005). It is for this reason that I position this study within the critical CSR literature and adopt a poststructuralist feminist paradigmatic position.

Before I discuss my positioning and core assumptions in detail, I first review relevant literature in industry, government, and academia to provide a starting point for contextually studying the power relations inherent in the gendering of CSR. These well-established influences determine
structures and boundaries around how individuals imagine their current and potential social realities.

**CSR & Gender in Industry & Government**

Social imperatives and human rights are highlighted within government, international organizations, and advocacy groups. The Canadian government has a variety of initiatives in place to support and promote an organization’s involvement in responsible business practices that largely subscribe to the business case logic (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2015; Industry Canada, 2011). Likewise, the government encourages female representation in leadership. For example, the Ontario Securities Commission (2014) recently approved a “comply or explain” securities law that promotes the inclusion of women in leadership positions by requiring disclosure of the number of women on corporate boards and in senior management teams, policies regarding women’s representation on boards, nominating consideration of director identification and selection, and director term limits and other mechanisms of renewal on their board.

With the exception of human rights issues (including those affecting women and children) being mentioned in the Canadian federal government’s extractive sector strategy (Global Affairs Canada, 2014), women’s rights are not explicitly identified as being a factor in CSR by the Canadian government. In contrast, international advocacy groups and other reporting organizations, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (n.d.), the United Nations Global Compact (2015), Standards Organization’s ISO 26000 (International Standards Organization, n.d.), and Social Accountability International’s (n.d.) SA 8000®, all recognize human rights (particularly those of women and children) as being an important component of CSR. Recently,
the Women’s Empowerment Principles, developed in partnership between the United Nations Global Compact and UN Women, focuses almost exclusively on the issue of gender equality in CSR, providing a “gender lens” through which organizations can analyze and benchmark business initiatives (Women’s Empowerment Principles, n.d., para. 6). In addition, Catalyst, a leading non-profit organization that advocates for accelerating the inclusion of women in business, has published research studies indicating that women leaders may be better practitioners of CSR: they develop higher quality CSR initiatives, increase the size of a company’s donation levels, and highlight gender issues in CSR strategies (Catalyst, n.d., 2011b).

Organizations such as Catalyst, the United Nations, and the International Standards Organization, are well known in Canada and help shape the discourse of both newspaper articles and women CSR leaders’ knowledge, attitudes, and engagement around CSR. In the 1980s, organizations were beginning to wrestle with what being a good corporate citizen means to their way of doing business. At around the same time, the influential Abella Commission Report on *Equity in Employment* (Abella, 1984) was published and made recommendations for massive policy changes by the Canadian government to confront “systemic discrimination” (p. 7) of women (and minority groups) in the public and private sectors (see also Abella, 2009; Agócs, 2014; Myrden, Mills, & Helms Mills, 2011). This resulted in the 1986 Employment Equity Act of Canada (amended in 1995). This unique Canadian affirmative action recognizes the need for systemic remedies to contend with inequity in the workplace and requires employers to engage in proactive employment practices to increase the representation of the four designated groups (women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal Peoples, and visible minorities) (Agócs, 2014).

Most of the CSR, women’s advocacy organizations and standards appear to be established in the 1990s in response to the need for companies to be able to deal with the changing rules in
business and increase legitimacy, as evident from headlines like “Social demands held difficult for business” (Anderson, 1978a, p. B3) and “Canadian firms learning how to do well by doing good” (1989, p. C7). These standards organizations are also mentioned by several of this study’s participants.

Despite the intent of women’s equity initiatives in Canada by the government and advocacy organizations (e.g., The Employment Equity Act, Government of Canada, 2012, 2013; the Ontario Securities Commission governance guidelines requiring disclosure of representation of women on boards, Ontario Securities Commission 2013; and the Catalyst Accord, Catalyst, 2013), the highly significant gap in pay between men and women in the workforce and the few senior-level women in business suggest the proverbial glass ceiling appears to be made of concrete (Blau & Kahn, 2007; Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015; Terjesen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009; Terjesen & Singh, 2008). Women continue to be under-represented particularly as they move higher up in the organization, being less likely to hold positions of authority, to have opportunities for promotion, and to be rewarded for their roles and be part of networks and support systems (Lynness & Thompson, 1997, 2000; McFarland, 2014, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2012; Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth, Rink, Stoker, & Peters, 2015; Vinnicombe, Doldor, & Turner, 2014). The CSR profession appears to be no different, with women earning 76 per cent of what their male counterparts earn and occupying 19 per cent of director-level positions (Allen-York, 2014; see also ACRE, 2016). It appears that even within the CSR profession, where equality of opportunity is commonly articulated in social responsibility practices, companies largely fail to focus on equal participation within their own walls.

There are other indications of considerable resistance in organizations to formally commit to
diversity. Even though the popular discourse of companies is positioned as being supportive of
twomen in leadership (e.g., “Why women matter when it comes to Canada’s gross domestic
product,” Reynolds, 2015a; “Companies Do Better With Women Leaders (But Women Need
More Confidence to Lead)…,” Adams, 2014), there are signs of competing discourses being
negotiated (see Mills, 1993). For example, even though 90 per cent of FP500 directors say
diversity is important to them personally and to their board, approximately 62 per cent of
directors of boards that do not have a diversity policy do not feel that their board should develop
a policy (Canadian Board Diversity Council, 2014). Furthermore, the few senior-level women in
business often attract substantial media attention, giving the false impression that barriers toward
women’s advancement no longer exist (Catalyst, 2015a). In an era when gender bias and
discrimination are rarely overt, evidently gender inequality in organizations remains chronic.

In summary, the macro-level of social arrangements that has been institutionalized by the
government and advocacy organizations in Canada (and beyond) has (re)created a context that
has shaped structures around gender, leadership, and CSR that guides organizations and
individuals regarding desirable forms of behaviour. These structures and constraints are deep-
rooted, hard to change, and often less noticeable, remaining largely unquestioned by
practitioners. The same can be said for CSR in the academic literature.

CSR in the Literature

It is only since the turn of the 21st century that CSR has expanded as a field of research (Grosser
et al., 2017). Dominant streams of related CSR and diversity research are usually positivist and
rely on the premise that there is an existence of objective information in a given system
(Maguire, Mckelvey, Mirabeau, & Oztas, 2006). Correspondingly, the goal of positivist CSR
research is “to provide a distinctive view of a corporation’s overall efforts toward satisfying its obligations to society” (Wartick & Cochran, 1985, p. 758). Gender-neutral assumptions have dominated organizational behaviour theory as well as practice, and most work on organizations includes no or little analysis on gender (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008). The field of CSR is no exception (Grosser & Moon, 2017).

Even though corporate social responsibility research has been widely discussed in both academic and practical discourse for more than half a century, for some time now critical scholars have been questioning the visibility of women in the CSR field (e.g., Banerjee, 2007; Grosser & Moon, 2005a, 2005b; Kilgour, 2007). There is a lack of consistent reporting on gender at the macro-level to adequately track changes and trends in gender development (Global Reporting Initiative, 2011) and what reporting does exist primarily uses balanced representation as an indication of visibility and equity (Alvesson & Billing, 2002). However, simply counting women based on sex is surface-level and equates physical attributes with diversity, and does not necessarily translate into diversity at a deeper level (Sheridan, Haslam McKenzie, & Still, 2011). Such statistics do not take into account the socially constructed nature of identity, nor do they consider diversity of attitudes, opinions, information, or values (Phillips & Loyd, 2006).

Regardless, the mere presence of women in CSR leadership positions is unlikely to create equity and eliminate discrimination. As Britton and Logan (2008, p. 119) note, “Inequalities of gender, race, class, and sexuality are deeply entrenched in workplace cultures, interactions, and even in the identities of workers.”

At the organizational level, the business case discourse for CSR (commonly referred to as corporate social performance) resonates strongly with management, referring to the contention
that firm-level productivity and economic gains can be realized by participating in CSR (see Baden & Higgs, 2015; Frederick, 2016; Kurucz, Colbert, & Wheeler, 2008; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003; Waddock & Graves, 1997) and by supporting gender diversity in organizations (e.g., Anderson, Reeb, Upadhyay, & Zhao, 2011; Carter, Simkins, & Simpson, 2003; Catalyst, 2004, 2008; Conference Board of Canada, 2001, 2013; Erhardt, Werbel, & Schrader, 2003; Smith, N., Smith, V., & Verner, 2006). Despite a number of studies evaluating the link between social responsibility and women in leadership with financial performance (e.g., Bauman & Skitka, 2012; Jones, Willness, & Glavas, 2017; Post & Byron, 2015; Russell, Evans, Fielding, & Hill, 2016), results have been mixed (Litvin, 2006; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; Post & Byron, 2015), leaving some scholars questioning a clear market motivation to engage in socially responsible behaviour (e.g., Roberts, 2003; Vogel, 2005). Likewise, many critical scholars argue that, ideologically, business case arguments are located within a functionalist paradigm that privileges and universalizes individual managerial interests (e.g., Litvin, 2006; Sinclair, 2006) and emphasizes difference to achieve instrumental, control- and compliance-oriented goals that maintain the capitalist status quo rather than equalizing differences between groups (Kirby & Harter, 2002; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2008; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010; Vogel, 2005; Wrench, 2007).

In comparison to macro- and organizational-level research, there are comparatively few micro-level CSR studies (Aguilera & Glavas, 2012). Much of the individual-level, related literature emphasizes how CSR can be used to influence attitudes and behaviour or how employees respond to CSR practices within their organizations (e.g., Aguilera et al., 2007; Glavas, 2016; Hameed, Riaz, Arain, & Farooq, 2016; Husted, 2015; Jones et al., 2017; Russell et al., 2016; Seivwright & Unsworth, 2016; Sharma, 2000; Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016; Weaver,
Tervino, & Cochran, 2007; Wiernik, Dilchert, & Ones, 2016). Recently, there has been some work that problematizes how individuals discursively make sense of CSR (e.g., Haudhri, 2016; McCarthy, 2017; Onkila & Marjo, 2017; Stumberger & Golog, 2016), showing a growing emphasis on tensions and contradictions experienced by CSR practitioners in organizations. However, these studies are exceptions. The aim of most related research to date is to demonstrate that CSR and diversity are positive and desirable.

What is largely neglected in extant research are studies that question the status quo and shed light on individual perceptions at a deeper level of how CSR is understood and perceived (see Bhattcharaya, Kroshun, & Sen, 2009; Gond, Akremi, Iaglens, & Swaen, 2010; Wang, Tong, Takeuchi, & George, 2016), particularly where women are concerned (Grosser, 2009; Marshall, 2007; Karam & Jamali, 2012). Though most extant functionalist research largely supports the idea that women leaders positively influence CSR, through a higher commitment than men to social responsiveness (e.g., Zahra & Stanton, 1988), CSR initiatives (e.g., Catalyst, 2013), or strategy (e.g., Bilimoria, 2000; Kesner, 1988; Rosener, 1990, 1995; Selby, 2000), this line of research fails to appreciate how individuals (or women, as in this study) embrace and use CSR in practice (Ghadiri, Gond, & Brès, 2015; Gond & Matten, 2007; Grosser, 2009, 2016; Grosser et al., 2016; Grosser & Moon, 2017; Morsing & Roepstorff, 2015). We are left with a gap in the research in how we understand interactions between the company’s CSR activities, the broader contexts within which they are embedded, and the individual’s own understandings and experiences. I propose that research on women in CSR leadership positions needs to be extended to consider the role of power, dominance, and inequalities in context in order to reflect their experiences beyond what the numbers might—or might not—suggest.
Critical researchers have recently begun to argue that CSR needs to focus on corporations’
ethical responsibilities and underscore the connection between CSR phenomena and broader
contexts (economic, institutional, political, and societal) in which they are embedded (e.g.,
Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Frynas & Stephens, 2015; Grosser et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017;
Matten & Moon, 2008). Furthermore, social and pluralistic considerations of power, context, and
individual agency need to be accounted for (e.g., Grosser, 2009; Grosser et al., 2013; Grosser,
Moon, et al., 2013) to provide a deeper understanding of women’s experiences in an
organizational setting (Hahn et al., 2014; Marshall, 2007; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Torchia,
Calabro, & Huse, 2011; Wang & Kelan, 2013). As Alvesson (2002) notes, studies in CSR have
rarely sought to explain how individuals interpret CSR discourse and are politically naïve; there
appears to be “a reluctance to recognize and address how certain actions and arrangements
sustain and reinforce asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 123). Toward understanding the
macro-level influences that frame the context around Canadian female leaders’ identities, I now
turn to a discussion on relevant feminist perspectives, which lays the foundation for why the
feminist poststructuralist paradigm is appropriate for my problematic.

**Sex, Gender & Liberal Feminism**

Much of the research discussed previously fails to distinguish between sex and gender, situating
men as dominant (sex) but failing to acknowledge the prevailing CSR discourse as masculinist
(gender). It is important to distinguish between the notions of “sex” and “gender” as well as their
relationship to each other, as differentiating the two are fundamental building blocks of the
different feminist traditions (Prasad, 2005). Sex is ascribed by biology and a result of physical
criteria (sexual organs, the reproductive system, and hormonal differences) and therefore
unalterable over time (Alvesson & Billing, 2002) with the exception of medical modifications
Gender, on the other hand, is a deeply embedded and changing, processual social order (Acker, 1990; Alvesson & Billings, 1997; Hardy & Clegg, 1996; Meyerson & Kolb, 2000; Oakley, 1972) that includes “a complex set of social relations enacted across a range of social and institutional practices that exist both within and outside of formal organizations” (Fletcher & Ely, 2003, p. 6). While acknowledging gender approaches are related to being male or female, the focus is not on individual men or women but on the relations between them and the consequential social attributes and opportunities learned through the socialization process. These relations are perpetuated by a system that supports “typical” gender roles and responsibilities, which in turn affect control over resources and decision-making authority (Broadbridge & Hearn, 2008; Lorber, 2001; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, n.d.).

**Why We Need to Move Beyond Liberal Feminist Approaches**

Liberal feminists see sex/gender as a variable defined as man or woman, not as an analytical framework, and advocate for equality based on sex and removing barriers to women through human development or structural/legal interventions (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Calás & Smircich, 2006, 2009; Chafetz, 1998, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Smircich, 1985). Accounts of women and work are mostly discussed as being related to inequalities to sexual difference and gender stereotypes (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Gherardi, 2010). This line of thinking has been contested for its inability to move gender issues beyond positioning women as being as good as men (Calás & Smircich, 2006), viewing subjects as a homogeneous group of people having an objective and uniform reality and ignoring their “day-to-day individuality” (Foucault, 1979, p. 91). However, as Bazerman (1988) argues, rhetoric and the researcher’s own understandings are never absent from any research. Traditional scientific research largely not only ignores subjects’ context, but
also stigmatizes them by constructing them in a way that diverges from their feelings, thoughts, and practices (Bazerman, 1988; Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997). I contend that a more inductive approach that aims to gain access to informants’ common-sense knowledge, while acknowledging individual subjectivities, will help foster social change when it comes to deep-rooted gendered structures in organizations.

CSR is often referred to as a “new approach to business” (Marshall, 2007, p. 165), yet masculinist discourses are dominant in corporate social responsibility in corporate and policy arenas (Acker, 1995; Marshall, 2007). CSR from this perspective has been mobilized to protect the dominant group’s interests rather than challenge the status quo (Gallhofer & Haslam, 2003; Spence, 2007). Though it is appropriate for powerful voices to speak out on sustainable issues, doing so carries the risk of continuing with business as usual, meaning feminist voices are not heard (Marshall, 2011). Furthermore, which voices dominate CSR discussions is largely determined by the context through which leadership is enacted (Marshall, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1991). Leaders often are key influencers of behaviour through “producing and reproducing gender-based assumptions and values through culture, which can both enable and constrain organizational members” (Myrden et al., 2011, p. 440). This interplay of control and resistance in the workplace has been found to maintain gendered attributes resulting in organizational knowledge being underpinned with masculine imagery and connotations (e.g., Calás, 1993; Calás & Smircich, 1991).

The liberal feminist perspective helps perpetuate dominant assumptions and associated rules that can be (re)produced and reflected in the discourses at multiple levels (see Helms Mills et al., 2010; Hartt, Helms Mills, & Mills, 2012). Earlier work by Kanter (1977) showed that work-
related behaviours of men and women (opportunity, structure, power, and relative numbers) limits the upward mobility of women and reinforce negative stereotypes about women’s work performance, especially in white-collar jobs. These assumptions about behaviour create meta-rules that individuals are exposed to daily that can provide a feeling of cohesion among individuals and also impose a sense of repression whereby individuals apply a disciplinary process and remain silent (Foucault, 1984; Helms Mills et al., 2010). These suppositions and processes influence and limit female CSR leaders’ identities as they conform to or resist the context and rules within which they are located (Hutton, 1988). The reality for female CSR leaders who participated in this study is largely the same: even though they have broken through barriers toward achieving gender equality, social structures that constrain their progress in the workplace remain.

Gramsci (1971) refers to this domination of one class over another as hegemony. However, unlike the liberal feminist perspective that presents women as passive victims of male dominance (Chafetz, 2001), hegemonic domination is not only about control; it is consensual, as the dominant class’s ways of seeing the world are accepted by those in subordinate positions as being normal. Accordingly, in applying the concept of gender to Gramscian hegemony, gender role theorists contend that individuals have a fundamental need to view the social system positively and are motivated to maintain the status quo. The belief that gender roles are fixed increases the legitimacy of the social hierarchy wherein women occupy subordinate positions and has consequences on how each gender views itself within the broader social system (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Kay, 2005; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). This helps explain how common practices, including the privileging of men in business leadership, are reproduced through power relations that become taken for granted over time (Grandy, 2007; Ives, 2004).
CSR discourses arguably draw from the same broader business rhetoric that privileges males, reproduces the status quo, and serves to reify the hegemonic authority of large corporations rather than produce any real change (Gond & Matten, 2007; Marvin et al., 2004; Prasad & Holzinger, 2013). CSR research to date largely has an “implied gender neutrality” (Marshall, 2007, p. 168). Recently, there have been calls for a more “gender-sensitive approach to social responsibility” (Grosser, 2009, p. 302) in gender organizational studies (GOS) to address some of the social aspects of business, including gender equity and diversity, that are now acknowledged as key issues in the workplace and in CSR (see also Grosser et al., 2013; Grosser & Moon, 2017). It is tempting to not consider gender when it comes to CSR, as the “challenges CSR might address are more important than creating trivial gender skirmishes. But gender is thoroughly interwoven with environmental destruction and deepening poverty” (Marshall, 2007, p. 168). We are already seeing that, without gender analysis, some key CSR concerns such as protecting basic human rights (e.g., equity of women in the workplace) cannot be effectively addressed (e.g., Kilgour, 2007; United Nations Global Compact, 2010). There is more work to be done.

We must move beyond traditional liberal feminist approaches toward understanding how even privileged individuals can be dominated due to core assumptions based on a system of practices that discursively situate women in less powerful positions (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Grandy, 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). CSR leadership involves much more than simply being put into that role and acquiring new skills; it involves a set of practices and behaviours that are more commonly associated with men, like assertively expressing opinions. When women are placed in leadership roles without addressing policies and practices that perpetuate gender biases, they have limited power to determine their own success (Iberra & Kolb, 2013). This treatment of
women in the workplace has created structures and cues that are embedded in the workplace and result from the discursive nature of social relations within organizations (see Acker, 1990; Hartt et al., 2012). As Marshall (2007, p. 176) notes, women’s CSR leadership is “‘fringy’ … whilst I see many men operating in the mainstream, I see many women operating at the margins.”

By embracing a critical approach to the sensemaking of female leaders in CSR, this study seeks to shed light on the discursive processes that both historically and presently affect the taken-for-granted perceptions of CSR in organizations and give voice to those female leaders who are often silenced because they are less powerful and marginalized. To this end, my feminist poststructuralist approach provides a lens through which I examine an alternate version of CSR leadership within organizations (Morgan, 2006).

The Feminist Poststructural Paradigm

Poststructuralism is a broad field of study that sees the relationship between language, power, and identity as being pivotal in understanding organizational phenomena (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fiol, 2002; Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006; Prasad, 2005). Poststructuralism is informed by nominalist ontological assumptions (which reject universally accepted conceptions of “what is” [Steffy & Grimes, 1986]) and social constructionist epistemological assumptions (“what it means to know”) (Gray, 2014, p. 19). Epistemologically, poststructuralism falls within the social constructionist perspective and is grounded in the belief that the human experience affects one’s perception of the external world (Boje, Ford, & Oswick, 2004; de Waall, 2005). This style of analysis is both reflexive and interpretive, and rests on the principle that knowledge is actively constructed by the learner (versus passively received) and is always contextual (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wheatley,
1991). Poststructuralism provides a discursive and linguistic approach that breaks down structures and deconstructs absent or “hidden” practices that are usually managed by a dominating few individuals (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Linstead, 2010; Maynard, 1994; Prasad, 2005).

This thesis draws primarily from the Foucauldian genre of poststructuralism (Foucault, 1982), which emphasizes the role of power and knowledge, embedded structures, and discursive practices that are usually managed by a few dominating individuals (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Weedon, 1993). Such practices can result in “dividing practices,” which are normative processes that result in hierarchical divisions that objectify the actor, or “deviant,” and “normalize” the rest of the population (Foucault, 1982, p. 777). In other words, “disciplinary power” (Linstead, 2010, p. 703) is exercised by attaching labels and marginalizing certain individuals, and the rest of the population is reminded to conform. Power is therefore seen as a network of systems that is built on a fluid system of relations within which power and individual resistance are exerted (Foucault, 1978) (as opposed to the Marxist view that sees power as a state of repression or oppression [Kelly, 2009]). Resistance from a poststructuralist perspective can be the result of a person feeling disconnected with her sense of self and the environment (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). For example, when interpreting the interviews, I identified such feelings of disconnect by attending to verbal and non-verbal expressions of anger or frustration as respondents shared their stories about discrimination. The poststructuralist position is therefore consistent with a central aim of this study, to reveal how female leaders are constituted through a seemingly neutral but highly masculinized CSR and leadership discourse.
Poststructural feminists see gender not as a result of visible, essential characteristics arising from sex or gender roles, but as “an axis of inequality/domination-subordination where gender relations are hierarchical power relations” (Calás & Smircich, 2009, p. 247). Foucault (1988, 1993) refers to these imbalanced relations as technologies of domination; they are disciplinary in that they constrain subjects from thinking otherwise about themselves. From this perspective, although individuals self-regulate, they are also influenced by “knowledge” that constrains their existence. In this study, for example, one respondent acknowledges how women in the media are often described as being a “queen bee” or “bitch,” and several other respondents describe the need to constantly “check themselves” to ensure they are not being “too assertive” and run the risk of being labelled a “bitch.” The enduring nature of CSR leadership observed in this study’s findings indicate that, even though gender is constructed socially, it is resolute and resistant to change (see Prasad, 2005).

Feminist poststructuralists believe that language plays a central role in understanding how meaning is socially constructed and given meaning by individuals (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Weedon, 1993). Meaning is historically located in the discourse (Prasad, 2005; Weedon, 1993) and space for change emerges when “truths” are destabilized through resistance and consciousness-raising (Prasad, 2005). However, poststructuralists give as much importance to what history does not say as to what it says. We are encouraged to question “positive” knowledge that represents a “valid truth” through being highly sensitive to issues of power and control that help make the discourses that are often silenced visible (Foucault, 1979, 1980). The aim is to help “debunk mythical social constructions which silence and oppress many of society’s members” (Calás & Smircich, 1992, p. 244).
For feminist poststructuralists, women’s lives and experiences are lacking in history (Prasad, 2005; Weedon, 1993). Feminist poststructuralists look for stories that represent women and their way of seeing the world. This perspective allows us to look at historically embedded organizational practices and discourses and provides a way to look at how commonly accepted rules control or mediate organizational activities and behaviour (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). It is for this reason that discursively examining the historical narratives of newspaper articles is valuable; dominant knowledge and attitudes of women in CSR leadership positions prevalent today are shaped by the past (see Foucault, 1978, 1982). If women are largely “invisible” in the articles, which the findings in Chapter 6 suggest, deep-rooted beliefs that women are less suitable in leadership positions are preserved.

I believe that individuals’ realities are temporary, constructed and reconstructed through language that becomes taken-for-granted assumptions, which can only be removed if you look at the discourses that created those assumptions in the first place. By examining the dominant and mundane daily discursive processes through the voices of female CSR leaders, I seek to identify emergent patterns that reveal power relations that result in the exclusion of women. Specifically, through the study of discourses of femininity that are present in women’s own language as well as in historical newspaper articles, I seek to unsettle biases by questioning normalized “truth” and meaning that resides within language that results in silencing some and privileging others.

**Feminist Poststructuralist Research on Gender and CSR**

There is limited feminist poststructural research that focuses on women and it is centred on the privileged individual who is excluded. This dissertation contributes to the literature by applying a feminist poststructuralist perspective to the study of female CSR leaders. While studying
leadership and CSR in combination is rarely considered in extant research, I draw from two lines of related feminist poststructuralist research, one focused on leadership and the other on CSR, to inform this study.

Most related studies, to date, on women in leadership are primarily descriptive and based on publicly available information (Terjesen et al., 2009). Gender diversity on boards has received recent attention, especially in relation to financial performance (Huse, Nielsen, & Hagen, 2009; Nielsen & Huse, 2010). Other studies have focused on the representation of women in corporate annual reports, finding that images and traditional gender subtexts2 reinforced powerful gendered divisions of labour and corporate hierarchies wherein women are “frequently portrayed as being less powerful and as organizational outsiders” (Bujaki & McConomy, 2010, p. 222; see also Benschop & Meihuizen, 2002). As Mills, Helms Mills, and Miller (2010) note, annual reports serve as sensemaking cues for others as they try to understand the organization; unconscious beliefs about gendered roles for men and women by those leading the organization are reflected in the reports, and imagery in annual reports can reinforce the gendered division of labour (see also Helms Mills, 2005). Providing a poststructuralist feminist account of masculinity in the postwar airline industry, Mills and Helms Mills (2006) observe the dominance of male leaders, who, at the time, had an almost exclusive role in developing underlying masculine values and subsequent employment practices that established a resilient gendered organizational culture. Another popular avenue of research includes studies that focus on leadership and management

2 “Gender subtext” is defined by Bendl (2005, p. 34) as “a set of hidden, latent, and subtly power-based gendered, gendering, as well as en-gendering processes that systematically reproduce gender distinctions, [and] categorize between sex/gender (normally in terms of men and women) based on objectified forms, rational procedures and the abstracted conceptual organization, which (should) create an appearance of neutrality and impersonality in organizations, organizational empirical research and theorizing, and the discipline of organization studies itself.”
within academic institutions, where masculinities and male dominance are the norm (Martin, 1994; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), expressed as discourses that include individualism, authoritarianism, and paternalism (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Finally, in her recent research, Baxter (2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) uses feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis to explore leadership identities and gender stereotyping in the U.K. press, and concludes that business at the leadership level continues to be inhospitable to female leaders. Although this line of research begins to recognize gender asymmetry in leadership, most of the aforementioned studies do not explain how women themselves make sense of the situations they are experiencing, nor do they recognize how certain arrangements or situations can maintain unbalanced power relations.

To date, gender awareness and feminist approaches have a regrettably low profile in CSR scholarship (Spence, 2016). CSR as a field itself has emerged in the last 15 years, and some of the attention to gender equity in CSR research has been stimulated partly by CSR in practice (e.g., The Women’s Empowerment Principles and Catalyst, discussed previously). However, even though it has been argued that feminist theory needs to be applied to these initiatives, such theory is not explicitly acknowledged in this work. Likewise, CSR research that applies critical feminist theoretical perspectives has not been well developed to date (Grosser et al., 2017; Grosser & Moon, 2017).

It is in this context that feminist poststructuralist scholars have only just begun to study organizations and CSR (Grosser et al., 2017). This line of CSR research includes feminist critiques of instrumental CSR that focuses on the business case or social performance and research on the political role of the firm in structuring inequality in feminist organizational studies (e.g., Bear, Rahman, & Post, 2010; Kurucz et al., 2008). Acker (1998) critiqued CSR,
contending it is a misnomer—that companies address CSR issues like gender equity to advance organizational legitimacy and profits rather than because of any wider social concerns. Exploring the gendering of leadership in corporate responsibility from a poststructuralist perspective, Marshall (2007, 2011) contends that dominant voices in CSR stakeholder groups are often defined within a patriarchal perspective. There has been related work done with reference to corporate value chains (comprising the customer, supply chains, and the community) (Barrientos, Dolan, & Tallontire, 2003; Kemp, Keenan, & Gronow, 2010; McCarthy, 2013, 2017; Pearson, 2007; Prieto-Carrón, 2006, 2008), as well as women’s participation in microfinance and entrepreneurship programs (e.g., Johnstone-Louis, 2017; Tornhill, 2016). Most of these studies focus on the marginalization of less advantaged female voices in CSR. In addition, the issue of gender and CSR has also been critically studied in relation to corporate boards (e.g., Bear et al., 2010) as well as the workplace (e.g., Grosser & Moon, 2005a, 2005b; Larrieta-Rubín de Celis, Velasco-Balmaseda, Fernandez de Bobadilla, & del Mar Alonso-Almeida, 2015). The aforementioned research primarily critiques CSR initiatives for not reflecting women’s knowledge and participation (Grosser & Moon, 2017), with many studies advocating for institutional change and the consideration of ethical business practices.

Based on the Habermasian (Habermas, 1990) concept of deliberative democracy toward improving the ethical embeddedness of business in society, a line of research called “political CSR” (PCSR) (Scherer & Palazzo, 2004, 2007, 2011) (also referred to as “corporate political activity” [Detomasi, 2007] or “corporate citizenship” [McIntosh, Leipziger, Jones, & Coleman, 1998]), asks for the role of organizations in societies to be reconceptualized so that organizations serve not only business itself, but more importantly, individual citizens and the larger society (Moon, Crane, & Matten, 2005). This perspective introduces normative theory into the role of
business in society and depicts CSR as a political process between corporate action and
stakeholders that is contested through discursive interaction (Sherer & Palazzo, 2007, 2011;
Scherer, Palazzo, & Matten, 2014). Related PCSR research adds a feminist perspective to CSR
and power and accounting for different phenomena including global governance at the macro-
level, strategic concerns at the organizational level or cognitive dimensions at the individual
level (Frynas & Stevens, 2015). Grosser and Moon (2005a; 2005b) examine the role of corporate
social responsibility in gender mainstreaming, arguing that women’s organizations need to
become involved in CSR to help address gender equity and new systems of societal governance.
Grosser examines CSR as a process of governance (2016) and in stakeholder relations (2009). In
looking at the gendering of CSR in the Arab Middle East, Karam and Jamali (2013) use an
institutional framework to discuss how CSR can potentially be mobilized. Keenan, Kemp, and
Ramsay (2014) argue that a gender perspective is needed to contribute to long-term sustainable
development. Critiquing the equity mandate of the UN Global Compact, Kilgour (2007, 2013)
warns it first must address the “pervasive and continued violation of women’s human rights”
(Kilgour, 2007, p. 751). Lastly, a study on the examination of CSR and power in developing
countries using a cross-cultural feminist perspective concludes that power and domination, as
well as the contributions of different actors to CSR discourse, will lead to better understanding of
the realities of responsible business practices for smaller organizations (Karam & Jamali, 2017).
These studies overlap with poststructuralist feminist research due to their focus on analysis of
whose voices are missing from governance processes and their aim to address this.

