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ADVANCING WOMEN IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP:

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Mary and Bob Craft. I am deeply grateful for your love, support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. I know you are with me in spirit, and I owe this accomplishment to you.

To my children, Katrina and Lukas Henderson. You have patiently watched me pursue my educational goal while providing me with your love and support. You are my greatest joy.

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Abstract

Women possess leadership characteristics that make them successful in a leadership role according to research. However, leadership roles of women in politics continue to encounter biases as society perceives the role of women to be incongruent with leadership. Although there has been an increase in women politicians since gender parity was achieved in November 2015, social, cultural, and financial barriers still exist. This study aims to build on previous research and explore the strategies employed by women leaders in Ontario to overcome the barriers they encounter in their leadership roles. Role congruity and social identity theories explain why these barriers exist. A qualitative method, consisting of semi-structured interviews, was used to understand the experiences of women who entered provincial politics and identify the individual and common barriers they faced. The purposeful sampling approach was used to identify experiences that raise awareness of how women overcome barriers to their participation in political leadership roles. The study provides valuable insight into the barriers that women political leaders still face, such as cultural and socioeconomic barriers. Moreover, it highlights that these barriers have not shifted over time. This research study contributes to the gap in literature outlining strategies women political leaders use to advance in politics, specifically through the development of their leadership style and empowerment.

Keywords: women, political leaders, leadership, barriers, underrepresentation, strategies

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Women are believed to possess unique characteristics that give them an advantage in leadership roles (Esser et al., 2018; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). For instance, research has shown that having women business leaders within companies increases the organization's value while instilling compassion and collaboration (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Eagly et al., 2003; Rao & Tilt, 2016).

The 2024 Annual Report Card on Gender Equity and Leadership revealed an increase in women in leadership roles in Canada (The Prosperity Project, 2024). Women represent 11.9 percent of executive officer positions, including chief executive officers, chief financial officers, and other corporate executives (Rosenzweig & Company, 2024). However, women represent just over 18 percent of Board of Director positions in publicly traded corporations (Statistics Canada, 2021). In Canada, women make up 50.7 percent of the population (The Prosperity Project, 2023), and approximately 82 percent of women are in the workforce (Grace, 2016; Moyser, 2017; The Prosperity Project, 2022; Trading Economics, 2024). Nevertheless, they only account for 35.6 percent of senior management positions (Statistics Canada, 2022).

One area that has seen a significant increase is the election of women is politics. For instance, following his election as Prime Minister of Canada in November 2015, Justin Trudeau appointed women to 50 percent of cabinet positions, achieving gender parity for the first time in the history (Catalyst, 2022; Lao & Britneff, 2019). This action was not only widely applauded worldwide (McLaughlin et al., 2018), but Canada moved from 20th to fifth position in terms of the representation of women in ministerial positions (Ng & Muntaner, 2019). The representation of women members elected to the

House of Commons in 2015 increased to 26 percent from the 2011 election, where women represented 25 percent of the seats in Parliament (Anderssen, 2015). The 2019 election saw another increase (Lao & Britneff, 2019) as the number of seats held by women in Parliament rose to 29 percent (Griffiths, 2019). Meanwhile, the representation of women in the 2021 election increased by one percent, bringing the total number of women to 30 percent (Maloney & Zimonjic, 2021).

In comparison, Canada's peer countries have a higher representation of women in Parliament. New Zealand, for example, is ranked fifth in the world with just over 48 percent of women in Parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021), whereas Sweden has 46 percent of women in Parliament (Mlaba, 2021). The United States however, saw an increase in women running for office in 2020 (Bleiweis & Phadke, 2021), followed by the election of the first woman of colour as Vice President (Cahn, 2020).

The 2018 election resulted in significant changes in the provincial governments in Canada. For example, in Ontario, women were elected to an all-time provincial high of 49 out of 124 Parliamentary seats (39.5 percent), representing an increase from 35 percent in 2014 with the highest increase across all provinces (Rushowy, 2018). However, the representation of women in Ontario in the 2022 election dropped to 39 percent, indicating a slight decline. In the 2018 Quebec election, women won 52 out of 125 seats or 41.6 percent (Valiante, 2018), while the 2022 election in Quebec demonstrated an increase, a record-breaking achievement, with women achieving representation of 46.4 percent (Laberge, 2023).

Most of the research on women in politics has centred on their underrepresentation, with a primary focus on barriers. A recent study examined barriers

to women in politics at the federal level in Canada found that women encountered social,

financial, and cultural barriers due to such themes as sexism, the role of the media,

family responsibilities, and societal expectations (Pettie, 2019). Similarly, Rheault et al.

(2019) identified that women politicians are assessed according to gender norms, which

contribute to many of the same barriers: namely, sexism, the role of the media, and

stereotyping within a party. Likewise, Thomas (2013) noted that gender

underrepresentation in politics does not occur at just the Federal level. Women are

impacted by individual, social /community, and political barriers that hinder their

opportunities and the overall representation of women in politics (Hanbidge, 2019). More

generally, the literature suggests that barriers to women in politics revolve around social

phenomena women experience, as well as structural or systemic challenges (Cool, 2013)**.**

The 2019 report by the Status of Women, Canada indicates that women continue

to have their leadership skills judged more sharply in a political environment than in

other business capacities due to an entrenched societal bias that women do not have the

strength to lead (Ro, 2021). Additionally, various studies indicate that the unique

characteristics held by women are incongruent with the societal views of women and the

role of leadership, signifying a gap in women holding leadership positions (Bonin et al.,

2019; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Instead, women are more likely to be viewed for their roles

as a mother and caretaker rather than in the role of a leader (Eagly et al., 2003; Esser et

al., 2018). Pepera (2018) also suggested that w**omen** are more hesitant to run for political

office than men. While prior research offers insight into the barriers women have

traditionally faced, little is known about how women have overcome these barriers.

Research Problem

Past research has examined barriers to women in politics and identified several recurring themes such as stereotyping, media representation, challenges with maintaining work-life balance, and a lack of confidence (Cool, 2013; Hanbidge, 2019; Pepera, 2018; Pettit, 2019; Rheault et al., 2019). To my knowledge, none of these researchers have explored the strategies women political leaders have undertaken to overcome or mitigate the barriers. Furthermore, available research has focused only on women representation and has not explored these barriers through a leadership lens. Thus, scholars and practitioners are left with a limited understanding of how continual barriers to women in political leadership can be addressed.

Research Purpose and Question

The purpose of this study was to build on prior research and explore how women politicians have navigated various barriers to focus on leadership and draw on role congruity and social identity theories. Notably, this study incorporated semi-structured interviews with current and former women politicians to address the central question guiding this study: What factors have contributed to the advancement of women in politics?

The context for this study is the province of Ontario, Canada's most diverse and populous province (Government of Canada, 2021b). The rationale for this setting is explained in Chapter Three. For the purposes of this study, Members of Provincial Parliament and Cabinet Ministers are considered formal leadership roles. Whereas MPPs are elected officials who represent the interests of their constituents in their respective

ridings, Cabinet Ministers are also MPPs, whom the Premier appoints to develop and implement public policy.

Significance of Research

Much of the research on women and politics has focused on examining the barriers to entry for women. The data indicates that women have made considerable progress in some provinces, such as in the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec. However, little is known about the factors contributing to their success. Guided by role congruity and social identity theories, this study addressed this gap in the literature by exploring specific strategies undertaken by women to be elected and, where applicable, to be appointed to formal leadership roles.

A qualitative method, consisting of semi-structured interviews, was used to understand the experiences of women who entered provincial politics and identify the specific barriers they faced. The purposeful sampling approach was used to identify experiences that raise awareness of how women overcome barriers to their participation in political leadership roles. The study provides valuable insight into the cultural, societal and socioeconomic barriers that women political leaders still face. Moreover, it highlights that these barriers have not shifted over time.

This research study is relevant to increasing women in political leadership roles as it contributes to the gap in literature outlining strategies women political leaders use to advance in politics, specifically in terms of their leadership style. Women in politics play a crucial role for raising gender equality and shaping public policy to better advance social, economic, and political outcomes (Vecchio, 2019). As more women participate in

politics, public policy will reflect a wider range of concerns and perspectives. (National Women's Liberal Commission, 2025).

Summary

This first chapter provides an overview of the study, including a statement of the problem, the purpose and central research question, and a brief overview of how this question is addressed. Chapter Two reviews the themes relating to barriers and other relevant literature that informed the research design. The theoretical foundations for this study are also further explored in Chapter Two. Chapter Three, the methodology chapter, discusses the supporting research questions, the population and sample, the research plan, and key ethical considerations. Chapter Four describes the study findings, with additional discussion of these findings and their implications provided in Chapter Five.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This study aimed to explore strategies undertaken by women political leaders in overcoming or mitigating barriers in political leadership roles. While prior research is available on women's barriers, little is known about how women overcome these barriers. This chapter examines the literature on women in politics and their underrepresentation as political leaders. As a result of the gender gap, this study examines the barriers women encounter as leaders, using social identity and role congruity theories to guide the analysis of gender and leadership while identifying the hurdles women encounter as they move into leadership roles. Through role congruity theory, the stereotype of leadership is assessed concerning the gender traits of women, supporting one explanation of the gender gap within politics. Social identity theory illustrates how women's identities, within their role as a leader and their role as a woman, impact a woman's representation as a political leader. Additionally, since women leaders bring inclusive policymaking and leadership styles, the leadership lens was used to investigate strategies women political leaders use to overcome their barriers.

Women in Politics

Women comprise half of Canada's population, yet this figure does not reflect women in politics (Liberal Party of Canada, 2019). Research has revealed an interest in the lack of representation among women political leaders, which has prompted an awareness in Canada that gender inequality exists within politics (Bashevkin, 2011). Societal awareness regarding women in politics has increased, particularly since the #MeToo movement (Raney & McGregor, 2023), and with Hillary Clinton becoming the first woman nominee for the U.S. presidential election in 2016 (Irving, 2019). Audiences

in the United States and worldwide have also been captivated by the rise of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the youngest woman elected to Congress in the United States (Irving, 2019).

As of January 2023, 26.5 percent of women are Members of Parliament, and women are in positions of Heads of State and government in 31 countries (UN Women, 2023). In contrast, over 75 percent of Parliamentarians in 90 percent of countries worldwide are men (Belknap et al., 2020). Over the last two decades, the rate of women's representation in national Parliaments increased from 11.8 percent in 1998 to 23.5 percent in 2018 yet CAWP. (n.d.). still falls below the benchmark set by the United Nations, where women are required to represent a minimum of 30 percent of a decision-making body to create change (Pepera, 2018; UN Women, 2021). Europe and Central Asia have made significant progress towards gender equality in Parliaments, including gender equality committees, women's caucuses and political parties. Similarly, the Swedish Parliament is considered a gender-equal workplace, with women holding 40 percent of the seats for the last two decades (Erikson & Josefsson, 2019; Pepera, 2018).

In the U.K., only 17 percent of the women elected become government ministers. They are responsible for education and the family rather than areas such as business or defence (McLaughlin et al., 2018), and the 2019 General Election in the U.K. saw more women representatives elected for the Labour Party than men for the first time (Belknap et al., 2020). In 2020, the Democratic Party in the U.S. had the most diverse range of presidential primary candidates in history, including the most significant number of women ever to run, with Kamala Harris becoming the first Vice President of the United

States and the second women to be nominated by a major US party for president (Belknap et al., 2020; CAWP, n.d.).

In Canada, women represent 30.6 percent of Federal politicians (Statistics Canada, 2024), compared to 36 percent (Equal Voice, 2024) at the provincial and Territorial level and 31 percent at the municipal level (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2024). The federal level of government is considered the primary level. It is concerned with the overall well-being of the country. In contrast, the provincial government is responsible for education, health care, resources, and regulations within each province, leaving the responsibility of the municipal level to focus on planning, infrastructure, operations and transportation of a city, town, village, district, or region (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-a).

Women's political representation within the last century in Canada has strengthened, with the first cabinet with gender parity after the Federal election of November 2015, the Women's March in January 2017, and the #MeToo movement online in the U.S. (Iyer & Mani, 2019). Across Canada, approximately 30 percent of the Provincial legislatures are women, excluding Quebec and Ontario, where women represent 46.4 percent and 39 percent of the seats, respectively (Vecchio, 2019; Rushowy, 2022; Laberge, 2023). Existing research regarding women in politics has primarily focused on exploring the barriers to the profession, which are discussed in the next section.

Barriers to Women in Politics

Researchers have examined the barriers surrounding the underrepresentation of women in various roles (Brignoli, 2020; Sabharwal et al., 2018; Sample, 2018). Within

politics, these barriers have been identified as issues associated with work-life balance, financing of political campaigns, recruitment processes, gender stereotyping, violence and harassment, political ambition, and gender portrayal by the media (Vecchio, 2019; Galandy & Tavcer, 2019).