**What Is Missing in the Poststructuralist CSR & Leadership Literature**

The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that the critical research agenda to date on
gendered organizations is becoming more established, with one of the most important emerging
areas in research on gendered organizations being the importance of exploring contextual differences (Britton & Logan, 2008). Though critical engagements with CSR are informative, the overwhelming majority do not provide detailed empirical accounts of how individual actors understand, practise, and resist CSR (Costas & Kärreman, 2013; Scherer & Palazzo, 2004, 2007). Additional critical research is needed that develops the radical humanist CSR agenda and takes an interpretive approach to CSR while empirically documenting the idea of power and context (Gond & Matten, 2007; Grosser et al., 2017; Grosser & Moon, 2017). This study attempts to contribute to this developing stream of research by taking a feminist poststructuralist approach to dominant gender discourses. I focus less on outcomes and more on the process of how individual identities and meanings are shaped (Hardy et al., 2000). By doing so, I offer a perspective and associated methodology that offers reflexivity as a researcher and brings missing voices and perspectives into the conversation.

The poststructuralist feminist paradigm considers these perspectives that are lacking in related literature to date, asserting that the sensemaking systems and power relations among firms and their stakeholders generate disagreements about CSR activities (Beckman, Colwell, & Cunningham, 2009; Frynas & Stevens, 2015; Matten & Moon, 2008). Gherardi (1994, p. 155) argues that past equal opportunity initiatives “have enabled many women to instrumentalize organizations … to combat the devaluation of the female.” If this is the case, an examination of CSR rhetoric relating to gender equity could be an underutilized resource to change gender relations (Grosser & Moon, 2005a, 2005b). Given that micro-level sensemaking practices can produce social changes at the macro-level (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010, p. 555), a study that can reveal the subjective nature of women’s CSR realities by providing a view at the micro-level
while considering power and other constraints (Frynas & Stevens, 2015; Weick, 1999) could destabilize traditional beliefs and provide new insights.

I seek to build on this promising stream of research that demonstrates how CSR can significantly shape organizational life and affect female leaders due to multi-level influences, particularly where politics and power in organizations are concerned. As Britton and Logan (2008, p. 119) assert, “We cannot merely note the consequences of working within gendered organizations or the characteristics of gendered organizations, we must see the process whereby organizations maintain and reproduce inequalities.” I suggest that some observable CSR activities, such as affirmative action programs and reporting or certification undertakings, may be political activities and result in CSR rhetoric that is inconsistent with employees’ realities (see Matten & Crane, 2005; Sherer & Palazzo, 2007). Specifically, I investigate CSR to explore its underlying masculinist perspective and question dominant ways of thinking about the concept (see Objective One). I critically examine the naturalness of female leaders in the CSR field, as historically framed by the Canadian newspaper press, by identifying the discourses that set boundaries on how individuals engage in CSR (phase one of this study) (see Phillips & Hardy, 2002). This perspective also helps inform this dissertation’s second and third objectives, which, based on interviews with female senior CSR leaders (phase two of this study), examine discursive processes that contribute to the gendering of CSR leadership. In short, this dissertation adds to extant critical poststructuralist leadership and CSR literature by providing a more critical understanding of how CSR is discursively practised and resisted in organizations, based on multiple levels of influence, and how it shapes the behaviour and identity of female CSR leaders.
Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of relevant research in CSR in industry, government, and academia. I then presented feminist perspectives of sex and gender and discussed why we need to go beyond the dominant liberal feminist approach toward a more critical and contingent approach to CSR leadership. After that, I reviewed relevant feminist poststructuralist research and considered the need for a line of research that investigates dominant cultural and social values with individual action.

Deeply rooted implicit theories and stereotypes—distinguishing beliefs or attitudes presumed to be typical of members of a group (Aries, 1996)—must be understood in order to identify the psychological mechanisms in place that lead to perceptions that women leaders are unequal to men. It is only once these mechanisms are understood that we can begin to counteract them and “create the necessary conditions for women to be able to make distinctive contributions” (Nielsen & Huse, 2010, p. 25). Though the mere recognition of inequities does not guarantee their dismantling (Martin, 2006), discrimination “cannot be fully understood without references to the discourses that give them meaning” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3). Do we risk continuing with business as usual, not hearing women’s voices (Marshall, 2007), or do we embrace an approach to leadership and social responsibility that is gender sensitive (Grosser, 2009)? By taking a feminist poststructural approach to providing insight into female CSR leaders’ reflections on their experiences and linking these experiences to dominant, established institutions, the male-dominated language that directs both the management and CSR arenas today may be called into question (Marshall, 2007).
Critical feminist theory shares two key objectives: “to reveal obvious and subtle gender inequalities … [and] to reduce or eradicate those inequalities” (Martin, 2003, p. 2). Only once these struggles are understood and acknowledged can we begin to counteract them. To this end, my theoretical underpinning of critical discourse analysis is outlined in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

As discussed in the previous chapter, the role of power and discrimination, due to gender differences in leadership processes and dynamics, remains largely unaddressed in the gender and CSR literature. I propose that using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Foucault, 1980, 1982) as a theoretical foundation will provide an opportunity for the marginalized voices of women in CSR leadership to be heard and understood. CDA focuses on issues of power and privilege on the (re)production of discourse, a notion that is central to the feminist poststructural paradigm that permeates this study. What sense do they make out of their experiences as minority leaders in CSR?

With this question in mind, I outline the theoretical framework of Foucauldian discourse and explain why its use of language and power is important to this study.

The Theoretical Positioning of Foucauldian Discourse

I chose Foucauldian poststructuralism (Foucault, 1972) because it provides us with a way of understanding that helps us rethink history and dominant ideas (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). It is also a suitable fit with my feminist poststructuralist lens because the focus is less on finding universal “truth” and more with the development of multiple “truths” represented by a wide variety of individuals within a social reality (Thomas & Davies, 2005). I believe that power relationships among individuals influence how we construct and reconstruct our worlds and that discourses therefore create temporary knowledge of the world. Given that institutionalized responsible corporate practices are both time and context dependent (Rivoli & Waddock, 2011), understanding the role of discourse and how women make critical sense of the discourse in guiding our thinking—our taken-for-granted assumptions about CSR and leadership that I
contend are gendered—is integral to this dissertation.

**Foucault’s Historical Conception of Discourse**

Foucault’s (1972) conception of discourse insists that history and context must be considered in explaining discursive processes. Foucauldian discourse analysis is concerned with distal context or history (Mills, 1993), where the distal context is understood to be the broader, macro-level social context (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). The focus of this type of analysis is on how the distal context “privileges some actors at the expense of others and how broad changes in discourse result in different constellations of advantage and disadvantage” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 25).

Foucault is concerned with understanding the historical conditions that motivate how we conceive present-day circumstances (Foucault, 1982). This approach is therefore concerned with the role of power to analyze the conditions under which a consensus of the “truth” has been achieved.

Foucauldian discourse considers power to reside in ongoing discursive practices that are reproduced through social interactions and power relations, becoming normalized over time (Bendl, 2008; Grady, 2007). Foucault sees discourse as not being stable over time, and not entirely within our control. In his archaeological analysis of discourse (e.g., *The Order of Things* [Foucault, 1966] and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* [Foucault, 1972]), Foucault charts certain discourses to show their constant state of change while tracing them back to the origins of key shifts in history. Discourse from this sense is “sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means that they have a profound influence on the way individuals think and act” (Mills, 1993, p. 55).

Foucault (1972) conceives history as an outcome of the past, a form of power that directs
perceptions of the past (Green & Troupe, 1989). This view of history is as much about society’s collective consciousness in creating categorical apparatus as it is about our knowledge of the past. In questioning the framework that creates history, Foucault favours the term *archaeology* over *history*, because the purpose of archaeology is to study discourse and the history of ideas (White, 1985). Archaeology examines discourses and common practices according to taken-for-granted assumptions, questioning their “evident arrangement” and looking for discontinuities (Foucault, 2002, p. 236). In this sense, each period in modern history has realized discourses that have resulted in certain types of knowledge being favoured (White, 1985) without us entirely *knowing* these discourses because they have been normalized (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982).

Behaviour and action are always mediated through discourses, or “practices of talking and writing,” which allow individuals to make sense of the world (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3; see also Foucault, 1966; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This sense often changes over time, as evident from one of this study’s respondents who acknowledges that, although she used to dress way more masculine earlier in her career, she now chooses to dress in a more feminine style even though she notices that when she does so, people look her up and down when she enters the room. In this way, discourses are evolutionary as identities are negotiated through ongoing interaction between individuals (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008).

Where traditional qualitative approaches most often assume a social world, discourse analysis attempts to explore how that world was created and what gives it meaning (Foucault, 1966; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Foucault’s (1979) conception of discourse helps begin to account for alternative voices where power is at play. Power relations and context in organizational theory can both “(re)produce inclusion and exclusion simultaneously” (Bendl, 2008, p. 51).
Consequently, discourses “are never ‘neutral’ or value free; they reflect prevailing ideologies, values, beliefs, and social practices that can serve a hegemonic function by promoting dominant ideas and practices as normal or natural, and the language used to describe them as a form of common sense” (Pratt & Nesbit, 2000, pg. 3). It is through this taken-for-grantedness that common practices are reproduced through social interactions and power relations are institutionalized over time. Thus, discourses can have profound implications toward understanding power, as when discursive practices become normalized, they become accepted ways of thinking. On one hand, power can be a positive or productive force for individuals who internalize the power effects of discourse. On the other hand, discourses can help us understand how discriminatory practices both develop and are resisted. For example, even though many women in the newspaper articles and interviews resist bearing the bulk of responsibility for domestic and child-rearing responsibilities, several respondents concede to adjusting their careers to accommodate family responsibilities. Power in this sense is a consensual, rather than coercive, process (Grandy, 2007; Ives, 2004).

**CDA & Feminism**

CDA is a widely used approach in feminist work (e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Mills, 1993, 2002; Prasad, 2005) as it provides insight into why, despite significant changes in the position of women over the last few decades, gender inequality and most forms of discursive gender domination persist today (van Dijk, 1998b). The word “critical” signals the need to unpack ideologies that become naturalized over time and become common beliefs, enabling us to “elucidate such naturalisations and make clear social determinations and effects of discourse which are characteristically opaque to participants” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 739). Certain discourses become common and acceptable, and adopting a critical perspective moves from
surface attentiveness toward understanding the larger social forces that dialectically shape and are shaped by society (Barley, 1983; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Fairclough, 1985). Whereas traditional analysis condenses meanings, discourse analysis aims to “identify multiple meanings assigned to texts” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 74) and “traces their implication” (p. 78) in context. For example, women in the workplace have historically been subjected to “double binds,” or “Catch-22s” or “self-defeating traps” (Kanter, 1977, p. 10) that constrain women’s power by setting them up for failure regardless of ability or effort. These no-win situations are a result of social interactions in which women have reported that their suggestions are ignored or ridiculed, or that they are excluded from meetings, lunches, or other micro-level interactions that occur in social contexts (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997). These mundane practices of organizations are simultaneously shaped by organizational and societal discourses while at the same time prescribing and perpetuating gendered roles and expectations for different individuals and groups (Prasad, 2005). In short, CDA moves beyond surface-level attentiveness and recognizes the role of deeper social forces that exist within the dialectical relationship with the discourse.

Applying Foucault’s (1979) approach to discourse problematizes our practices and challenges how we make sense of our experiences, and supports my goal to provide new insights into how women reflect on their experiences. For example, past and present discourse about women CSR leaders in Canada can influence how these females form their own identities. Some of these statements may promote the participation of women in leadership positions (e.g., Good for Business: A Plan to Promote the Participation of More Women on Canadian Boards [Government of Canada, 2014a] and “6 ways to get women into leadership positions and keep them there” [Stuckey, 2015]), while others challenge this knowledge based on the discourse of discrimination (e.g., “Grooming women for the top? Make sure you’ve got men at the table”
Some discourses remain dominant and carry discursive power, and some are marginalized over time even if competing or resisting discourses are present.

Discourses are a result of internal and external (meso- and macro-level) complex constraints that aid in the production and reception of discourse that work together to help form the identities of women in leadership positions (Mills, 2002). Identity in a discursive sense highlights the changing and context-sensitive nature of selves (Alvesson et al., 2008). According to Olsson and Walker (2004, p. 456), female identity is paradoxical and constantly negotiated in a corporate world where masculinity dominates: women’s identity work “involves shifting, relational and frequently contradictory discursive constructions.” By producing clear language and knowledge about women in leadership, dominant discourses produce a particular view of reality that becomes institutionalized and reified over time (Maguire & Hardy, 2006). However, even dominant discourses are never completely unified; they are “partial, often crosscut by inconsistencies and contradiction, and almost always contested to some degree” (Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 304).

Foucault’s (1979) notion of discourse provides an appropriate theoretical position through which to study women leaders in CSR because it not only acknowledges the significance of power and knowledge in identity construction, but also permits the analysis of both macro-level, textual, and structural levels of discourse and micro-level explanations of production and comprehension (Boyd-Barrett, 1994; van Dijk, 1988b). Foucault (1982) sees language as a form of power that creates discourses responsible for assumptions that legitimize and privilege some and marginalize others; power from this perspective is diffused, enacted, and embodied in the
discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2005; van Dijk, 1993). This approach examines the relationship between texts, power, and discourse and involves focusing attention on the form and structure of the written or spoken texts and associated meanings rather than on the people who were interviewed (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Prasad, 2005). Language use in speech and writing is therefore seen as a form of social practice. In turn, the relationship between social practice and a discursive event—framed by the “situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s)”—is dialectical: “The discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). In this way, discourses are understood as representations of difference; they are binary, rhetorical\(^3\) structures that engage thinking about fundamental questions and allow taken-for-granted principles and interpretations to be interrogated (Attridge, 1992; Butler, 1990). For example, the headline “New breed of women out looking for work” (Bell, 1980, p. T1) is an instance of newspaper media discourse around female CSR leaders in Canada. This headline can be deconstructed as a representation of difference (typically associated with inadequacy), which is socially accepted and internalized, forming the parameters within which women CSR leaders shape their own identities. Therefore, “discourses are sets of sanctioned statements which have some institutionalized force, which means they have a profound influence on the way that individuals think and act” (Helms Mills, 2003, p. 55).

Although Foucault’s (1980) work focuses on how power is exercised at the macro-level, it has been argued that it does not provide a mechanism to understand the role and voice of the actor and how individual decisions are made at the local level: “The problem is that Foucault leaves us with an inadequate framework to explore how agency is played out in particular contexts”

\(^3\)“Rhetoric” is defined as instrumental, persuasive discourse that is used to respond to, alter, or reinforce audience understandings including the larger community (Bitzer, 1968).
Shurmann (1985) notes that Foucauldian analysis narrowly construes agency by seeing it as embedded in discursive processes; it is concerned with the discourses that produced subjects rather than the individual sensemaking that makes some discursive practices meaningful and others not. Consequently, some feminists have criticized Foucault’s work for having an inadequate framework to account for agency and resistance (central notions in critical feminist research) in order to explore how it is played out in particular contexts (e.g., Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004; Devaux, 1996; Newton, 1998).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of my theoretical positioning. Critical discourse analysis provides the context for macro-level issues of power and privilege in the production and reproduction of discourse. However, on its own it does not provide a complete picture of how individuals make sense of and enact corporate social responsibility. That is why this study, placed at the intersection of feminist research, critical discourse analysis, and critical sensemaking, provides a unique contribution to the study of female CSR leaders. CSM allows for a focus on the voice of the agent—something that is missing from Foucauldian analysis yet important to the framework of this study—as I seek to bridge micro-level understandings of the sensemaker to the production, maintenance, and resistance of macro-level discourse. Understanding not only the dominant system, but also the experiences of the females themselves, will shed light on how female leaders make sense of and enact CSR.

Next, I turn to critical sensemaking, which is used as an analytical framework to conceptualize the multi-faceted essence of how and why some experiences become subjectively meaningful to women in CSR leadership positions.
CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: CRITICAL SENSEMAKING

This chapter outlines my reflexive status as well as the multi-dimensional, critical sensemaking (CSM) heuristic I use to guide my method toward contextualizing and capturing the gendered voices of Canadian female leaders as well as the gendering of CSR (the two central aims of this study). CSM provides a unique approach to problematizing the reality of female leaders’ experiences and may help explain how the discourse of CSR is evolving due to embedded institutional systems in which power privileges some actors and disadvantages others (Foucault, 1982; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Wodak, 2001).

Using the critical sensemaking heuristic supports the theoretical framework of Foucauldian discourse analysis because of its focus on understanding how power is individually, socially, and institutionally reflected in discourses (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000; Helms Mills et al., 2010). CSM provides a methodological approach that helps account for agency by focusing on social psychological influences, as individuals create meaning of discourse and make their own decisions accordingly. Rather than being products of discourse, individuals produce, maintain, or resist the discursive process (Helms Mills, 2003; Mills, 2008; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004).

Acknowledging that the social construction of organizations emerges through the discourse of its members (Mumby & Clair, 1997), CSM is a reflective process that considers context and explains dominant assumptions about organizational life as they are reproduced over time (Helms Mills, 2005). CSM is well suited to the study of gendering of women in leadership and discriminatory practices in organizations, providing a mechanism for investigating why some voices are “heard” over others and how this subsequently leads to the gendering of organizational cultures (Helms Mills et al., 2010).
I begin this chapter by describing the critical sensemaking framework. Following that, I describe my fluid and reflexive status that involves the sensemaking not only of the participants, but also of myself as a researcher.

**The Critical Sensemaking Framework**

Critical sensemaking (Mills, 1993; Helms Mills, 2005) is grounded in Weick’s sensemaking framework and addresses issues of power, context, and feminism through making connections between four elements: (1) *socio-psychological properties* (Weick, 1995, 2001) through which people make sense of their experiences; (2) *formative contexts* (Unger, 1987b), the order or structure of social life; (3) *organizational rules* (Mills, 1988), the broader societal framework through which people interact; and (4) *Foucauldian discursive practice* (Foucault, 1979), through which discursive practices can be revealed. Used in combination, these four components appreciate the role of power relations and inequalities while taking into account social context and the role of agency as individuals make sense of their experiences (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000; Helms Mills et al., 2010). However, I am mindful that these elements are not clear-cut or meant to be used separately; they are simultaneously mediating each other while an individual is making sense of her situation.

The CSM process involves paying attention to the discourses (e.g., elements of rules and formative contexts) that are involved in the identity work of the respondents (Thurlow, 2007). To discern which sensemaking properties are influencing meaning, I looked for discursive elements that were present or absent in the language particularly where gender and CSR are concerned. Language can filter meaning and influence individual sensemaking, sometimes legitimizing or disrupting existing gendered power relations in CSR leadership. At times, some properties play a
more significant role in sensemaking than others, whereas at other times, all properties appeared to be influencing the sensemaker simultaneously (Helms Mills et al., 2010). For example, when describing conflicts that they experienced, many women retrieved the context of their previous work experiences or government or organizational policies on gender equity to extract cues, perceive plausibility, and enact their individual identities in response to situations. Individual responses to shocks varied from more overt denouncements of sexist comments to more subtle forms of resistance like acknowledging being passed over for a promotion due to having children. Here we see formative context, organizational rules, and psychosocial properties (extracting cues, plausibility, and enactment) playing a more visible role in individual sensemaking. This flexible approach allows me to truly interrogate the data (Mills & Helms Mills, 2006) while also allowing me to stray from the prescribed method as necessary.

The ongoing process of sensemaking is disrupted by what Weick calls shocks, which serve as triggers that interrupt established ways of doing things, often introducing an emotional response (Helms Mills, 2003; Weick, 1995). According to Weick (2001, p. 462), shocks offer opportunities for resistance: “When people lose their ability to bound ongoing events, to keep pace with them by means of continuous updating of actions and interpretations, or to focus on interrupting conditions, they begin to lose their grasp.” For example, in several studies on women on boards, women noted that it was a shock for them to experience the power games taking place both inside and outside the boardroom (Huse et al., 2009; Neilson & Huse, 2010). In the interviews, such disruptions are common triggers for female CSR leaders (many of whom also serve on boards) who seek to re-establish themselves as they progress through their careers.
Socio-psychological Properties: Foregrounding the Individual Agent

As an “ethnomethodology of organizing” (Mills, 2008, p. 29), Weick’s (1995) sensemaking provides an alternative approach toward understanding the process individuals experience, while trying to make sense of a particular situation or issue (Helms Mills, Dye, & Mills, 2009; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld 2005). Sensemaking is both an individual and a social process that shapes interpretations and helps explain patterns of behaviour that occur within an organization (Weick, 1995); it therefore provides an appropriate framework through which to examine the contextual factors of structure and discourse while focusing on the perspective of the individual agent.

Sensemaking has seven psychosocial properties that help people “size up what they face” (Weick, 2001, p. 461). Each of these properties is integrally linked but separated to allow for analysis and explanation (O’Connell & Mills, 2003).

1. Social, social interaction with others;
2. Grounded in identity construction, one’s sense of self;
3. Retrospective, done after the fact;
4. Reliant on cues that are sensed;
5. Ongoing projects, a continuous process;
6. Based on plausibility, rather than accuracy, with one’s grasp of events; and
7. Enactive of the environment, creating action that is based on attempts to better understand the environment.

Recall that Foucault (1978, 1979) acknowledges present-day discourses as being shaped by the past on a continual basis through social practices. Correspondingly, sensemaking’s retrospective, social, and ongoing projects properties serve to enhance the Foucauldian theoretical perspective and are often present in the accounts of the women featured in this study. For example, one
respondent attributes her lack of career progression to taking time off to have children. Her
sensemaking is an ongoing, self-conscious, cognitive, and social process that helps structure the
unknown into a framework that helps us retrospectively “comprehend, understand, explain,
attribute, extrapolate, and predict” (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51).

The sensemaking framework also allows us to focus on elements beyond what is offered by
Foucauldian discourse. First, understanding how women CSR leaders form their personal
identities through *identity construction* is a key objective in this study and an important
component of sensemaking. Identity construction is described by Weick (2001, p. 461) as what
gives a person “that sense of who one is … (and) provide(s) a center from which judgments of
relevance and sense fan out.” Identity work captures “tactics and processes through which people
attempt to form, repair, maintain, or revise their identity” and describes “the varying ways in
which individuals seek to establish their identity positions” (McInnes & Corlett, 2012, p. 27).
Identity construction is a central component of the sensemaking process because it not only
influences how individuals construct their own identities, but also affects the interpretation of the
other six sensemaking properties. Often this process involves ongoing efforts individuals make
to maintain a positive self-identity in spite of resistance or tensions due to pressure or social
obligations (Watson, 2008).

As Marshall (1995, p. 21) asserts, “creating a viable and self-congruent identity are significant
challenges for many women” in leadership positions. For instance, most studies on successful
women leaders have indicated that their performance has to be better and more consistent than
the performance of men with comparable backgrounds (Conrad & Poole, 1998). Yet, if a woman
highlights her own credentials and accomplishments through self-promotion, she will likely be
penalized for violating female social gender prescriptions to be modest (Crawford & Unger, 2004; Rudman, 1998). In the interviews, many women indicated that they are well aware that the rules for being assertive in the workplace are different for women than they are for men. As one respondent puts it, she doesn’t want to be “pushed out” (due to her aggressiveness) and, as a result, she is “constantly checking (her)self.” The construction of personal identity is a central element of CSM because it provides a mechanism for understanding how participants are disciplined by discriminatory rules and practices. This research contributes by providing insights into identity construction when it comes to the internal processes of female CSR leaders’ “sensemaking at the intra-subjective, individual level, where individuals are struggling to diagnose, ‘What is going on here?’” (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002, p. 355).

*Salient cues* describe signals extracted from within the organizational environment, other similar organizations, or the larger, macro social context (Helms Mills et al., 2010). “Cues tie elements together cognitively” (Weick, 1995, p. 54), and the cues individuals or organizations pick up can indicate what is of relative importance within a broader system of understanding (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). In this study, the media plays a role in this process, as it maps representation and provides macro-level cues for a particular “terrain” based on an indefinite number of modes of representation (Fay, 1990). Many of the prevailing stereotypes of women (e.g., emotional, affectionate, nurturing, kind, empathetic, selfless, helpful, passive, and generally concerned for the welfare of others [Cupach & Canary, 1995; Eagly & Karau, 1991]) that were recurring themes in the newspaper articles in the last 40 years are also supported by the informants. As one respondent, Julia, observes, “My female bosses for the most part have been more emotional, more empathetic, like all the stereotypical women characteristics….” Valerie, on the other hand,
appreciates working with men who are “…certainly more direct and less emotion( al).”

Validations of appropriate behaviour of men and women in the workplace via both the media and individuals can unconsciously contribute to the enactment of gender stereotyping by reinforcing typical gender roles.

Whereas the other six properties of sensemaking influence an individual’s sensemaking, enactment is about taking probing actions that improve and define one’s sense of the situation (Weick, 1995, 2001). Helms Mills (2003, p. 198) explains that enactment in sensemaking “means that we create an activity that reflects our making sense of the experience within our environment.” Critical sensemaking draws on organizational rules theory (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) to help explain what activities of socialization occur to enact organizational rules that reinforce organizational culture and set limitations on the behaviour and sensemaking of individuals (Helms Mills, 2003). The importance of these constraints that mediate the social construction of beliefs and individual actions is salient to the enactment of discourse in this study. For example, one of the well-established informal rules for women in the workplace involves mentoring and advocating for women, but this involves doing so in a way that does not make men feel disadvantaged themselves. As Mary puts it:

> I think there needs to be mentorship and coaching women and differential investment in that. It’s hard because then my male colleagues would say, ‘well why is it that (females) would get that,’ but you know we need mentorship and coaching to be senior leaders.

Enactment becomes visible in Mary’s sensemaking process by “putting meaning into language and talking with other organizational members” (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009, p. 462). As she enacts her beliefs about mentoring women, she also makes sense of them. While sensemaking at the organizational level due to a company-wide mandate to accelerate the achievement of gender parity can happen in a collective fashion, individuals within organizations can enact sensemaking
in different and contradictory ways. What is plausible to Mary appears less plausible to some of her male colleagues, which may hinder the company’s progress with programs toward the advancement of women.

Finally, plausibility is about understanding a story and how events are woven together, often depending more on intuition and reasonable explanations rather than on an unbiased, scientific reality. If something is plausible, a particular meaning or explanation makes more sense than alternatives (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). Plausibility becomes particularly important when respondents describe how they made sense of a discriminatory experience at a particular moment in time (though other sensemaking elements, like social context and personal identity, may also influence how they retrospectively interpret the account). The notion of plausibility can shed light on why, on an ongoing basis, some discriminatory practices, like labelling (see Becker, 1966), become acceptable. For example, in the newspaper articles analyzed in this study, normative representations of women with power tend to situate women within the stereotypical categories of motherhood or fashion (see Phalen & Algan, 2001). These messages can be powerful as they create, maintain, and modify (Foldy, 2006)—as salient cues that are plausible—a female leader’s ongoing understanding of reality.

If something appears to be implausible to us, we are likely to reject it. Mills and Helms Mills (2004, p. 148) suggest that “plausibility may be a crucial socio-psychological aspect of resistance,” as resistance is more likely to result when situations move “beyond the point of plausibility.” For instance, when Julia attempts to make sense of an interaction in which her (male) counterpart makes an explicitly sexist comment to her, her internal dialogue in response is
“you asshole!” His comment goes beyond what is plausible to Julia, and her response suggests disbelief and anger (a “shock” in sensemaking).

Formative Context and Organizational Rules: Making Sense of the Environment

Although the sensemaking properties provide a useful lens through which to analyze agency, individual action does not occur in isolation (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). Helms Mills’ critical sensemaking (2003) reminds us we need to consider formative contexts, along with organizational rules, to link social values and individual action (see also Blackler, 1992). Unger (1987b) describes formative contexts as being widespread and deep-seated assumptions about everyday life at the local level that reproduce existing practices and become accepted social assumptions. The formative context is hard to challenge and identify in the midst of everyday social situations, and the CSM framework creates space for a discussion of how macro-level institutional arrangements affect extracted cues, plausibility, and enactment of organizational practices that create gendered organizations. Individuals privilege some knowledge while ignoring other through a process that helps them manage meaning; the result is the reproduction, creation, and maintenance of broader-level discourses. Formative contexts can influence how sense is made and how people act (Helms Mills et al., 2010), serving to filter and mediate interpretations without their even being aware of it (Ciborra & Lanzara, 1994). The link between the local site of sensemaking and the broader social context is important, as understanding micro-level actions in isolation “is frequently inadequate to understanding what is happening in the system, what its limitations are, or how to change it” (Weick, 2001, p. 447). For example, the 1986 Employment Equity Act of Canada brought a level of awareness to inequity, making discrimination more “visible” and therefore more easily destabilized (Unger, 2004).
Mills and Murgatroyd’s (1991) organizational rules contribute to the establishment of the context in which sensemaking happens, accounting for how discriminatory practices are reproduced at the meso-level. Helms Mills and Mills (2000, p. 59) define rules as written or unwritten “phenomena whose basic characteristic is that of generally constraining, guiding, and defining social action.” These rules serve as a type of organizational control through which legitimacy and resistance are exercised, and collectively constitute the culture of an organization, often implicitly co-ordinating members’ activities and becoming accepted modes of behaviour (Clegg, 1981; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). When organizational rules are followed, they are reinforced; organizational structures are a result of a series of decision rules that construct and reconstruct organizations (Acker, 1990). For example, even though the Alberta government sets rules for maternity and parental leave that specifies individuals are to have their same, or equivalent, job back when they return to work (Employment Standards Code, 1996), several women in this study identified concerns about taking the full leave due to perceived unwritten organizational rules that indicate negative impacts on their careers. The success of employment standards, serving as imposed institutional-level rules, can therefore be called into question when social expectations within organizational structures limit and constrain individual behaviour. Individual realities, as reflected in the discourses, indicate that a different sense is made (Hartt et al., 2012). Hence, organizational rules help begin to explain how organizational expectations are socially constructed and, often unintentionally, lead to discriminatory practices (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000).

Organizational rules, within the critical sensemaking framework, also incorporate the concept of meta-rules to sensemaking practices (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Meta-rules are “broad in scope and represent points of intersection between a number of formative contexts” (Thurlow & Helms
Mills, 2009, p. 464) and are represented in this study by industry or company-specific employment equity initiatives. For example, the dominant business case discourse for gender equity, a meta-rule about how organizations should operate, is endorsed at multiple levels: the macro-level by the Canadian government (e.g., 1986 Employment Equity Act and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2015) and the newspaper media; the meso-level through company websites that specify a commitment to gender equity; and the micro-level when it is enacted by individuals, as shown by one informant who voices frustration over losing exceptional females who were assets to the organization due to a lack of advancement opportunities within her organization. Therefore, while the business case discourse is both popular and appealing, it also arguably reproduces existing business practices and social relations that privilege men (Bendl, 2008; Grandy, 2007; Marshall, 2007, 2011). In this way, rules paradoxically provide a feeling of cohesion for individuals within an organization while imposing a sense of repression where individuals are disciplined and constrained from thinking otherwise, “Simultaneously serv(ing) to contain differences of opinion, beliefs, and values while resulting in practices that give the appearance of unity of purpose” (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000, p. 58).

While rules are forces that control and define actions within organizations, these rules fail to adequately account for the role of agency, as organizational members both create and are shaped by rules (Helms Mills, 2003). This is why Weick’s (1995) sensemaking with its focus on the individual, as discussed earlier, complements organizational rules within the critical sensemaking framework. For Foucault (1988), the individual is disciplined within a spectrum of complex power relations. I now discuss the final element of CSM, Foucauldian discursive practice, that helps account for these power relations.
Discursive Practice: Examining Power Relations

In addition to being the theoretical foundation for this research, Foucauldian discursive practice (Foucault, 1979) is an element of the critical sensemaking framework that “account(s) for the possibilities of sensemaking, plausibility, and identity due to their embedment in powerful discourses” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190). The discourses around employment equity, for example, are much more subtle than they were 40 years ago (as we will see in Chapter 6). In this study, the question of how some talk and language becomes privileged over others can be reflected in the dominant and alternative narratives.

Although CSM’s (Helms Mills et al., 2010) sensemaking provides us with a useful lens to analyze agency through sensemaking (Weick, 1995), organizational rules that guide and constrain social action (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991), and formative context by connecting the local site of sensemaking to the macro-level context as individuals extract, interpret, or enact their environment (Helms Mills, 2003), I feel another filter is needed to identify language that reflects power and privilege. I therefore use critical discourse analysis, in addition to CSM, to identify the discursive effects of gendered language in the news articles and the interviews.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In addition to using critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a theoretical foundation, I apply CSM’s discursive practice, “to account for the possibilities of sensemaking, plausibility, and identity due to their embedment in powerful discourses” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190). This involves using CDA as a methodology through which to filter the language that reflects power and privilege. CDA is an appropriate analytic to closely examine the discourses that provide an individual within the organization a way to receive, organize, and create meaning in a socially
constructed world (Boje, 2008; Foucault, 1978; Helms Mills et al., 2010). It allows me to explore how gendered understandings came to be and investigate how individual female CSR leaders are affected by them.

Concerned with text, discourse, and context, the study of discourse permits an examination of the normalized “truths” and subjective meaning embedded within language that is based on social interaction (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Prasad, 2005). However, there are a spectrum of social realities that discourse can represent. Discourses can be roughly characterized into either social constructivist accounts (McHoul & Grace, 2007; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or Foucauldian discourse (Foucault, 1982; Potter, 1996). Even though both perspectives share some social constructionist ideas, for example, seeing phenomena as being given coherence and meaning by discourses (Berti, 2017), social constructionists are concerned with what people do with discourses and what realities they represent (Potter, 1996). I chose Foucault’s (1972) approach to CDA due to his insistence that discourse shapes reality; they are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49) that can be traced to “the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time” (pp. 32-33). Thus, everything we are familiar with in our world is formed and reformed through discourses. Likewise, van Dijk’s news as discourse framework, used in the first phase of this study to analyze historical newspaper articles, is consistent with Foucault’s principles of CDA by emphasizing that various levels of texts must be understood within the context of social relationships and organizational power. In short, this critical lens allows me to question historical truths by focusing on layers of suppressed and unconscious knowledge (Fairclough, 1995, 2005; McHoul & Grace, 1997; Parker, 1992).
CDA “should describe and explain how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimated by the talk and text of dominant groups and institutions” (van Dijk, 1996, p. 84). Language therefore constructs and produces a social world that is maintained or constrained by “text, discourse, and context” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 6). As a result, CDA highlights reflexivity in interpreting the stories of informants, capturing both what is said and what is not said in order to identify the power relations at work. These underlying assumptions in the discourse may not be obvious initially, but themes emerge as individuals make sense of their experiences and reconstitute meaning: “Discourse analysis does not simply comprise a set of techniques for conducting structured, qualitative investigations of texts; it also involves a set of assumptions concerning the constructing effects of language” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 5). This is why CDA can offer insight into the power dynamics and knowledge that surround discursive processes, allowing for this study’s investigation into how individuals leading CSR create meaning around experiences by considering how discriminatory practices have emerged over time.

The critical discourse methodology is uniquely suited to this study due to its poststructural feminist paradigmatic positioning and focus on the relationship between discourse and power. From a feminist perspective, discourses result in the enactment of gender that becomes organizational rules or expectations (Sawicki, 1996; Weedon, 1993). An analysis of formative contexts in critical sensemaking creates space for a discussion around how the macro- and meso-level contexts provide cues that are interpreted and, based on plausibility, enacted by individuals (Helms Mills, 2003). This has implications for gender identities; discourses enact gender and become organizational rules, and these ideas are empowered and accepted as knowledge (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). Discourse analysis allows me to focus on identifying hegemonic masculine discourses to understand taken-for-granted assumptions that have constructed the identities of
women CSR leaders (Foucault, 1979; Phillips & Hardy, 2002) that perpetuate the domination of masculinity over femininity at the leadership level in business (Connell, 1987). For example, leadership is typically associated with masculine approaches to management that are emphasized in masculine gender stereotypes, including assertive, independent, competitive, confident, analytical, tough, and aggressive (Morgan, 2006; Wood, 1999). These stereotypes are perpetuated in the media and provide cues that affect individual understandings about organizational rules for appropriate behaviour, as illustrated by Gwen, a respondent in this study:

"You know women can be easily painted with a very quick brush stroke of, oh, she’s a bitch or a queen bee or whatever versus a man would never be painted with that same brush stroke. We see it in our media. We see it how you paint a Redford, Premier Notley, a Christy Clark versus the other Premiers in the country that are male. How we dress, who we’re married to, that’s never brought up in editorial about male politicians. So I think our dialogue has to change, the way we discuss gender has to change and, and frankly I’ll get passionate about this but all diversity and inclusion has to change. We definitely have biases and they’re brought into the work place … I think for sure there’s what I call unspoken biases that people do not even know exist."

Gwen draws on cues in the macro-level context by noting that the media portrays female leaders in stereotypical ways, and her text reflects her subjective reality. Digging deeper, we see that she makes sense of these stereotypes by engaging in a form of resistance by acknowledging these “unspoken biases” and by doing so destabilizes taken-for-granted assumptions and enacts change.

In summary, CDA provides context for macro-level issues of power, but on its own does not allow for an account of individual understandings or enactments of their gendered experiences in the workplace. Hence, using CDA along with the methodological framework of CSM allows me to show the connection between dominant assumptions, reflected in the rules and structures, and the local-level discourses that reflect individual processes of sensemaking.
Why a Gender-Sensitive, Critical Sensemaking Approach to CSR Is Needed

Using CSM to study CSR in feminist scholarship helps illuminate and advance a research agenda that considers agency and highlights issues of resistance to power, a perspective that represents a relatively new research direction in CSR (Grosser et al., 2017). To my knowledge, there is no work examining CSR at the leadership level from a feminist, critical sensemaking perspective.

Studying CSR through the lens of CSM, which extends sensemaking by accounting for power, knowledge, and structure (Helms Mills et al., 2010), will better explain patterns of behaviour that occur. In terms of leadership, sensemaking is best described as “the management of meaning” (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). In this way, the concept of sensemaking is at the core of understanding what motivates individuals in organizations to support CSR (Fisscher, Nijhof, & Steensma, 2003; Nijhof & Jeurissen, 2006). CSR behaviour can be understood, through sensemaking, as the process that individuals adopt to manage relationships with stakeholders based on their perception of the internal, organizational world and the external world (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). CSR should be a participative process that includes employees (and sometimes other stakeholders) first and foremost: “To be applicable, corporate responsibility should be understood as a process through which individuals’ moral values and concerns are articulated” (Maclagan, 1999, p. 43). The outcome for sensemaking can be a springboard for action, as meaning construction can eventually shift to persuasion and influence (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

Using CSM allows for the exploration of how CSR processes and related gendered understandings of CSR occur within the organization. Individuals actively define their own reality through communicating with others. The result is that organizational members have shared beliefs and actions that are collectively created, a notion that is supported by GOS
literature that sees organizations as being formally or informally socially constructed and constrained. However, gender scholars also consider that these systems were created by and for men (Meyerson & Kolb, 2000), which has implications when it comes to understanding CSR beyond Weick’s theory. With more adaptive and context-related approaches becoming more prominent in CSR research (Basu & Palazzo, 2008; Godfrey & Hatch, 2007; Matten et al., 2003; Porter & Kramer, 2006), CSM provides an appropriate theoretical approach to understand how women leaders make sense of company-specific approaches of CSR (Cramer, Jonker, & van der Heijden, 2004; Fisscher et al., 2003; Nijhof & Jeurissen, 2006; van der Heijden, Driessen, & Cramer, 2010).

Will the current paradigms for CSR leadership be replicated, given that the current leadership group is relatively homogeneous (Marshall, 2007)? I contend that challenging gendered assumptions based on masculinist notions at the leadership level by examining contradictions reflected in the language of participants could help ensure that the answer to this question is no.

**Reflexivity: My Own Self-Reflection**

Through critical self-reflection about one’s own thoughts, feelings, values, biases, experiences, and theoretical models, the researcher can reveal hidden privilege, identify power differentials that limit participant involvement, illuminate ethical concerns, heighten understanding and create more egalitarian relationships. (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2012, p. 177)

As Foucault (1982) reminds us, we must continuously exercise self-reflexivity by reflecting on our own thought, knowledge, action, and practices to be aware of power and rules that we may sometimes inadvertently apply in our way of knowing. My explicitly reflexive approach is therefore a vital and pervasive foundation for this study’s use of the critical sensemaking framework. Reflexivity is also a central element of feminist research methodologies, which
requires an ability to reflect about oneself and others toward uncovering different types of knowledge (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

As we make sense of our experiences, the language we choose reflects our viewpoints and socio-cultural perspective. Therefore, reality is a result of personal interpretations based on experiences, and shared discourses are constructed in the process. Social discourses are dialogic; both explicit and implicit relationships between people are made evident in their discourse. As Bakhtin (1994, p. 276) notes, “The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.” I therefore strive to be acutely aware that my own lens is a perspective that will result in my seeing things in a particular way (Nietzsche, 1967).

To engage in critical appraisal of my own practice, I am mindful of Hardy’s (2001) recommendations to enhance reflexivity: “(1) explicitly acknowledging that language constructs, rather than simply reveals, reality; (2) grounding research in historical processes; (3) allowing different voices to pervade the text; (4) acknowledging that not all possible voices are expressed, nor are the voices that are present expressed in equal terms; (5) surfacing multiple meanings; and (6) avoiding rhetoric and convention” (p. 26). Reflecting in this way allows me to understand how the research process itself shapes its outcomes (Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001). To protect the integrity of my research process, my reflexivity (applying a critical perspective to my own knowledge claims) involves having my advisers monitor my progress as a researcher, acting as
sounding boards, who challenge ideas and provide encouragement (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012).

Following Bakhtin (1994, p. 276), my role as researcher is that of an “active participant.” My subjectivities are acknowledged during data collection, as interviewees’ responses are seen to be co-produced by both parties (Rapley, 2001). Gubrium and Holstein (1997, p. 117) describe the “active interview” approach as follows:

Construed as active, the subject behind the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details. The respondent can hardly “spoil” what he or she is, in effect, subjectively creating.

This work therefore represents not only the sensemaking of female leaders, but also my own sensemaking as a researcher as I reflexively seek to understand the perspectives of the participants. Though my goal is to give voice to the individuals being interviewed, I also recognize that my voice is explicitly present in this study. My adoption of a first-person writing style is an overt reminder of the presence of my experiences and perspectives in the development of this work. Therefore, this reflexive process is expected to affect my own sensemaking, how I retrospectively make sense of my experiences, and how I see the world today.

I must admit that, even at the early stages of writing my research proposal, this study “shocked” my sensemaking process, awakening within me a higher level of sensitivity to discriminatory practices. I have become increasingly aware of examples of the lack of women leaders in the management and board levels and the voices I do not hear, including in my own workplace (with only two of 12 public members on the board being female). This heightened awareness has resulted in multiple shocks that have fuelled my drive to do research that is part of my personal
identity and challenge the status quo toward, in some small way, affecting change. In each interview, salient cues and social context are ignited by ongoing retrospection of my own experiences to enact plausibility and potentially have an impact on my personal identity. Data analysis from this perspective is essentially a sensemaking exercise during which judgment is inevitable (Pawson, 2001). (Italicized words represent Weick’s [1995, 2001] seven properties of sensemaking.)

Finally, I acknowledge that, as a researcher using discourse to analyze a topic, I am not only studying the discourse, but also engaging in a new discourse and producing new texts. This approach is consistent with my poststructural epistemological understanding, which recognizes that biases are always present in the construction of reality (Boje et al., 2004). As noted by Mezirow (1990, p. 1), “Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem-solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built.” To protect the integrity of this study and to be consistent with my reflexive, poststructuralist approach, I continually and critically reflect on my own narratives as I interpret the stories of the informants. For example, during the research process, I wondered whether a different social dynamic would have been generated if I were a male researcher or if I did not have the same life and management experiences. To honour these women’s stories, I included many direct quotations rather than paraphrased text to ensure the accuracy of what was being said.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the value of critical sensemaking lies in its ability to consider various multi-level elements that are simultaneously influencing a person as she is making sense of a situation. I use
CSM as an analytical framework to address the discursive formation and practices of women CSR leaders. CSM acts as a method of deconstruction which allow me to focus “on issues of power, knowledge, structure, and past relationships” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 188) by taking into account not only my own sense of what is being observed as a researcher, but also the enactment of discourse by individuals who are active agents in their own sensemaking processes. Within the CSM heuristic, Foucauldian discursive practice is used to identify language gathered that is most relevant to my study. My reflexive status allows me to bring missing voices and perspectives to the feminist and CSR conversation (see Grosser et al., 2017; Grosser & Moon, 2017).

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological approaches that informed my research process (Chapter 5) and subsequent analysis of findings (chapters 6 and 7). In the next chapter, I outline the specific details of my two-phase research process.
CHAPTER 5. RESEARCH PROCESS

The structure for conducting this research builds on the literature review and theoretical and methodological underpinnings by looking at CSR in a historically conscious way (Suddaby, 2013). This approach allows for an examination of the legacy of female CSR leaders toward understanding contemporary challenges. Because my aim is to investigate both the gendering of CSR discourse and the gendering of women in leadership positions as they make sense of their identities, I employ a two-phase approach.

First, using CSM, I conduct a historical overview of the discursive construction of women CSR leaders as framed by “facts” reported by select Canadian newspaper print media. I chose to examine news articles in phase one of my research, not only because the mass media plays a pivotal role in influencing expectations around appropriate behaviour in business (Koller, 2004), but also because the media has been criticized for distorting reality by under-representing women and portraying men and women in stereotypical ways (Basow, 1992; Durham & Kellner, 2006). According to van Dijk (1988a, p. 248), “Unless readers have different knowledge and beliefs, they will generally adopt these subjective media definitions about what is important information.…” The media affects people’s lives by shaping their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs, and affects practices by invisibly transferring the dominant hegemonic ideology (Marvin et al., 2010; McLuhan, 1964). Language is the instrument through which the dominant, socially constructed ideology is transmitted, enacted, and reproduced; by studying discourse strategies, we can gain insight into the ideologies and social meanings expressed in the discourse (Foucault, 1972). Adopting a discursive approach to analyze texts and subtexts from media articles provides an opportunity to uncover whether and how the media, as a dominant institution in our society, as well as members of more powerful groups and institutions (e.g., business executives), help
sustain the consent of ideologies that perpetuate gender stereotypes of women in leadership positions. My examination of gender inequity therefore extends beyond organizations, acknowledging the role that the media plays in both shaping and potentially bringing about change within organizations.

The second phase of this study involves collecting narratives through a series of open-ended questions with a select sample of Canadian female CSR leaders in the private sector. I have identified a category of individuals—female senior CSR leaders—whom I perceive to have most likely experienced exclusion. This observation is based on my growing awareness of the discourses that prevent women from attaining senior leadership roles (due to recent media attention and my own academic interest) as well as my personal experiences as a part of this broadly defined community. Analyzing the interview narratives means connecting micro- and meso-level understandings to the macro-level context presented in the first phase of this study as well as the literature review. The theoretical framework of CSM (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010) is used to give these women a voice in the CSR discourse and shed light on structures that continue to result in the gendering of female leaders in Canadian business.

Deconstructing the texts while acknowledging silences allows me to bring to the surface hidden discourses and examine the enactment of power and influence as women in leadership positions form personal identities and make sense of their experiences. As Phillips and Hardy (2002) note, focusing on the discourse of individuals can help identify specific processes that can lead to institutional change. Even relatively powerless actors have been found to influence the field by framing arguments in ways that entrench new practices within organizational texts.
In this chapter, I begin by discussing the first phase of my research and the process I use for thematic analysis, toward understanding how female CSR leaders have been framed by the Canadian newspaper print media in the last 40 years. These articles provide context at the macro-level for the subsequent sensemaking examined in the interview analysis. I include a conceptual framework to illustrate my use of the two approaches in combination. Next, I discuss phase two of my research, which comprises an outline of practical considerations (access, sample, and interview process), as well as the CSM-inspired framework I used for analysis.

**Phase One: Thematic Analysis Using Critical Sensemaking (& News as Discourse)**

The thematic analysis in phase one examines how different meanings have been framed by the media and how both the media and the individuals featured in the articles appear to make sense of their environments. To identify meanings that inform CSM’s formative contexts, in addition to CSM, my analysis of a selection of newspaper articles is guided by van Dijk’s (1988a, 1988b) news as discourse framework. News as discourse allows for a systematic approach to the textual and contextual study of media text while considering power and social context at different levels of analysis. Therefore, using CSM and news as discourse in combination allows me to apply an inductive approach to explore macro- and micro-level processes to identify underlying meanings that inform them and investigate how a gendered discourse around the arrangement of women in leadership and the CSR field has been established and perpetuated (see Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Calás & Smircich, 2006; van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b). The goal here is to study written and spoken texts while considering the social context, the participants, and the “production and reception processes” (van Dijk, 1988a, p. 353). By examining the language produced by the press, I extend gender and inclusion research by acknowledging and examining the barriers that lie outside the scope of organizations toward furthering our understanding of the
formative context, which has “important implications for gender integration within these organizations” (Joshi et al., 2015, p. 1471).

I view CSR discourse as being dynamic and contextual in its meaning and uses (Carroll, 2008; Gond & Moon, 2011; Herjig & Moon, 2013); CSR practices are based on developments in business and society relations as well as the corporate, institutional, social, and ethical contexts (Moon, 2002; Gond & Moon, 2011). I seek to disturb the assumed naturalness of female leaders in the CSR field by questioning how they have been framed historically due to my belief that current perceptions are a result of an active, fluid process of interpreting and reinterpreting different accounts over time. This process, according to Foucault (1980, 1982), is disciplinary in nature, providing the boundaries or “the ‘frames’ with which people make sense of particular issues and give sense to them” (Vaara & Tienari, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, social realities around CSR and gender cannot be understood in isolation from their context; discourses set boundaries on how individuals and companies contextually construct and engage in CSR (see Phillips & Hardy, 2002). By drawing on the historical discourses of newspaper articles, I show the different realities produced by the texts that shape readers’ understandings and practices. For example, the newspaper media has consistently (re)produced the notion of masculinity being the norm in business and CSR leadership by primarily quoting male leaders as CSR experts. Such articles present cues that individuals draw on to understand their formative context, and many female leaders acknowledge feeling isolated in a male-dominated workplace environment. In this way, past discourses help reveal the socially constructed discriminatory practices embedded within CSR that have become institutionalized and set boundaries (in the form of rules or expectations) around how female CSR leaders make sense of their social realities (e.g., Helms Mills et al., 2010; Waddock & Graves, 1997; Weaver et al., 1999; Wood, 2010).
Recall that in Chapter 1, the first objective of this research focuses on providing a historical overview of the discursive construction of female CSR leaders in Canada:

(RO1) To explore whether and how the discursive construction of CSR is gendered through CSM and CDA. How has the newspaper media discursively framed women in CSR leadership in the last 40 years? How were today’s taken-for-granted perceptions created and how are they maintained?

With this objective in mind, I critically explore how the discourse of women in leadership positions in Canada has been shaped by the past using the CSM heuristic. I undertake a discursive review of 168 Canadian news media articles relevant to women, leadership, and corporate social responsibility. For this investigation, I use thematic analysis, which is similar to content analysis in that it attaches a code to a given text, but thematic analysis pays greater attention to the context of the material analyzed (Joffe & Yardley, 2004; see also van der Heijden et al., 2010). Thematic analysis is useful in capturing complexities of meaning within a data set by allowing a researcher to preserve the larger context of the dialogue (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Therefore, this approach looks not only for themes that manifest in the content of the data, but also for meaning at the latent level. Latent meaning requires interpretation based on either deductive coding (existing ideas the researcher brings to the data) or inductive coding (from the raw information itself). The nuances of high-frequency themes are then explored in depth. This approach is fitting for research that examines the existence of social representations within particular groups (Joffe & Yardley, 2004), and allows me to critically read between the

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4 Content analysis involves “establish[ing] a set of categories then count[ing] the number of instances that fall into each category” (Silverman, 2001, p. 12).
lines to uncover emergent discourses of silences, absences, or exclusions that provide clues to power relations and inequities in the workplace.

Because my goal is to shed light on the gendering of CSR, as well as the gendering of women leaders in business more broadly, I selected a variety of relevant articles that shed light on the greater societal and political context. I identify key time frames that influence how things like rules and subjectivities were viewed at a particular point in time. In determining which time frames would be used, although several methods have been suggested (see Mills, 1994, 1995, 1996; Mills & Ryan, 2001), the decision was made based on two main considerations. The first revolves around an effort to capture critical events based on several significant initiatives in Canada to address barriers for women in the workplace. The first time frame (1976–1986) captures the publication of the Abella Commission Report in 1984 and the changing discourse prior to and including the establishment of the 1986 Employment Equity Act of Canada. The second time frame (1987–2000) is when the 1986 Employment Equity Act becomes more established and we see CSR beginning to take hold in mainstream news discourse. The dismantling of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women by the federal government occurs in 1996. In the third time frame (2001–2016), CSR is becoming well established within the business community and gender equity becomes a consideration within CSR (Grosser et al., 2017), with the discourse being influenced by the establishment of several advocacy organizations (e.g., International Standards Organization 26000, n.d.; the Women’s Empowerment Principles, n.d.; Catalyst, n.d.). The third time frame also captures discourse around the closure of most of the Status of Women in Canada offices in 2006 and, more recently, the Ontario Securities Commission’s (2014) guidelines encouraging listed companies to report female representation in leadership (see Chapter 2). These critical events shocked decision
makers within Canadian businesses to re-evaluate their existing policies, and individuals affected struggled to make sense of their situation (see Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995).

The second reason for choosing these time frames is a more practical consideration. The year 1976 was used as a starting point because news articles are readily accessible on the databases starting around this time. This ensured that I had a considerable amount of data from a wide enough selection of appropriate articles for the periods chosen. (See Appendix C for a listing of the 168 newspaper articles selected.)

Using ProQuest’s Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database, I looked for Canadian news publications using the search option “newspapers” from the past 40 years to find relevant articles using appropriate search words. Most articles pulled were from The Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star because of their national scope and wide circulation (though several local newspaper articles were included in the analysis as well). Using the search terms “women,” “leadership,” “corporate social responsibility,” “social responsibility,” and “business,” together and in different combinations, I skimmed approximately 500 news articles. (Columns/editorials, letters to the editor, etc., were excluded because I consider them to be less credible news sources.) I then selected 50–60 articles for each time period until I felt that theoretical saturation was reached. Each article was then reviewed carefully several times to identify obvious and more subtle themes as I applied Helms Mills’ (2003) CSM framework and components of van Dijk’s (1988b) news as discourse as a framework for CDA. My analytic procedure was iterative, as I went back and forth between the CSM and CDA approaches as themes became apparent in the

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5 Even though the Toronto Star is not technically a national newspaper, it has continued to enjoy one of the widest circulations in Canada in the last 40 years.
news articles. This process is consistent with Weick’s (1995) approach to sensemaking, which he sees as an ambiguous, ongoing process that does not happen in a particular sequence.

Framework for Analysis of the News Articles: Combining CSM & News as Discourse

Together, CSM (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and the use of news as discourse (van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b), permit an inductive approach to analyzing news at the local level while searching for global meanings. CSM (Helms Mills et al., 2010) is the foundation of my analysis of the newspaper articles as it shows “layers of rules” (Helms Mills, 2005, p. 245) that establish a structure within which individuals make sense of situations. The Foucauldian discursive practice element of CSM is used in combination with van Dijk’s (1988a, 1988b) news as discourse approach to news production and reception. Spotlighting the role of language, Foucauldian discursive practice and news as discourse emphasize that texts must be understood within the context of organizational power. Language in this sense is more than just a mode of communication; it is the process through which taken-for-granted views and practices that privilege males can shape individual understandings and be reified over time (Foucault, 1990, 1991; Hardy et al., 2000; Prasad & Mills, 1997). Both Foucauldian discursive practice and news as discourse are methods within the broader approach of critical discourse that supported my reflexively and encouraged me to understand the voice of the agent in the midst of deep-seated assumptions about everyday social situations (formative context) as well as phenomena that appear to be constraining and guiding social actions (organizational rules) (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004).

Organizational rules guide behaviour by limiting sensemaking within a social reality, revealing the power effects of the discourse (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). When the mass media
communicates these organizational rules, they provide cues that establish and enact what can be in organizations. This then constrains individual sensemakers’ social reality as they engage in a process that establishes, enforces, or enacts the rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). My analysis involved first looking for cues in the articles that indicate the presence of informal and formal rules and then delving deeper into the rules to investigate how they impose order on organizational and individual practices. I identified cues by discursively attending not only to obvious gender subtexts, but also to the more latent indications of gender distinctions whereby “so-called neutral organizational texts are not neutral at all” (Kelan, 2008, p. 430). This process allowed me to identify a number of powerful informal rules reflected in the newspaper media since the 1970s that have continued to reinforce masculine notions of leadership (e.g., Rule #1: “Businessman” = Leader).

Because the purpose of discourse analysis is to identify multiple meanings within texts, appreciating the “contextual and interpretive sensitivities [where] the benefits of discourse analysis lie” is essential (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 75). My goal is to examine often overlooked meanings in texts; texts are seen to constitute reality (rather than simply reflect it) (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Texts address issues that are truth-related, such as (1) how particular biases push reality constructions in distinct directions; (2) which particular aspects of reality, if any, are subject to conflicting interpretations (or, in the absence of conflict, which are generally agreed upon); and (3) where the sources of interpretive divergence are located (e.g., in collective interests, in documentary conventions, or in the setting in which documents are produced) (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, the texts help inform this study by representing the sensemaking of the media as well as the individuals cited in the articles. Collectively, these texts are frames, which work as “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals to provide world views, or
“to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large” 
(Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986, p. 464). The term “text” from this perspective includes not only written words and text, but also other social and symbolic phenomena through which meaning is created (Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 1997; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

Drawing from Van Dijk’s news as discourse framework, I consider macro-level processes (semantic macrostructures and formal superstructures) as well as the micro-level process of rhetorical structures. Conducting my analysis via this framework allows me to inquire into abstract formal structures of news reports and into their subtle underlying meanings in a way that is usually ignored in textual analysis. Specifically, *semantic macrostructures* describe what the article is about (the gist) from a global level and accounts for the overall forms of discourses, including things like headlines in the news or leads (openings). These macrostructures are subjective and represent the construction (and sensemaking) of the writer and signal the essence of the article to the reader who may or may not pick up on these cues (van Dijk, 1985, 1988a). Headlines can create meaning that biases readers toward interpretations of a story: “News reporting not only provides information for readers to interpret but often comes prepackaged with that interpretation as well” (Teo, 2000, p. 14). News headlines are crafted in a way that uses the fewest words to get the maximum attention from readers, and can therefore provide a critical researcher with insight into the newspaper’s ideologies and values through an examination of the word and syntax choices made or the pictures used (Teo, 2000).

*Formal superstructures (schemata)* consider the form of the text and how the story is organized and ordered. News discourse tends to follow conventional schema (van Dijk, 1985) and is traditionally organized in order of importance, often referred to as the “inverted pyramid,” which
cues readers' sensemaking of the article (Teo, 2000). Articles are therefore organized by schemas, and conventionally have categories including the headline, lead, body (e.g., main event, background, context, history, comments) with the most prominent schematic categories appearing early (van Dijk, 1988a). As a result, many of the illustrative examples in my analysis of the newspaper articles are derived from the headlines or the first few lines of an article where the most important schemas are typically located.