Specific research into women in politics has focused on the barriers that hinder the representation of women (House of Commons, 2019; Pettie, 2019; Cowper-Smith et al., 2017). For example, prior research (Petite, 2019) identified four key barriers contributing to the underrepresentation of women Members of Parliament in Canada. These barriers included preconceived ideas where the leader's skill sets are perceived to apply to men (and not women); women are not as competitive; women are more focused on the responsibility of the family; and women do not have the same political affiliations as men.

The media is influential in the role of political leaders as it assists in portraying messaging and framing leaders regarding their strengths and abilities (Schlehofer et al., 2011). Therefore, framing has the capability and power to create a platform to identify, interpret, evaluate, or suggest areas of growth or change (Schlehofer et al., 2011). Women politicians are usually portrayed as women first and politicians second, which creates a gendered image of a woman political leader and impacts the public's perception (Liu, 2019). As gender stereotyping is expected within the media (Wagner et al., 2019), the misrepresentation of women leads to a biased view of women leaders regarding their responsibilities and appearance (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019) that results in insults, threats, and the suggestion that women do not have the strength or are not fit to be in politics (Pettie, 2019; Scott, 2023). Perraudin and Murphy (2019, p. 3) suggested that:

Politics has become a hostile environment for women – in which we are harassed, demeaned, and threatened as a matter of course …. Not only does this affect the individual women targeted, but it also contributes to a culture in which women's voices are not welcomed or respected.

There are general perceptions across Canadian society surrounding gender-specific traits which generate societal views (Manzi, 2019). Unfortunately, these beliefs are often based on stereotypes, affecting decision making (Manzi, 2019). Gender and leadership roles are often associated with prescribed characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman & Chen, 2005; Stempel et al., 2015), so men and women may be accepted into leadership positions with preconceived ideas by those who are judging them of what is expected from each gender (Hart et al., 2009; Stempel et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2023).

Leaders of political parties may want to place women candidates in geographical ridings but feel that there could be a potential bias towards the candidate due to their gender. As a result, women may not receive the support required to move forward, thereby representing another form of stereotyping (Baskaran & Hessami, 2018; Carleton et al., 2018). Women may also lack confidence because of societal expectations in leadership roles (Schneider & Bos, 2019), which results in lower levels of political ambition than their male counterparts, even when women have the same personal traits and professional qualifications (Snagovsky & Kerby, 2018). When women are recruited as candidates to demonstrate a party's commitment to gender representation, they are often placed in areas where a party has little chance of winning (Galandy & Tavcer, 2019).

Gender and Leadership

Globally, in 2021 women in senior management positions (Natural HR, 2021) grew to 31 percent. Consequently, corporate America saw an increase in the representation of women leaders in 2016; however, even with this increase, women remained underrepresented in a leadership capacity (Burns et al., 2022). In 2022, Statistics Canada reported that women comprised over 47 percent of the workforce (Randstad, 2023), while 2023 brought about an overall representation of 34 percent of women accounting for seats on the boards of Canada's FP500 organizations (Women's Executive Network, 2023).

Historically, good leaders have been associated with traits and behaviours associated with masculinity, such as being task-oriented and authoritative (Rey, 2005). Agentic characteristics, known to be qualities of men, are seen by many to be attributed to leaders, including assertiveness, ambition, aggressiveness or independence (Eagly et al., 2003; Gartzia & van Engen, 2012; Rao & Tilt, 2016). Conversely, women are expected to identify with communal characteristics, including affection, empathy, gentleness and sensitivity (Eagly et al., 2003; Rao & Tilt, 2016). Emphasizing gender roles versus leadership qualities reinforces stereotypes and excludes those who do not fit into leadership stereotypes (Shea & Renn, 2017). Eagly et al. (1995, p. 140) determined that "gender role expectations spill over onto leadership . . . and produce important consequences."

Existing biases and gender stereotypes about traditional gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) can favour males in achieving leadership positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Choi, 2018; Sabharwal et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2023) while creating obstacles for

women (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Liu, 2019). Specifically, women leaders are not provided the same opportunities when gender stereotypes are maintained (Broadbridge, 2010; Sandberg & Scovell, 2015). For instance, the glass ceiling has been defined as a significant barrier to women achieving top leadership positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Folke & Rickne, 2014; Sabharwal et al., 2018) based on hurdles women encounter as they move closer to the top of the leadership hierarchy (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Galandy & Tavcer, 2019; Jemison, 2018). Furthermore, as women put their careers on hold to care for their families or to create a work-life balance, these invisible barriers become more apparent (Sabharwal et al., 2018; Sheichuk, 2023) and do not align with the flexibility that women require to care for children or family or other responsibilities (June 2015).

Several studies have addressed the incongruence between women's roles and leadership and acknowledged the prejudices that bring these barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Within politics, the prejudices associated with role incongruence contribute to the barriers that women leaders experience (Gloor et al., 2020; Gregory, 2017). Gendered stereotypes can impact the voters' perceptions of women candidates and discourage women from entering politics (Hill et al., 2016; Holman, 2023). Common beliefs hold that for women to succeed in leadership roles, they need to act and think like men; however, when women leaders display characteristics of assertiveness or authoritarian as a leader, they tend to be disliked because their behaviours do not match the stereotype of women (Alqahtani, 2019; Ryan et al., 2016).

Theoretical Explanations

Role congruity and social identity theories help explain why barriers exist for women in leadership, including political leadership roles. Role congruity theory shows how the stereotypes of leadership create barriers for women leaders, impacting their role to lead, followed by social identity theory, which describes the identities of women leaders to the groups they belong to (Hogg et al., 2012).

Role Congruity Theory

Social role theory provides the grounding for role congruity as this theory builds on the incongruity of societal perceptions between gender roles of women and men in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Mendoza & DiMaria, 2019). Role congruity theory explains two prejudices known as descriptive and injunctive (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which transpire when there is an incongruity between the roles of a leader and that of a woman (Schock et al., 2019). Descriptive prejudice considers women to have communal traits that do not align with the characteristics of a leader, such as nurturing or sensitivity. In contrast, male leaders embrace characteristics such as ambition or self-confidence which are agentic traits that some assume are natural traits of a leader (Bendada, 2018). Injunctive prejudice, on the other hand, focuses on conformity and how women should behave; if women demonstrate agentic traits in a leadership role, they are viewed negatively (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Societal views impact role congruity (Hart et al., 2009) by encouraging that leadership roles are better suited for males (Stempel et al., 2015). This view conforms to the think-manager think- male model (Schein & Davidson,1993), in which the manager's role is associated with the leadership of males (Bendada, 2018). Gender stereotypes

associate men with leadership roles, creating gender gaps in leadership (Gloor et al., 2020). Women are impacted by stereotypes (Hill et al., 2016) as women are not considered equal in demonstrating the same characteristics to lead (Stempel et al., 2015). This gender bias exists in leadership roles where areas are dominated by males (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006; Heilman, 2001). Being a mother while being a leader is a prime example of a stereotype where women are viewed as having the primary responsibility for childrearing but cannot manage demanding jobs. This perception reinforces the idea that stereotypically masculine traits are associated with leadership (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). Consequently, incongruity exists between the traits attributed to women and the agentic qualities associated with the image of a successful leader, which creates an understanding that women are not effective in a leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012). This view persists, as women leaders may portray themselves differently to avoid the archaic views of a woman's role (Esser et al., 2018).

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory considers certain behaviours that can be expected based on the differences in group roles. Previous research has shown that attaining status is more difficult for some individuals than others (Geiger-Oneto & Simkins, 2017). This theory focuses on how individuals are seen as leaders by social groups and through the processes within groups, as the role of a leader refers to creating oneself and others concerning the groups to which one belongs.

According to social identity theory, leaders develop in groups due to their representation of the group (Lanka et al., 2020). This theory is also concerned with

understanding how individuals come to be leaders through social categories and group-level processes as individuals assume an identity (Lanka et al., 2020) and identify themselves within a group to belong (Dudley, 2019), which guides the norms and values of an individual (Dudley, 2019). Social identity theory compares differences between those who receive more attention and those who do not feel valued (Gregory, 2017). The group that receives attention seeks to achieve and maintain a positive group identity (Dudley, 2019). This theory focuses on an individual's traits and a particular group's social identity (Dudley, 2019; Gregory, 2017).

Social identity theory proposes that social identity is comprised of areas where individuals define themselves as belonging to a specific social group. The theory identifies categorization as the initial stage, where individuals place themselves into social groups based on where they feel they belong. The second stage pertains to the dedication an individual brings to a group they belong to, otherwise known as affective. The third aspect is evaluative, which refers to the representation of a group compared to groups of individuals who do not belong (Dudley, 2019). Leaders belong to a group that is looking to achieve and receive attention (Steffens et al., 2017). Leaders emerge in groups due to how they represent the attributes within the group; however, issues may arise with implementing a social identity theory approach to the leader identity. Role models and mentors provide helpful information for individuals to observe and learn processes that provide examples of leader identity for individuals to compare between the leader role model and themselves (Lanka et al., 2020). A leader is considered to take on the identity of a group by building influence and acceptability from members within a group who believe the leader represents the specific norms (Gloor et al., 2020).

In summary, role congruity and social identity theories explain why gender roles have created gender norms within society while identifying differences in behaviours (Gloor et al., 2020). Role congruity theory builds on the incongruence of societal views between gender and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) by explaining two prejudices, descriptive and injunctive. Society views leadership roles more suitable for males, strengthening the notion that gender stereotypes and a bias that women are not equal, creating incongruity between the traits of a woman and the qualities associated with a leader. Conversely, social identity theory focuses on how individuals are seen as group leaders. This theory emphasizes an individual's traits coupled with a group's social identity. Leaders are considered to belong to a group while taking on the identity of a group.

The Current Study

The literature illustrates that prior research on women in politics has primarily focused on exploring barriers to women's participation. No known studies have investigated these barriers from a leadership perspective or how they have been overcome. For the purposes of this study, Parliamentarians are defined as leaders.

Political leadership is a role maintained and governed by legislation and principles in political office (Peele, 2005) and involves all aspects of elected offices at all levels of government (Carbert, 2005). This leadership embodies a structure involving three areas - someone who leads, followers comprising one or more individuals under the influence of a leader, and the connection between the leader and followers (Léon, 1968). The role of a leader is an essential element within politics due to the level of responsibility for making significant decisions on behalf of others (Alan et al., 2019).

There is a need for women in political decision-making as women leaders are perceived to bring more inclusive policymaking and leadership styles to government (The World Bank, 2020). The best quality of a leader is reflected in how the leader brings the values and goals of a group together (Léon, 1968); however, the political structure does not represent this. This exemplifies critical organizational areas that require a review focusing on procedures, policies, and practices (Eddy & Ward, 2015).

Political leaders follow the rules and regulations of a particular setting (King et al., 2015). They are considered representatives of governments that provide oversight on governmental policies, builds relationships, and impacts decisions affecting its citizens' well-being while gathering support from the government and the people. (B.PAC, 2020; Torfing & Ansell, 2016). Provincial leaders within Ontario, known as Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), represent constituents from their respective ridings. The duties of an MPP include attending to the responsibilities in their home ridings, which may involve meetings with constituents or resolving provincial issues, as well as gathering at the Legislature in Toronto when the government is sitting (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-b). MPPs may also take on additional roles, such as that of a House Leader or Cabinet Minister (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-b). All MPPs are recognized as leaders in representing their constituents; some also take on specific leadership roles within government with named responsibilities to advance or challenge specific portfolios. However, as the legislature was established when there was a lack of equality with professional and personal gender roles, women MPPs may face barriers with their responsibilities (Vecchio, 2019).

Changing how women in politics are viewed and providing better opportunities for women politicians to break down barriers provides a starting point for eliminating obstacles women experience as political leaders. The Canadian House of Commons has made progress in improving work-life balance such as scheduling votes after the Question Period, publishing the House of Commons calendar earlier to allow easier planning for members and coordination with school calendars, as well as working with the Administration about special accommodations (Government of Canada, 2020). However, further change is required to break down these barriers (Pettie, 2019). With the integration of role congruity and social identity theories (Eagly & Karau, 2002), this research explores strategies women political leaders have undertaken to advance in politics. This study adds to the current literature on women in leadership, particularly political leadership.

Summary

This literature review provides a synopsis of women and leadership roles, specifically women political leaders. Women Parliamentarians are known to be more inclusive (The World Bank, 2020); however, worldwide, women are underrepresented in politics (Gipson et al., 2017). Current literature reinforces that leadership characteristics focus on gender-related qualities, where agentic traits such as assertiveness and strength are associated with men and communal traits identified as compassion and encouragement are related to women. Gender-related leadership characteristics are identified as contributing factors to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles. These factors are presented as barriers, and they include work-life balance, financing of political campaigns, recruitment processes, gender stereotyping,

violence and harassment, political ambition, and gender portrayal by the media (Vecchio, 2019). Research has focused on the incongruence between women's roles and leadership and acknowledged the prejudices that bring about these barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

      Two major theories guide an examination of the lack of women political leaders in this study. Through role congruity theory, the incongruence of women's gender traits and the role of a leader is assessed as it relates to political leadership. Additionally, social identity theory is used to examine the traits of women in their role as political leaders. Jointly, these theories develop an awareness of how stereotypical social views are incongruent with the distinctive characteristics of women leaders.