Finally, rhetorical structures deal with those properties of discourse that make the language use and the communication more persuasive (e.g., using exaggerations or understatements, emphasizing contrast, or using rhetoric borrowed from the military) (van Dijk, 1988a). For example, an article discussing the progress of women in the workplace notes that “women may still need armour and swords to make their way in organizations” (MacKay, 1978, p. B1). Even though this article at first glance appears to be sympathetic toward women’s rights, an examination of the subtler gender subtext reveals an aggressive undertone and the emphasis of a male-dominated metaphor. By focusing not on the news structures themselves (though attention was paid to them), but on understanding their specific functions, “the expression of underlying knowledge, beliefs, attitudes or ideologies as a result of specific constraints of newsmaking” can be made visible (van Dijk, 1988a, p. 179).

My use of CSM’s (Helms Mills et al., 2010) Foucauldian discursive practice and van Dijk’s (1988a, 1988b) news as discourse in combination, within the CSM framework, is represented in Figure 5.1. To illustrate, the 1978 newspaper headline “Bias, Own attitudes, Limit Women’s Promotions” (MacKay, 1978, p. B1) illustrates a semantic microstructure-level schema (van Dijk 1988a) that cues a discursive practice within CSM that is disciplinary by placing the onus on
women themselves to achieve equity. Reading further, the rhetorical structures in the article suggests that “equal opportunity is about catch up” and “boosting” the self-confidence of women (B1), a salient cue (socio-psychological property) that represents an organizational rule within the social context that is enacted by the individuals cited in the article. Thus, this article fails to question the status quo and contributes to a formative context that maintains existing power structures and organizational rules. (Note: the CSM framework is discussed in more detail in the next section.)

Figure 5.1. CSM’s Discursive Practice (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and News as Discourse Framework (van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b)
My approach to analysis continues in phase two of this study where the texts produced by the in-depth interviews are linked to many of the recurring themes identified in the analysis of the newspaper articles in phase one.

**Phase Two: In-Depth Interviews**

Phase two of this research builds on the results of the media analysis and involves collecting stories and narratives through a series of open-ended questions with female CSR leaders situated in Alberta. My goal here is to use CSM to “dig deeper” into the meaning of the texts (see Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) and bring to the surface patterns of meanings that are created by the actors themselves (Weick, 1995).

My data collection is focused on collecting participant accounts of discursive processes they have experienced in order to investigate how the gendering of leadership in the CSR field came to be. The corresponding research objectives associated with the interviews of the female leaders are:

- **(RO2)** To analyze what structural (e.g., macro-level formative context and meso-level organizational rules) and psychosocial (e.g., micro-level sensemaking) discourses influence individual sensemaking of gender and CSR. *How do these discourses come to be, how are they maintained, and how are they subject to change? What historical, organizational, and individual interactions are at play, and how do they contribute to the exclusion of women within this field?*

- **(RO3)** To understand the relationship between CSR discourse and the identities of gendered
women in leadership positions. How do these women relate to, incorporate, or resist conceptions of gender into their identities?

Toward achieving these objectives, my goal was to interview seven to 10 women in private organizations in Canada who have held CSR leadership positions for at least one year to ensure they had the experience to produce a rich narrative. I define a “female leader” as someone who has administrative authority and one or more direct reports. Position titles used in this study include CEO, vice-president, director, and leader. Realizing that there are a limited number of qualified CSR leaders within private organizations who may be hard to access, I began my respondent search through purposeful networking starting with my contacts in the Alberta business community. I also used snowball sampling to obtain a diverse mix of high-level female leaders in the CSR space who would be willing to be interviewed. This recruitment technique, and my exclusion of women with whom I had worked previously, avoided the introduction of my own inherent biases in respondent selection. I define a diverse sample of women participants for this study based on industry type and company size. After I connected with a potential respondent either on the phone or through email, I sent her additional information about the study via email that included a letter of initial contact along with the informed consent outlining the study itself as well as the interview process. I conducted interviews until theoretical saturation was reached: “A data category was considered saturated if it was reflected in more than 70 per cent of the interviews, confirmed by member checks (interviewee feedback on the analyzed data), resonated with key informants, and made sense given prior research” (Bowen, 2008, p. 148). My final participant list includes nine senior female CSR leaders who work in Alberta’s two major cities.
My respondents are women who work under the umbrella term (based on title, department, or self-classification) of “sustainability” as well as those in “corporate social responsibility.”

Corporate social responsibility and sustainability are identified as near-synonyms by some researchers and as completely different constructs by others. CSR is commonly seen as being focused on social issues and sustainability on environmental issues (Carroll 1979; Dahlsrud, 2008; Schwartz & Carroll, 2008). Following Gond & Crane (2010, pp. 680-681), I treat the terms more like synonyms as I consider them to be “umbrella constructs, or ‘broad concept(s)’ or ‘idea(s)’ used loosely to encompass and account for a broad set of diverse phenomena.”

The participants are key decision makers for the CSR function in their organizations and hold a variety of titles including CEO, vice-president, director, and leader. Recognizing that there are so few executive women in the CSR field in Alberta, I use pseudonyms and am careful to exclude texts that may disclose the identities of these women. The number of direct reports of participants ranges from two to 20. Demographically, their ages range from 35 to 58, seven of the nine respondents have children, and all but two participants are classified as Caucasian. The primary industries in Alberta are well represented, with four respondents from the financial services industry, three from the oil and gas industry, and two from the construction and manufacturing industries. Company size varies: two participants work for smaller organizations with less than 350 people, three are at companies with about 3,000 employees, and four are employed by larger organizations ranging from 11,000 to 220,000 employees globally. Each company is privately owned and enjoys a strong presence in Alberta, with many appearing on lists representing Canada’s top employers. Hence, the sample represents a diverse set of participants in terms of demographics, industry, and company size.
All interviews were conducted between May 17 and June 17, 2016, at the respondents’ place of work in a private office space or meeting room (which minimized extraneous noise and interruptions). During the interview, I provided some basic information about the study and then followed a loosely structured interview guide. My interview strategy was to introduce a topic or question, and to encourage the respondent to speak about the topic for as long as possible by probing for additional details as required (see Barley, 1983). I found that, even though I had more detailed questions on hand, respondents answered most of them as our discussion progressed. Given the subjective approach of this phase of the research, as the interviewer, I took an active role in the conversation, but the questions and conversations flowed into a variety of directions as the interviews progressed. Our dialogue was a process that “[mobilizes] language by talking, listening, and constructing meaning” (Rhodes, 2000, p. 217). Listening was important, and striking a delicate balance between being active without being intrusive, while being attentive to what the interviewee was or was not saying, was critical (Kvale, 1996).

Although I used prompts and key words to encourage the informants to provide additional information about their experiences, I found that allowing the informants to do most of the talking helped maintain the authenticity of their stories. The average interview was approximately 80 minutes, resulting in a total of just over 12 interview hours.

Specific interview questions were wide-ranging and open-ended to give respondents an opportunity to reflect on issues they felt were important to them in managing CSR as female leaders. For example, what are the characteristics of female CSR leaders? How do women obtain these positions? When women do obtain leadership positions, what roles do they assume (Nielsen & Huse, 2010) and what are their discussions like (Huse, Hoskisson, Zattoni, & Vgano, 2011), particularly around CSR agendas? Who advocates for CSR and what approaches are
Interviewing CSR leaders directly helped address some of these questions (Terjesen et al., 2009) and add to knowledge on the internal profile of female CSR leaders in Canada while applying the underutilized approach of critical discourse in CSR research (Burchell & Cook, 2006; Ocler, 2009). (See Appendix D for the interview guide.)

To maintain a conversational tone, while covering the material in a systematic way and probing for more in-depth responses (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), I digitally recorded the interviews and had them transcribed. Minimizing note taking during the interviews increased my listening ability and provided a greater sense of presence during the interviews. Recording the interviews also ensured that recollections were accurate and accounted for pauses or overlaps (Silverman, 2011). The recordings allowed me to revisit the interviews over and over again (three to four times each) to ensure I preserved the meaning of the word as well as the pauses and the sounds (e.g., laughing). As needed, my own interpretations of the information represented was confirmed through member checking when needed (by reviewing the accuracy of the account with participants) to ensure accurate understanding of the narrative (Creswell, 2008) or to obtain additional information. I adhered to Athabasca University’s policies and guidelines for research ethics as well as the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Government of Canada, 2014b) to ensure that proper procedures for minimal-risk research were followed (see Appendices A & B).

As a researcher, I assumed an active role in the study. Sometimes during the interviews, I had to stop myself from relaying my own similar stories as a former female leader in an effort to ensure I understood the respondents’ frames of experience (and to respect their time). However, in the poststructuralist tradition of owning and acknowledging my own subjectivities, I share some of
my sensemaking perspectives, based on my own experiences, while interpreting the respondents’
narratives (Chapter 7). My critical perspective also challenges me to constantly question and
highlight sensemaking that challenges my own interpretations in the analysis. Using a reflexive
approach to interrogate the data meant recognizing the imprint of my own sensemaking
throughout this research project (from the development of the questions to the interpretation of
the data and selection of themes). As appropriate, I spell out my own point of view and
perspectives and expose unintended distortions to affect “change through critical understanding”
(van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). I believe that exposing my own life scripts helps me recognize the
influence of my individual power while keeping my analysis honest, meaningful, and authentic.

My poststructuralist feminist viewpoint supports collaborative and trusting relationships with
respondents. As Punch (2006, p. 56) reminds us, “A researcher’s ethical responsibilities include
the overarching principles of academic integrity and honesty, and respect for other people.”
White and colleagues (2001) outline eight principles of feminist research: power imbalances,
expand the questions asked, listening to women’s voices and experiences, emphasis on diversity
and intersectionality, multidisciplinary and mixed method research, reflexivity, social
relationships during the research process, and use of research results (put research into practice,
disseminate through activism, empower others). These principles guided my research process, as
I strove to recognize the use of power as respondents told their stories. I showed interest in and
respect for participants, recognizing them as individuals and equals, to flatten the hierarchy
between the interviewer and interviewee toward an interview process that was collaborative
(Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This involved a number of strategies toward making the interview
relaxed and fluid: each interview location was mutually selected so that the participant felt
comfortable and safe; a few minutes were spent establishing rapport at the onset; silence was
used to subtly encourage the interviewee to continue; I asked for examples, specific details, or more information as needed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995); and I used some personal disclosure—for example, identifying myself as a former female leader in business—when appropriate to challenge the researcher-participant hierarchy (Oakley, 1981, 1999). Hence, the process emphasized establishing a social relationship with respondents while encouraging them to open up and talk at length. I also listened intently to the participants’ stories to understand the lived experiences of each woman (without confusing them with my own feelings and opinions).

After each interview, I was left with a feeling of gratitude for the conversation, as I was moved by many of the participants’ stories and experiences. I was touched by their candor, as many of these women shared insights that they had never before articulated. When I reviewed the notes after each interview, I took the time to reflect on each session, and made notes of my reactions and responses to the dialogue. With each reading of the transcripts, as I analyzed the narratives, I developed a deeper appreciation for these women’s experiences and still today feel a strong sense of connection with each one.

Once the interview transcribing was complete, I immersed myself in the participants’ narratives and began first to review the individual data, then to analyze the collective data for patterns, themes, similarities, differences, etc. I spent a great deal of time listening to the interview recordings and examining the texts to make connections between the different levels of discourse in order to see how the various parts of the data interrelate (Morrow, 2005). Because I view meaning as being socially constructed and texts as meanings that are frozen in time, each review of the texts resulted in new interpretations and reinterpretations with every reading. “Every transcription, is a retelling—a new telling of a previously heard, now newly heard voice”
A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CSR

(Denzin, 1997, p. 43). Furthermore, with each new interview, I gained a more in-depth understanding of informants’ perspectives and recognized emerging themes that enabled me to connect the data with the sensemaking processes applied in this study.

The interview process allowed respondents to revisit their stories, adopt and share stories that were consistent with their present context, and make sense of their situations. My data are therefore not so much about these women’s sensemaking processes, as they are about how their present-day sensemaking processes influence how past experiences are understood. This meant striving to be cognizant of the contextual, historical moments within which the text was produced (Bakhtin, 1994). For instance, the oil industry in Alberta experienced massive layoffs due to dropping oil prices in the year prior to the time of the interviews; this “moment” influenced the experiences of informants, particularly those directly involved in the industry. Many of them noted that their companies saw CSR as a “non-core” position and therefore their departments were the target of layoffs in the economic downturn. In short, my approach is consistent with the retrospective nature of CSM, which acknowledges current experiences in the frame of past understandings while being conscious of the formative context within which this knowledge resides.

Next, I present my analytic framework visually incorporating each of the CSM elements.

Framework for Analysis of the Interviews: Critical Sensemaking

There isn’t a prescription for critical sensemaking analysis (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2007) or for critical discourse analysis (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Prasad, 2005). CSM takes sensemaking, which began as a “set of explanatory ideas” (Weick, 1995, p. xi), and “refin(es) and explicat(es)” them by taking into account issues of power and context that are
missing from Weick’s original framework (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 182). As a heuristic for
organizational analysis, CSM is used as a guide to help me see how respondents’ stories begin to
come together and how they discursively make sense of their experiences. The critical
sensemaking heuristic uses the seven interconnected social-psychological properties of
sensemaking and accounts for the voice of the agent placing the role of formative contexts,
organizational rules, and discourse at the centre of its analysis (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills
et al., 2010). The four CSM elements simultaneously influence and mediate a sensemaker,
providing a contextualization of how individuals reflect and interpret their experiences.

I metaphorically illustrate the analytical framework I used as a guide to capture the key elements
within CSM (Figure 5.2).
To bring this framework to life while accounting for identity and power, I was guided by Phillips and Hardy’s (2002) approach to discourse analysis. But, due to the emergent nature of data analysis, I adapted it (as they suggest) to my own individual approach that made sense in light of this study. Given my view that discourse constructs how we interpret the world, I established what was constructed and then I examined how these constructions related to the individuals who were represented in this study (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). My investigative process included identifying the concepts represented in the narratives, coding the narratives based on themes, and linking the micro-level discourse to the broader, macro-level discourses using the critical
sensemaking framework. This involved making sense of how the results in phase two of the research are connected to the results in phase one. Throughout this process, I attended to language and power by paying attention to inconsistencies, silences, or unexpected occurrences that may marginalize individuals.

More specifically, I first reviewed each of the interviews several times to understand and appreciate what the participants had to say. Next, I iteratively coded and organized the data into manageable chunks by creating groups, or themes, based on congruencies or discrepancies (e.g., Patton, 2002; Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Initially, I kept this process simple and did not consider sensemaking theory as I wanted the data to speak for itself. The first level of coding involved annotating the data and identifying emergent higher-order themes (e.g., Haney, Russell, Gulek, & Fierros, 1998; Stemler & Babell, 1999). This iterative, tedious and time-consuming process allowed me to articulate nearly 50 themes. Here, I used nVivo as a data analysis tool to help me work through the data. I then distilled these themes in subsequent levels of coding and interpretation, which involved noting my own reflections as I interpreted the narratives. Because this process involved a lot of internal debate to determine the best thematic fit for a particular text, I continued my analysis on a Word document where I was better able to organize my thoughts and engage in my own subjective process as I explored “multiple meanings and trace(d) their implications” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 78).

My analysis involved working within the CSM framework to help me reveal the socially constructed discursive range of power relations in respondents’ accounts. Following Thurlow and Helms Mills (2009, p. 468), I “allowed language to highlight the elements of the process that were most significant in influencing that particular representation.” The text of the interviews
therefore directed which sensemaking properties came into focus in my analysis, and often a
number of meanings were drawn on simultaneously during the sensemaking process. For
example, identity construction for some informants is based on their strong sense of obligation to
their work and the people it affects, yet they also draw on the broader CSR business case
organizational discourse to legitimate the importance of their work.

My flexible approach allowed me to move to a micro-level of analysis in which I looked at
“intonation, lexical or syntactic style, rhetorical figures, local semantic structures, turn-taking
strategies, politeness phenomena, and so on” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 261). This process proved
fruitful, as “digging deeper” into the themes revealed examples of gendering processes within
notions of hierarchy and power. For example, when interpreting the data using Foucauldian
discourse, I observed that many respondents felt assertiveness was important toward career
progression, yet many of them also expressed frustration with this career strategy, articulating or
implying that they wanted their work to speak for itself. By paying close attention not only to
their talk and language, but also to their silence, I attended to pauses and hesitations that may
have indicated that an alternate voice was being suppressed. Going beyond surface-level
assumptions to tease out hidden discourses and discursive practices provides a way to unpack
how women individually and socially construct their realities (Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Thomas
& Davies, 2005). This approach allows me to understand the hidden discourses and discursive
practices that enact gender and become organizational rules and expectations (see Helms Mills et
al., 2010; Sawicki, 1996; Weedon, 1993).

Finally, to remain true to the reflexive nature of the analysis, I was cognizant of my own role in
the production of this study and regularly disputed my own interpretation and explanation of the
data. In some cases, I eliminated explanations if they were not supported by other narratives or themes or did not resonate with the theoretical framework of the study (see Thurlow, 2007).

**Conclusion**

Without more radical research, particular voices, ways of knowing, and forms of knowledge, as well as important questions related to culture, ethics, morality, and quality of life, will be systematically excluded… (Hardy & Maguire, 2016, pp. 103-104)

This chapter provides an overview of my research process and principles. I adopt a poststructuralist feminist perspective and use the critical sensemaking heuristic to provide context for the analytical process applied in my two-phase research design. Seeking to reveal how hegemonic practices help maintain structures of power, my methodology is designed to allow me to identify dominant and hidden discourses and identify how gender inequity in organizations is maintained within these discursive formations. In this explicitly feminist and reflexive critical work, explore the micro-dynamics of CSR in an effort to understand how some knowledge has become privileged over time, and how this knowledge intersects with other, established bodies of knowledge. Specifically, my goal is to unearth taken-for-granted assumptions relating to women leaders in CSR, and destabilize and challenge the dominant discourse of CSR as being constituted as part of an embedded institutional system that shapes social reality and constrains these women in the workplace.

Next, Chapter 6 provides a review of the key findings for phase one of this study, helping establish the macro-level context that has (re)produced organizational rules and dominant assumptions within the formative context by “reading between the lines” of a selection of newspaper articles published in the last 40 years. This purpose of the thematic media analysis is
to inform the larger study that involves making sense of the discourse gathered through the interviews (Chapter 7).
CHAPTER 6. READING BETWEEN THE LINES: ANALYSIS OF NEWS MEDIA ARTICLES

In this chapter, using CSM, I conduct a critical, discursive examination of the narratives extracted from Canadian news media articles in the last 40 years to inform how the present-day discourse of women in CSR leadership positions has been shaped by the past. I use the CSM heuristic and link the four sensemaking processes to shed light on structural issues of power, rules, and resistance (Helms Mills et al., 2010). By doing so, I acknowledge media’s role in creating plausible media narratives—that represent sensemaking cues that guide actions—regarding female CSR leaders. This approach directs us away from rational, rhetorical accounts of the organization and instead turns our attention to how psychosocial sense is made of the organization within a broader formative context and organizational rules (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1969). I do this by using CSM to “dig deeper” into the stories framed by journalists as well as the individuals quoted in the article. Due to the changing discourse around women’s equity in Canada since the 1970s, there has been an ebb-and-flow pattern of resistance with the “other” (business women) expressing frustration with stereotyping and barriers to progression while the “in-group” (business men) struggles to maintain its privileged status. Such interruptions to established practices within the ongoing process of sensemaking, or shocks (Weick, 1995), offer opportunities for resistance as individuals update their sensemaking. To help me identify multiple meanings that are often overlooked within the newspaper articles, along with CSM, I use a complementary method, the news as discourse framework (van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b), which draws attention to the local and global textual structures of news reports (see Figure 5.1).
Consistent with the Foucauldian poststructural tradition, my examination of the news articles is not meant to be generalized, rather, the purpose is to trace what has been written historically about women leaders in the context of CSR and leadership to help inform current, taken-for-granted perceptions. The media is a powerful cultural influence with the ability to reproduce and structure societal opinion (Gauntlett, 2008; Gill, 2007). The influence of news reports as a form of public discourse provides cues that guide our sensemaking (O’Connell & Mills, 2003).

Readers interpret certain frameworks, rather than alternate ones, around dominant knowledge and attitudes (van Dijk, 1988a) that influence their organizational reality. While the following analysis includes observations that are made based on the structures of the articles (e.g., by counting the number of males and females featured and considering semantic macrostructures and formal superstructures), my focus is to examine the deeper meanings of the media’s narrative to get at the underlying messages and implicit meanings conveyed through the articles (e.g., kinds of quotations, rhetorical structures used). I focus on going beyond merely identifying discriminatory discourse toward women in the articles under analysis to show the more subtle, yet equally harmful, forms of discrimination that “explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose (gendered divisions of labor)…” (Acker, 1990, pp. 146-147) that are manifested through the newspaper media. These manifestations are important, as they frame the sensemaking of individuals by representing cues that can become a plausible guide for actions (Weick, 1995).

Observing this discourse helps provide a historically conscious perspective of women leaders in business while providing insight into their current representations today.

In this chapter, three time frames are used (1976–1986, 1987–2000, and 2001–2016) because, as described in the previous chapter, they capture relevant contextual changes that cause shocks that are reflected in the Canadian newspaper press narrative around women in business leadership.
Using the CSM framework, I identify themes that emerge during these time frames through the discourse of the media and explicate how these plausible accounts of reality develop and their organizational implications.

**1976–1986: Masculinity and Males as the Norm**

Sensemaking tells us that individuals extract cues, which support their own sensemaking, from pre-existing structures and ongoing activities in the broader social context (Weick, 1995). A number of critical events leading up to and during this time frame caused organizational shocks that destabilized the existing state of organizations and, as Weick (1995) would argue, caused a reassessment of existing policies and a breakdown in the ongoing process of sensemaking. Nevertheless, gendered texts and subtexts that privilege masculinity in CSR and business in general are the norm. Though there is some evidence of resistance, much of it is by men who wish to maintain their leadership status within organizations. Such enactments of a discourse help reproduce the status quo, despite indications that some are challenging the rules around women’s existence in the workplace.

**Formative Context & Shocks: “A New World for a New Woman?”**

Formative contexts provide structures around what can be imagined and enacted by organizations and individuals. Formative contexts are a result of institutional arrangements that come together and, through a contingent and collective process of struggle, constraints, and acceptance by individuals and groups, restrict what can be imagined or reimagined in society (Unger, 1987a, 2004). One such institutional arrangement, the privileging of white middle-class males in business, became destabilized during the significant activist movement in the 1960s and 1970s in Canada that argued against the normative processes that perpetuated the patriarchy
(Friedan, 1963). This resulted in several initiatives to address barriers for women in the workplace. First, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1967, provided a report in 1970 that included 167 recommendations on the status of women to enhance sex equality in society, the economy, and politics (Bird, 1970). This led to the establishment of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) in 1973 (Bashevkin, 1985). Second, human rights commissions were established in all provinces in the 1970s, and in 1982 the provision of equality rights was given to individuals regardless of sex as a result of an amendment to Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Finally, in 1984, the Abella Commission Report on *Equity in Employment* was published, advocating for massive policy changes to confront discrimination of women (and minority groups) in the workplace (Abella, 1984; Myrden et al., 2011). These initiatives represent macro-level structural changes that, according to Weick (1995), can lead to organizational shocks that can create ambiguity and initiate a new sense being made of a situation. During this time period, these shocks indicated that normative and stereotypical representations of women are starting to be challenged.

Despite signs of resistance to the status quo, organizational shocks to workplace routines, due to the women’s movement and equity legislation, appear to be unable to create sufficient urgency to cause a break in routines (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995). To deal with the ambiguity, people revert to habitual responses because of what is familiar and plausible to them (Unger, 2004). Newspaper reporters (the vast majority of whom are male) appear to reinforce the status quo by rarely featuring women in CSR-related articles, and when women are mentioned, it is in stereotypical ways (e.g., as leaders of advocacy groups, community investment managers, etc.) (see Appendices C & D). Such texts can be considered sources of exclusion that limit what can be counted as knowledge and provide clues to related power relations and inequities in the
workplace (Foucault, 1981; Prasad & Mills 1997). The power question here is, “who’s voices are heard in the sensemaking process?” This may be due to the prominence of men in the news serves as a salient cue that, on an ongoing basis, further strengthens their position of power by enhancing their status and visibility while denying the perspectives of women (Scannell, 1992). Female leaders are less “visible,” making constructions of what a leader “looks like” less easily destabilized (see Unger, 1987a). It is a “chicken and egg problem” (Cukier, Jackson, Elmi, Roach, & Cyr, 2016. p. 388). Meanings are retrospective in sensemaking, as the language and events of the past that are meaningful for an individual will help construct that individual’s sensemaking of future events (Weick, 1995; Helms Mills et al, 2010; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). If women don’t see people like them positioned as leaders in the media, their own imagined future leadership position becomes less plausible. This socialization influences their personal identities and could result in enactments of sensemaking wherein women find it more difficult to see themselves advancing to these positions. Therefore, the dominant social values reflected by the media act as a disciplinary practice that normalizes and legitimates the social assumption that men make more suitable leaders, serving as a restrictive influence on organizational rules and individual enactments of meaning. This process is interactive where individuals’ social identities are reinforced by an organization’s identity that is a male one, which presents a problem for women trying to fit in (Fiol, 2002). Thus, the newspaper articles during this time period help contribute to a formative context that can become entrenched and able to withstand challenge and revision attempts (see Unger, 1987b).

Organizational Rules & Gendered Subtexts

The formative context helps define institutional fields, taken-for-granted arrangements and shared beliefs that can be exercised through rules that give coherence and continuity to the roles
people enact (Blackler, 1992). The status of women was reinforced by two powerful informal rules established by the newspaper media during this time frame: (1) “Businessman” = leader and (2) Females, be feminine.

**Rule #1: “Businessman” = Leader**

One of the most prominent rules expressed in the articles reinforces the masculine notion of leadership. “Businessmen” are consistently positioned at the helm of organizations and are the ones responsible for thinking beyond economic issues to consider businesses’ broader social and cultural surroundings. For example,

> Mr. Desmairais said that all businessmen must seek out the means to disprove the myth that business’ only role in society is to benefit its owners at the expense of workers and consumers… (Anderson, 1978a, p. B3)

These ideologies are further reinforced through the use of male-dominated metaphors and visuals that show the dominant “businessman” ideal. A case in point is a *Globe and Mail* article (MacKay, 1978, p. B1) that says successful women will “need to do a lot of carving, have thick skin and take the lumps … women may need still need armour and swords to make their way in many organizations.” Such subtle gender subtexts can exclude women (Koller, 2004; Solomon, 1997) by emphasizing the masculine qualities of aggression and domination (Davies-Netzley, 1998). Similarly, an illustration in a 1985 article shows a devil and angel on the shoulders of a man, while several others feature photographs of prominent male business leaders addressing issues of corporate social responsibility.

These exclusively masculine texts convey meaning about who is appropriate for what job (Harlow & Hearn, 1995) and reinforce perspectives of the elite majority. This process creates a formative context within which it is less plausible that women business leaders even exist, much less speak about issues related to corporate social responsibility. The use of both direct and
indirect quotes as well as visuals in news reports gives it the semblance of “factivity” and authenticity (Tuchman, 1978, p. 96) but also admits only those in positions of power. Furthermore, there doesn’t seem to be any evidence of resistance to the “Businessman” = leader rule reflected in the newspaper articles, indicating that the changing context around women’s equity remains largely unsupported (perhaps implausible) by both the journalists and the male leaders featured in the articles. The powerful are, therefore, further empowered by quotation patterns that confirm and enhance their status as the norm while systematically silencing the powerless (Bendl, 2008; Lacan, 1977; Scannell, 1992). As a result, ongoing sensemaking remains uninterrupted and the status quo is maintained. As Weick (2001) explains, once the sense of a situation is established, “that sense can be terribly seductive and can resist updating and revision” (p. 460).

Rule #2: Females, Be Feminine

Highlighting femininity provides the media with a culturally acceptable way to frame a woman with power. Normative representations of gender understand femininity as requiring a particular way of being, categories Phalen and Algan (2001, p. 301) call “the four f’s of women’s news: family, fashion, food and furnishings.” By situating women in these categories, the idealized image of womanhood is created while neglecting women’s desire for individuality (Smith, 2008). Other articles construct what it means to be a female leader based on a masculine ethic: they need to be honest, driven, intelligent, and aggressive while maintaining a feminine appearance. For example, one journalist instructs junior females to dress conservatively until they become a “top executive,” at which point they can adopt a more “feminine style” (Woodridge, 1981, p. F3), and another warns that “sweaters and pants are a sexy combination to men and if a woman is a mail clerk and wants to stay a mail clerk, she should wear sweater and
pants” (Bullock, 1985, p. C2). The pervasiveness of power is apparent, as even the options for individuality are constructed by language that creates discursive boundaries around individual interpretation of what it means to be a woman.

By producing hegemonic masculine discourses, the media (re)constructs given assumptions (cues) that perpetuate the supremacy of masculinity over femininity in business. The news helps define women in society as being subordinate to men while further perpetuating dichotomies that reproduce stereotypical representations of women. These discourses, or “routines,” help reproduce a formative context that reinforces existing structures and power (Unger, 1987b). Normative representations of gender understand femininity as requiring a particular way of being that presents an idealized image of womanhood that is created while neglecting women’s desire for individuality (Phalen & Algan, 2001; Smith, 2008). Many of the headlines are explicitly demeaning to women, implying that women in business are “playing” and that their roles are not being taken seriously. In essence, women are being advised to learn the language of business, a language that has been created by and for men, that reinforces a women’s subordination, and that implicitly discourages challenging why this “language rule” exists in the first place. This example of discursive power can’t help but underpin the enacted meanings and identity construction of aspiring (or existing) female leaders and their lived realities during this time period.

The Sensemaking Properties Influencing Individual Enactments of Subordination: “Bias, Own attitudes, Limit Women’s Promotions”

Although organizational shocks and rules may prompt individuals to draw on a variety of cues in their changing environments, identity construction is a central concept within the sensemaking process not just because it influences individual sensemaking, but also because it influences how
the other six sensemaking properties are understood by individuals (Helms Mills et al., 2010). In sensemaking, people tend to look for cues that confirm their own views and minimize those that contradict them to maintain plausibility (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Weick, 1995). For example, a number of articles adopt a liberal feminist perspective and suggest that women themselves are the “problem”:

Bias, own attitudes, limit women’s promotions … The second—and more difficult—problem concerns the attitudes of the women themselves … experts note a lack of confidence (and sometimes motivation) among female employees at junior levels. (MacKay, 1978, p. B1)

These cues are inconsistent with the many initiatives within Canada to address barriers for women in the workplace, and instead reinforce the powerful discourse that puts the onus on women themselves to achieve equity. Because these messages are widely promoted in the media, they have a disciplinary nature on the identities of women who are told, by those more powerful (i.e., the many male business leaders quoted in the articles), that they need to adopt existing ideas of leadership that are based on well-established, masculine characteristics (see Calás, 1993; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Wood, 1999).

Women themselves appear to enact a masculine discourse and are even shown justifying the status quo: “Women directors feel limited ranks justified … (there are) good reasons (women) are so few in number” (McCallum, 1979, p. B2). (The reasons specified include lack of a desire for responsibility and the current state of the economy.) In another article, a female vice-president at a bank enacts a feminine identity (Rule #2: Females, be feminine) when she explains, “I think that when I began, I strived to look the part—tailored almost to boredom. Now that my position has solidified, I feel comfortable wearing prettier clothes” (Woodridge, 1981, para. 2). For this vice-president, the system of control is so well established that she enacts it
through compliance. Thus, her self-identity stays within the discursive boundaries of femininity.

In a final example, the feminine quality of submissiveness is enacted:

Hesitancy about their personal qualifications and abilities are obstacles holding many women back from attempting a change in lifestyle … “I lack confidence and I’m not able to express ideas in the presence of authority … My boss is loud and obnoxious and considers women a threat. My job is high-pressure and I can’t handle it.” (McCallum, 1978, p. W6)

The female cited in the excerpt above indicates that she lacks confidence and feels unqualified for her “high-pressure” job. Her personal identity is constrained by the reproduction of everyday meaning based on a social context in which her boss is stereotypically “loud and obnoxious”; the discourse of subordination is maintained as a result.

**Power & Resistance: “Why Women Still Fail to Reach the Top”**

From Unger’s (1987b) perspective, newspaper articles are communicative actions that represent formed routines, while the deep structures represent the formative context (see also Crawford & Mills, 2011). In addition to the lack of prominence of women leaders in the newspapers during this time period (communicative actions), the language used in the articles suggests deep-level discursive structures that are manifested in surface-level communication (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). By the mid-1980s, the discourse presented in the newspapers indicates frustration with the lack of progress in removing barriers that remain firmly in place (e.g., “Why Women Still Fail to Reach the Top” [Maynard, 1986, p. A82] and “We must run 10 times faster just to stay in the same place” [1986, p. B1]). Though these messages are important (serving as potential shocks that attempt to break routines), they are at odds with what other discourses protect with respect to power relations (Flyvbjerg, 2012). One such discourse specifies that women can reach business leadership positions based on their own merit:
New breed of women out looking for work … Women need both a realistic picture of the job market and a realistic picture of their own aptitudes, abilities and interests before setting their career goals… (Bell, 1980, p. T1) (italics added).

What does “realistic picture” mean? The rhetorical structure used here appears to be a limitation, or informal organizational rule (consistent with Rule #1: “Businessman” = Leader), that constrains their power by framing how ambitious women can be. Furthermore, men are excluded in this discourse, inferring that, unlike women, they already have a “realistic picture” of the job market and their abilities. Such positioning of women fails to acknowledge the underlying structural biases that prevent women from progressing and contributes to the maintenance of power differentials in the workplace. The result is a socially identified boundary that limits who a woman can be within her social reality.

The formative context links dominant social values and individual-level actions, which helps explain why the quest for organizational change that challenges male dominant routines can be met with resistance that can affect the rate of change (Unger, 1987b, 2004). One source of resistance originates from the in-group that has an interest in maintaining existing power relationships and structures in society (van Dijk, 1988a). This is exemplified in the following excerpt from an article that quotes a man who expresses concern about women joining boards:

> It is not just that we feel we will have to clean up our language. I think our kinship with animals shows through. When a female enters the group, males become more self-conscious and begin to preen and put on something of a performance. This self-consciousness and the implicit competition for the female’s attention may wear off quite quickly, but it does take time. (McCallum, 1979, p. B2)

The dominant narrative here represents social values, or an informal organizational rule (e.g., Rule #2: Females, Be Feminine), that dictate “how things are done” and reinforce individual actions (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009, p. 464; also see Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). By justifying resistance as being due to different biology between genders whereby men, by nature,
compete for women’s attention even at the highest executive levels, the masculine social value of competitiveness is reinforced. This cue in the social context reinforces the stereotypical alpha male in business (an “animal” who competes for women’s attention) and influences the individual sensemaking of readers in a way that devalues the legitimacy of equity initiatives. Perhaps even more troubling is the sexual objectification of women, who are being treated as objects for men’s desires. As MacKinnon (1989, p. 145) explains, the hierarchy is fundamentally tied to “sexualized power relations” whereby men are socially conditioned to find a women’s subordination sexy. It is these “implicit, unspoken background conversations upon which explicit conversations rely for grounding and understanding” (Crawford & Mills, 2011, p. 102). Such context-preserving routines serve to reproduce the male dominant discourse in organizations (Unger, 1987b). Discourses like the excerpt above therefore take place within a formative context (or “background conversation”) that takes existing social structures for granted, and show that during this time period, there is significant resistance to the idea of gender equity in the workplace. The imagination of the possible remains censored as a result (Unger, 1987b).


Like the previous era, when women are prominent, they are typically presented in stereotypical ways. However, during this time frame, we see the impact of the 1986 Employment Equity Act (a critical event) starting to take hold within the social context. The changing discourse around women in the workplace is accompanied with resistance to established organizational rules as the out-group (women) express frustration with the barriers that continue to perpetuate inequalities in the workplace. At the same time, some members of the in-group (“businessmen”) appear to be struggling to maintain existing power structures.
Formative Context & Shocks: “Change the Order of Business”

The tone of the articles in the 1980s was largely upbeat (though perhaps a bit naïve) about the prospects for gender equity in the workplace, coinciding with the government’s willingness in the 1970s and 1980s to establish agencies and institutions that would serve to improve the status of women in Canada. By the 1990s, the discourse had changed when the Canadian government started to dismantle these initiatives with repeated cuts to organizations and agencies that serve women’s interests. The most significant change that affected the social context of women in the workplace leading up to this time period was the 1986 Employment Equity Act in Canada, which required employers to engage in proactive employment practices to increase the representation of women and other minority groups (Abella, 1984; Agócs, 2014). Representing an organizational shock, this regulatory change, or meta-rule (Helms Mills et al., 2010), disrupted the status quo and triggered organizational sensemaking by imposing structures that required businesses to redefine their hiring practices and their ways of thinking.

The 1986 Employment Equity Act is described in a 1987 Toronto Star article as being a somewhat controversial “landmark decision”; the article goes on to note that most businessmen react automatically (and negatively) to any notion of government intervention or direction in how they conduct their business because it “adds to the cost of doing business” (Crawford, 1987, p. A14). Another form of more subtle resistance to the adoption of this meta-rule is the suggestion that, only a year after the Employment Equity Act was ratified, women have achieved equity:

With pay equity behind them … both government and business have a large stake in getting better jobs, and more money, into the hands of women…. Giving female workers access to the training needed for these sophisticated skills is the real key to closing that 35 per cent wage gap between men and women. (Speirs, 1987, p. A27)
These excerpts illustrate the retrospective sensemaking of the journalists whose narrative is problematic because it creates a social context that validates a meaning that is not true (even though it may be plausible to them). Reflective of a shift to the post-feminist era where feminism is no longer positioned as a political initiative (Gherardi, 2010), feminism is instead presented as a lifestyle that can be (and has been) achieved, where women should be happy with the gains the movement has made (Varvus, 2002). The subtext here is one of “pretended equality between males and females” (Bendl, 2008, p. 60). Hence, the cues at the time suggested that the equity “problem” is solved, turning attention away from the reality of discriminatory practices and allowing them to remain undetected. These more subtle forms of resistance refer to the familiar and plausible by simplifying the inequity issue based on the business case argument or an issue that has been dealt with through legislation. As a result of these constraints, the rate of change is slowed, and the structural implications of inequity remain unacknowledged and unaddressed (see Unger, 1987b).

Perhaps such constraints contributed to a second shock during this time period when, in 1996, the federal government dismantled the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) that had been in place since 1971 to advise the government and inform the public about women’s issues (Cuthbert Brandt et al., 2011). This act was inconsistent with the meta-rule of employment equity, and feminist groups started to overtly resist these changes and condemn the Canadian government’s inaction or withdrawal of support for women’s equity, as shown in headlines like “Women decry killing of status council” (Monsebraaten, 1995, p. A3) and “Merger of women’s agencies attacked as ‘dreadful shame’” (1995, p. A7). The macro-level context was changing beyond the point of plausibility for feminist groups, who resisted these
changes through narratives that attempted to de-legitimate the acts of the more powerful government institution.

Organizational Rules & Resistance: “Working Harder Than Ever”

Helms Mills and Mills (2000) argue that gendering organizational cultures results from organizational rules, as well as resistance to these rules, that serve to order organizational practices that represent appropriate forms of behaviour. Rules are interpreted and enacted by individual actors, the journalists as well as individuals featured in the articles, who may decide to comply, ignore, challenge, or reject the rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). During this second time period, the two rules uncovered in the previous time period are still present, though somewhat more subtle. Rule #1 ("Businessman" = leader) continues to be enacted in the newspaper press, implying that male leaders have authority over social responsibility in business. For example, leading “businessmen” are almost exclusively featured and quoted (see Appendices E & F), and male-dominated metaphors prevail (e.g., “New York’s 7th Ave. rag trade is a white-collar war zone where only the toughest and shrewdest survive” [Patch, 1988, p. K1]; “Founder sticks to her guns” [Crawford, 1994, p. A14]; “the villain-of-the-moment is domestic big business” [Bertrand, 1996, p. E13]; and, “…as government suits up for battle” [Marotte, 1996, p. E13]). Rule #2 (Females, be feminine) continues to be perpetuated as appearance is still frequently used to describe female leaders (e.g., “Her 5-foot-10-inch, 120 frame, shoulder-length tumble of gleaming chestnut hair, chorus-girl legs and a wide, dimpled smile that sets off her heart-shaped face, all make Carolyne Roehm an easy woman to envy” [Patch, 1988, p. K1]), and “Her neat, navy suit, carefully coiffed hair and downplayed makeup no doubt fit the Toyota image to a T” [Vyhnak, 1989]). The appearance of the male leaders is never mentioned with one exception in which male attire is referred to in a way that is demeaning to women: “In other
words, men have become the new woman, a bunch of insecure whiners worried about their asses looking too big in Hugo Boss” (Kingston, 1999, B1).

Three additional rules emerge during this period of time: Rule #3: Don’t discriminate against women OR men; Rule #4: Women are good for business; and Rule #5: Women are responsible for managing household and family responsibilities.

**Rule #3: Don’t Discriminate Against Women OR Men**
Sensemaking shocks are evident in the media articles that frame how men are reacting to the shock of formal societal-level rules around employment equity. According to Weick (2001, p. 47), an increase in ambiguity can create some unique opportunities for change. However, these opportunities can be thwarted by resistance from men who desire to maintain their status. The masculine rhetorical structures of having a “winner” and a “loser” can be seen in the news media discourse during this era; for women to gain more, men must consequently lose something (Goddu, 1999). A case in point is a Toronto Star article with the headline, “Male angst at the millennium; Women have seized new roles, kids are asserting their rights, computers have stolen their jobs. What’s left for the 21st century man?” (Lautin, 1999, p. 1). The gender subtext of unconscious exclusion and neglect is apparent (Bendl, 2008); the traditional argument of women being discriminated against is turned on its head by providing a counter-perspective implying that men are being discriminated against (despite evidence that shows otherwise).

**Rule #4: Women Are Good for Business**
To help manage ambiguity, organizational rules help cohere events by supporting solutions that are consistent with the past (Helms Mills & Mills, 2009; Weick, 1995, 2001). One such binding mechanism is the dominant business case discourse on women’s rights in business.
We have a concern about having women represented not just because they’re women, but because companies that take full advantage of their best people are going to make more money and give us a better return on our investment (Khalfani, 1995, D2).

While the sensemaking of the journalist positions female managers as one of a corporation’s greatest assets, it oversimplifies the key to organizational success. This discourse restrains women’s contributions as being solely economic and ignores other possible advantages of hiring women or the ethical imperative. This perspective is consistent with what some critical theorists have argued is a central problem with the business case discourse for managing gender diversity: it reduces people to resources to be managed, which overlooks the identities of individuals and agency in pursuit of efficiency and competition (Cheney & Carroll, 1997). Individual sensemaking and identities are not accounted for, and the popular gendered strategic business case approach to business results in the “commoditization of diversity” (Prasad & Mills, 1997, p. 17) that reduces diversity to a temporary fad and ignores the moral imperative in business and socially significant patterns of oppression. Furthermore, when market and capital forces are prioritized, the possibilities that gender equity initiatives could have for human interaction are curtailed (Litvin, 2006; Martin, 2000). The media therefore constitutes the discourses of the business case and establishes a social context that may actually close, rather than open up, opportunities for the advancement of women in organizations (Perriton, 2009).

**Rule #5: Women Are Responsible for Managing Household and Family Responsibilities**

During this time frame, sensemaking is enacted through resistance to attributed social identities that present women stereotypically as bearing the bulk of the responsibility for care of children as well as domestic chores:

> Canadians, especially Canadian men, must change their view that women should bear the bulk of the responsibility for taking care of children and the elderly, the chairman of a federal advisory council says…. The “new reality” of so many women in the work force demands that “the extra burden” be lifted from them, Jacques Vasseur said at a news conference in Toronto yesterday. (Temple, 1987, p. H8)
Women are starting to “reject the role of the mythical superwoman, who runs ragged with the burdens of home and work” (Jackson, 1997, p. D3) and are recognized to be “Working harder than ever” (Growe, 1987). Similarly, a Toronto Star article on “Rented ‘wives’” says that “Women (are) too busy with business to bother with laundry. Or shopping. Or cleaning, for that matter. Women who don’t want to ‘do it all’” (Bounds, 1992, p. B3). Several articles in The Globe and Mail suggest that the “mommy track” damages women’s careers: “‘Mommy track’ row dividing women” (Lewington, 1989, p. A8); “Pardon me boys, is this the mothers-only choo-choo?” (Lipovenko, 1989, p. A7); and “Careers move slowly on the mommy track” (1991). Pre-existing rules that dictate it is a woman’s job to raise children are starting to be rejected, and instead, alternative “new rules that recognize the economic realities of the 1990s: two income families and the single working mother” (Lewington, 1989, p. A8) are being advocated for. Attempts are being made to reformulate existing rules and social practices and create a new meaning, or the making of sense, within organizations around traditional gender roles. These micro-level actions contribute to a more visible broader-level societal discourse that starts to destabilize dominant assumptions, and create a formative context where society’s routines are being questioned and a new meaning around equity is being enacted.

Sensemaking & Identity: Producing, Maintaining & Resisting More Subtle Stereotypes (and Counter-Stereotypes)

Sensemakers can be subject to texts and imagery that send contradictory messages about what it means to be a female leader. This process contributes to organizational cultures that are gendered, serving to reinforce rather than diminish discriminatory behaviour (Helms Mills, 2005). Such cues affect the identity construction of women during this time period who are making sense of implications of the 1986 Employment Equity Act. There are several instances
when women are positioned as being a valuable business asset, as shown in *The Globe and Mail* headline “Women are going to make the difference” (1992, p. B6) and an article titled “Banking on Women,” which situate women as being able to “take their place in (the) new economy” through “self-employment and small business” (MacIsaac, 1993, p. B24). At surface level, the emergent discourse is one in which equity is advocated for through a discursive process that attempts to recreate the identities of women in the workplace. Yet, a closer look at the texts and photographs in several articles indicates that these initiatives may be undermined by depicting women in stereotypical roles. For example, the women featured in the aforementioned articles are defined by their roles as a “lifelong seamstress” and an owner of a convenience store. Such articles serve as cues that enact a formative context that may limit the sensemaking of aspiring women by showing them in gender-specific roles; senior-level executive positions are not even presented as a possibility. Thus, the selective use of images and language sets discursive boundaries around women’s career prospects that can unconsciously perpetuate discriminatory practices and maintain a culture that is gendered. Legislation alone is not enough to reposition how women are perceived in the workplace; individual and organizational identities need to enact meanings that support, rather than contradict, a culture shift in practice.

In the 1990s, women largely *enacted* a discourse of integration that is situated within male understandings of business (see Bendl, 2008). Such enactive language is constructed in an article with the headline “Women tee up for business: like their male counterparts, they’re discovering the value of hitting the links”:

> (Golf) really opened up a whole different world for me…. I hated the game at first, but (am) now a convert…. And as men have done for eons, they’re using the golf course as much for business as for recreation. Already familiar with the language of balance sheets and marketing strategies, (women are) adding birdies, eagles and sand saves to their
vocabularies … in keeping with their rising status in the business world, many women are finding golf a useful business tool. (Motherwell, 1996, p. B7)

The discursive practice in this excerpt shows how deep-rooted powerful discourses can make up our “histories of experience” and translate into plausible organizational rules and expectations (Helms Mills, 2005, p. 247). The “if you can’t beat them, join them” mentality indicates that compliance with the well-established structures and masculine organizational rules that serve as a disciplinary mechanism in the Canadian workplace and the recipe for success. This, in turn, affects individual sensemaking as the women cited in the article enacted this lived reality by embracing and reflecting the rules for networking in business; meaning is put not only into language, but into action as well (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 462). By embracing the dominant discourse, the women featured in the article (as well as the journalist) are not only reproducing and transmitting the way reality is perceived (Foucault, 1972; Mills, 2003), their enactment of meaning is also shaping societal discourses (see also Fairclough, 1985).

Power & Resistance: Adjusting to the “New Woman”

Ambiguity and shocks are part of the sensemaking process as individuals and organizations deal with variability. Some males attempt to create coherence by resisting the changes, as they wrestle with the immediate problem of adjusting to the “new woman” (Lautin, 1999, p. 1). What is plausible for one group—in this case, men—is inconsistent with what is plausible for another group (women). “Today’s man” (Lautin, 1999, p. 1) may be struggling with shocks that challenge the pre-existing set of rules of gendered organizations, which constrain what equity means to them. The win/lose mentality demonstrates a struggle for power as men use language that devalues the language of equity.
At the same time, some women leaders in business are resisting traditional stereotypes and refusing to follow the conventional business rules. For example, Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, is quoted in a 1993 article as saying she made unconventional moves because not having a business degree worked to her advantage:

I would have been ruled by male terminology more, quantity. I would have pooh-poohed my instinct and left my values at the door because that was what you were supposed to do. (Crawford, 1994, p. D2)

Roddick’s sensemaking process involves the creation of a personal identity that is distinct from the norm in business. Her resistance is triggered by cues that indicate a disconnect between her sense of self and the environment in which she is operating (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). The implausibility of the social context around post-secondary business programs shocks her to resist oppression by overtly challenging the patriarchy that is expressed through language. Sensemaking disruptions like this suggest alternative meanings are starting to be constructed by a select few about what it means to be female in the workforce. Such processes of resistance attempt to shift power relations and open up new ways for women to deal with structural constraints by encouraging women to redefine their identities in the workplace.

2001–2016: “Cause for Only Muted Celebration”

It is only recently that gender equity has been considered an important component of CSR (United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, n.d.; World Economic Development Forum, 2015). By 2001, the news media articles indicate that the social context and organizational rules for corporate social responsibility in business as well as feminist practice have changed. Using the search terms “women” and “corporate social responsibility” resulted in significantly more articles in this time period than in the previous ones, suggesting
that CSR and women are commonly connected in newspaper articles. Perhaps this is reason for optimism, as the narrative of the media is highly influential in shaping societal understandings of women leaders. But, as one journalist frames it, this is “cause for only muted celebration” (Olive, 2013, p. B1). These positive gains are subdued by discourses that continue to situate masculinity in business as the norm.

Formative Context & Shocks: The Gendered Nature of CSR Leadership Persists Despite Resistance Efforts

At the beginning of this time period, the establishment of several influential advocacy organizations for women’s rights within the CSR context (e.g., Global Reporting Initiative, 2011; ISO 26000, n.d.; United Nations Global Compact, 2015) and women in leadership (Catalyst, 2011a, 2011b; Women’s Empowerment Principles, n.d.) started to gain momentum. The impact of these initiatives is reflected in an article in The Globe and Mail (2003, p. N2), about “The Future of Corporate Social Responsibility,” in which Coro Strandberg, a well-known female CSR leader in Canada, cites results from interviews with nearly 50 thought leaders on CSR:

CSR will come to be seen as good corporate governance and a key determinant of corporate success in the marketplace… (Corporate standards) will become more uniform as standard-setting bodies such as the Global Reporting Initiative, AA1000, SA8000 and the UN Global Compact consolidate their programs … with standardization and stakeholder engagement in triple-bottom-line reporting, “real” CSR will become more readily distinguishable from “cosmetic” CSR.

Strandberg makes a clear link between social values that “will become mainstream business practice over the next decade” (2003, p. N2), with tangible actions and accountability being required of participating organizations. Thus, macro-level shocks are starting to create space for CSR leaders to challenge existing social assumptions by calling attention to the need for a more integrated approach to CSR and equity to achieve “corporate success in the marketplace” (Strandberg, 2003, p. N2). However, whether human rights should be regulated is a divisive
issue between activists and business: “Business people from Canada feel these deals should be exclusively about their rights and are quite uninterested in ensuring that the rights of women and men working in their corporations are protected” (Montgomery, 2001, p. A1).

Another recent development in Canada, or shock, which had an impact on TSE-listed companies was the Ontario Securities Commission’s (2014) guidelines requiring the disclosure of representation of women on boards. Such sensemaking shocks can effectively create a sense of urgency for businesses and individuals and, in this case, to update their ongoing sense around equity and CSR. While shocks disrupt established ways of conducting business, they are often accompanied by resistance (Weick, 1995). For example, in response to this regulatory change, a number of subsequent news articles question existing gendered institutional arrangements indicating that social values are starting to change. Many offer advice for women wanting to get on boards (e.g., “Want to be a director? Here’s how to get on board” [Galt, 2006, p. B12]). Ramsay (2014, p. IN4) advocates for gender quotas as many other countries have done because the vast majority of executives do not support “comply or explain” securities regulation. Another journalist suggests that structural reasons are responsible for too few women getting the “corner office,” including men choosing other men who they are comfortable with for top-level positions or women at the top who themselves have no consensus on how to approach the topic of women in power (or whether it should be addressed) (Creswell, 2007, p. G11). Finally, in advocating for more women on boards and in executive positions, a Toronto Star reporter calls for

an end to the ghettoization of top women managers in human resources, legal affairs and public relations, from which CEOs rarely emerge…. More women CEOs, the only real decision-makers in business…. Today’s 2.4 percent of women CEOs of Fortune 500 companies is cause for only muted celebration. (Olive, 2013, p. B1)
The aforementioned articles illustrate an awareness of structural and discursive restraints, providing evidence of resistance by some who are challenging the rules of the game. Nevertheless, attempts for revision of existing structures are constrained by influences that reinforce a different message around the status of women in Canada that (re)produces a societal and organizational culture where gendered notions of leadership are the norm. One such shock occurred in 2006 with the federal government’s removal of the word “equality” from the mandate of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and its $5-million cut from the operating budget, forcing the closure of the majority of their offices. These closures repressed the women’s movement in Canada and made the NAC, once a strong policy advocate for women’s rights in the 1980s, fall into latency and be effectively silenced (Collier, 2014; Dobrowolsky, 2008).

At the same time, more subtle messages that reinforce inequity continue to be presented by the newspaper press. Women business leaders continue to receive differential coverage during this time period; they not only write the articles less frequently, but are also less likely to be framed as experts or leaders, directly quoted, or featured in photographs (see Appendices E and F) (even though, as Bartsch and colleagues [2000] point out, individuals sharing the same characteristics of a particular group, specifically gender, are better positioned to speak on behalf of this group). This observation is consistent with previous findings that women’s representation in the press is substantially underrepresented (e.g., Armstrong, 2004; Jolliffe, 1989; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Shor, deRijt, Miltsov, Kulkarni, & Skiena, 2015; Zock & Turk, 1998). Media visibility (whether positive or negative) signals what and whom society sees as important, serving to further preserve entrenched status beliefs. Scholars have argued that differential media coverage of women and men is more than simply a reflection of gender inequalities in business leadership; it
exacerbates and magnifies these inequalities by implicitly indicating that men are more highly evaluated than women (DeSwert & Hooghe, 2010; Gallagher, 2011; Tuchman, 1978).

These institutionalized rules serve as a normative process in creating a deficient self that becomes normalized among the highest business leadership levels. Foucault (1982, p. 777) calls these normative processes “dividing practice(s),” where the media is playing a role in maintaining the gendered balance of power by imposing an identity of inadequacy on female business leaders (see also DeSwert & Hooge, 2010). These dominant assumptions create boundaries that are communicated and reinforced through informal organizational rules.

**Organizational Rules: “Mandating Diversity Emerges as the New Norm”**

At surface level, equity between men and women is often positioned as a given (e.g., “We’ve come to accept many court decisions—on women’s rights, for instance—as being more equitable and closer to our society’s best interest” [Nosterud, 2003, p. B8]). However, like the previous eras, there are formal and informal conflicts, or rules of the game, that are re(produced) by newspaper journalists as well as the individuals cited in the articles. Even though these rules are presented more subtly during this period of time, they perpetuate existing power relations within organizations and are part of a formative context that limits the availability of alternatives in individual sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

All of the rules identified in the previous time periods (with the exception of Rule #3: Don’t discriminate against women OR men) continue to be presented in the newspaper media, though in a more understated way. One positive sign is the gender-neutral language that is used by the media; the term “businessman” has been replaced with “business people” or “men” and “women” (Rule #1: “Businessman” = leader). However, women continue to be positioned as
being different and outsiders (Rule #2: Females, be feminine). As with the previous time periods, when the news media does cover women leaders in the last 15 years, the news is trivial and often related to family status or physical appearance. One executive is described as follows: “Clad in a silk and linen Donna Karan suit, the 70-year-old looks trim and proper” (Strauss, 2011, p. B5); another is portrayed wearing “a subdued yellow wool suit, looking every inch the formidable business lady…” (Knelman, 2001, p. D11). Even the identity of a U.S. senator appears to be influenced by societal-level constructions that perpetuate masculinity in leadership; Senator Hillary Clinton is noted as declining having her portrait taken for *Vogue* because she feared it would make her appear “too feminine.” An editor-in-chief of *Vogue* is subsequently cited in the latter article as saying, “The notion that a contemporary woman must look mannish in order to be taken seriously as a seeker of power is frankly dismaying” (Immen, 2008, p. C1).

The discursive power of the business case for equity (Rule #4: Women are good for business) remains strong as this argument for CSR is prominent in the vast majority of articles. For example, a reporter for *The Globe and Mail* suggests that combating the wage gap needs to begin by “separating it from the realm of ‘women’s issues’ and framing it as an economic one that has an impact on families at the micro level and the economy on a macro one” (Eichler, 2012, p. B14). Another article notes that, “By quizzing suppliers about their hiring practices, companies are not only raising awareness but bolstering their networks of business partners and improving the bottom line … diversity is fundamental to achieving superior business results (Galt, 2010, p. B10). Positive as such macro-level initiatives are, many of them have been hindered by acts of resistance on the organizational and individual levels.
While some articles identify women’s struggle for work-life balance, others resist Rule #5
(Women are responsible for managing household and family responsibilities) and credit a lack of
work-life balance for women’s success:

Ms. Sabina has no concept of work-life balance. She never got married, though she was engaged once and broke it off. She never wanted children. She doesn’t take holidays…. Her obsession with hard work and getting ahead wasn’t compatible with finding a life partner, but it helped her land jobs at established organizations and seats on prestigious boards. (Strauss, 2011, p. B5)

According to the journalist, Ms. Sabina is creating a new meaning in her making of sense processes, one that is different from previous eras where women reject the idea of “having it all.” Instead, she resists Rule #5 through a discursive process that produces and imposes different limits (“giv(ing) up on family altogether”) on sacrifices that women need to make to be successful business leaders. Such positioning of women imposes a sense of repression by constraining a women’s choice to simultaneously be a successful business leader and mother (see Foucault, 1984). Unfortunately, perpetuating and celebrating the notion that women must overcome more obstacles than men to achieve a leadership position fails to acknowledge gender inequalities that impede women’s progression in the first place. As one journalist for The Globe and Mail writes,

These trends mean fewer women in the highest reaches of business, government or law. They get the message that if you are truly ambitious, you must give up on family altogether. And by reinforcing social attitudes that say women don’t belong on top, this lowers the status of all women. (Tralee, 2006, p. F1)

In summary, all of the rules identified in previous eras perpetuate pre-existing frameworks that continue to impose structures in organizations that create boundaries around how to be a successful woman in the workplace. Perhaps the journalists and individuals featured in the articles are unaware that their unchallenged assumptions around gender and leadership
unconsciously reaffirm the exclusion of women leaders in business today. However, there is a sign of change during this time period. A new rule emerges (Rule #6: Equity is now a part of CSR) that challenges prevailing social values and constraints, attempting to provide space for individuals to imagine a different reality.

**Rule #6: Equity Is Now a Part of CSR**
There are several organizations and advocacy groups that shocked individuals and businesses into enacting real change by questioning existing rules, establishing new ones, and providing research that promotes inclusion. In 2000, the United Nations Global Compact (United Nations Global Compact, 2015) was conceived as a result of the combination of several mandates, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Labour Organization’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This initiative advocates for a principled approach to doing business with 10 principles of the UN Global Compact that involve responsibilities relating to human rights, labour, government, and anti-corruption (United Nations Global Compact, 2015). While several like-minded international standards organizations followed suit (e.g., the International Standards Organization’s ISO 26000 [International Standards Organization, n.d.] and Social Accountability International’s SA 8000® standard for decent work [Social Accountability International, n.d.]), the United Nations Global Compact could be considered a shock to organizational cultures around the world as it directly challenged organizations’ value systems and encouraged them to adopt a principled approach to doing business. In addition, an advocacy organization, Catalyst, has gained momentum internationally as a force for change when it comes to workplace inclusion. Catalyst has effectively helped shape the discourse around organizational- and individual-level engagement in CSR and is frequently cited in the news media as a research authority on diversity
in organizations. As a result, these organizations have helped change the macro-level context around social arrangements by building awareness of women’s experiences in the workplace and their barriers to advancement, as well as providing individual and organizational strategies to serve as models for change (Catalyst, 2004, 2014a).