      This research draws attention to the limited research on the strategies women political leaders use to overcome barriers in a leadership capacity and addresses this gap by examining the barriers to leadership roles and the strategies undertaken to overcome them. Chapter Three outlines the research methods used for this study.

Chapter 3. Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research questions and explains the specific methodology used for this study. A research methodology demonstrates the organizational structure for a given study, whereby the purpose, research questions and research methods are interrelated and connected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This chapter describes each structural element incorporated into the study, including the research design, the site and population, the study sample, and the data collection and analysis.

The central research question was identified in Chapter One: What factors have contributed to the advancement of women in politics? To address this central question, the following sub-questions were developed:

1. What barriers have women politicians encountered at various stages in their political careers (i.e., candidacy selection, election process, assumption of role)?

2. How have women politicians overcome these barriers?

3. What other factors have contributed to the increased representation of women in politics?

Research Design

This study used a phenomenological qualitative approach to address the research questions. The approach explored barriers and strategies while interpreting phenomena women political leaders experienced within the Ontario Provincial Legislature. Data was collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews. These participants were elected or appointed Members of the Provincial Parliament (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A semi-structured method enabled the researcher to use a guided method of interviewing within each interview. At the same time, the question's wording may have

differed across each interview, and the questions may not have been asked in a specific

order for each interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A qualitative method was appropriate

for this study as it was necessary to understand the barriers, which could only be

accomplished through speaking directly with the participants. Qualitative research

provides a platform of discovery for the participants to share their experiences through

their voices in a respectful and natural environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Park &

Park, 2016). In contrast, using a quantitative method such as a survey would not have

allowed this study to focus on the heart of the experience. Instead, a quantitative

approach would have focused on variables and factual data of the research problem,

removing the essence of the lived experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Description of Site and Population

A purposeful sampling strategy was used to explore experiences of the

phenomenon being examined and gather information that answered the research

questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposeful sampling is a method that identifies the

same experiences of the phenomenon being researched, therefore adding to a common

understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As this method is the primary qualitative

sampling approach, this researcher identified participants who would guide and help

answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Purposeful sampling strategies

were used to determine the group of women leaders being researched, and purposeful

random sampling would reduce biases and add credibility to the research (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016). The researcher resides in the Province of Ontario and is not fluent in French.

Therefore, Ontario was chosen for this study as it was one of two provinces (the other

being Quebec) that had a high number of women in provincial politics. As such,

undertaking the study in this context was expected to provide a richer account of strategies adopted to support women in political leadership roles. The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, located in Queens Park in Toronto, consists of elected Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) and Cabinet Ministers.

Population

This study investigated the lived experiences of women political leaders (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The study population included current and former women provincial political leaders (MPPs and cabinet ministers) elected during four provincial election cycles from 2011 to 2022. This period was selected to explore women's experiences one election cycle before and two election cycles after the significant increase in women's representation in 2014 to allow for comparisons within the Province of Ontario.

The 43rd Parliament of the Legislative Assembly is comprised of 124 Members of Parliament (MPPs), of which 47 are women (38%). In addition, women account for 8 out of 30 cabinet minister roles (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, n.d.-b). The total number of former and current women politicians, including Members of Provincial Parliament and Cabinet Ministers, who have been in office from 2011 to 2022 is 79 (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In summary, the population consisted of participants who met the following conditions:

- Current and past women political leaders (i.e., MPPs and Cabinet Ministers from the Province of Ontario).

- Elected between 2011 and 2022 (the last provincial election).

- Affiliated with one of three main political parties in Ontario: the Liberal Party, Conservative Party, or New Democratic Party.

- Agreed to provide information on their lived experiences.

Participants and Procedures

Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken to test the interview protocol and make required adjustments based on participant feedback. Following the 2022 Provincial election, draft email messages to potential participants were sent to seven MPPs (Appendix C). An Invitation to Participate (Appendix D) was attached to the draft email, providing additional study information. These participants resided in Ottawa and the surrounding area and were in office between the period of 2011 to 2022. These current and former MPPs' names and email addresses were publicly available on the World Wide Web and the Ontario Legislature website. Three participants responded by email, agreeing to participate in this study. At the same time, the remaining four individuals either provided email responses that they were not available to participate in the study due to their schedules or received no response. The pilot study participants were forwarded a Letter of Information and Consent (Appendix F), the consent form of which was signed and returned to the researcher before each interview. Date and time based on the participant's availability were organized for the interviews.

The interview consisted of eight questions allocated throughout four categories. Each of the four categories had two to three probing questions that were used to streamline the questions. The objective of this pilot was to verify the clarity of wording in the interview questions, ensure there were no issues with the sequence of interview

questions, and that the number of interview questions concerning the interview duration was proportional (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The first interview category focused on the initial candidacy stage of the participants. The participants were asked to share background information on their experiences before entering politics. The second interview category focused on the participant's initial experience as an MPP, specifically the challenges and factors leading to their success. The next category was aimed toward the leadership roles of the participants, followed by a general question about women in politics. The interview questions were not distributed to the pilot study participants before the interviews.

During each interview, the researcher took notes, which were reviewed along with the recordings following each interview. Piloting assisted this researcher in becoming comfortable with the interview skills required to interact with the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This pilot, however, initially presented issues in garnering support for the research study, as the pilot commenced following an election and at the beginning of the summer. Interviewing the women leaders presented challenges due to time constraints and establishing initial contact (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Nonetheless, this study confirmed that no revisions were required to the interview protocol; therefore, the in-depth pilot study interviews were included in the overall population sample.

Main Study

The names and email addresses of current MPPs were publicly available on the Ontario Legislature website. Gaining access to former MPPs presented a slight challenge due to personal information not being publicly available (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

To overcome this challenge, the researcher sent emails to the riding offices of incumbents to solicit their support in contacting former members (Appendix E). When no responses were received from a respective riding office, professional and social media channels were searched for former MPPs' names and contact information. From this process, draft email messages to potential participants (Appendix C) were sent to 65 Members of Provincial Parliament who were in office between the period of 2011 to 2022. An Invitation to Participate (Appendix D) was attached to the draft emails, providing additional study information. Consistent with the pilot study, the email provided an overview of the research, including insights that would contribute to the study (Wilson, 2014).

Participants who agreed to participate in the study were forwarded a Letter of Information and Consent, which asked them to review, sign, and return the consent form. The researcher and the participant or the participant's office organized the date and time for the interviews based on the participant's availability.

Based on prior research (Pettie, 2019), there was an expectation that 20% of the total population would agree to participate in the study. However, the final sample consisted of 15 participants: 3 from the pilot study and 12 from the main study, representing all three provincial political parties. The sample of the participants was small enough to gather and analyze relevant information but large enough to understand the phenomenon (Vasileiou, 2018). Table 1 identifies the participants of the pilot and main study, alongside the Provincial Parliament status of the participant at the time of the interviews, the number of terms in office, the type of study the participants participated in and the political party affiliation of the participants which consisted of the three main

political parties. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, the party affiliation of the

women political leaders is not identified. Instead, the letters A, B or C are used to

distinguish party affiliation.

Table 1

Overview of Study Participants

Participant	Provincial Parliament Status	Number of terms in office between 2011-2022	Study	Political Party Affiliation
P1	Past Member	2	Pilot Study	A
P2	Past Member	2	Pilot Study	A
P3	Current Member	1	Pilot Study	C
P4	Past Member	2	Main Study	C
P5	Current Member	1	Main Study	A
P6	Current Member	2	Main Study	C
P7	Past Member	3	Main Study	B
P8	Current Member	4	Main Study	A
P9	Past Member	1	Main Study	A
P10	Current Member	2	Main Study	A
P11	Current Member	1	Main Study	B
P12	Past Member	1	Main Study	C
P13	Past Member	1	Main Study	A
P14	Current Member	2	Main Study	C
P15	Past Member	3	Main Study	A

Note: P8 and P14 are now Past Members.

Informed Consent

As noted above, for both the pilot and main studies, a Letter of Information and Consent Form (Appendix F) was sent to all participants before the scheduled interviews. The consent form provided the following information:

- An overview of the study, which includes risks and confidentiality, the time commitment that is involved, any possible risks from participating in the research study and who has access to the data

- Purpose of the research

- Requirements of the participants

- Timelines of the research study

- Goals for the research

- Benefits and risks associated with the participants

- Confirmation that the data retrieved from the interviews is to be classified as anonymous unless otherwise directed by the participant

- Awareness that the participants could withdraw from the interview/research process at any time.

The significance of this consent form was to ensure transparency and trust with the participants. The participants were asked to review and return the signed consent form to the researcher before the interview. The signature on the consent form confirmed that the participants were aware of expectations, confidentiality, anonymity, and ethical considerations surrounding the voluntary interviews. Signed consent forms were returned before each interview with no questions. Before the start of each interview, the consent forms were reviewed with the participants to remind them that participation was voluntary and that at any time, they could end the interview and withdraw from the research without any consequences. The researcher also reconfirmed that the interviews could be recorded.

Interview Protocol

This study was based on interviews of participants who were elected or appointed to the Ontario Provincial government (Wilson, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). At the beginning of each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the importance of confidentiality and anonymity on behalf of the participants. Icebreakers were used to commence the interview process and build rapport while establishing a warm environment. To explore the lived experiences of women political leaders, open-ended questions (Appendix B) were used to gather information on the

experiences from the participant's leadership roles. The interview questions prompted

varied responses from the participants, raising new findings for the study (Wilson, 2014).

One participant asked to move past one of the interview questions. The participant did

not provide a reason, and the researcher agreed without asking questions. The interview

questions focused on the following themes:

- General overview of background and decision to pursue a career in politics.

- The extent to which participants view their roles as leaders.

- How participants experienced the expectations others have of their role

- Potential barriers to entering and succeeding in politics and political leadership

- Strategies utilized to overcome any potential barriers.

For both the pilot and main studies, the interviews were conducted in English and

held via Microsoft Teams or Zoom due to COVID concerns, with one interview

conducted by telephone. The average time for the three pilot interviews was 42 minutes,

ranging from 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews averaged 50 minutes for the main study,

ranging from 30 to 110 minutes. The interviews were recorded electronically (with the

participant's permission) and through handwritten notes. Audio-recorded interviews

ensured that the participant's exact response was captured during the interview process.

Data Analysis Approach

A qualitative software program, NVivo 11, was used to organize and code the

data for analysis. The audio recordings were reviewed following each interview and then

transcribed. Eleven interviews were transcribed by the researcher with four interviews

transcribed through NVivo 11. Following each transcription, the interviews were

reviewed and then uploaded to NVivo. All identifiable information was removed from

each transcript. Participants were assigned an identifying number from 1-15 to reduce the

risk of a privacy or confidentiality breach as all their identifying information was

removed. Only indirect identifying information, such as whether a participant was a

former or current Member of the Provincial Parliament, was retained to reduce the ability

to identify individuals. Transcripts were reviewed three times to ensure data was

reflected accurately.

The first round of coding involved highlighting groups of words or common

statements and patterns that stemmed from the semi-structured interviews of the

participants. This first round of coding was repeated several times to ensure a complete

review of the data. A second round of coding was then applied to review the themes and

subthemes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Pattern coding was applied to words and common

statements from the interview and research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The themes

identified corresponded with four interview categories, including (a) Pre-Politics, (b)

Initial Experiences, (c) Leadership and (d) Women in Politics. These categories

encompassed themes that were generated through deductive coding used in developing

an understanding of the barriers women politicians encountered. Deductive coding was

reviewed for commonalities based on the theories used in this research, role congruity

and social identity, and the barriers this research identified.

Additionally, strategies adopted to overcome the barriers alongside the factors

that contributed to increased representation of Members of Provincial Parliament in

Ontario were developed through inductive coding, considering the participant's point of

view according to the words used (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Themes were also based on

textural and structural descriptions. Textural refers to what the participants experienced,

followed by a structural description showing that their experiences happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research looked at transcendental phenomenology, where phenomena were gathered from a group of individuals. This information was then analyzed, and themes were formed from these experiences using a structural description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This researcher's own experiences were bracketed and removed from identifying with the phenomena. Methodological rigour was applied throughout this research to identify areas of interest focusing on gender and barriers within the Ontario legislature and to identify evolved changes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

This study's trustworthiness was assessed to test the rigour of the findings using four measures: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability which Marshall and Rossman (2016); and Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted as effective to test rigour. This research established credibility through data triangulation of a pilot study and participants representing three political parties from 2011 to 2022.