The work of these organizations flows through many of the news reports discussing equity and CSR since 2001. Unlike in the previous time periods, diversity in recruitment and hiring practices is positioned as being an integral part of CSR in organizations. For example, a journalist writing in an article in *The Globe and Mail*, “Mandating diversity emerges as the new norm,” notes that “…the Royal Bank of Canada asks suppliers about diversity in their hiring and promotion policies … (as part of) the bank’s corporate social responsibility initiative…” (Galt, 2010, p. B10). These narratives indicate that dominant assumptions around equity are being destabilized, making equity initiatives within CSR more plausible to individuals and organizations who enact them at the local level. However, there is still cause for concern beyond the aforementioned rules. A number of discourses create boundaries that shape the individual identities of female CSR leaders.

Sensemaking & Individual Identities: “(Don’t) Cross Over Into That Negative Stereotype”

Assumptions at the societal and organizational levels affect the identity construction of individuals and draw from a plurality of discourses (Helms Mills et al., 2010). One such discourse that affects female leaders’ identities involves placing the onus to achieve equity squarely on the shoulders of women themselves (a discourse that has remained strong since the first time period). For example, the lack of representation of women in the news media has been explained by women’s unwillingness to be quoted, few female experts available to be
interviewed, or a lack of women’s interest in certain topics (Aryal, Internews, & LeMay, 2013). If women fail to occupy senior leadership positions, or if women are more likely to be directed into positions like human resources and communications rather than CFO positions (Bitti, 2015; Wechsler, 2015), they will be less likely candidates for CSR spokespeople. Newspaper coverage in the last 15 years has featured several high-profile females repeatedly (e.g., Coro Strandberg, principal of Strandberg Consulting, and Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop). This observation is consistent with previous research indicating that media coverage concentrates on a very small number of very well-known individuals (e.g., Gallagher, 2011; Shor et al., 2015). However, the reasons given for a lack of representation of women leaders in the media “should not be dismissed as mere excuses, but their underpinnings are at the core of gender dynamics and power relations” (Aryal et al., 2013, p. 13).

The individual identities that ground sensemaking processes are discursively influenced by gender dynamics represented in broader dominant assumptions (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995). The positioning of women in the media, and a culture that socializes women to behave in certain ways, serve as cues that contribute to the (re)production of a particular version of social life. For example, there is some evidence that women often say no to requests to appear as experts in news broadcasting (Paikin, 2014) due to a confidence gap between men and women as a result of socialization (Hall, 2012). This suggests that individual women continue to struggle to enact the stereotypical masculine “front and centre” leadership style that permeates western organizations (Schotter & Weigelt, 1992). As a result, ongoing sensemaking that perpetuates that status of male leaders as the norm remains uninterrupted (Weick, 1995, 2001).
A second influential discourse around high-level female leaders in the newspaper articles that remains prominent during this time period locates the woman as the “other” and therefore as an exception to the norm. For example, a *Globe and Mail* article describes the first female president of the Calgary Petroleum Club (an exclusive networking club for Calgary business) as “The Farm girl who grew up to lead the Pete Club” (Pitts, 2007, p. B8) and another features the first black female vice-president of Scotiabank (Kovacs, 2014, p. M2). In an article about Ellen Kullman, the CEO of DuPont, being a role model, she is described in a way that highlights her differences:

That’s where conventionality ends. She is the only woman on DuPont’s senior management team and one of just 12 female CEOs running a Fortune 500 company. The first thing that distinguishes Kullman from the other “thought leaders” … is that she speaks simple, direct English. But what really sets her apart from the other “experts” … was that she has actually changed the culture of a major corporation and won over its 67,000-member workforce. (Goar, 2012, p. A15).

In pointing out Kullman is the only woman in DuPont’s senior management team, the journalist distinguishes Kullman in a way that could arguably serve to position her as an outsider. Although these articles bring attention to female leaders, positioning them as novelties reinforces their subordinate position while further perpetuating understandings of sex segregation of jobs. Furthermore, such labelling creates a *social context* that does not have shared relevance for the vast majority of women in the workplace who are stuck below the glass ceiling. Deep-rooted barriers that undermine women’s confidence and aspirations continue to be ignored (Cukier et al., 2016).

A third discursive theme that influences individual identities and has remained strong and consistent since the 1970s is based on Rule #2 (Females, be feminine). For example, women are described as having a “female style of leadership” and being “good conciliators” with “emotional
intelligence” (Blokhuis, 2003, p. 42) who are all about “caring for each other” (Kovacs, 2014, p. M2). Masculine women are seen as contradictions between their expected feminine identity and the masculinity of power, and evoke negative reactions (Charles & Davies, 2000), as shown by the following question asked of the woman responsible for leading KPMG’s corporate responsibility strategy: “How did you navigate the issues many women face of getting what you want without crossing over into that negative stereotype of being too pushy?” (Hampson, 2009, p. L3). The retrospective lens being used by the journalist is a result of her sensemaking based on her own past experiences and understandings. While there is no one right meaning attached to a given experience, her language, or cue, enacts the construction of sensemaking by making it plausible that assertive women are evaluated differently than men for the same behaviour (see Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009; Weick, 1995). It is evident that gendering processes are still being reproduced in the media, but, as Bendl (2008) argues, their concealed nature prevents them from being perceived as gender discrimination (see also Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). As a result, because such practices are less “visible,” they are more difficult to destabilize (Unger, 2004).

**Power & Resistance: “She’s Tired From Juggling the Demands of Job and Family”**

One rule that became apparent in the second era and continues to be met with increasing resistance is Rule #5 (Women are responsible for managing household and family responsibilities). Attempts to challenge this rule in the previous era focused on bringing attention to stereotypical representations of women who “do it all” (Bounds, 1992, p. B3); more recently, a new language of resistance has emerged. The “Superman image doesn’t fly for those trying to do it all”: 
She flies through the air, cape flapping in the breeze. Under one arm is a briefcase; under the other, her child. She’s superwoman. But her cape has been dragging a lot lately. She’s tired from juggling the demands of job and family.

The Superwoman myth started in the 1980s when baby boomers, raised to believe they could have it all, start(ed) having children of their own. (Bradbeer, 2003, p. K06)

Another Globe and Mail journalist, in an article headlined “Working girls still have it tough today,” refers to the 1980s movie Working Girl to shed light on the fact that not much has changed since then. In the movie, the lead character says, “I’m not gonna spend the rest of my life working my ass off and getting nowhere just because I followed rules I had nothing to do with setting up” (Eichler, 2013, p. B17). Similarly, in advocating for Canadian men and women fighting for a more equitable society, the writer of an article titled “We’ve come part way, baby” (Rebick, 2004, p. A21), identifies a patriarchal structure as being the root of the problem:

…we changed a lot of laws that were holding us back, and we changed workplaces, organizations and movements where women and feminist men are now in the lead. What we failed to do was uproot the patriarchy that we identified in the beginning as the root of the problem. Male power continues to dominate in war, politics, and in corporate boardrooms and in too many families.

This redefinition of women in business overtly challenges the deep-rooted structures that prevent career progression due to family obligations. Adding legitimacy to the language used, several of the aforementioned articles refer to the research of organizations like Catalyst. Although these discourses are met with some resistance (e.g., articles inferring that leadership gaps are a result of women’s own choices), messages that open up career choices for women by addressing deep-rooted systemic barriers and practices in the workplace are perhaps reason for optimism.
Conclusion

Understanding the media’s role in historically shaping and reflecting society by (re)producing discourses helps provide insight into why it has been difficult to enact efforts toward the advancement of women into leadership roles. The language of equity in the last 40 years has been de-legitimated by a discourse that invokes compliance with existing gendered organizational practices. Changes in legislation and policy are therefore not enough if the macro- and organizational-level rules do not support a climate for equity. Even though women have long been challenging the status quo in the workplace, the media has been slow to alter its image of women. As Romano (1986) suggests, “The press does not critically examine privileged cultural beliefs”; they instead publish stories that emphasize the dominant view or stereotype (McKercher, Thompson, & Cumming, 2011). The discourses presented in the newspaper articles represent institutionalized practices that, together with organizational rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991), largely fail to acknowledge the systematic discrimination of women. Hegemonic views prevail, biasing readers toward a particular interpretation of the text while subduing alternate interpretations (van Dijk, 1988a) and showing how powerful even subtle organizational rules can be in setting limitations on the behaviour and sensemaking of individuals (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010). As a result, women continue to be framed in highly restricted ways based on patriarchal versions of conventional femininity, which create specific understandings of social reality that legitimate existing power relations.

In the next chapter, using the critical sensemaking heuristic, I “dig deeper” into the gendering of female CSR leaders by examining how they discursively create meaning from their experiences.
CHAPTER 7. THE GENDERING OF WOMEN CSR LEADERS: APPLYING A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I attempt to make sense of the data gathered in the interviews using CSM (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Whereas the previous chapter provided insight into the broader social contexts and environment that have shaped how women leaders in CSR have been constructed over time, my interest in this chapter lies in understanding how female leaders make sense of things, and how they use language to create meaning and enact CSR in organizations (see Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). Even though I do not explicitly use CDA in my analysis of the interviews, I am guided by Phillips and Hardy’s (2002) approach to discourse analysis to identify often overlooked meanings in text and to account for both identity and power. In this vein, I use CSM as a heuristic to create space for the voices of women CSR leaders to discursively discuss some of the contextual and historical cues that influence their personal identities and shape their sensemaking.

In sensemaking, the understanding of events is an ongoing process influenced by our interactions with others and the cues we extract that give plausibility to our interpretations (Weick, 1995). Plausible interpretations of shocks do not necessarily rely on accuracy; they are a result of a complex process that weighs personal experiences and expectations with understandings of how the organization and society works (Yue & Mills, 2008). The shocks the informants experienced were triggered not by disasters or emergencies, discussed by Yue and Mills (2008) or Weick (1995), but by day-to-day experience as they resist (or fail to resist) discriminatory behaviour. My examination of female leaders’ sensemaking therefore involves focusing on their efforts to “size up what they face” (Weick, 2001, p. 461) as they actively produce, maintain, or resist discourse (Helms Mills, 2003; Mills, 2008; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Sense may not only be
made of a particular situation, or rule, but it may be ongoing as identity and situation can be unstable and, as a result, subject to resistance (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). This might explain why some discriminatory practices become normalized while others become subjective in meaning to people and are resisted.

The first section of this chapter deals with interactions influenced by the formative context, focusing on societal-level discourses that the CSR leaders interviewed make sense of retrospectively. Following this, I discuss the effects of formal or informal organizational rules reflected in the dominant and silent discourses of discrimination. Throughout this chapter, I highlight the interdependent psychosocial properties of sensemaking outlined in Weick’s (1995) framework (identity construction, retrospection, enactment, social, ongoing, extracted cues, and plausibility) to provide insight into micro-level individual perspectives in relation to the formative context and rules (see Figure 5.2). Although certain sensemaking properties become significant in particular narratives, in most cases, multiple properties (or sometimes all properties) are influencing individual sensemaking simultaneously (Helms Mills et al., 2010). I begin my analysis by looking at the formative context, which involves identifying cues derived from the macro-level discourses as a result of two key sensemaking events that women leaders retrospectively “size up” (Weick, 2001, p. 461).

**Sensemaking - Structured Within the Formative Contexts**

Recall that formative contexts, along with rules and values of those contexts, can shape and reshape the construction of individuals’ identities, in a process that brings together dominant social values with individual action (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Formative contexts therefore set boundaries, or rules, on what can be imagined as possible, representing institutionalized practices
within which sense is made (Hartt et al., 2012). By examining the discourse of events, or shocks (the recession as well as advocacy efforts), within the context of the social environment, I reveal dominant assumptions and power relations at work.

The Retrospective Nature of Sensemaking: Past Experiences Reveal Boundaries

As is typical in sensemaking, I begin my analytic process by identifying a shock that causes a break in organizational routines and signifies a point at which sensemaking occurs (Weick, 1995). One notable recent critical event is due to a weak global oil market and the ensuing two-year recession in Alberta that came to an end in 2017 (Gibson, 2016; Rumbolt, 2017). In sensemaking terms, the dive in oil prices triggers an organizational shock and ensuing layoffs that precipitated making sense of the impact of the recession on the experiences of the informants. In particular, those directly involved in the industry feel they are at more at risk than men of losing their jobs. As Valerie explains, the fact that CSR is a female-dominated profession is cause for concern:

You look at our executive team, there’s two women and it’s the typical corporate services role with the HR, communications, that portfolio. And for men, that engineering group in our industry, along with the top-level finance people, they are the ones who tend to get ahead. There’s not a lot of women in core positions in the energy industry. The women tend to be in either support positions or they’re not the hardcore positions. For this reason, a lot of my job as a leader in (corporate social responsibility) involves justifying our department’s existence … ensuring that articles go up on our Intranet and that our reports are ready. It’s almost that we have to continually convince (our leaders) that we should be here. Whereas, if you’re an engineer for an energy company, or if you’re doing the finances, you’re core, right? We are trying to make our role more strategic, whereas prior to the economic downturn it was just handing out cheques with little internal engagement. I think that’s probably the biggest struggle and we’ve been facing downsizings; my group got cut as much or more than most. I’ve felt in some ways we

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6 These concerns are not unfounded. According to the Parkland Institute (a non-partisan Alberta-wide research centre located at the University of Alberta), the negative effects of oil’s inevitable booms and busts have caused more economic damage to women than to men (Lahey, 2015; also see Catalyst, 2016; Jackson & Hussy, 2017).
were easy targets…. We have to sign off on a corporate responsibility policy every year but do people really get it? I’m not sure. I think before the downturn we wanted to take corporate responsibility seriously and do more employee engagement on the broader CSR, but with the downturn those people that were working on that are gone and so it’s just some of the functional areas that just contribute to the reports. That’s what I worry about … is that (CSR is) a reporting function as opposed what it should be.

Valerie’s understanding of who is at risk of losing their jobs (and who gets ahead) during the recession is a retrospective process (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). She notes her past experiences, for example, having to continually convince leadership that CSR is important, to make sense of the fact that her department was downsized more than others. The reality for Valerie is that the identity of her organization, the one that promotes itself to the broader social context as being heavily invested in CSR, is inconsistent with a more powerful language reflected within the organization’s entrenched informal rule around privileging financial efficiency. Valerie’s discourse reveals boundaries that reside within a formative context. Limitations are set on the imagination of the plausible, based on gender (females holding non-core jobs) and position (CSR being seen by leadership as a public-relations initiative). The associated rule here is, “We (have to) try harder to prove ourselves” (discussed in the next section). By questioning the downsizing process that made her CSR team “easy targets,” Valerie resists dominant assumptions that maintain the power relationships within the discursive field in which her organization operates.

According to Foucault (1998), resistance is present in every act of domination: “At every moment, we move from rebellion to domination, from domination to rebellion” (p. 94). While dominant societal discourses at surface level are supportive of women in leadership (see Rule #6: Equity is now a part of CSR), there are counter-discourses that contribute to the dynamic of leadership and CSR. To illustrate, Cathy, who works in the male-dominated oil and gas industry,
expresses anger and frustration over the industry’s low representation of women in leadership positions:

I understand if we were seeing less representation of women in the workforce and in these higher positions because there’s just, just fewer that are, that are you know choosing to, to work their way up, I’d be OK with that but I know that’s not really the reason. I know that there is, there is a lot of other things that are, that are at play and I, and I, that pisses me off a lot. It really pisses me off and I don’t like the fact that still women are just not taken as seriously in general as men. I see that every day and it might be more so because I’m in the oil and gas industry and in a male-dominated industry.

The formative context “link(s) dominant social values and individual action” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 189). Cathy retrospectively draws on previous shocks that she sees “every day” to inform her sensemaking of the current representation of women in the workforce. Sensemaking tells us that what resonates with one audience may not make sense to others. For Cathy, it is implausible that women are not working their way up because there are fewer qualified women. She is regularly subjected to less overt forms of discrimination in her workplace and profession (e.g., women not being taken as seriously as men), and suggests that gender biases are embedded in society and particularly evident in the oil and gas sector. Conversely, Jill explains the lack of female leaders in her organization as being due to a lack of qualified women. She retrospectively explains the status of women in her company in a way that positions both her sense of self as well as her leaders favourably. For example, she notes that “as a woman working here for the most part, this would be one of the most progressive firms you could work for.” As discussed later in this chapter (see Rule #1: “Businessman” = Leader), on several occasions, Jill’s acts of resistance to combat discrimination resulted in “small wins” (Weick, 2001, p. 439) that have encouraged her to continue to engage in social interactions that disrupt the status quo and have, as a result, strengthened her identity as someone who stands up for what is right.
Despite their different retrospective sensemaking processes, Valerie, Cathy, and Jill’s narratives reflect sensemaking that resists broader discourses. They offer a language that questions the efficacy of equity initiatives and helps to destabilize male-oriented notions of leadership in their organizations and industries.

**Reliant on Cues: Macro- and Organizational-Level Equity Initiatives**

In addition to the recession in Alberta, the work of advocacy organizations (e.g., Catalyst, 2011b; ISO 26000, n.d.; United Nations Global Compact, 2015) can be considered another recent critical event, or shock, that triggered the rules and values around CSR to begin to shift. This newly formulated principled approach to business has created ambiguity around normative representations in business, providing a mechanism through which organizations have scope for improving the status of women (see Grosser & Moon, 2005a, 2005b).

Interpretations of situations often draw on other discourses for legitimacy, which, in turn, affects the sensemaking practice of individuals (Fairclough, 1992; Weick, 1995). In this way, the formative context is both productive of, and produced through, discourse (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). An example is Julia’s account of initiatives at her organization to promote women in leadership positions:

> There’s a couple of our strong female senior leaders in the region that are also really engaged in other things like women’s executive network. We support many women-dominated groups; we partner with Catalyst on a number of initiatives as well as the Women of Influence. We have a couple of employees who co-founded an organization in Calgary for women investing in knowledge which provides financial and life management for women by bringing in different speakers and addressing things from a female perspective. Our organization is very supportive of these initiatives and I think that comes too from having some of our most senior leaders within (the banking industry) being women.
Julia’s sensemaking draws from different cues from both organization and society that interact to define what is plausible in her particular organizational context. At the macro-level, Julia describes the equity initiatives her organization supports, including advocacy organizations (e.g., Catalyst) as well as women’s groups (e.g., Women of Influence). At the organizational level, employees have founded an organization for women investors that is supported by her company’s leadership, many of whom are female. Julia extracts cues that are consistent with those of the organization, and her micro-level sensemaking supports her beliefs that are reflective of the dominant discourse through the privileging of prevailing assumptions.

Grounded in Identity Construction: Zebras in a Herd of Horses

Identity construction is a dynamic and relational process based on cues received at any given time (Simpson & Carrol, 2008). The effect of macro-level equity initiatives is apparent in Mary’s organization, which is undergoing its own change process to promote equity. Mary engages in a subtle process of resistance as she ponders whether her organization is going to honour its commitments to promoting equity:

I was asked if I was differentially choosing female candidates. My response to that individual was, would I have been questioned if it was the reverse? If I had a team of six males, I bet you I would have never been asked that question…. I was not happy about that and still I’m not happy that I was questioned because if you looked at the population of applicants, it was 90 per cent female so the odds were you were going to hire a female candidate. It really rubbed me the wrong way…. I think a trust thing so you want to see that there’s follow-through on commitments to promote equity. You don’t want it to just be a program where they’ve said women will be promoted, you want to actually see women get promoted into leadership positions. I think that’s something that the firm is trying to do and should continue to differentially invest in, even if it rubs some people the wrong way. They have to start to get the trend moving in the right direction so that they can recalibrate at some point; they need to pay active attention to it in order for something to change because there’s still a lot of, (sigh) different mindset from some of the senior male leaders who have been here for 25, 30 years, who may not see it the same way. But it’s that new generation that are shifting the mindset here.
Mary notes some irony in being questioned about differentially hiring female candidates despite the fact that her organization has explicit commitments to promote equity. As a result, she “was not happy … that (she) was questioned…. It really rubbed (her) the wrong way.” Interpreting organizational cues that support what she hopes to be true, she points out that, even though there are different outlooks from some of the more mature, male senior leaders, she is optimistic that the “new generation” will help “shift the mindset here.” The dominant discourse promotes a new identity as a firm that mandates diversity and inclusion and actively promotes women (this is also in evidence on their website); however, the true success of the program remains to be seen (at least by individuals within the organization). As Thurlow and Helms Mills (2009) remind us, redefining an organization’s identity through change initiatives is accomplished through individual sensemaking processes. Clearly, less powerful actors, like Mary, are watching closely to see whether her company delivers on its equity promises.

Identity construction allows individuals to come to understand meaning in their own identities within both context of power based on dominant assumptions at the organizational and broader macro societal levels (Helms Mills et al., 2010). “Our identities lie importantly in the hands of others” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 316). However, individuals are not products of discourse; agency takes place as people make sense of their lives and the restrictions placed upon them (Tomkins & Eatough, 2014). Much of the identity work of these women is based on their strong sense of obligation to their work and the people it affects. Their personal lives and professional careers are integrated, and their work in CSR and sustainability is an important part of their individual identities:

*Mary.* I have a few female engineers on my team so they would have an interesting perspective. They come at it with a very matter-of-fact lens but they have entered this field because they have a passion for, you know, sustainability and the community and
they always say they wanted to do something different with their career that, that would make a difference where they could still apply their technical background. I have highly educated female friends who have pursued, you know, a career in sustainability because they wanted their career to make a difference but I haven’t actually heard that same reason from most of my male contacts. I would say it seems males aren’t necessarily entering a career in sustainability because they want their career necessarily to look different. Males are a little more practical; they are highly technical in their mindset or want to crunch the numbers on climate change. They see the business value in sustainability. On the other hand, the females in my team have thought about their life holistically and what they want to do for their career path. In terms of my own career, I’m the same. I’m able to combine an entrepreneurial mindset with a passion for doing business in a sustainable way; I found my sweet spot in terms of career and I feel fulfilled by that.

Mary indicates that women take a different approach to CSR and sustainability from some of their male counterparts because of women’s passion to make a difference in society. Over and over again, the informants describe sustainability as being a part of their values and who they are; they see their work and personal lives as integrated. They enact a language that is contrary to traditional profit-driven business models that emphasize the symbolic status of work and hierarchical position. CSR is a part of many of these women’s values and, as such, makes these CSR leaders, as Cathy puts it, like “a zebra in a herd of horses.” None of them indicates that she necessarily looks to “get to the top”; rather, they all express deep beliefs in helping others and contributing to their organization and society. Such a “calling orientation” (Hameed et al., 2016, p. 788) in CSR employees has been found to strengthen employees’ perceived prestige, internal respect, and subsequent levels of organizational identification. These women see power as capacity, stemming from a community and highly relational (see Billing & Alvesson, 1993). In short, the social purpose of business is unmistakably intertwined with the identities of the women interviewed, underpinning who they are as leaders.
Ongoing Projects: Changing the Culture of Business

When discussing CSR, many of the women leaders emphasize the importance of the role of the individual in changing the culture of business. They demonstrate courage by stepping out of the usual way of doing things and advocate for a new, more plausible approach to CSR that imbues a more feminine style of leadership, valuing teamwork, empathy, and patience (rather than traditional, masculine approaches to business that focus on number-crunching). As Gond and Matten (2007) suggest, a more gender-sensitive approach to CSR that challenges the status quo and foregrounds females could produce the much-needed real change in our society. For example, Cathy uses her discursive power to invoke a language that enacts a different approach to the dominant management narrative in business:

I’ve had this conversation with a friend of mine, and she kind of pointed out she said it’s the really unfortunate thing is that, is that we’re going through this transition in the way that business is done here and we don’t have any really big role models that are stepping out above the crowd to show the way. It feels like we’re just all kind of standing here saying we know something needs to be done, we all sense it, we all feel this kind of stirring in us but we’re waiting for somebody to take the lead and say here’s how it’s done and, and it’s not happening or I don’t see it happening a lot. It, it is starting to happen but it’s not happening fast enough for me.

Cathy’s language reveals the ongoing nature of sensemaking, where a cue, a conversation with a friend, caused her to “break (her) routine” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 186). Cathy’s description of the formative context links her local site of sensemaking with the broader context where micro-level actions in the sensemaking process “are small actions with large consequences” (Helms Mills, 2005, p. 491). In discussing the importance of CSR in business, Cathy underscores the sense of importance in changing the traditional business model while acknowledging the difficulty in shifting current dominant assumptions. She exemplifies the significant impact the identities and actions of top leaders have on enacting the identity and culture of organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). This is important in CSR, as social change agents can pressure
corporations to catalyze social change; individual actors’ motivations at the micro-level have profound implications for creating a climate that catalyzes CSR at the organizational level and consequently imparting social change at the societal level (Aguilera et al., 2007; see also Dobers & Springett, 2010).

**Social Context: Indications of Who Is Appropriate for What Job**

Even though the women interviewed all operate within the discursive field of CSR, the social context in which they exist draws on multiple competing discourses. Julia acknowledges that her organization is supportive of equity initiatives, but she also observes that the majority of “front-line workers” (not leaders) in the CSR profession are women:

> Probably 90 per cent (of CSR professionals are) women, at least in Alberta for sure but if I think about nationally, that I know that are working in this space. Very heavy on the, on the female side. Very, very heavy … I think about front-line workers, predominantly women. I would say that just because women are the nurturer and are stereotypically more the nurturers.

The formative context guides individuals to “desirable” forms of behaviour, creating and recreating a social reality within the discourses (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). What is interesting here is that the social property of sensemaking appears to be influencing Jill’s perceptions around who is suitable for what job. Jill makes the same observation as Julia, and explains that women tend togravitate toward CSR positions:

> In leadership and sustainability and corporate social responsibility, I see way more women in those roles than I do men for the most part. Now it doesn’t mean that (women are) in senior positions in the organizations but there’s way more women. When I look at a lot of firms that kind of do sustainable consulting, there’s a lot of women there and the little bit that I’ve seen, I would say also women gravitate to those positions and tend to be successful in them. We don’t have anyone in an executive position and we don’t have any women on our board yet so we’re definitely still missing pieces there and I think that part of that is just capacity. It’s not for the lack of the company wanting to have women. It’s just there hasn’t been that many qualified women … again, when I look at my time at the engineering firm, there were not very many women in senior positions; there really were a lot of men. It’s not that they didn’t want to promote up women, there weren’t women in
that many positions … from a CSR perspective, I would say more women tend to gravitate to those (CSR/sustainability-related) positions.

Even though these women advocate against discriminatory behaviour, there are indications that they are implicitly affected by the same stereotypes we saw perpetuated in the newspaper articles over the last 40 years. They enact their identities as being “warm and fuzzy” and “nurturers” as they rationalize why a large proportion of people working in CSR and sustainability are women. These discursive representations serve as “technologies of power” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) that constrain individuals from thinking otherwise about themselves. According to Benschop and Doorewaard (1998), such references to “feminine traits” can help endorse communal traits and reinforce females as being an exception in business leadership where male leaders are mainstream. Thus, by constructing themselves according to these boundaries, these women are, albeit unintentionally and unknowingly, conforming to the current structure of social arrangements.

**Based on Plausibility: The Empowering Effect of Employment Equity**

Plausibility in sensemaking is about coherence: “how events hang together, certainty that is sufficient for present purposes, and credibility … it is constrained by agreements with others, consistency with one’s own stake in events, the recent past, visible cues, projects that are demonstrably under way, scenarios that are familiar, and actions that have tangible effects” (Weick, 2001, p. 462). If any of these sources of grounding disappears, the story or situation may be implausible, and people can begin to lose their grasp of what is happening. The well-established discourse of employment equity can initiate sensemaking that can empower individuals to question the rules and strengthen their own identity work (Helms Mills et al., 2010). For example, in describing a defining moment in her career, Gwen describes a shock
when a male in a position of power attempted to take advantage of her. This encounter with
gender discrimination clearly infuriates her to this day:

I sensed that sometimes he was not above board in how he communicated with me. I went to see him looking for a job. He came on to me. Totally like lips on and I just went, it just made me sick. I did not apply. Those are the things that just to me can’t be tolerated, but can you imagine, using his power that way. Those are the types of things that I find are aggravating, when men use their power on, yeah what, the defenseless person. It made me sick. Therefore, my tolerance was less after that. If someone says something and they kind of know they’re offside, I’ll just say that’s not appropriate. They know that I’ll call them on it.

Gwen is an exception. Most women do not confront sexist remarks when given the opportunity, as women who openly oppose gender discrimination can sometimes experience punitive ramifications (Swim & Hyers, 1999). When Gwen describes being “hit on” by someone with whom she was discussing a potential job opportunity, she characterizes his behaviour as being outside of the boundaries of acceptable fair play, moving beyond the point of plausibility.

Initially, she ignored her gut instinct, as she “sensed that sometimes he was not above board,” but after “he came on to (her),” she chose not to pursue the job. Gwen did come away with a valuable lesson from this experience: “…my tolerance was less after that…. They know I’ll call them on it.” The enactment of meaning is visible in this example, “but the same enactment of meaning may impact the plausibility of other actions, and simultaneously the construction of individual identity (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009, p. 462). This defining moment, or shock, affected Gwen’s enactment in sensemaking; she made a choice to take action against discriminatory behaviour in the workplace. By doing so, she produced “structures, constraints, and opportunities that were not there before (she) took action” (Weick, 1988, p. 306).
Enactive of the Environment: Rejecting the “Rules of the Game”

According to Weick (1988, p. 307), “At the heart of enactment is the idea that cognition lies in the path of the action. Action precedes cognition and focuses cognition.” Gwen’s account of trying to join her male colleagues in a golf game shows language that enacts her beliefs as she also makes sense of them (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

I get so mad at the condescension, or even my (male executive counterparts) going out for lunch don’t think to ask me. They’re better now but I’ve called them on it, ‘so you guys are going golfing, so hello, why can’t I go golfing too?’ Yeah, those little things, or (the belief that as a male you) can’t ride in the car with a female alone. ‘What? (Chuckle) Should I be scared of you?’ You know, yes, I have encountered those little things throughout my career that just are aggravations more than anything. For a while there I never used to call anyone on it, but now I do, or just the jokes or just the little, like I said, the unconscious biases that happen. They probably happen my way too but it’s just sometimes how they talk about my wife (Gwen’s husband) or the stereotypical conversation that happens. I think that’s where I get a little bit crass. I’m lucky that I have some really good male colleagues who for the most part are not chauvinists. I know of other females that work in other companies that face that. If I had to deal with that, I don’t think I’d be very nice.