Ethical Reflections

With the core principles of the Tri-Council Policy guiding this research, the Research Ethics Board (REB) approval was received prior to the start of the interviews to ensure the participants' respect. Participants could decline to answer any interview questions and terminate the interview at any time without any negative consequences.

Audio recordings were used to collect data for transcription and data analysis. The recordings were in electronic format through an iPhone voice recorder and Microsoft Teams on a password-protected device. No identifiers were included in the transcription or the data file name to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Names were collected

for the completion of consent forms only, while phone numbers were collected if the researcher needed to contact the participants to arrange an interview. Unique identifiers were used in place of real names to protect the women's identities and political affiliations for confidentiality. Additionally, e-mail addresses were collected to schedule video interviews and for follow-up contact if participants were willing to be contacted or requested a copy of the findings.

Signed consent forms were collected electronically before contacting the participants and stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. Participants were also asked to confirm their consent form at the start of their interview. They were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of the collected data, such as political riding, party affiliation, and office held. That information was not shared with any other sources except for this researcher for the purposes of this research. As the primary investigator, this researcher was the only person with access. All transcribed interviews were encrypted and password protected. This researcher was the only person with knowledge of the study participants.

Summary

This chapter provides an overview of this study's qualitative research design method. Qualitative research was chosen as the method to explore the phenomenon of why women have not achieved gender parity as political leaders. The design of this research identified the research population, explored data collection and analysis methods, and created an awareness of the phenomenon to understand the essence of the lived experiences of the target population through those of the study participants. This researcher is considered the primary research instrument, and semi-structured, in-depth

interviews were conducted with a sample of three pilot study participants and twelve

main study participants. These participants were representatives of political parties,

including a diversity of candidates. An initial pilot study was used to test the validity and

rigour of the research. The interviews were conducted in English and held via Microsoft

Teams or Zoom, with one interview conducted via phone. Data was coded through

deductive and inductive processes to understand the common experiences and why there

was a lack of women political leaders. The following chapter provides the findings of the

qualitative data.

Chapter 4. Findings

This chapter presents the research findings on the barriers women politicians face throughout different stages in their political careers, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome them. These findings were organized according to three Stages of the Participant's Political Career: Identifying as a Candidate, Initial experiences as an MPP and the Evolution of the Role. The following sub-questions assisted in gathering information on the participants' political journey:

1. What barriers have women politicians encountered at various stages in their political careers (i.e., candidacy selection, election process, assumption of role)?

2. How have women politicians overcome these barriers?

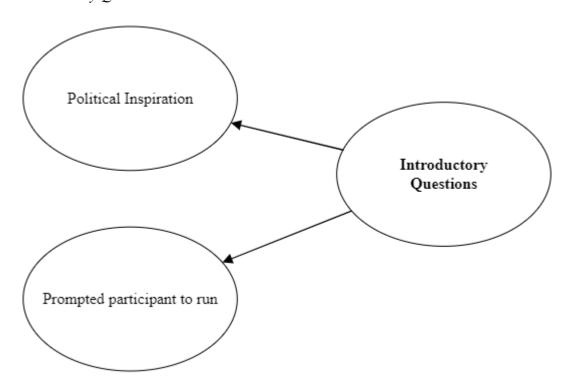3. What other factors have contributed to the increased representation of women in politics?

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the study participants, addressing their motivation for political involvement and any valuable advice they may offer to women entering the political sphere. The participants' direct statements were used to mirror the participant's experiences as they relate to several identified key themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Key Findings

Introductory questions, as shown in Figure 1, were used to familiarize the researcher with each participant. Although these questions were not a central focus of the literature, they offered insight into the participants' motivations for engaging in politics and their rationale for pursuing candidacy. The findings are provided below.

Figure 1

Introductory Questions

Political Inspiration

       The interview data revealed that all participants were motivated to become involved in politics for various reasons. Numerous participants noted that their motivation for politics stemmed from either their surroundings or the influential figures in their lives. Several participants discussed their upbringing with family members actively involved in politics, while others cited their experience working directly for politicians. The data revealed that several participants' inspiration to enter politics included either having an interest in a specific political party, their experience working as a school trustee, or the positive interactions experienced over time.

P1, a former political leader and a participant in the pilot study, was in provincial office for two terms. P1 indicated that she "was curious about the way in which politics worked and approached this with an open mind . . . eager to learn."

P2, a former MPP, was a participant in the pilot study and was in political office for two terms. She noted that as a child, her father was involved in politics:

> As a little girl, my father was always involved; he never was a candidate but was always involved in organizing electoral campaigns in our area. But I must admit that there were not many role models so it was more for the guys than the girls, but I was interested in politics and I didn't think it was for me because almost no women were in politics, just a few women. What got me into politics was the volunteer work I did.

P3, a current MPP is a participant in the pilot study shared that she was surrounded by politics. Her interest in politics started at a young age:

> I always had an interest in politics, but one that was kind of non-partisan and non-specific. I was the kind of kid who said I was going to grow up and be prime minister. Once I graduated from university and started working, I had a career in pushing for policy change from the outside of the political process. From within that role … made me believe that the way to get anything done was to get involved in politics.

P4, a former MPP with two terms in provincial office, participated in the main study. Her father was a volunteer in politics and P4 worked with the community and shared that she did not think about going into politics until she was asked:

An MP at the time asked me to lunch... She had asked me if I would consider

running … provincially. It took me about three months to say yes as I checked

with individuals across the political spectrum and thought about what that would

mean.

P5, a former member of municipal politics and current MPP, is a participant in

the main study with one term in political office. P5 expressed an interest in volunteering

and contributing to the community. She drew inspiration from her mother, who served as

her role model, while her father's involvement in politics shaped her aspirations:

I vowed I would never, ever, ever go into politics. I saw the value in volunteering

and giving back and that you get more joy from giving. The more you give, the

happier you feel, and so that's followed me my whole life. When I thought about

running, I talked to a few people, and they said you don't have a poli sci degree,

you need to be a school trustee first, you're not known, and you're not connected

to a party. The more they said that I couldn't, the more I said just watch me.

P6, a former member of municipal politics and current Member of Provincial

Parliament, is in her second term of office. As a participant in the main study, she was

raised and involved in politics most of her life:

Individuals who ran for different levels of politics got me involved, and at a

young age in Grade 3, I ran for student council. Politics has been in my blood. I

have many political figures in my life, and it's been part of growing up and the

culture around the dinner table.

P7, a former political leader, was in Provincial Parliament for three terms. As a participant in the main study, P7 acknowledged it was family involvement in politics that inspired her:

I would say it was my family, my parents, because they were very involved in politics, not at the level that candidates were, but they were always involved in local political campaigns. My mother in particular was involved. She used to help in the campaign offices, but the offices basically were headquarters for each campaign, and she would work in in every campaign. And so we were brought along as children.

P8, a former political leader was a member of the Legislature for four terms. Before politics, P8 was in a job that she loved. As a participant in the main study, her defining moment surrounding politics was when the first woman Premier of Ontario gave her Throne speech:

I remember sitting there with the program in my hand and taking notes. Everything in the speech - her attention to transit issues, housing and homelessness, seniors, youth, the environment … all the priorities I was doing as a community leader and thinking, wow, this woman was going to be the Premier.

P9, a former Member of the Provincial Parliament and municipal politics, was in office for one term. P9 was in municipal politics and shared that her political inspiration did not come from an individual, but from a meeting:

I went out to my first public meeting, and I thought I needed to get involved. I joined a business advisory committee. It was a really good breeding ground to learn what politicians do and how government works, which I think is helpful.

P10, a current Member of Parliament, is a participant in the main study. P10 noted that her interest in politics was due to the result of a cause, not a person:

I got involved in politics as a school trustee. I was the president of the school council, I had never done any kind of leadership before. I've been in before the school board many times trying to make the pitch about the school's needs, they asked me to run as a trustee   I guess, when I really expanded my network, but also my appetite to exercise leadership because I realized that I could bring change and I could influence positive change, and I was very motivated by that. It was a question of opportunity, and for me, like provincial was a very obvious choice because of education as well.

P11, a participant in the main study, is a current Member of Provincial Parliament. P11 worked in media for several years and shared that she decided to, "move from journalism to politics." Her political motivation came from watching and learning from a political figure who inspired her.

P12 worked in education before becoming involved in politics and was a former Member of Provincial Parliament with one term in office. P12 indicated:

I never wanted to be involved in politics. It was never a goal of mine, but creating a more equitable society is a goal of mine. I had something to bring to the table in terms of making Canada a more equitable society.

P13, a former Member of Provincial Parliament, was in office for one term and participated in the main study. P13 noted that she worked with a political figure and was able to see, "… who was going to run in the nomination."

P14, a participant in the main study and a former Member of Provincial Parliament, served two terms in office. P14 grew up with politics in her family and remembers "stuffing envelopes", P14 indicated that an MPP, "… asked me a number of times to run and a number of times I said no, and I didn't see myself as somebody who could do that. It just and it never it was never something on my radar."

P15, a former Member of Provincial Parliament, participated in the main study and was in office for three terms. P15 stated:

> I was always interested in politics, not necessarily partisan politics. There was always political discussion in our family. My mom was involved with local politics, and she was constantly agitating for change. I grew up in a household where there was lots of political awareness and lots of political conversations and I was involved in political action as a kid. Two motivators for getting involved in elected politics was school board politics and the education of my kids.

Prompted participant to run

The interview data showed that participants were either approached to run for political office or had a desire to participate. Several participants indicated that federal or provincial politicians had contacted them, including riding associations.

P1 shared that she was asked to run by an MPP who was resigning at the time. According to P1, this MPP was "her illustration of a woman political leader". P1 was running in a by-election, which, according to P1, meant that "the parties aligned, there was more weight and power in managing the election."

P2 noted that she was approached to put her name forward for a Provincial election and indicated that she "was ready to go to provincial." However, P2 shared that as the only woman, it was not easy.

P3 revealed that what prompted her to run as a candidate was the political party she was aligned with. "I decided to put my name on the ballot and not just be somebody who was working behind the scenes . . . My riding association didn't have a candidate … so I was the one who stepped forward."

P4 shared that one reason that prompted her to run was a party that "was the closest party to my political views." P4 noted, "maybe I can get more achieved if I'm sitting in one of those green leather chairs at Queen's Park…"

P5 noted that she was prompted to run for provincial politics after being asked to run by one of the political parties. According to P5, the party "planted the seed," and P5 stated that she decided to run.

P6 shared several issues that prompted her to run, such as "it was time to see some fresh eyes" in provincial politics. P6 also noted that she wanted to bring a different perspective.

P7 shared that her motivation to run as a candidate stemmed from her involvement in agencies and the community:

> What motivated me to run as a candidate, I was involved as a volunteer in a number of agencies and also served as a board member for a community organization. I saw a lot of gaps in the health and social services system, and that's what really motivated me to run. I felt that that was the best way for me to try and bring about some change.

P8 shared that she was prompted to run when she received "That call. It happened really quickly because I got the call, and I said yes, I would do it. I had to go through that process of being nominated by the local Riding Association." P8 noted that she was not in politics at this time, "I was sort of midstream in this in this amazing job".

P9 shared that she was an appointed candidate. She indicated, "I would have never won in my neighbourhood, and even though I had been a municipal politician for xx years, I would have never been successful in winning a nomination. I didn't even know what a nomination was."

P10 shared that her decision to run for provincial Parliament arose when she saw how the cuts of one political party were impacting various communities. "I got really triggered and thought, this is worth the fight, and I can do this."

P11 shared that she had "a goal to run as a XX candidate," and what prompted her to run was that she was "being groomed."

P12 shared that her partner arranged for her to meet with an MP. This MP, according to P12, indicated that P12 owed it to herself, "Take politics seriously as you have something to bring to the table in terms of making Canada a more equitable society and …. it needed a bigger platform." According to P12, she was prompted to run, as the riding association approached her due to her social justice work and her public stances

P13 noted that she worked for a constituency office, "prior to running" and was aware of "who was going to run in the nomination," for a political party.

P14, noted she started thinking of the province as her playground. She stated that she had to try to:

Win the election. All of the issues and barriers that I'm facing were because of legislation that wasn't providing tools. And so, once I started to think of it that way that this is my input plus, I had been asked to focus on training for equity and teaching others to recognize their positions of privilege. And so here I was teaching that, and now I have this opportunity to run, and I am going to do it. So my name went on the ballot.

P14 chose to run for a political party and when she started to seriously consider running, she met with a family member for advice. The advice she was given was "…remember that every single party wants the best province or the best country that they can imagine. But they have different tools, so pick your tools and that's how you choose your party." P14 shared that with the tools and advice she, "…started looking at platforms and thinking about how people advocate and what language they use to advocate, because even if it's like health care, different parties will use different language to talk about health care. The tools of the XXX, and the language of the party spoke the most to the way that I try and use my position of influence for good. And so that's the reason that I ran for them."
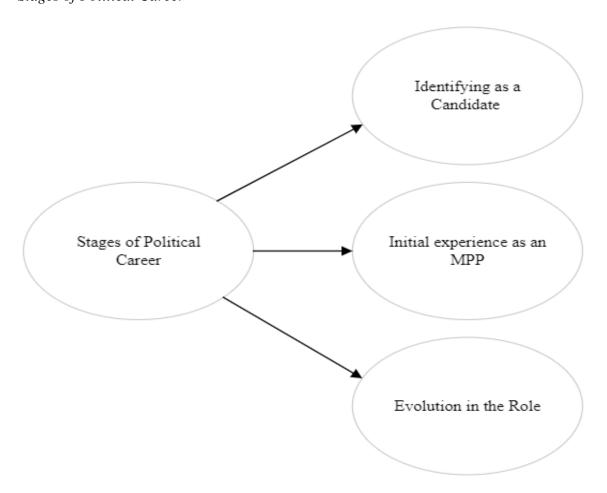
P15 shared that she wanted to be part of the provincial government to bring about change, which prompted her to run for politics.

I had never belonged to a party, and I really felt that the only way that I could affect the kinds of changes and damage repair that needed to be done was to be part of the provincial government that would repair that damage. So that's what that's what really propelled me to run for office.

Stages of a Political Career

The study findings are structured based on the research questions explored in this study, including the barriers faced by women in politics, the strategies used to address these barriers, and other factors that contributed to a rise in women in politics. Figure 2 identifies three stages of the participant's political career.

Figure 2

Stages of Political Career

Specific periods of time during the participants' political careers were reviewed, generating themes from the participants' interview responses to answer the research question: What barriers have women politicians encountered at various stages in their political careers, specifically identifying as a candidate, initial experience as an MPP and

the evolution of the role. These themes provided insight into the barriers women political

leaders encountered at various stages of their political careers. Common barriers

experienced throughout the participants' political careers are presented later in this

chapter.

Identifying as a candidate

Research data uncovered an individual barrier that women political leaders

experienced at the candidacy stage of their political careers. Interview questions revealed

that the barrier encountered by several women was related to the intensity of the role at

the candidacy stage. A feeling of disconnect, a lack of campaign members, or having

thoughts that nothing could prepare one for this role can have an adverse effect on the

candidacy stage experiences.

Intensity of the role. The process of entering the political system begins with a

participant putting their name on a ballot. When participants were asked to speak about

their experiences as initial candidates, eight out of fifteen participants shared their

experiences. Four participants described their initial candidacy stage as serious and

challenging, highlighting difficulties such as a lack of support for door knocking,

attending debates, recruiting volunteers, and managing long days. P1 stated, "There was

lots of aggressivity in the door to door. I was told - Put her in jail, and I think it was the

level of aggressivity the influence of American politics on some voters". In addition, P2

shared that at the time of her candidacy stage, "… it was rough"; however, she noted

that, "I campaigned and campaigned, I did every door in my riding with the team." P3

expressed similar views the first time she ran:

Deciding to run at the last moment meant that I had no campaign team around

me. All the fundraising had to be done during the campaign period, so we didn't

know how much money we would have to spend on top of trying to put in the

work of fundraising that money. At the same time that I was trying to knock on

doors and attend debates, volunteer recruitment and volunteer management.

Those were just enormous logistical challenges; my kids were quite young for

that election.

Furthermore, P4 noted that she would, "…start handing information out at 7:00 am and

would finish before 9:00 pm. That is political campaigning. If you want to win, you

should always run scared." Two participants, however, had indicated that they

encountered minor, if not any, issues in their candidacy state. Lastly, P14 shared that she

enjoyed door knocking, indicating, "My favourite thing was the door knocking where I

got to meet real people who sometimes had no idea that there was an election coming."

Overall, participants had diverse campaign experiences. Some participants felt

they were unable to win a riding, while others, particularly those who were appointed

candidates, believed that they would have never been successful in winning a

nomination. Interestingly, P7 noted that she found "other women very reluctant to do the

door-to-door work because they didn't want to answer any questions."

Initial Experience as an MPP

When questioned about their initial experiences as Members of Provincial

Parliament (MPPs), several participants described the personal barriers they had

encountered. These barriers revolved around the feelings of being inundated and dealing

with imposter syndrome.

Feeling overwhelmed. Participants' initial experiences as MPPs varied. Seven out of fifteen participants discussed the overwhelming sense of the role. Experiences raised among these participants included the intensity of the role, lack of sleep, being mentally and physically exhausted or having no money for some participants. P3 shared that nothing prepared her for being a candidate:

It was intense. The level of scrutiny, the intense workload, both mental and physical demands on your time, and what that means for your family, work, and social life. I just never knew what was coming at me and felt like I was kind of a wide-eyed child riding a roller coaster the entire time. I felt like I was just constantly reacting, as though I didn't know how to react or prepare for what might be coming next. There is so much administrative work that needs to be done at the beginning. The challenges of finding staff, finding an apartment for Toronto, finding office space in the riding and getting things stocked up, practices and routines in place is all happening at the same time that you are meeting with constituents.

Similarly, P14 mentioned:

It's like a whirlwind like you were. There is no force in the world that teaches you about the political system compared to being in it. And that starts when you have your name on a ballot and you're starting to do the canvassing of such. And it was such a whirlwind, I was overwhelmed.

Imposter Syndrome. Imposter syndrome was experienced by three out of fifteen participants. In P9's first year as an MPP, she thought she was in the wrong place, "I kept feeling that someone was going to put their hand on my shoulder and say hey you, you

don't belong here. I had an imposter feeling the first year. I had no idea what I was doing. At the beginning you're afraid you're going to get thrown out or something bad will happen. You don't know where the guard rails are." Similarly, two participants compared walking into the Legislature and walking into grade 9 class as having a nervous feeling, like they did not belong.

Evolution of the Role

In the interviews, three participants highlighted unique barriers related to the development of the political leadership role. The barriers discussed revolved around the level of scrutiny and a lack of trust.

Level of Scrutiny. One participant discussed the level of scrutiny that women leaders faced in their political positions. "For younger women, the question of who will look after your children or if you don't have any, you're probably going to because all women want to have children." P3 indicated that women were frequently criticized for being seen as too emotional or not strong enough for a leadership role when implementing discipline. Additionally, there were opinions on the attire of women.

Lack of Trust. One participant raised the issue of being less trusting as a political leader. Although her leadership style remained the same throughout her political career, P13's skills developed in her leadership role, and she "learned to be less trusting." P13 acknowledged that she would always trust first by default, "but I watch my back because of the experiences."

This research data identified common barriers throughout the various stages of the participant's political careers. These barriers were introduced during the interviews and centred around cultural/societal considerations, as well as socioeconomic factors. as
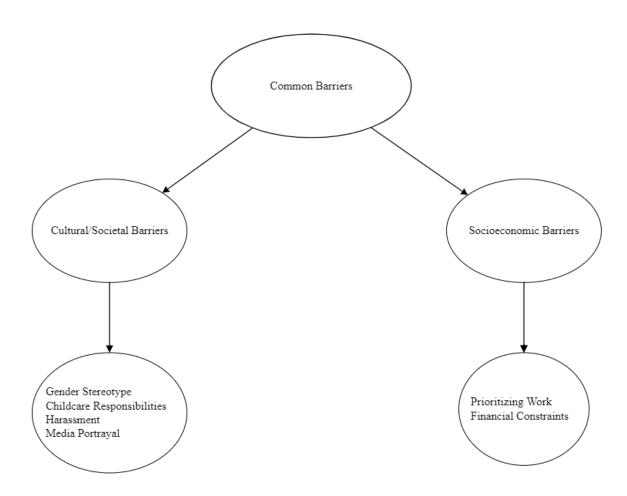
seen in Figure 3. Cultural/societal considerations encompass concerns such as gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities, harassment and media portrayal, while socioeconomic factors include prioritizing work and financial constraints.

Common Barriers of Women Political Leaders

Participants further shared insights on the challenges new politicians often face which will be further explored at the end of this chapter.

Figure 3

Common Barriers of Political Leaders

Cultural/Societal Barriers

The data in this study uncovered cultural and societal barriers women political leaders were exposed to across the stages of their political careers. The cultural and societal barriers were identified as gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities, harassment and media portrayal.

Gender Stereotypes. Five out of fifteen participants in this study discussed the influence of stereotypes on their political leadership role during their interviews. Participants shared experiences of encountering stereotypes relating to sexism, physical appearance, how one speaks, attire, leadership skills and having to work harder than a man. These stereotypes were observed to impact the role of women in political leadership. Participants noted that a person's gender should not determine or restrict the abilities of a politician based on their appearance or leadership qualities. P3 noted that misogyny is the tone of a woman's voice or the age of a woman when deciding to have a child could be scrutinized. She stated there are:

Definitely, a lot of sexist tropes still that women face that if you are too fierce, then you are angry or bitchy. If you are not fierce enough, it's because you are not tough. Criticisms of women's voices are always too shrill, too soft, too whatever... accusations of being too emotional and not strong enough for leadership you won't be able to get the men to respect you and follow you… for women, there's so much scrutiny on what we wear and making sure you're not recycling the same outfit too often and that your outfit is just the right amount of tasteful, professional, not too sexy, not too revealing, not too dowdy. Male colleagues are

not asking themselves if they know enough and if they're prepared enough, they

just assume that they know enough.

Additionally, P4 shared:

There's a huge amount of misogyny. I can only imagine what it used to be like

before my time. But I would say almost some days, I feel like it's on the rise

again, I certainly see it on social media. Women just get pummeled and attacked.

Men do too, of course, but there's some swear words particular to women that get

used a whole lot these days

These opinions were echoed by P12, who indicated, "It's still a very sexist and

misogynist place for sure, just for doing your job, as a woman that you end up receiving

the kind of hate that one does it's absolutely disgusting." P12 shared:

White women will do better than women of colour… There is no question that

things have evolved enormously for women in the last decades. And you would

never have seen women in the positions of leadership that you do now… when

there are intersectional issues… when there's anything else, whether they're queer

or whether they're women of colour, Indigenous, black, whatever it is, then those

issues multiply. And if you're a person who wants to fix it and who isn't prepared

to roll over and let it happen, you are going to be punished for it.

P7 mentioned that she needed to decide on the last name she would run with, due

to suggestions that she should run with her husband's last name. P7 cited that she refused

as she did not want to be known for her husband:

I got some criticism at the beginning when I first announced I was running. . .

who was going to be home to take care of the children. I had to decide what name

I was going to use because I never changed my name. Some suggested that I

should run with my husband's last name and I refused to do that, I'm going to run

as who I am, there was some discussion about what name I should use, which

seems ridiculous to me in this day and age. But anyway, that was that was that.

The election of Donald Trump further reinforced misogyny, according to P15.

P15 stated, "I mean, there are assumptions about what a leader looks like . . . An inherent

assumption about who is qualified to lead is very much a barrier for women . . . sexism

has gotten a new lease on life since Donald Trump was elected," and feels that "… it has

never really gone away."

Childcare Responsibilities. When participants were asked if they had

experienced any challenges during the interviews, nine participants out of fifteen raised

concerns. Of the nine participants, three participants touched on the experiences they

encountered surrounding childcare responsibilities, while six of the participants provided

their views on balancing motherhood with political leadership and that age was not a

factor as all children need their mother. While all participants recognized the barriers to

childcare related to the various stages of a political career, the factors influencing these

barriers varied among the participants. P14 emphasized that childcare for her was a

crucial determinant for her decision-making regarding her political career:

I didn't have a network of people who could watch my kids. When I explained

that as one of the deciding factors about whether or not I would have my name on

the ballot, the parties assumed I would.

P3's initial experiences with childcare challenges started at the beginning of her

political career, specifically when she started campaigning to be an MPP. P3 shared that

her campaign team looked after her children when she needed to attend political debates when no one could help.

> For younger women, the question of, well, who will look after your children or if you don't have any like will, you're probably going to because don't all women want to have children of the accusations of being too emotional and not strong enough for a leadership role.

> When P7 first announced she was running for office, she was in receipt of criticism from the community where she resided with her family. Individuals from the community thought she should be home to take care of her children as it was known that her husband would be away.

> P13 noted that women are considered the primary caregivers, and it is hard for them not to be home, "If they're not at home doing that role for the number of hours, they feel they want to do it for sometimes that's unpalatable to them." Similarly, P5 and P4 noted the challenges with childcare responsibilities and having to be the best. P5 stated, "The election campaign is deadly exciting, but it's unbelievable what you do. I don't know how you juggle children," whereas P4 noted expectations to be, "the best mother, primary child caregiver and elected official."