For many women in business, there are negative ramifications for not attending or being invited to social events that men set up. Given that a significant amount of relationship building and decision making takes place outside of the office, a woman who is not present for any reason may be considered an outsider as a result. After being exposed to overt gender discrimination, Gwen assertively calls attention to being excluded in an unintimidating way and effectively condemns the sexist behaviour. Gwen’s identity construction shows refinement on an ongoing basis, and instead of accepting practices of sexism, she enacts her power and resists and rejects the “rules of the game” (which to her, are implausible) by refusing to be exploited. Gwen’s comments are consistent with a poststructuralist feminist position of power in her sensemaking that involves bridging micro-level practices, like being invited to golf or lunch, to macro- and societal-level unconscious biases. Her power is constitutive and enacted at the individual level.
(Mills & Helms Mills, 2004), conveyed in her expression of annoyance at the double standards surrounding stereotypical social roles for men and women when she describes her male counterparts referring to her stay-at-home husband as her “wife.” She produces a resolute negative emotional reaction and judgment of the behaviour, saying “it just made me sick” and “I get so mad at the condescension.” Her expression of anger serves both to raise awareness and to denounce sexism.

A Reflexive Pause

When I reflect retrospectively on my own career progression, I realize now that, early on in my career, I was blissfully unaware of institutional rules and discourses around women leaders. Shortly after graduating from post-secondary, I took a position in a male-dominated industry and I was one of three females in a large corporate office, who was not part of the administrative team. I felt that my boss at the time (a male CEO) assessed me based on my capability, rather than any preconceptions based on my gender or age, and encouraged me to learn and take risks. Within a year or two I advanced to a position I desired within the organization, navigating my career based on my own sense of self. I realize now that my ignorance was strength, and it was only later on in my career, after being exposed to several less-than-ideal bosses (and discriminatory practices), that I realized the potential for others to influence and legitimize the cues I embrace (or resist) in my own identity construction of a competent female leader. I suggest that if more employers were to disengage from existing masculinist paradigms of leadership at the micro-level, or resist them head-on, like Gwen, perhaps more women would draw on plausible cues that translate into meanings that encourage the construction of identities that espouse capability and confidence in their own leadership potential.
Making Sense of Gendered Organizational Rules

The formative context guides how institutional-level fields develop organizational rules from which individuals extract cues, perceive plausibility, and enact their sense of identities in response to situations (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Systemic barriers at the institutional level are interpreted and enacted by individuals who make sense of these established practices in the form of rules at the organizational level (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). In this section, I focus on the rules that result from and are informed by the formative contexts.

My analysis of organizational rules involves looking for cues in the language that reflects processes that impose order on business practices and routines. According to Clegg (1975, 1981), power relations in organizations can only be understood by examining how organizational members act within a framework of systems of control (rules) that are interpreted and enacted. Although Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) point out that there are at least 17 ways to look at rules in organizations, my analysis pays special attention to the conflicts and rule systems, or “rules of the game,” that are (re)produced and implicit. Together, various rules cohere to form the culture of an organization, and the nature of that culture can contribute to how women see themselves or how they are discriminated against (Mills, 1988). Actors’ actions are therefore based on their interpretation of rules, as they may decide to comply, ignore, change, challenge, or reject the rules. Some of the dominant rules that surfaced are formalized by organizations, like proactive employment programs. However, perhaps more influential is the silent discourse of informal rules, the focus of this section, that serve to order organizational routines and practices (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991).
My discussions with the informants made visible several well-established informal rules women need to follow to be successful in the Canadian workplace. These rules are:

1. “Businessman” = leader;
2. Females, be feminine;
3. Having children is bad for your career;
4. We (have to) try harder to prove ourselves;
5. Be assertive but don’t be a bitch; and
6. Mentor and advocate for women but don’t make men feel disadvantaged themselves.

Some women overtly challenge certain gendered rules by refusing to play the game and advocate for more support and mentorship of women leaders. Others show more subtle forms of resistance, and still others appear to accept the status quo. One of the most dominant informal organizational rules, which is also identified in the media analysis, is “Businessman” = leader.

**Rule #1: “Businessman” = Leader**

Though many informants report working for forward-thinking organizations that promote equity, most of them recognize *salient cues* that indicate subtle gender biases are still alive and well. Jill offers an example:

The company has done quite a bit to, to equalize that out as well so it’s not a gross disparity (in pay based on gender), but I would say it hasn’t been even. When I first started here they used to have a leadership conference every year and so leadership conference for management, and it would only be men going. When I got here I remember a few of (the women) kind of grumbling a little bit, like, you know, how come we don’t get to go to this. Everyone, literally everyone else in the office would go except for the accounting department and the project assistants, not even our female accounting manager. Anyways, at some point very shortly thereafter they made the switch and everybody went and it was the right decision.
Jill’s story shows how organizational rules can be changed by engaging in a process of resistance and enactment. Because there was a discrepancy between her sense of self and the environment she was operating in, Jill’s anchors began to disappear and her “grasp of what is happening began to loosen” (Weick, 2001, p. 461). Jill and some of her female colleagues in the organization appear to see the situation as implausible, and rather than be constrained by the environment and past experiences, they create an environment that reinforces their sense of credibility (Weick, 1995) by disrupting the status quo. The current situation was challenged due to social context (as well as resistance and enactment); women were “grumbling a little bit” about only men going to the company’s leadership conference, forcing the company to make the “right decision” and invite everybody.

In Jill’s account below of having only women cover reception at lunchtime, she tells a story that illustrates her sensemaking process due to a discriminatory gender practice at her workplace:

> We used to have reception coverage for lunch, lunch hour and basically it was all the women in the office who would rotate and cover reception coverage. At some point I had said like to one of the guys who was managing that process that I’m out of the office a lot on jobsites and have to rush back to work reception. I don’t think I flat out said to him, but in my head was, ‘If I was man right now you would never have me working reception coverage.’ And he told me that if I don’t do it, then a bunch of other people might not like, and it’s going to cause issues. We would hire summer students, university summer students that know less, and they would never do that coverage. It did cause quite a bit of discontent amongst women in the office for quite a few years, and was a real bone of contention for me. If they were men, there’s no way that covering reception would have ever been considered. It just never felt fair. I ultimately went around the guy who was coordinating it and said got myself taken off reception duty. Eventually, they corrected it and left a sign up at lunch and said they weren’t going to have any lunch coverage.

Jill experiences a shock that causes her to resist cultural norms that are against her beliefs, and as she retrospectively considers past experiences, she enacts her environment by confronting the situation head-on. There also appears to be a disconnect between the identity of the organization, one that Jill cites as being a “progressive firm,” and the internal experience of female employees.
The social context validates and gives shared relevance to her sensemaking: “It did cause quite a bit of discontent amongst women in the office for quite a few years, and was a real bone of contention for me.” Displaying a strong personal identity, she employs persistence, confidence, and forcefulness to obtain the attention of other actors, challenge the organizational rules by applying the meta-rule of “fairness,” she successfully manages the outcome of the situation. By doing so, she resists the ingrained social norm that expects women to be subservient to men and the practice and associated texts fail to become “embedded” in the organizational discourse (Phillips, Lawrence & Hary, 2004, p. 643). Small wins like Jill’s can be successful in combating discrimination because the stakes are reduced and the losers are encouraged to accept the outcome without disrupting the social system. For the victor, the result is a feeling of “confidence that flows from a pursuit of small wins” (Weick, 2001, p. 439).

Whereas Jill’s examples of sexism are quite subtle, Julia describes an interaction in which a more overt act of discrimination occurs. The account below shows her strong reaction to an explicitly sexist comment:

I’ll work the registration table and one of the folks from the committee who I had been sitting on this committee with for more than a year and a lawyer, male lawyer came in to check in and he walked up and he said, ‘I’m checking in.’ He didn’t really look at me and I said, ‘Oh hi (Bill), you know it’s nice to see you,’ and he looked up and he said, ‘Oh, (Julia), I didn’t recognize you, I thought you were (emphasis) just a secretary!’ I thought, ‘You asshole!’

This scenario shows how the normalization of discriminatory practices can exclude women leaders while at the same time suppressing conflict. Julia calls the male lawyer who thought she was “just a secretary” an “asshole,” and even though it wasn’t to his face, it shows a bold and disapproving response to his sexist comment. Perhaps if Julia had vocalized her thoughts, according to Martin (2003) she would have run the risk of being labeled as “bitchy” or “overly
sensitive.” Bill’s comment represents a shock in sensemaking; it is beyond what is plausible to Julia. Meanwhile, the wrongdoer appears to be completely unaware of the inappropriateness of his comment. Perhaps this is to be expected, as “it is in the very nature of the phenomenology of power that those … who have it experience its workings [are] least aware of it” (Schotter & Weigelt, 1992, p. 40).

Jill’s and Julia’s accounts illustrate how subtle and ingrained the practicing of gender can be. “Many gendering practices are done unreflexively; they happen fast, are ‘in action,’ and occur on many levels” (Martin, 2003, p. 344). Even well-intentioned people can engage in discriminatory practices based on the social construction of organizational expectations (Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). The effect of organizational rules is powerful as these women reflect on their experiences and contest previous knowledge when there is a shock that is outside the boundaries of the acceptable. Schmitt, Branscome, Kobrynowicz, and Owen (2002) assert that such experiences in the workplace not only impede women’s progress, but can also cause them psychological harm despite efforts to maintain positive personal identities. However, the informants in this study reveal something different: as these women engage in subtle and not-so-subtle processes of resistance, their changing sense of self opens up new ways to deal with organizational rules and structural constraints. The result appears to be an increased flow of strength and confidence in who they are as leaders.

Rule #2: Females, Be Feminine

A more feminine style of leadership that emphasizes communal traits and emotional intelligence, which has been evident in the newspaper articles since 1976, is endorsed by many of the
respondents themselves. Taking risks and being authentic for many informants also means not being afraid to show your emotions in the workplace:

*Gwen.* You know for a while there I tried to get rid of that, like, you know, the whole crying at work and now I’m, like, cry at work. (Chuckle) I mean why not? (Laughter) What can you lose? I just think you have to be real, you have to be authentic, it doesn’t have to be, you know, this or that and I would say traditional leaders I think that’s where I see the biggest gap for men.

Such micro-level interactions prescribe gender roles and expectations for women (Prasad, 2005) that are drawn from the same broader, macro-level societal discourse that we saw in the media analysis around how women should behave in the workplace. Gwen encourages women to embrace their emotions at work, and describes her current female boss as having masculine qualities she does not enjoy. By encouraging these characteristics, Gwen attempts to introduce a language around showing emotions that starts to challenge and reframe the dominant, masculine discourse that has historically been a discursive boundary around the expression of emotion at the workplace.

**Rule #3: Having Children Is Bad for Your Career**

It can be argued that endorsing feminine traits reinforce stereotypes. Specifically, as “nurturers,” women traditionally bear the brunt of responsibility for household and family (see Rule #5 in the previous chapter). Indeed, women, on average, devote more time than men do to housework and child care (Bianchi, 2000; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Given that seven of the nine respondents have children (with the eighth respondent just about to have her first child), it is perhaps unsurprising that this rule forced women to make sense of the negative effect of having children on their careers:

*Julia.* I don’t think it’s a myth that if you’re a woman and you take maternity leave for a year that it is detrimental to your career, I think there’s still a lot of disparity…. I think that we’ve come a long way but I think that there is still, there’s a long way to go to, to
even out the playing field and to have, allow a woman to go about her parental responsibilities and not be penalized for it. I took a year off for maternity leave. I came back and therefore I’m not moving up the ladder as fast as I should, I’ve been passed over for promotions. There’s comments that are made, sometimes, sometimes intentionally and sometimes, sometimes not. It just, it just is.

Julia looks retrospectively at her experience of having a child and the impact on her career and does not challenge the status quo. Her narrative, “I’m not moving up the ladder as fast as I should, I’ve been passed over for promotions…. It just is,” indicates her defeated status. Her status appears to be reinforced through social interactions with others, whose comments set boundaries and limits on Julia’s own sensemaking and contribute to her positioning as “other” (i.e., not fitting into positions designed for men) within her social reality (see Calás & Smircich, 1996; Calvert & Ramsey, 1996). Her acceptance of this career limitation indicates that it has become a normative process that serves to sustain and rationalize her acceptance of the status quo. She has negotiated an identity according to what is plausible to her. Although Julia does show subtle resistance by acknowledging that she’s been overlooked for promotions, her resistance appears to be repressed in the midst of powerful constraints, demonstrating that the formative context is well established and difficult to challenge and change (Unger, 1987a, 1987b).

Mary responds to Rule #3 by engaging in a process of sensemaking that illustrates the social nature of sensemaking and its influence on her personal identity. Her pregnancy represents a disruption in a routine process (her work life) and requires her to make sense of what is happening now and what will happen next (Boudes & Laroche, 2009). Mary suggests that if she does not make partner in the near future, it will be interesting because she will know it will be because of her maternity leave.
I think about how things will be managed with me going on maternity leave. People like to tread lightly around what they say to you but they’re very clear to say that it’s not going to affect your development, it’s not going to affect your chances of becoming a partner and, what I would like to see is that that’s true. So I’m going to be a good case study and I actually have a lot of female colleagues, senior managers who are watching my situation to see if the firm follows through with what they’ve said because technically I would have been on track to be a partner right away and if that changes I will know that it’s largely a result of me stepping out so it’ll be interesting.

…In the position I’m in right now, I mean, I’m about to check out from my own business for (chuckle) however long and, and I’m not planning to take a year and part of the reason is that I feel that I have to still be somewhat aggressive to go after the opportunity whereas if, if I were male like it, it wouldn’t be the case, right? Because my male colleagues wouldn’t be dipping out of their career, you know, at this stage.

By expressing concern around others imposing the identity of “inadequate” on her due to having a child, Mary is engaging in what Foucault (1982, p. 777) calls “dividing practices,” a normative process that objectifies a subject. Mary’s real or alleged differences due to her biological ability to have children makes her inferior to her male counterparts, who are more compatible with the career continuity preferred in the workplace. In this case, she is concerned that the stigma of an identity label (pregnancy, mother) will marginalize her, or have “disciplinary power” (Linstead, 2010, p. 703; see also Foucault, 1979), as evident from her clear concern that having a child will limit her career progression. This objectification appears to be a result of social context, due to a concern about division from others, but it is also a result of a division inside herself and her identity as someone who is on track to be a partner in her organization. Mary intends not to take her full maternity leave in order to maintain her career trajectory, particularly because her male counterparts would not be leaving their careers at this stage. Such extracted cues represent a tension in sensemaking, as if there is a discrepancy between the cues received (supportive formal programs on one hand versus a lack of perceived support in reality), her plausibility may be constrained, her source of grounding may disappear (Weick, 1995), and the credibility of the organization could be at risk.
Below, Jill tells her story of being pregnant with her two children, and the difference between her bosses’ reactions at two different organizations. These two experiences provide examples of cues Jill extracted from each organization and a recognition of Rule #3 that led to organizational shocks in her sensemaking processes. Shocks create ambiguity and trigger individuals to make sense of things differently. They are also shaped by context and may take different forms (Weick, 1995).

Going on two maternity leaves, it absolutely hurts your career. My first mat leave was at the engineering firm and at some point there was a position that I was sort of interested in. It was just a way to kind of bump up and learn a new skill there but I flat out had to say to the guy doing the interview that I was four months pregnant. I said I totally understand if you don’t want to train me and then I’m going to go on mat leave. Essentially what ended up happening is that they found someone else for the role, but I probably would have got the role had I not been pregnant. I totally understood that. I actually flat out told them because you feel like as a woman that if I had not told them and then they had hired me and then trained me it would not have been fair. I also personally didn’t feel like it maybe wasn’t the best move for the company, either. So I ended up staying in the position I was in for probably six months longer than I should have because of that. But I also knew that and I also felt like that was a reasonable decision under the circumstances. But, you know, you lose, you know, a year of benefits of your RRSP contributions.

I got pregnant with my second child in my first year working here. I was probably seven months pregnant and (my boss) had come up to me and said, you know, I heard that you’re interested in the (sustainability) stuff, while you’re on mat leave if you want to take a course or if you want to write the exam, we’ll totally support you in that. Which was just like mind-blowing, compared to people when they see you’re pregnant they think, oh, you’re pregnant, you’re probably not coming back to work after. I got more than a few people say, this is your second kid, you’re probably not coming back and I was like no, I’m coming back like for sure…. I passed my exam and so I ended up coming back off maternity leave early just because I was happy to do so.

Jill’s two diverse experiences illustrate the ongoing nature of sensemaking and how discrepancies facilitate how sense is made of a situation. In the first story, the cues extracted were inconsistent with her sensemaking process. By telling the interviewer she would understand if she wasn’t hired given her pregnancy, Jill is legitimizing the employer’s potential
discriminatory practice. However, she later states that maternity leave “absolutely hurts your career,” indicating that, in retrospect, she did not understand. This inconsistency represents a shock that was triggered by Jill’s workplace culture. As a result, the organization’s credibility became strained and Jill eventually left. In contrast, the second story is plausible and the organization credible. Jill expresses another shock, updating her ongoing sense, that her boss’s reaction to her pregnancy is the opposite of her previous experience. Based on the supportive cues in the second scenario, she chooses to return to work earlier than originally planned. She continues to enjoy a long career at the second organization, which she says recognizes and supports her ambitions. For Jill, there is a clear link between perceived organizational support, her identity as a capable professional, and her dedication to work.

Jill’s accounts also illustrate the importance of language and vocabulary in defining reality and framing experience. She chooses her words surrounding the incident carefully, and has difficulty expressing the cause (i.e., gender discrimination) and the effect (her discomfort) produced as a result. However, as MacKinnon (1979, p. 28) points out, “The unnamed should not be mistaken for the nonexistent.” She expresses uneasiness from the experience at the time and implies that what happened to her was discriminatory even though she did not use the label “gender discrimination” explicitly.

Another Reflexive Pause

In hearing these women’s stories, I can’t help but take a reflexive pause and look retrospectively on my own career path. Prior to having children, I worked in senior marketing management and consulting roles that were highly demanding. When I had my first child, I struggled to maintain a career that I loved in order to spend what I felt was enough time with my child. I felt high levels
of anxiety and stress as I tried to be “superwoman” and do it all—a mindset we saw reflected in the media analysis in the previous chapter. This stress was mine and mine alone, as having children had no notable impact on my husband’s career. I did not resist this mindset; instead, I completely changed my career into one that moved me out of business and into academia to accommodate my family life. I chose an identity that was based on both work and family (not just work), and the career path I now construct in academia is quite different than the one I lived over ten years ago. As I look back on this decision, I sometimes wonder what my career today would have looked like had I not changed paths. Like many contemporary women, I struggled (and still struggle) with attempting to balance the incompatible social roles of both mother and professional woman (Fassinger, 2002). Indeed, women customarily adjust their jobs to accommodate family responsibilities (taking flexible working schedules, turning down promotions or career-enhancing opportunities, etc.), which jeopardizes their career success (Hewlett & Buck, 2005). Would I have made the same decision today as I did then? Likely yes (as I do love my job teaching post-secondary), but I do now recognize that there is likely more to my story. I now realize that my decision and sensemaking at the time was triggered by Rule #3 (Having children is bad for your career)—a rule that I no longer accept.

**Rule #4: We (Have to) Try Harder to Prove Ourselves**

Despite the implementation of formal rules at the macro-level (e.g., the 1986 Employment Equity Act) or various organizational-level equity initiatives, the path to success for women in leadership is not so simple. The universal theme around gender-related discrimination that we saw reflected in the newspaper analysis (e.g., “We must run 10 times faster just to stay in the same place” [Maynard, 1986, p. B1]) represents an informal rule that emphasizes an alternative meaning from the intent of equity initiatives. Informants’ experiences are consistent with studies
spanning three decades that show a gender gap in work effort, wherein women must work harder than men to achieve similar results (e.g., The 1977 Quality of Employment Survey [Quinn & Staines, 2001]; The 1997 and 2001 Skills Surveys of the Employed British Workforce [Felstead, Gallie, Green, & Inanc, 2014]; The 1992, 1997, and 2002 National Studies of the Changing Workforce [Bond & Galinsky, 2004]). For example, Mary discusses the effect of recent advocacy initiatives in her organization:

I have reported to a lot of senior (male) leaders who have really coached and mentored and advocated for me. You see differential investment in female partner candidates that you probably wouldn’t have seen before and what that means is you get a lot more outreach and support, it seems, than what used to happen which is, which is positive, right? We’re brought into things more actively and thoughtfully than before where it was just considered to be, if you put your hand up, you got a seat at the table. Now we’re pulled into certain initiatives and discussions and things that probably wouldn’t have happened I would say five years ago…. Sometimes I see male leaders as being more vocal as advocates and can actually take you further sometimes in these organizations than women if they are not necessarily respected at the table as advocates. I do work for a few senior female leaders who are very well respected but they’re also going through their own challenges at the leadership table where they’re trying to advocate for themselves in certain positions. So you can see that all of us as females are trying to kind of push our way up regardless of level. Whereas the men we work with are kind of just in a solid, like they’re already there, if that makes sense. I don’t know how to explain it but so I think if you get the right connection with a female leader and they have enough support, then they can bring you along.

The realization that Rule #4 exists (We [have to] try harder to prove ourselves) triggers a sensemaking process for Mary whereby she resists the value and the plausibility of the language of equity within her organization. Though Mary describes her organization as being “very supportive of (equity) initiatives” by providing “differential investment in female partner candidates and that means you get a lot more outreach and support,” there are competing discourses at play. Whereas females are trying to “push” their way up, men don’t need to, as they are “solid” and “already there.”
Similarly, Stephanie and Colleen report having to work harder than their male colleagues to prove their value:

Stephanie. I just feel like for every woman out there I’ve got to work twice as hard as the guy next to me to show that I can pull my weight…. It is different coming from a really male-dominated environment where I knew everyone’s pecking order to this environment I’m in now where I have no idea.

Colleen. Being female probably plays into it, but sometimes I feel I have to work harder to really show that I know what I’m doing.

Even during the hiring process, gender bias toward males can be apparent. This is evident in one of Julia’s stories:

When I was a new grad and I was applying for jobs. My name is (Julia) but I was born as (Joe)…. I sent out a bunch of resumes as (Julia) and I sent out bunch of resumes as Joe and I got more calls as (Joe) than I did as (Julia). So I don’t know, to me it was a perceptional thing about my name and maybe people thought I was male, I don’t know. I’d like to think not, but it was an interesting little experiment that I did … it’s small and it was a long time ago but it’s just something that sort of stuck with me.

Weick (2001, p. 460) describes sensemaking as “seldom an occasion for passive diagnosis” as a person is “sizing up a situation.” Even though size-ups may appear to be short-lived, their influence is enduring. Julia’s “interesting little experiment,” sending out resumes under both her real name and a more masculine-sounding version of her name, resulted in her masculine alter ego receiving significantly more interviews. Julia’s story is an example of how biases can impede opportunities for women even before they obtain employment, even for CSR positions for which equity is a central concept. Although Julia describes this experience as being “small”

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7 Julia’s discomfort is supported in the research. In a meta-analysis of 49 studies, Davidson and Burke (2000) concluded that bias exists in evaluations of job applicants, indicating strong preferences for males for masculine-sounding positions and females when the position was seen as more feminine. This has implications for women who aspire to be in senior leadership positions in business (as well as other male-dominated professions) as these roles are primarily defined and understood in traditionally masculine terms (Eagly & Karau, 2002). They may suffer from biased perceptions as long as they pursue positions traditionally defined in masculine terms or held by men.
and “a long time ago,” she suggests that she feels otherwise by noting that the experience has “stuck with her” throughout her career. As Julia retrospectively makes sense of this experience, she indicates a sense of discomfort with the discriminatory practice of interviewing respondents based on presumptions about their gender. In doing so, she resists the gender identity label, “a sign that invokes meaning in the form of a response aroused in the person who interprets it” (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115), of “unqualified female.”

**Rule #5: Be Assertive but Don’t Be a Bitch**

Recall that identity construction in sensemaking is an ongoing process that gives people a sense of who they are (Weick, 1995, 2001), and often involves attempts to maintain a positive self-identity despite resistance or tensions (Watson, 2008). Identity labels evoke meaning around the “qualities of the identity claimant,” arousing an associated response from people who interpret it (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115). It is apparent that compliance to both feminine and masculine roles by navigating between being assertive, being aggressive, and being a bitch can be a struggle for women leaders.

Many informants described the fine line between being an assertive woman in leadership and being labelled a bitch. Jill offers an example:

There’s still that perception of some of the strong women in leadership, they get associated with that ‘B’ word and nobody wants that. Nobody wants to be that person, so there’s that trying to balance between having strong opinions without coming across like that. Not that some of the guys don’t have to navigate around some of that; they definitely don’t have to navigate around it in the same way…. I would never want to be construed as someone who was the bitch word but there are some women who probably are, like, fine with that’s something I would never be comfortable with. So you’re always just constantly checking yourself as you do your work.
The identity label of bitch “enables self-signifying,” how Jill makes sense of who she is and how she acts, as well as how she interprets “others’ signifying behaviour” (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115). Her identity work illustrates that discriminatory practices activate her sense of self. If you are an aggressive female and consistent with the masculine trait of leadership (Cantor, Bernay, & Stoess, 1992; Conrad & Poole, 1998), you are inconsistent with gender stereotypes and run the risk of being labelled a bitch. Jill makes sense of these incompatible role expectations (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992) by behaving in ways that are congruent with her gender role to have a greater chance to be positively evaluated (Haslett & Lipman, 1997; Lott & Rocchio, 1997; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). By enacting this rule, and by submitting to the connotations associated with this label, Jill is disciplined by “constantly checking (her)self.”

Stephanie, on the other hand, contests meanings associated with this identity label often associated with women leaders. She exudes exasperation about navigating the fine line between being confident and being a bitch:

> I think as women we get jealous if we see other women who are aggressive because, in business, regrettably there’s a real fine line between confident and arrogant … they’re really capable or they’re a bitch. I just find it so interesting because I look at the leaders I have worked with and I think a lot of the men have gotten to places in this company who don’t deal with the hard stuff. They don’t like conflict and are unwilling to resolve things. Instead, they let things go. They just let it ride. They let it fester. Whereas I think women are less capable of doing that, and then sometimes you get a little reputation because you’re, you know, you’re bitchy or you’re harsh.

Oppressive practices can be deactivated by questioning the identity labels that others place on women in the workplace. Stephanie resists the connotations associated with being labelled in this way, noting that being aggressive can damage a woman’s reputation, whereas men are rewarded for such behaviour. She also notes that men don’t tend to deal with the “hard stuff” and “let
things go,” which leads to unresolved conflict in the workplace. Thus, she attempts to enact a new meaning—a more positive language—around being aggressive in the workplace.

Sensemaking is a retrospective process, and in the latter stages of her career, Valerie shows an awareness of the structural and discursive constraints that limited her career progression. She uses labelling to stabilize her search for an explanation of things that don’t make sense and tries to reconcile the conflicting meanings of “assertiveness” and “aggressiveness” in her sensemaking process:

I report to a vice-president, and when I first reported to him he said to me how come you’re not a VP? Nobody has ever asked me that. I said that it’s because I haven’t scratched and clawed and I think you’ve got to scratch and claw to progress as a woman certainly in the energy business … I’ve looked at a couple gals who have kind of made it into that next level and they’re far more, not that I’m not assertive, I would say they’re more aggressive. The difference between assertive and aggressive. I’m assertive and I’ll stand up for myself and I’ll speak up with some confidence but I’m certainly not aggressive. Aggressive would be phoning up an executive member and saying I want to go on to the next level and join this team and I’m qualified for this work. I’ve seen women that have got ahead by doing this. I would never and I should have maybe, like making it known that hey, I want to be a VP and I want to take on this new area. I’ve never been like that. I’ve always been, you know, if my work speaks for itself, I’ll get promoted which I guess is a little old-fashioned, but it’s very female … it’s that career aggressiveness and that career planning and that I’m going to be a VP and I’m going to get ahead attitude that I’ve just never had…. Well, I guess I did call somebody when I got this job and I was promoted to where I am now.

Valerie’s self-identity swings between “assertive” and “aggressive.” Until recently, Valerie refused to play the game and participate in normalized understandings of how women get ahead in the workplace. This is consistent with the behaviour of many contemporary women who adopt less authoritative communication styles—a more feminine style of leadership—in their pursuit of powerful positions (Campbell, 1989). It also might be indicative of fear: “Given the contractual nature of employment, the vagaries of capitalism and the structural inequalities of power, fear is invariably a perennial feature of organizational life” (Knights & McCabe, 2002, p. 243).
Regardless, because of her “old-fashioned” and “very female” approach, she did not move up to the “next level” as quickly as some of her more forceful female counterparts. Realizing that adopting the dominant feminine standard of assertiveness in the workplace negatively affected her career progression, she eventually did play the game by being more aggressive and, as a result, was promoted to the position she is in now.

**Rule #5: Mentor and Advocate for Women BUT Don’t Make Men Feel Disadvantaged Themselves**

Changes in the formative context advocating for women in leadership creates space for related initiatives to be enacted within organizations. A common expression of resistance to biases in the workplace involves empowering other women through sponsorship and mentoring. In sensemaking, social context is based on social interaction with others; “To change meaning is to change the social context” (Weick, 2001, p. 461). By advocating for a change in social context and creating opportunities for mentoring, the informants engage in ongoing events in a way that resists normative practices in organizations. Specifically, when asked about their thoughts on women being the minority when it comes to CSR leadership positions in Canada, all of the informants felt that formal or informal mentoring is of critical importance when it comes to increasing the number of female leaders in the workplace. Valerie provides an example:

> I take kind of coaching and mentoring very seriously myself. It’s funny with these layoffs and everything and with the up and down of our company the last, I’d say, two years, I’ve turned into a go-to person for a lot of women and I’ve had more coffees than I’ve ever had in my life this last six months to a year because there’s younger women that haven’t been through a downturn, and I’ve been through too many and I take great pride in that they do come to me and they just want to talk and I listen and give them perspective and everything. So to help women getting ahead, I think that it is nice to have a champion and/or mentor and/or coach and/or someone who’s going to listen to you. I’ve had a couple champions in my life and they’ve been really, really helpful to my career ... that’s another piece of advice that I would give to women right now is to identify a mentor or a champion. I hope most women that do want to move ahead will seek someone out, and I don’t know how many women do.
Similarly, May discusses the positive impact the hiring of a well-respected female Chief Sustainability Officer has had on her personally as well as her organization:

A couple of years ago the company hired a new Chief Sustainability Officer with a wealth of experience in the area and from there the team expanded and we had spent a fair bit of time developing a reporting function and I think at this point the team’s mandate has grown significantly. She is highly respected in the field and I had the opportunity to work with her for several years when I was in her team. She urged me to broaden my experiences to grow as a leader.