> **Harassment.** All fifteen participants emphasized the significance of serving their constituents and working diligently. However, eleven participants experienced harassment, directly or indirectly, impacting their roles as political leaders. According to Vecchio (2019), harassment of women political leaders encompasses sexist remarks, harassment, sexual assault and threats, which can have a negative impact on the experience of a women leader in politics. Interestingly, two participants who were in

office for more than one term mentioned that they had not encountered any form of harassment.

Participants indicated that the tone of interactions experienced ranged from one of appreciation to harassment. Most participants reported that the harassment experienced just for doing their job was not pleasant. Experiences extended from receiving inappropriate messages or social media posts, name-calling, racism, fear that no one knew where staff and family resided, receipt of threats, having campaign signs vandalized with inappropriate language or their signs being damaged. This type of harassment, according to P4, is one reason why recruiting people for the role of an MPP is challenging "…. as there is so little, if no, respect for office," raising concerns about its effect on women's political involvement (Vecchio, 2019). P4 shared:

> I block probably 30 people a day on Twitter just for the most egregious actions, like yelling every name in the book at me and thinking that's OK. This is what politicians have to put up with now, so no wonder we have a hard time recruiting people who are sensitive and women and people who are, racialized and marginalized.

P10 said:

> You can't let it get to you personally. It's obviously an easy thing to get the politicians to voice your rage, your frustrations, or your sadness, so you need somebody to blame. You never do enough. As long as there are people suffering because we're not doing enough, and you get blamed for everything that happens in the world. You need to make sure you don't take it personally, and you need to understand that the voice of a few is not the opinion of the majority. The majority

of people in the community really don't like it. And that's really counterbalanced all the nastiness that comes from the others.

P15 felt the harassment was dangerous, "…politicians are just part of the population who have been chosen to represent . . . I think that it puts our democracy in a precarious position . . . when politicians are held in such low esteem." As noted by the Social Sciences and Research Council (2023), harassment demonstrates that women are not wanted in politics.

Media portrayal. In the participant interviews, fifteen participants discussed the portrayal of women politicians by the media, as well as the impact of social media on candidates and elected officials. P13 stated "The media needs to sell stories, and they're focusing on what their readership would like to hear." Similarly, P14 emphasized that the media's role is to create newsworthy content. Social media was discussed by P4 describing it as a platform for trolling, swearing, and insults that require individuals to have thick skin, "Certainly see it on social media dramatically. Women just get pummeled and attacked. Men do too, of course but there's some swear words particular to women that get used a whole lot these days."

Several participants noted that the media did not portray women politicians equally, as P9 stated:

Most of the women I worked with put in a lot of hours and worked very hard. However, their motivation was always in question. You can't fight back against the media. You can try to correct the record, but no one reads the correction.

According to the 2019 Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, biased media treatment based on gender is one of the factors that may

discourage women from participating in electoral politics. The media's coverage of women politicians can bring about stereotypes that discourage women from entering politics.

Socioeconomic Barriers

The role of a politician can be both exhilarating and demanding. According to the findings of this research study, participants encountered socioeconomic barriers as noted in the research data. The barriers participants referenced were associated with one's political leadership role, including prioritizing work and financial constraints.

Prioritizing Work. Participants described the demand to work long hours while juggling their responsibilities outside of work as a barrier to women in politics. These challenges included travel, obligations, family responsibilities, time constraints, the pressure of disappointments and nurturing personal relationships. Seven out of fifteen participants provided an overview of the challenges.

Although P5 described her role as an MPP as her true vocation, all participants noted that the role of a political leader requires women to always be accessible. This can pose challenges in meeting job expectations, particularly for women juggling family and childcare responsibilities.

P13 described herself as a workaholic and an insomniac, working 20 hours a day for a couple of days. Similarly, P15 noted that her work-life balance was "tipped towards work." All participants expressed that work-life balance was a challenge, and P3 demonstrated this by sharing her perspective:

There hasn't been any work-life balance; it's been an 80-hour-a-week job,

evenings and weekends. And when the Legislature is sitting you have to add in at

least six to eight hours for travel per week, depending on what form of travel.

Monday through Thursday afternoon would be a wild ride of very long days

trying to make sure that I'm on top of all the Queen's Park work and the

legislative demands. Then, Thursday afternoon, another trip home, and then

Friday to Sunday, I try to cram everything into the riding that needs to be done.

As balancing is difficult, P8 explained that if she wanted to move forward politically, she

could not always choose her family over work.

During the interviews, participants discussed the requirement to be at the

Legislature every month as part of the role. MPPs had to be in Toronto every week the

Legislature was in session. Depending on their role, cabinet members were obligated to

attend cabinet meetings. P13 mentioned that the time commitment to be at the

Legislature amounted to three weeks per month, with the MPP working out of their

constituency office on the fourth week. "There were women who had to fly and stay in

Toronto during the week as opposed to those who could go home nightly. Depending on

the role of the MPP, they could be working extremely long hours," according to P9. She

went on to say that there is no balance and that it is hard. She explained that when you

are at Queens Park fighting for what your community wants, your riding thinks that you

have forgotten about them and that you only care about Queens Park, which causes a

role, not strong enough to impose discipline where you need to, or you know, the idea

that feeling of disloyalty.

Financial Constraints. During the interviews, concerns were raised about the

financial constraints associated with the candidacy stage and throughout one's political

career. According to the interview data, fundraising for campaigns and childcare

expenses had a significant impact on financial situations. Six participants out of fifteen spoke of financial concerns.

"Fundraising had to be done during the campaign period, so we didn't know how much money we would have to spend on top of trying to put in the work of fundraising that money," shared P3. Similarly, P11 stated that raising money for her campaign was a challenge. P7 confirmed this by stating: "I know that some women have concerns about being able to raise the money that they need in order to run a full political campaign." P2 acknowledged that:

> Women have to put some money to start with because, especially if you are in a riding where you have less chance to win, you do fundraising. But it's not always easy; it depends on who you are. If you are a big shot in town, you'll do fundraising, and you will raise a lot of money, but others may not have this network to raise a lot of money.

One participant spoke about the financial constraints due to childcare costs. P14 stated:

> I pay somewhere between four and five hundred dollars a month right now for childcare for one child because my other kids have finally become old enough that I don't have to pay for childcare for them, and that's my everyday childcare. My overnight childcare as the job means that I'm expected to be in Toronto four days a week for three weeks a month for the X amount of months that the Legislature is sitting. The government can call us back, so we have had a pandemic where I have done overnights over the weekend, I've slept at Queens Park, and somebody has to be with my kids. So overnight childcare and

somebody who was on call is hugely expensive. And the other part of it is that

typically it's women's work.

Acknowledging the difficulty of balancing an election campaign with a full-time

job, P13 highlighted the demanding nature of the nomination process. With an average

duration of 12 weeks and no financial compensation, it poses a significant challenge for

many aspiring candidates.

Strategies to overcome common barriers

The second research question examined the strategies women in a political

leadership role used to overcome the barriers they encountered during three stages of

their political career. The data identified the following themes: Set Boundaries, Work

across party lines, Maintain an Equitable Lens and Surround yourself with a Support

Network. Table 2 lists the themes and subthemes for Research Question 2.

Table 2

Research Question 2 Themes

Theme	Subthemes
Set Boundaries	
Work across party lines	
Maintain an Equitable Lens	
Surround yourself with a Support Network	Campaign Team Family, partners and friends

Set Boundaries

Seven participants spoke about the importance of setting boundaries and

emphasized the need for balance between family, work, health and colleagues. They also

stressed the significance of self-belief, confidence and effective organization to not feel

overwhelmed. P3 expressed, "Women need to be confident that they know they are good enough to learn." Male political leaders play a crucial role in transforming political institutions into inclusive environments for women, which will aid in changing the landscape for women in politics by offering opportunities to juggle their family responsibilities with their political careers (Liu, 2019).

Some participants mentioned the importance of allocating time with family, while prioritizing their health and well-being by prioritizing rest. P1 noted that it was good to set boundaries for oneself, such as not being on social media after a certain time whereas P5 conveyed:

Stand for something, and don't waver. Carve time out for yourself, like health and your family and friends … Your inbox will always be full. You're never going to have an empty inbox. And who cares? Take care of yourself and do great things, and I'll tell you if you want something done, give it to a busy person. If you want to change the world, then get more women in office. The why is very important, and if you lose sight of it, your life can become difficult. Forgetting the why will impact your actions, as they will be dictated by others rather than your own motivation. It is very easy to be influenced by people who just want to manipulate you and get you to do what they believe is the important thing to do.

Work across party lines

Nine participants expressed the importance of working across party lines regardless of one's party affiliation. According to P6, working across party lines is about demonstrating leadership. Participants acknowledged that political leaders may not

always agree, but they need to find a way to work together, as P2 mentioned "…that is politics…" P4 recalled:

> I try to work collaboratively, and I try to work across party lines. Here's the reality, good political debate sounds very rancorous when you're watching it, but you have to remember that's a small town and those same people who are yelling at each other, across the aisle, are then sitting on a committee and traveling together, sitting next to each other in a plane. They're mingling at a lobby event, which is where a lot of the work that I got done…by networking. You do that by working with other.

Participants added that getting to know members of other parties was important, however resorting to personnel comments of other political leaders was not supported. P7 noted that, "…it's just about a difference of ideas that you're exchanging and that you need to respect everyone in the Legislature, state your position, but do it clearly and politely as possible." Furthermore, out of the nine participants, P8 highlighted how experiences between parties at times can be viewed misleading:

> I was running against a very well-known candidate in XX party and we went toe to toe like it was fabulous. I loved it because it wasn't real. This wonderful experience I think media often looks for the polar, not just the consensus and coming together on things. For instance, in the legislature, all four parties passed Bill 75 December of 2021. That was an opportunity to talk about the consensus that we're experiencing.

Maintain an Equitable Lens

Three participants in this study discussed the importance of not giving up while highlighting the need for women's voices to be heard. Participants acknowledged the importance of having significant input into policy as women bring an equitable lens to the table. Thus, women need to be proud to be in politics. The removal of gender stereotypes impacting women political leaders requires a shift in society's attitudes surrounding gender (Vecchio, 2019).

P6 noted:

You're as strong as an equal as your male colleague, and they're just as strong as you are. Often, we have to hold each other up. As I say, we bring a different balance to that table. But most of all, making sure that you are proud of what you do, keep on doing what you do and work together and really because in some respects as, being a woman in politics, it's about, I think, just balancing those special needs of yourself and but also being very proud that you are a female in politics.

Maintaining an open and fair-minded approach and showing respect towards one another will aid political leaders in advancing their agenda, according to P6. Meanwhile, P12 emphasized one of her goals was to "Create a more equitable society; I have something to bring to the table in terms of making Canada a more equitable society from the messages that I used to the lessons that I used to teach."

P14 emphasized the significance of maintaining a connection to the community despite differences in the political system:

Take a deep breath and recognize that the system wasn't made for women. You

will encounter issues within the system that nobody has ever thought of; trust

your gut about them because the world will tell you that they don't exist. Trust

that there is a reason that you're in that place and that you're standing on the

shoulders of other women and other women of colour who have thought to be in

that place. Stay connected to the community so you're not fighting for things

nobody understands.

Surround yourself with a Support Network

Most of the participants revealed that having support and being surrounded by a

supportive network made a difference in their political leadership roles. Participants

referred to a supportive network as their campaign team, family, friends, and partners.

Campaign Team. The presence of an experienced campaign manager and a

competent team was key for six participants in the candidacy stage. According to P8, her

campaign manager provided her with a playbook that contributed to her success in the

election. P8 acknowledged that if she wanted to be successful, she needed a team and

supporters as the political role can not be done alone, "Every campaign is a tough

campaign, and I take every campaign like I'm behind. My volunteers, the people that

surrounded me, and my effort in between elections really contributed to the victory."

P14 shared that her campaign manager would sit with her in the campaign office

and help to make her not overwhelmed:

I had an amazing campaign manager, and she would sit with me in this back room

in our campaign office and break down the platform, so I wasn't feeling too

overwhelmed. Like, let's just remember the key messages for health care because

you have a debate about health care, you know, like piece by piece, because

looking at the entire like literally the platform that their vision for the entire

province and the province oversees all the things so that on its own to remember

was difficult.

Furthermore, out of the six participants, P4 indicated that there was a positive

impact of women being elected, as campaign managers were more willing to work with

women, "My campaign manager only worked with women."

Family, partners and friends. When the participants were asked about their

successes as initial candidates, twelve out of fifteen participants emphasized the

significance of receiving support from their partners, family and friends. This support

extended from the candidacy stage to the evolution of their role as a political leader. The

findings reflect appreciation by participants for the support received, with terms of

endearment having a positive impact on the participants. P5 noted that her husband was a

saint and her sounding board, as he always reminded her that she was a good person. P5

spoke about, "having phenomenal friends and family who believed in me". P6 shared, "I

have a very strong marriage with my husband. Having that support from home was

always an important role."

Family support is important as noted by P7, "my family support has been

invaluable in just helping me move forward". Similarly, P10 shared:

> It's very important to have 100 percent support of my family because my family
>
> supported me in allowing me not to be home at all because. The job is very
>
> demanding, and that means that somebody has to be at home… my husband
>
> always picks up the slack, and the kids were very supportive.

Words of encouragement from family members such as "you got this, you're doing great, we're so proud of you" as noted by P10 were considered "gold, especially on the days when you get home after a very hard day, and then you feel like you're asking yourself, what am I doing there? Is it really worth all this pain?"

Factors Contributing to Increased Representation

The third research question examined other factors that might have contributed to the increased representation of women in politics. The data identified the following themes: shift in the political landscape, recruitment, and engagement. Table 3 lists the themes and subthemes for Research Question 3.

Table 3

Research Question 3 Themes

Theme	Subthemes
Shift in the political landscape	Gender equity policies
	Strong presence of women leaders
Recruitment	Being asked to run
Guidance	Community Involvement
	Support Network

Shift in the political landscape

The political landscape has experienced significant developments that have played a pivotal role in advancing the success of women in political leadership roles. According to this study's findings, participants referred to various factors, such as gender equality policies and the strong presence of women leaders, as key contributors to the progression of women's representation in politics. As P4 mentioned, women have demonstrated that they can get elected over men which increases the opportunities of succession.

Gender equity policies. During the interviews, when asked about the key factors behind women's success in politics in Ontario, the majority of participants acknowledged the importance of gender equality, either through direct mention or reference. The participants also expressed that discussions surrounding the appointment or recruitment of women need to be translated into action. However, it was suggested that a strategy should be devised to ensure a smooth and welcoming transition for women in politics.

One participant associated with the NDP party mentioned gender equity several times, referring to gender equity policies as having made a difference in the party due to

the increase in the number of women elected. The 2022 Provincial election in Ontario brought gender equity, with over half of women in seats in the NDP party (Rushowy, 2022). Additionally, there was mention that women within the NDP party have equal opportunities to be nominated as candidates.

Several women agreed that having support available would increase the number of women running for a political party. In one interview, a participant mentioned that if the Liberals and Conservatives adopted similar policies to the NDP, there would be gender parity in the Legislature. One participant mentioned that she was proud of the Ontario Liberals in terms of having a commitment to have women represent half the party. Also, the participant mentioned that all three of the main political parties in Ontario made it their objective to have women represented to have a shared voice.

Strong presence of women leaders. According to the participants, the presence of women political leaders has increased over time. One of the highlights noted by participants was having a woman Premier in the Province of Ontario as women could see themselves as being elected and electable. Seven participants shared the importance of seeing more women in politics.

The interviews demonstrated that women political leaders want to see other women succeed. P2 indicated, "Women come to me … a lot of women because they saw what I did in politics, and I wanted to encourage women to go into politics … I want them to succeed." There was a common reflection in the data that women were speaking with other women in politics, which would substantiate social identity theory, as women political leaders play an important role in motivating and influencing other women (Tse

& Chiu, 2014). P7 acknowledged the importance of encouraging more young women to go into politics. P4 noted that politics is about multitasking which women are good at.

Authenticity was discussed during the interviews, specifically around prioritizing women either as candidates or as leaders, according to P13. Equal Voice was mentioned by several participants as a key group that empowers women and promotes inclusivity for women to have a stronger voice at the table, as noted by P15, bringing about structural changes assisting women's participation in politics.

Recruitment

Recruitment was acknowledged as a contributing factor to the increase in women political leaders. Over half of the participants were asked to run as a Member of Provincial Parliament by a political representative or a riding association. Not being qualified to do the job or being referred to Imposter Syndrome was raised by a couple of participants.

Being asked to run. When asked to share their inspiration for becoming involved in politics, over half the participants noted they were asked to enter politics, with a few who mentioned they were involved in a political office. Over ten participants were asked to run by either a political representative or a riding association. For P2, the real determinant of her becoming a politician was being asked to go into politics by a politician, as she shared that she was winning in politics due to being asked.

Several participants who were asked to go into politics indicated they had a lack of awareness surrounding the role. Some women revealed they found it helpful to speak with other women or other political representatives who were in the position as an MPP prior to making a final decision. P3 mentioned:

Women tend to suffer from imposter syndrome much more than men, and a lot of

my male colleagues are not asking themselves if they know enough and if they're

prepared enough, they just assume that they know enough and then they're ready.

I just want to say to women, you need to learn more before you step in. We need

to be more confident that we already know enough or that we're good enough to

learn as we do it. I think surrounding yourself with good people who are going to

be supportive of your leadership and supportive of your role and who are ready to

step in and take tasks out of your election campaign, take tasks in your office.

That's what's going to help you get through those cases of imposter syndrome.

That's what's going to help you get through the tough times. That's what's going

to help you, whether the double standard or the challenges of the job.

Some participants mentioned that they did not feel they were qualified to do the job.

However, as P1 indicated, all candidates were curious about politics and eager to learn.

Guidance

The interviews revealed that the growing presence of women in politics can be

attributed to their active engagement in their communities and the strength of their

support systems. According to the findings, community involvement and having a

supportive network emerged as key contributors.

Community Involvement. Volunteer work was a predeterminant for several

participants to enter politics. Participants acknowledged the importance of having a

supportive and encouraging group surrounding them while providing encouragement. P5

indicated that she gave her first speech while her parents were volunteering and noted

the importance to give speeches before one is chosen to be a political leader. According to participants, there is value in volunteering and giving back.

Participants also found areas where they could advocate for a cause and create awareness. As P6 mentioned, she put her name on the ballot to run as it was time to bring a different perspective. P10 shared that she got involved in politics and was motivated due to a cause and to work with the development of children.

The urge designated me as the obvious person for some reason to lead the conversation. I've been in before the school board many times trying to make the pitch about the school needs and just trying to convince them of the value. When the election time came, I said why not take it to the next level and go fight for this cause, so I became a school trustee, and that's when I really expanded my network, but also my appetite to exercise leadership because I realized that I could bring change and I could influence positive change, and I was very motivated by that. And at the provincial level … was a very obvious choice.

School board politics and the education of the participants' children motivated a couple of participants to become involved in politics. Additionally, listening to the first woman Premier of Ontario speak while representing a community organization was also a catalyst to become involved in politics.

Support Network. Support of family, friends or loved ones was an important factor for participants, alongside not having to worry about childcare. P3 mentioned:

Her and her husband's time at home didn't overlap for 15 or 20 minutes; it was fine. Emotionally, the kids were better able to handle the demands of the campaign. I had … such a strong campaign team around my family, which meant

there were a lot more people to draw in for childcare when we needed it. So, there

was just a lot more support in general around faith, which made a big difference.

Several participants revealed their partners were very supportive and encouraged

them to become involved in politics, leading to their success in politics. P12 indicated

that her partner wanted her to run, and when she got elected, his job was, "… to make

sure that every time you come home, there is a good meal on the table and there's a lot of

support for you." Family involvement, whether in politics or having their support, was a

contributing factor towards the involvement in politics.

Invisible Barriers of Political Leaders

The research data identified invisible barriers women political leaders confront in

their political leadership roles. These barriers can be felt through a variety of settings

such as logistical challenges, party policies and legislative processes.

Logistical Challenges

Logistical challenges encountered by fifteen participants included staff

recruitment, securing accommodations and office space, understanding the legislature's

responsibilities, having no time to learn, navigating the system and feeling overwhelmed.

These challenges were commonly experienced when participants entered into their roles

as MPPs. P3 shared her experiences of not having the information to respond to

questions as everything happened quickly. She further expanded to say:

There's so much administrative work that needs to be done at the beginning. The

challenges of finding staff, finding an apartment for Toronto, finding office space

in the riding, practices and routines in place is all happening at the same time that

you are meeting with constituents. So being an MPP is like three or four different

jobs; you're trying to learn all these different jobs, all at the same time. There's a lot of swimming upstream in the first few months. There's some guidance from the party, but the party is not great at transitions. There hasn't been a lot of support for navigating how do you get things done within Queen's Park or where we should be going for it.

P9 had a similar experience of needing to comprehend the proceedings in the Legislature. Understanding the intricacies of what was transpiring in the house was challenging at times. P9 shared, "I didn't understand the script of what was happening in the house, and it probably took me a year to understand." Feeling unsure about how to navigate the system for someone working in the legislature or riding was a common feeling, which was described as having a lot of information coming at you all at once.

P4 felt that that was no time to learn after she was elected. She shared that: "It was overwhelming. I was dropped into the water without knowing how to swim and told to swim because the house was sitting, and it was in full swing." According to P10, the challenge was not having support.

Party Policies

Party policies reflect the vision of each political party and vary accordingly. According to the interview data, these policies can also influence the barriers. P14 noted:

One can forget about the vision bringing about tension… pieces of legislation die in committee because I didn't know that the government has to call it in committee that next phase of the process. I thought that it just automatically was in the queue and would get debated. It doesn't happen that way, which means there are backroom negotiations between parties to decide what's going to be

passed. Like those kinds of things or pieces of the system that has not changed, that will keep the barriers going.

The influence of party policies expands, especially when the party is in the process of selecting a new leader as noted by one participant. According to P1, individuals' prospects in politics are largely shaped by party insiders. She emphasized the importance of building strong connections within the party, stating, "It's crucial to have a wide network within the party. If I could start my political journey again, I would dedicate more time to understanding the internal dynamics of the party rather than focusing solely on my constituency".

Legislature Processes

One participant observed the legislature's regulations specific to requesting assistance from pages that provide support to the members in the chamber. Although this method may seem uncomplicated to some members, one participant noted that for a person of colour, hand gestures to motion support of a page can recall memories of a time when this type of assistance predominantly catered to the needs of white men. Experiences such as these heighten awareness of social norms.

Summary

This chapter provided the research findings on the barriers and strategies fifteen women politicians faced throughout three stages in their political careers. Overarching themes uncovered were cultural, societal and socioeconomic barriers, while the strategies revealed to overcome the barriers focused on: (1) Set Boundaries (2) Maintain an Equitable Lens (3) Surround yourself with a Support Network. The findings were organized according to three Stages of the Participant's Political Career: Identifying as a

Candidate, Initial experiences as an MPP and the Evolution of the Role. This chapter

provided a brief overview of the study participants, addressing their political motivation

and reason to become politically involved. With the results obtained from this study,

scholars and practitioners understand how barriers to women in political leadership can

be addressed. The findings presented a deeper understanding of the factors contributing

to the increased representation of women's political leaders. Chapter 5 presents the

conclusion to this research study through the interpretations of this study followed by the

recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5. Discussion

Using role congruity and social identity theories, the purpose of this study was to build on prior research and explore how women politicians have navigated the various barriers to gaining and maintaining roles as political leaders. Specific strategies undertaken by women to be elected and, where applicable, to be appointed to formal leadership roles were explored. Much of the research on women and politics has focused on examining the barriers to entry for women. As data indicates, women have made significant progress in some jurisdictions, such as the Canadian province of Ontario, and more is needed to know the factors contributing to their success. The findings of this research demonstrate that women continue to have their leadership skills judged in a political environment, as indicated in the 2019 report by the Status of Women (Ro, 2021). Barriers identified in this study have not shifted over time and are similar to barriers identified in other studies (Galandy & Tavcer, 2019; Vecchio, 2019), which focus on work-life balance, financing, gender stereotyping, harassment, and gender portrayal by the media.

Semi-structured interviews with current and former women politicians addressed the central question guiding this study: what factors have contributed to the advancement of women in politics? This study addressed the gap in the literature by exploring specific strategies undertaken by women to be elected and, where applicable, to be appointed to formal leadership roles. The findings added to the current knowledge on both women and politics and women in leadership by presenting a greater awareness of how women overcome barriers to their participation in political leadership roles by developing their leadership style.

This study reflected on the motivation behind their involvement in politics. It delved into the experiences of women Members of Provincial Parliament, the barriers faced by women leaders, the strategies that led to their success, and factors contributing to the advancement of women. The study identified key areas where women MPPs saw differences when compared to their male colleagues. This study also revealed that having a support system is crucial for anyone in a leadership role. The participants emphasized the need to surround themselves with supportive people who can assist in navigating any barriers that may arise during the election campaign.

Chapter 5 discussed key findings outlined in Chapter 4, focusing on barriers and strategies women Members of Provincial Parliament have encountered at various stages of their political careers. This also offers the study's theoretical and practical limitations.

Summary of Findings

This research study revealed that women Members of Provincial Parliament, past and present, faced common barriers throughout three stages of their political careers. The three stages included identifying as a candidate, initial experience as an MPP and the evolution of the role. These barriers centred around cultural/societal factors such as gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities, harassment and media portrayal, while the socioeconomic factors included prioritizing work and financial constraints. Strategies, such as setting boundaries, maintaining an equitable lens and surrounding yourself with a support network were employed by the participants to overcome the barriers at different career stages.