Many of the women interviewed have built a network of supportive and collaborative relationships that have helped them become the leaders they are today. They recognize the importance of the encouragement of their mentors to give them inspiration and they try to do the same as they mentor others.

While women largely advocate for and mentor other women, there are indications of subtle resistance to these efforts by men. Mary indicates some tensions with respect to the rules, as her male colleagues have questioned why there are female-oriented mentorship programs (as opposed to male-oriented programs). She also infers that organizational efforts to rectify inequity need to be carefully framed so that her male counterparts don’t feel disadvantaged themselves:

I think there needs to be mentorship and coaching women and differential investment in that. It’s hard because then my male colleagues would say, ‘Well, why is it that (females) would get that?’ but, you know, we need mentorship and coaching to be senior leaders. So how is it that you get that differential investment? ...I think it’s a trust thing so you want to see that there’s follow-through on commitments to promote equity. You don’t want it to just be a program where they’ve said women will be promoted, you want to actually see women get promoted into leadership positions. I think that’s something that the firm is trying to do and should continue to differentially invest in, even if it rubs some people the wrong way…

I was particularly struck by Mary’s story as only months ago, in my own workplace, one of my male colleagues asserted that “reverse sexism” was happening in our workplace. Confused, I
asked him what he meant by that, and he said he felt that the women in our offices were receiving more accommodations to their schedules than the men by our then female chair. It surprised me that he concluded this was taking place without seeming to consider a wide variety of other factors like the need to match subject matter expertise or work experience to particular classes. Regardless, his perceptions around preferential treatment indicate to me that Mary’s concerns about equity programs being thwarted by males who may perceive that they are being disadvantaged by such programs is a reality in many workplaces, including my own. This conversation left me feeling a bit disheartened about how much has changed since the late 1970s where “a key concern (was) to avoid setting quotas so that men will not feel they are being discriminated against” (MacKay, 1989, B1).

In conclusion, there are many well-established “rules of the game” for women leaders to navigate in the workplace. Sensemaking tells us that what makes sense to one group of people may not be plausible to another (Weick, 1995). There appears to be a disconnect between institutional-level and organizational-level equity initiatives and the alternative, more telling reality that many of these women leaders face daily. Many of the formal equity programs in place at organizations are accompanied by informal rules that restrict and guide behaviour, like the need for women leaders not to take the full maternity leave that they are entitled to in order to remain on track in their careers. This indicates that equity programs can be undermined by more powerful, informal rules that are reproduced and normalized through subtle interactions. Even though there is some evidence of resistance to the rules, there also seems to be some tolerance for them as well, which may be cause for concern because it suggests a level of acceptance of uneven gender-based power relations at the highest levels of CSR leadership. It could be argued
that, by failing to challenge biased assumptions overtly, some of these women are unconsciously reaffirming the privileged status of men in the Canadian workplace.

**Conclusion**

Using critical sensemaking to explore female CSR leaders’ experiences at the local level shows how they make sense of their experiences on a day-to-day basis while placing them within the context of organizational power and the broader social context (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Together, CSM’s formative context, psychosocial properties, and organizational rules offer a heuristic toward understanding how these women make sense of key organizational events, or defining moments, they have experienced in the workplace. Many of these women’s accounts reveal either overt or more subtle resistance to the gendered system in organizations and society, wherein men’s power continues to be pervasive and persistent. While powerful actors largely set direction for formal organizational rules which are reflective of the broader social context and constrain individuals’ interpretations of meaning, the women’s narratives indicate that there are more subtle, well-established “rules of the game” with which they must contend. Some women (especially those later in their careers) choose to challenge these discriminatory practices overtly by questioning the offenders, whereas others do so in more indirect ways, such as working harder to prove themselves or coaching and mentoring others. By engaging in such micro-processes of resistance on an ongoing basis, many of these women are (sometimes unknowingly) enacting discourse that could lead to institutional change.

What struck me about these women was their strong sense of identity that translated into a sense of obligation to contribute to society in a meaningful way. All of the leaders interviewed see their work as CSR leaders as an opportunity to have a position where they can stay true to what
is important to them make meaningful contributions to society. Over time, on an ongoing basis these women overcame and learned from shocks due to subtle or overt discriminatory actions in their workplaces; this process appeared to strengthen their sense of personal identity. Perhaps this explains the resilient qualities found in the strong women leaders interviewed. They certainly seem to have had lots of practice!
CHAPTER 8. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

I began this thesis by setting out to make sense of women in leadership by discursively examining both the gendering of a CSR discourse, as well as the gendering of women in CSR and in business more generally. A key aim of this study therefore involves revealing the gendered nature of CSR leadership to destabilize the status quo through consciousness-raising (see Foucault, 1972; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Prasad, 2006). Recall my research objectives: Explore whether and how the discursive construction of CSR is gendered through CSM and CDA (RO1); Analyze what structural (e.g., macro-level context and meso-level organizational rules) and psychosocial (e.g., micro-level sensemaking) discourses influence individual sensemaking of gender and CSR (RO2); and, understand the relationship between CSR discourse and the identities of gendered women in leadership positions (RO3). In examining these research objectives, I embraced the feminist poststructuralist paradigm and applied a critical sensemaking methodology. I first investigated the positioning of women CSR leaders in the Canadian newspaper media over the last 40 years using the various components of CSM (Helms Mills et al., 2010), along with the news as discourse framework (van Dijk, 1988a, 1988b). I then applied the CSM methodology to the experiences of women leaders to understand how they enacted, produced, and resisted the construction of gender through the discursive effects of language in sensemaking.

In this final chapter, I begin by reviewing this study’s theoretical and practical implications. I then outline its limitations, provide recommendations for future research, and offer my own concluding reflections.
Theoretical Contributions

There is significant space for research on theoretical, qualitative research in “CSR scholarship that addresses gender issues or brings gender analysis to the field” (Grosser et al., 2017, p. 2). My theoretical contribution to this undeveloped research field is a result of my feminist poststructuralist approach to CSR leadership. Some scholars have situated feminist ethics with empowered women (although not exclusively) imparting social change through responsible business practices (e.g., McCarthy, 2017; Wicks, Gilbert, & Freeman, 1994). Feminist ethics in this sense focuses on relationships and co-operation, as fostering socially responsible behaviour in business. Moving beyond traditional liberal feminist research, the poststructuralist paradigm allowed me to question the system that supports technologies of domination (Foucault, 1988, 1993), or knowledge, that constrains the existence of individuals. By focusing on the processes, rather than outcomes, of how individual identities and meanings are shaped (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000), I focused on the everyday interactions of individuals and the power relations within those interactions. Despite the positioning of women as being untapped resources within corporate social responsibility throughout international bodies such as the United Nations (McCarthy, 2017), the reality within CSR leadership indicates that resilient, stereotypical social constructions of gender are being (re)created.

Within the poststructuralist paradigm, my use of the Foucauldian (1979) discursive theoretical framework allows us to understand how some discursive practices around women in CSR leadership have become normalized and duplicate existing, taken-for-granted assumptions around the role of women in the workplace. This study therefore contributes to existing theory by taking into account how power emerges historically and links understandings of the sensemaker at the micro-level to the broader structural and societal discourse (macro-level) from a critical
perspective. In the Canadian news media, we saw examples of women being sexualized, positioned as the “other,” and being defined by motherhood and household responsibilities. Likewise, in the interviews, the informants all experienced overt and more subtle discrimination in their careers (e.g., being hit on by a colleague, passed over for promotions, or pigeonholed into soft/non-core positions). Such positioning of women serves to structurally and discursively constrain women in power whose self-identities are influenced by a range of experiences including social interactions and organizational rules. The effect of such gendered power relations is apparent with many women who, albeit unknowingly, self-regulate by enacting subordination (e.g., checking themselves to avoid being labelled a “bitch”), constrained from thinking otherwise about themselves (Foucault, 1988, 1993). Although this study centered around the experiences of CSR leaders, their voices provide insights into how language is created as meaningful and enacted as discourses that privileges and embeds masculinity in organizations (Acker, 1998; Calás & Smircich, 1991).

Methodological Contributions

The framework of critical sensemaking offers a unique way to examine how discourses about women in leadership are produced, reproduced, and legitimized by the newspaper media as well as by female leaders themselves. CSM as a methodology highlights the various layers that interact to understand the interconnected influences that female CSR leaders draw from to make sense of their situations. Going beyond sensemaking by considering a complex combination of multi-level variables while foregrounding identity construction as well as power structures and relationships, CSM is “a complex process, which may evolve in different ways within different contexts” (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 191). My intention at the beginning of this project was to apply each CSM element one at a time to provide various levels of investigation, but after I
began my analysis I quickly discovered that the CSM elements are best applied simultaneously, rather than in any specific order. Although different sensemaking processes are highlighted in various sections of my analysis, I often worked with various elements together to identify interconnected relationships. In this way, CSM allowed me to consider historical or systemic contexts and view the process through which discourses become meaningful to individuals as they are (re)created, interpreted, enacted, and resisted. Hence, I contribute to the refinement of CSM as a methodology, by applying it to the fields of leadership, gender, and CSR, and help show its potential and robustness. I engaged participants in a process of active sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and created space for multiple voices in the investigation of the psychological processes that created gendered substructures (Acker, 1990) that have made discriminatory practices in CSR leadership acceptable over time.

CSM not only reflects power effects in discourse, but also provides a framework through which we can see factors that influence how individuals make sense of their experiences. More specifically, my focus is on attempting to represent traditionally marginalized voices and show examples of compliance and resistance to discursive practices. For example, I found that resistance became visible in informants’ sensemaking process when they described a shock—often a result of a social interaction—that made a discriminatory experience implausible, causing them to destabilize existing discourses (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Even though the focus of this study was to bring forward marginalized voices, I was surprised to find (in the news articles and the interviews) that another significant source of resistance to equity in the workforce was from male leaders who saw equity initiatives as a threat. Hence, CSM as a methodology bridges broader socio-cultural discourses and the local site of sensemaking, which enabled me to uncover structures and processes that enable some narratives
to become plausible within organizations and protect the status quo. By using multiple methods of analysis and by approaching my research in a dialectical fashion, I contribute to the development of empirical accounts of CSR leadership.

**Practical Contributions: Toward Social Change in the Workplace**

The purpose of this thesis is to reveal the gendered nature of social arrangements in order to bring to the surface the hidden discourses that mediate the opportunities of women leaders in the field of CSR. Despite the fact that the Employment Equity Act has been in place since 1986, the progress of women in leadership in Canada has been remarkably slow. As Fairclough (1989, p. 72) suggests, there has been a “decline in the overt marking of power relationships (that) should be interpreted as a concession on the part of power-holders” who have been “forced into less direct ways of exercising and reproducing their power.” Though much of the rhetoric in the media and organizations suggests that inequity is unacceptable, there are less direct mechanisms in place that serve to reproduce the status quo.

I found that dominant societal and organizational mandates around gender equity were, at times, inconsistent with the informant’s lived reality. There appears to be a tension between the positioning of formal programs that have been positioned as being successful by organizations (and in the newspaper articles) and some of the women’s experiences with discriminatory behaviour. In this way, cues can disrupt the ongoing process of sensemaking and create shocks that represent opportunities for resistance (Weick, 1995). Women leaders can effectively avoid being defined by others by recognizing discriminatory practices and becoming active agents in defining themselves. Through recounting their stories, many informants showed resistance by acknowledging and labeling their experiences discriminatory and diminishing the power of the
stereotypes that constrain them. This gives them the capacity to influence others and promote the fair and unbiased treatment of women (Wirth, 2005). Perhaps if sexist comments were more frequently denounced, people’s understanding of reality would be “shocked” and discriminatory actions destabilized. As a result, the behaviour would be more visible, less acceptable, and more difficult to enact. Over time, the collective efforts of women could have significant impact in fighting gender discrimination in the workplace. In short, by making sense of their experiences within the broader context of power and privilege, this study helps introduce an activism to CSM and CSR and an impetus for change (van Dijk, 1993).

Many CSR leaders also foster change by resisting discursive boundaries that the dominant masculine discourse has placed around expressions of femininity at the workplace. They reject the double binds that some argue position them as the “other” and place them in a no-win situation (see Behschop & Doorewaard, 1998; Charles & Davis, 2000). They instead choose to embrace a feminine leadership style that embraces showing emotions at work and is espoused in nurturing employee development with what workers value: recognition, feelings of accomplishment, being treated with respect and dignity, involvement and pride in meaningful work, quality of life, and opportunities for self-development (Conrad & Poole, 1998; Eagly & Carli, 2004). Diekman and Eagly (1999) argue that a more feminine style of leadership, based on a more flexible, culture- and relationship-oriented style of leadership, actually erodes women leaders’ disadvantage in the workplace by elevating the importance of building collaborative relationships based on values associated with female social norms.

However, women’s agency in producing change is only one piece of the puzzle. The impetus for gender system change must also occur at the macro-structural level, where males control power
and resources, and women lack sufficient agency to change the system. As Chafetz (2001, p. 625) argues, “no privileged category of people consciously and purposely relinquishes its privilege (except under duress).” Affecting organizational change of any kind requires those in positions of authority and power, usually those who benefit from the status quo, to embrace the change. This means not just focusing on strategic executional factors, but also aligning cultural factors, such as language, to the change.

Space for change emerges when “truths” are destabilized through resistance and consciousness-raising: “Unearthing the gendered nature of social arrangements is a vital part of the feminist agenda, for it is the first step in accommodating women’s interests and preferences in the wider fabric of society” (Prasad, 2005, p. 168). Presenting alternative versions of past accounts can help destabilize how leadership has been historically framed by the newspaper press. By observing how stereotypes have been consistently constructed and communicated in newspaper articles over the last 40 years, I attempt to create space for new depictions of gender to emerge. As Kitch (2001) notes, it is important to look at the past in a way that helps revise, reshape, or broaden that history. The media is a leading institution in cultural knowledge production, and the messages it communicates about gender roles are incredibly important. Journalists must be aware of the impact of their choices and must give a broad spectrum of leaders prominence in their articles. At the same time, women perhaps need to think about how they can influence the media discourse by being active in getting their issues heard and making themselves available to the media. As Hartmann and Husband (1974, p. 41) reveal, “Attitudes cannot be changed significantly, independently of the structural relationships to which they relate.” The number of women and the roles they play in the media is a mechanism for institutional change because of its influence on societal perceptions (Young, 2011). If the media positions women as experts, it
is socially constructing women as experts and providing frames or “definitions of situations that produce meanings and organize experience” (Fairhurst, 2005, p. 166). Just as the media plays a role in perpetuating cultural norms and practices, so too can it play a significant role in promoting gender equity and shaping notions of leaders that affect women’s advancement in business. In this way, the media is arguably a mechanism for changing institutions and unveiling the discursive (re)production of female leaders in the news media. But first, the power of the media must be acknowledged and addressed before real change can take place (Young, 2011).

Changing the deeply ingrained masculine leadership style that permeates western companies begins with self-awareness, by making the unconscious conscious. Organizational awareness and engagement of the institutional field in a locally relevant way can support meaningful organizational change (Prasad, A., Prasad, P., & Mir, 2010). Stereotypes are deeply embedded in our culture, and companies need to make a conscious effort to look for workplace cues that emit stereotypic judgments or suggest gender-specific criteria (see Steele, 2011). As Karam and Jamali (2013, p. 60) note, gendering CSR could potentially serve as an “untapped critical change lever” that could contribute to the plight of women. If these leaders are able to use their discursive power to establish an alternate, dominant narrative throughout their organizations—a culture of emotional empathy within CSR—alternate meanings about the nature and purpose of CSR may emerge. We may then be able to move beyond the fundamental assumptions of CSR as a public relations and branding exercise (Banerjee, 2007; Dobers & Springette, 2010). In short, by uncovering the gendered nature and homogeneity of the dominant CSR discourse in Canada, I have highlighted the need for change.
Limitations & Future Research

Because this study looks at individuals in specific environments, observing different women (e.g., gender, position, race, sexuality) at different sites (e.g., industry, company size) would add more breadth to our understanding of how sensemaking occurs in different variations of CSR leadership. Such intersectional analysis will give us better insight into undoing power relations at the individual and social levels, and help us move away from treating women as a homogeneous group. Specifically, additional exploration of power differentials based on career stage/generational experiences as well as industry type may prove fruitful. This study was limited to respondents who are senior female CSR leaders, but I did find that self-confidence and resistance were more visible when informants were later in their career stage. There is some evidence that supports the notion that women in young adulthood put the needs of others first and feel restrained by societal expectations to be feminine and selfless, and that their identities change after midlife experiences when issues of self and personal identity dominate and nurturing others moves to the background (Gilligan, 1990). It would be interesting to extend this study’s research by focusing on the experiences of mature women in CSR who have failed to achieve a higher status position, or on young women who are experiencing barriers in career progression. Further exploration that considers industry type is also warranted. The interviews as well as related research (e.g., Catalyst, 2011a; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Uppal & LaRochelle-Côté, 2015) indicate that women leaders experience higher levels of discrimination in male-dominated environments like the oil industry. In short, I am proposing that further scholarship at various intersections would help build a more inclusive research agenda around CSR and gender (see Grosser & Moon, 2017).
Another future research direction could focus on looking at critical sensemaking in a naturally occurring setting. Given that critical sensemaking is socially constructed and emerges from the discourse of its members (Helms Mills, 2005), the social dynamics and discursive strategies may be more visible for analysis in comparison with a more structured interview setting.

Finally, my analysis of the historical newspaper articles was intentionally limited because its purpose was to inform the analysis of the interviews. However, there are opportunities for future related research on women CSR leaders focusing on other forms of journalism such as business magazines, television news media and investigative journalism shows, or, more recently, social media. In the last two decades, the Internet has had a profound impact on the newspaper industry, resulting in journalists having less influence over how news is disseminated (Bakker, 2012; Franklin, 2013). If the media is a powerful source of knowledge and social control (Rachlin, 1988), there could be an opportunity for new forms of media to turn the traditional hegemonic image of what it means to be a female CSR leader on its head. Using critical sensemaking to study and reflect the present-day context could provide unique perspective on the process of how younger generations, in particular, interpret and (re)create discourses that affirm or resist traditional notions of the masculine leader.

**Final Reflections**

Throughout this research process, my reflexive approach has encouraged me to step back and reflect on my own reactions to and understandings of the findings. To acknowledge my own sensemaking, I retrospectively consider my own experiences in the workplace whenever they occur in this thesis. At the same time, I was mindful that the voices of the subjects (not the author) were privileged; as Weick puts it, “We are not the point” (2002, p. 898).
My intent is to provide an alternate way of looking at female CSR leaders, and I recognize that the analysis represents one of many possible understandings of events and situations. “The observation that life is lived forwards but understood backwards, is just as true for us as reflexive observers, as it is for the people we observe” (Weick, 2002, p. 895). At times, I felt angry and discouraged that the structures that serve to marginalize and exclude women from the highest levels of CSR remain firmly entrenched despite well-intentioned organizational programs as well as equity laws that have been in place for years. I was often compelled to look retrospectively at my own career, at instances where at the time I did not recognize unequal power relations between men and women in the workplace, let alone question discriminatory actions. My critical sensemaking approach, poststructuralist feminism, and the importance of reflexivity enables me to have a stronger voice than I did before I embarked on this journey—a voice I won’t hesitate to use to challenge both overt and subtle discriminatory behaviour that can limit women’s own choices in whether or not they pursue leadership positions.

I acknowledge that my work as a feminist poststructuralist researcher has been inscribed with an agenda that aims to show a different understanding of female CSR leaders and destabilize dominant notions that continue to support powerful and steadfast masculine notions of leadership. However, I feel I have been true to myself and my informants in my use of critical sensemaking. I offer a story that is empirically sensitive and reveals impressions and interpretations that, I hope, encourage the reader to pause and consider taken-for-granted biases, truths, and meanings that have silenced some voices and privileged others (see Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, 2006). An important step toward achieving equity for women in leadership requires a destabilization of the status quo through building awareness of discriminatory stereotypes, biases, and attitudes (Prasad, 2005). This research has also left me hopeful, as I believe that all of
us as individuals have the micro-level power to resist misrepresentations of the “other.” Through their sensemaking process, many of the female leaders interviewed showed strength and resilience as they resisted both overt and more subtle gendered practices in their workplaces. By destabilizing given “truths,” challenging dominant discourses, and introducing competing discourses, these women are interrupting some of the practices and understandings that many scholars deem responsible for re(creating) gendered organizations (e.g., Acker, 1990; Calás & Smircich, 2006; Helms Mills, 2005; Grosser & Moon, 2017; McCarthy, 2017). They are like zebras who are not afraid to show their stripes, as their voices and reflections give hope to others (including myself) to rethink what is possible.
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Frederick, W. C. (2016). Commentary: Corporate social responsibility: Deep roots, flourishing growth,


Grosser, K., Holgersson, C., Knights, D., & McCarthy, L. (2013). Gender work & organization:
Corporate responsibility and gendered organizations (Call for abstracts for the 8th Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference, June 24–26, 2014, Keele University, UK). Retrieved from http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/58518/GWO2014_Call_for_abstracts_all%20streams_1.pdf


Kovacs, J. (2014, July 26). When there is struggle, well-being and success can be the result: Christine Williams, the first black female vice-president of Scotiabank, shares her journey. *Toronto Star*, M2.


A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CSR


Marens, R. (2008). The hollowing out of corporate social responsibility: Abandoning a tradition in the


A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CSR


A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CSR


Rapley, T. J. (2001). The art(fulness) of open-ended interviewing: Some considerations on analysing interviews. *Qualitative Research, 1*, 303–323.


A CRITICAL SENSEMAKING STUDY OF WOMEN LEADERS IN CSR


We must run 10 times faster just to stay in the same place. (1986, Oct. 10). *Toronto Star*, B1.


Women are going to make the difference (1992, June 10). The Globe and Mail, B6.


APPENDIX A: Athabasca University Research Ethics Approval

September 30, 2015  Ms. Jennifer Cherneski  Faculty of Business  Athabasca University  File No: 21930

Ethics Expiry Date: September 29, 2016
Dear Ms. Jennifer Cherneski,

Thank you for your recent resubmission to the Faculty of Business Departmental Ethics Review Committee, addressing the clarifications and revisions requested for your research entitled, "Women on Boards: Making Critical Sense of Their Approach to Corporate Social Responsibility".

Your application has been Approved and this memorandum constitutes a Certification of Ethics Approval. You may begin the proposed research.

This REB approval, dated September 30, 2015, is valid for one year less a day.

Throughout the duration of this REB approval, all requests for modifications, ethics approval renewals and serious adverse event reports must be submitted via the Research Portal.

To continue your proposed research beyond September 29, 2016, you must apply for renewal by completing and submitting an Ethics Renewal Request form. Failure to apply for annual renewal before the expiry date of the current certification of ethics approval may result in the discontinuation of the ethics approval and formal closure of the REB ethics file. Reactivation of the project will normally require a new Application for Ethical Approval and internal and external funding administrators in the Office of Research Services will be advised that ethical approval has expired and the REB file closed.

When your research is concluded, you must submit a Project Completion (Final) Report to close out REB approval monitoring efforts. Failure to submit the required final report may mean that a future application for ethical approval will not be reviewed by the Research Ethics Board until such time as the outstanding reporting has been submitted.

At any time, you can login to the Research Portal to monitor the workflow status of your application.

If you encounter any issues when working in the Research Portal, please contact the system administrator at research_portal@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,
Fathi Elloumi  Chair, Faculty of Business Departmental Ethics Review Committee  Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL - RENEWAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (AUREB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The AUREB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

Ethics File No.: 21930

Principal Investigator: Ms. Jennifer Cherneski, Graduate Student
Faculty of Business

Supervisor: Dr. Kay Devine (Supervisor), Professor
Faculty of Business

Project Title: ‘Zebras Showing Their Stripes? A Critical Sensemaking Study of the Discursive Construction and Gendering of Women CSR Leaders’

Effective Date: September 5, 2017  Expiry Date: September 4, 2018

Restrictions:

Any modification or amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval.

Ethical approval is valid for a period of one year. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

A Project Completion (Final) Report must be submitted when the research is complete (i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)) or the research is terminated.

Approved by: Joy Fraser, Chair
Athabasca University Research Ethics Board

September 5, 2017
## APPENDIX C: Newspaper Articles Included in the Thematic Analysis Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Toronto Star</th>
<th>Globe and Mail</th>
<th>Other (typically local papers)</th>
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APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol

This research seeks to provide insight into how female leaders make sense of their experiences and corporate social responsibility/sustainability. I will be interviewing at least seven and up to ten Canadian directors from as many organizations. Your answers will be completely confidential. No names or organizations will be identified in the research results.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW: ___ Yes ___ No

INFORMED CONSENT SIGNED: ___ Yes ___ No

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Respondent: _______________________________________________ Date: _____________________
Age: _________
Occupation: _______________________________________________
Where work: _______________________________________________
  How long: _______________________________________________
Partner? _________________________________________________
Kids? How old? ___________________________________________
Year started current organization: _____________________________
Current position: __________________________________________
  Other positions held previously? ______________________________
How many employees in organization? In CSR ‘dept.’ _________________________________
  How many men? __________________________________________
  How many women? ________________________________________
Are there any other organizations you’re involved with (e.g., volunteer work)? ______________

-------------------------------------------
GUIDING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your career, from university studies to your current position as a CSR/sustainability leader.
   a. How do you come to be in this position?
   b. Why this company?
   c. Describe one or two highlights of your time on in this organization so far.
   d. Has there been anything that has been particularly difficult or frustrating?

2. I’d like to get your perspective about the current state of women in CSR leadership. Women are the clear minority in leadership in organizations in Canada. (Men are twice as likely to hold senior management positions.) Any thoughts on that?
   a. Why do you think that women are under-represented in leadership positions in organizations?
   b. Do you think that is an issue? Why or why not?
   c. What do you think would increase the number of women in leadership positions?
   d. When you reflect on your X years of leadership, is there anything you would do differently?
      i. What advice would you have for women aspiring to leadership positions?
   e. Have you experienced any biases as a female leader?

3. As you know, this research is looking at the experiences of female CSR leaders. Tell me about your experiences as a female CSR leader.
   a. In what ways do organizations foster CSR—who and why? What led your organization to adopt/take on CSR initiatives?
   b. Who leads CSR in your organization and why?
   c. Tell me something about the leadership dynamics in your organization. What role does it seem women have in relation to leadership?
   d. Do you prefer to work with men or women or mixed groups? Why?
   e. Do you notice any differences in how men work together in comparison to women?
   f. What are the characteristics of female CSR leaders?
      i. How do they obtain these positions?
      ii. Once in these positions, what roles do they assume?
   g. What does your understanding of CSR mean relative to other men? Other women?
   h. Can you give any examples of women leading CSR? Describe their CSR agendas.
      i. Do you have any examples of other organizations and how they espouse/enact CSR?

4. The next few questions revolve around the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR).²
   a. What does corporate social responsibility mean to you?
   b. Is there an awareness of corporate social responsibility in your organization? Can you tell me more about that?
   c. How would you describe that employee identities within your organization are linked to CSR?
   d. What are external perceptions of your company’s CSR ‘identity’? How do you think that impacts internal perceptions of employees?
   e. Who advocates for CSR in your organization? What approaches do they use?
   f. How would you describe your organization’s approach to corporate social responsibility? Can you give some specific examples that you’re aware of?

² Definition of CSR (for reference): aims to embrace responsibility for corporate actions and to encourage a positive impact on the environment and stakeholders including consumers, employees, investors, communities, and others.
g. How well do you think your company fares when it comes to corporate social responsibility?

h. How do you think about CSR? Are there things you’re passionate about?

i. In an ideal world, what would your wish list be for corporate social responsibility initiatives for your company?

5. Do you know of any other female leaders in the field of corporate social responsibility/sustainability in private organizations I might be able to connect with?

[Thank the individuals for their participation in the interview. Assure of confidentiality of the responses.]
APPENDIX E: Male and Female Presence in CSR Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Men quoted or noted</th>
<th>Women quoted or noted</th>
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<tr>
<td>1976–1986 (N=31)</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987–2000 (N=71)</td>
<td>90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001–2016 (N=61)</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Male authors</th>
<th>Female authors</th>
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<tr>
<td>1976–1986 (N=14)</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987–2000 (N=25)</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001–2016 (N=21)</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
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Note: Totals include articles that have CSR as a central focus (e.g., noted in headline or lead paragraphs) but exclude articles focused on equity. This is because equity was not widely considered to be a component of CSR until the turn of the century (see analysis of articles from 2001–2016). Author is unknown in some articles.
### APPENDIX F: Dominant CSR Voices and Themes in the Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSR theme</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Illustrative headlines</th>
<th>Who quoted/mentioned</th>
<th>Reporter gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advocating for CSR</td>
<td>Toronto Star (15/11/1994)</td>
<td>Business must look beyond profit</td>
<td>Male bank chairman</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>The Montreal Gazette (09/03/1996)</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility crucial in this era of downsizing</td>
<td>Male consultant Male advisor</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Vancouver Sun (05/05/2000)</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility starting to take root</td>
<td>Female president &amp; CEO N/A</td>
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<td>Ottawa Citizen (30/07/1989)</td>
<td>Moral responsibility: Firms can’t afford not to have a conscience</td>
<td>Male director Male professor</td>
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<td>Toronto Star (13/07/1991)</td>
<td>Greed giving way to ethics in business</td>
<td>Male president Male president Male professor Male director</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Globe and Mail (30/05/2000)</td>
<td>Corporate social responsibility still a vague notion</td>
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<td>Sell social conscience, executive tells food banks</td>
<td>Male executive vice-president Female</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
<td>Toronto Star (17/10/1998)</td>
<td>‘Green’ business can be good business</td>
<td>Male politician Male president N/A</td>
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<td>Green corporate agenda boosts bottom line</td>
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<td>The business case</td>
<td>Calgary Herald (27/03/1989)</td>
<td>Philanthropy alive and well: Companies’ charitable efforts help communities and bolster business</td>
<td>Male director Female community investment manager</td>
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<td>Canadian firms learning how to do well by doing good</td>
<td>Male company spokesman Male professor N/A</td>
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