Barriers

Research on women in politics has mainly focused on identifying the barriers

women face in achieving political representation. In previous studies (Galandy & Tavcer,

2019; Pettie, 2019; Rheault et al., 2019; Vecchio, 2019), several barriers' women

experience in Canadian federal politics were identified including harassment, childcare

responsibilities, gender stereotypes, prioritizing work, financial constraints, and media

portrayal. This research study revealed that the findings related to women Members of

Provincial Parliament were nonexclusive to the barriers identified at the Federal level,

supporting the notion that gender underrepresentation does not just occur at the Federal

level (Thomas, 2013). Women face individual, social, community, and political barriers

that deter their opportunities and overall political representation (Hanbidge, 2019). Petite

(2019) identified four key categories of barriers contributing to the underrepresentation

of women Members of Parliament in Canada. Reasons resulted from preconceived ideas

where the leader skill sets are perceived to apply to men (and not women); women are

not as competitive; women are more focused on the responsibility of the family; and

women do not have the same political affiliations as men.

According to the findings, there is a link between the 2016 election of Donald

Trump and increased misogyny. P15 noted that misogyny has intensified, and people

have assumed that a leader should be a certain way. This supports the idea that societal

views impact how people view specific roles, as Hart et al. (2009) noted. However, P15

also stated that women should not be held back from being in politics.

Fifteen participants were asked to recount their initial or early experiences as an

MPP during the interviews. Participants shared instances where they were unfairly

judged or labelled as not strong enough for leadership roles. They also highlighted the prejudiced notion that women could not impose control where it was required, as men would not respect or follow women. These stereotypical behaviours that women experienced were based on what they wore, their qualifications to lead as well as their appearance. Through these findings, role congruity of prejudice was associated with the traits of women not aligning with the traits of a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Mendoza & DiMaria, 2019; Bendada, 2018).

Family responsibilities were also raised, particularly about childcare. Sexism was discussed as having gained traction in light of American politics. There was also concern that the participants were not considered equally capable of taking on leadership roles if their primary focus was on being a parent in their ability to lead if their primary role was considered a mother, or if there were assumptions regarding childrearing. This reinforces the stereotype that leadership is inherently tied to masculine traits (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006).

Throughout the participant's political careers, eleven participants encountered various forms of harassment. They openly shared their experiences, and there was mention that harassment was one reason why there were difficulties recruiting women. The forms of harassment experienced included the vandalization of property, the use of terrible language, threats, or receiving hate mail. These behaviours aligned with social identity theory, bringing into question the leadership traits of these participants as the focus is placed on the traits of the women (Dudley, 2019; Gregory, 2017).

Prioritizing work in Provincial Parliament had contrasting impacts on participants relating to pressures of the position, family responsibilities, or the location of where one

resides. There were barriers in prioritizing work for the participants as the women could never turn their roles off which impacted the families of several participants. Commuting to the Legislature was a daily routine for some women, while others opted to fly and stay in Toronto during the week they were sitting in the Legislature. The hours were demanding, and it was essential to strike a balance. The reality was challenging in terms of the role as the role of an MPP was far from easy, as it entailed a significant amount of work and dedication which contrasted with the common perception.

The challenges of assuming public office, particularly the difficulties of securing accommodations in Toronto were raised. Transitioning to a new constituency office or to the Legislature, for example, without sufficient support was noted to be confusing. The influence of party politics was also highlighted as a significant challenge, as having a thorough understanding of the inner workings of the party in one's constituency was crucial

The role of media is an influential and vital role with political leaders and has the capability and power to create a platform which can identify, create interpretation, evaluate, or suggest areas of growth or change (Schlehofer et al., 2011). The misrepresentation of women in the media leads to a biased view of women leaders regarding their responsibilities and appearance (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2019) that can appear in many forms, including insults, threats, as well as suggestions that women do not have the strength or are not fit to be in politics (Pettie, 2019; Perraudin & Murphy, 2019). Fifteen participants discussed the portrayal of women politicians by the media. Several participants noted that women were not portrayed equally. Role congruity theory

suggests there is an incongruity between the role of women and their political leadership role (Schock et al., 2019).

The findings of this study demonstrated that misrepresentation continues to take place. Participants reported that they were subjected to insults, trolling, swearing and threats. Gender biases were also noted through media treatment and how the media described women and men politicians.

Strategies

Providing women politicians with better opportunities to break down barriers provides a starting point to eliminate the barriers women experience as political leaders. The findings of this research draw from the participants' experiences in mitigating barriers they encountered in their leadership roles. The key themes identified focused on setting boundaries, maintaining an equitable lens and surrounding yourself with a support network.

Seven participants spoke about setting boundaries and emphasized the need for balance between family, work, health and colleagues. They stressed the importance of self-confidence and being organized to not feel overwhelmed. Levels of political ambition differ between men and women, and women tend to doubt or downplay their skills in their political abilities (Vecchio, 2018). According to social identity theory, leaders develop in groups due to their representation of the group (Lanka et al., 2020).

Three participants discussed the importance of not giving up while highlighting the need for women's voices to be heard. Participants acknowledged the importance of having significant input into policy as women bring an equitable lens to the table. Thus, women need to be proud to be in politics. The removal of gender stereotypes impacting

women political leaders requires a shift in society's attitudes surrounding gender

(Vecchio, 2019). Support was a powerful discovery uncovered through the interviews, as

the role of a political leader is demanding. and participants expressed the importance of

being surrounded by a supportive network. Gender-equity policies would impact the

media's biases as a party ensures women have equal opportunities to be nominated for a

candidate. This has increased the number of women running while increasing the

proportion of women getting elected to the party.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Research on women and politics has primarily focused on examining the barriers

women experience upon entry into politics. In this study, the implications for role

congruity theory support the data analysis that incongruity exists between the traits of

women and the qualities associated with leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Gender

stereotypes surrounding traditional gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002) continue to

create obstacles for women political leaders (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Liu,

2019). As women work towards creating a work-life balance, this invisible barrier is

more apparent (Sabharwal et al., 2018; Sheichuk, 2023) and does not align with the

flexibility required to care for children, family, or other responsibilities (June 2015).

There is a perceived incongruity between women's social roles, the demands of the

leadership role and the characteristics attributed to men and women in leadership roles

(Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Wood, 2008). Alternatively, social identity theory

provides a framework to understand how women political leaders develop in groups due

to their representation of the group (Lanka et al., 2020). The implication of this theory is

used to explain why gender roles have created gender norms within society while

identifying differences in behaviours (Gloor et al., 2020). Social identity theory is

comprised of three areas: categorization, identification, and comparison (Dudley, 2019).

Leaders emerge in groups due to how they represent the attributes within the group;

however, issues may arise with implementing a social identity theory approach to the

leader's identity.

The findings of this research study reflect practical implications towards the

advancement of women in political leadership roles. The first implication underlines the

ongoing cultural, societal, and socioeconomic barriers women political leaders continue

to confront, impacting their leadership roles during three phases of their political career:

the candidacy selection, election process, and the assumption of the role. These barriers

include gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities, harassment, media portrayal,

financial constraints and prioritizing work, contributing to the underrepresentation of

women in politics. The second implication suggests that strategies employed by women

leaders to overcome barriers encountered in their leadership role can create opportunities

to dismantle the barriers. These strategies consist of setting boundaries, working across

party lines, maintaining an equitable lens and cultivating a supportive network that

inspires women to see themselves as leaders. This network may consist of family,

friends, a campaign team, mentors, or women who have previously held similar positions

and can offer advice and share their experiences. The final implication suggests an

increasing representation of women in political leadership roles as the result of gender

equity policies and the presence of strong women leaders. Recruitment efforts

contributed to this increase, as women were encouraged to enter politics. Additionally,

women's political advancement was linked to their involvement in their communities and

the strength of their support systems. These findings suggest that there is a change in the way women in politics are viewed as women politicians are being provided with better opportunities to break down barriers to advance in politics. Based on these strategies, the following recommendations offer valuable insights for potential candidates, women politicians, and the gendered nature of political leadership

Recommendations for potential candidates:

This section offers recommendations for women interested in pursuing a career in politics by former and current political leaders. The suggestions include maintaining confidence in your abilities and surround yourself with support.

Maintain confidence in your abilities. Believe in yourself and focus on your motivations for pursuing a career in politics. Maintain confidence in your abilities and embrace the opportunity by preparing yourself with as much knowledge beforehand surrounding policies and your skills. P3 shared:

> Women often suffer from imposter syndrome much more than men, and a lot of male colleagues are not asking themselves if they know enough and if they're prepared enough, they just assume that they know enough … I just want to say to women, you need to learn more before you step in. We need to be more confident that we already know enough or that we're good enough to learn.

Being a woman must not be a determining factor in one's ability to succeed as a politician, it is important not to let anyone discourage you. Prioritize your wellbeing by making time for yourself, your family, friends, and your health. Trust your instincts and be true to who you are.

P14 highlighted:

You will encounter issues within the system that nobody has ever even thought of, trust your gut about those issues because the world will tell you that they don't exist. Trust that there is a reason that you're in that place and that you're standing on the shoulders of other women and other women of colour who have thought to be in that place. Stay connected to community so that you're not fighting for things that nobody understands.

Surround yourself with support. Surround yourself with those who are supportive of your leadership and your role. Look to women who have held political leadership roles before you as they possess a wealth of advice and experience to share. Take pride in being a woman in politics, and that you bring an equitable perspective to discussions. P4 advises, "find good mentors and get good staff when you have the opportunity. Look to your elders, the women who've done it before you because we have a wealth of advice, and a wealth of experience."

Recommendations for women politicians

This section presents recommendations to support women politicians in their leadership roles. It emphasizes the importance of working across party lines and establishing boundaries.

Work across party lines. Women in politics should support each other and take pride in their roles. Treating each other with respect and focusing on the issues, rather than the gender, helps elevates the community's voices and experiences. Learning to work with the opposition is important, as this will not only make the role of a Member of Provincial Parliament easier but also demonstrates leadership by working across party lines.

Empower women. Empower other women to get involved in politics as you play a key role in motivating and influencing them. More than half of the participants of this study entered provincial politics after being encouraged to run by a political representative or riding association.

Recommendations to recognize the gendered nature of political leadership

This section outlines recommendations to foster gender equality in political parties, riding associations and with male Members of Provincial Parliament.

Political Parties/Riding Associations. The results of this study indicated that women leaders experienced cultural, societal and socioeconomic barriers in their leadership roles. These barriers included gender stereotyping, childcare responsibilities, harassment, media portrayal, prioritizing work and financial constraints. As noted in this study, women are impacted by stereotypes (Hill et al., 2016) as women are not considered equal in demonstrating the same characteristics to lead (Stempel et al., 2015). Being a mother while being a leader is a prime example of a stereotype where women are viewed as having the primary responsibility for childrearing which reinforces the idea that stereotypically masculine traits are associated with leadership (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). Consequently, incongruity exists between the traits attributed to women and the agentic qualities associated with the image of a successful leader, which creates an understanding that women are not effective in a leadership role (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012). Party policies are to reflect the vision of each political party, yet the policies can also perpetuate the barriers that exist. Enable women and dedicate time to improving the representation of women (Vecchio, 2019) in provincial politics through reviewing the policies

Male colleagues. Five out of fifteen participants in this study discussed the influence of stereotypes on their political leadership role. Participants shared experiences of encountering stereotypes that were observed to impact the role of women in political leadership roles. Societal views impact role congruity (Hart et al., 2009) by encouraging that leadership roles are better suited for males (Stempel et al., 2015). Participants noted that a person's gender should not determine or restrict the abilities of a politician based on their appearance or leadership qualities. A leader takes on the identity of a group by building influence and acceptability from members within a group who believe the leader represents the specific norms (Gloor et al., 2020). Fostering gender-sensitive workplaces supports the presence of women political leaders while achieving gender equality. With male colleagues championing this approach, they assist in the advancement of women political leaders (Vecchio, 2019).

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study had several limitations. First, the time required to contact individuals and conduct interviews certainly reduced the number of women interviewed. As the pilot study was conducted at the beginning of a new provincial term and during the summer, challenges were encountered in connecting with newly elected, re-elected or former MPPs within the provincial government. Despite the researcher's attempts to reach out to both current and former MPPs, the pilot study ultimately took four months to complete which was longer than originally anticipated. Additionally, the pilot and main study population aimed to include a diverse representation of current and former political leaders from all three political parties, however, this goal was not achieved as the study faced challenges in accessing former and current MPPs. Despite the sample size being

sufficient to gather information, several interested participants could not take part due to scheduling conflicts. The researcher reached out to riding associations for guidance in connecting with former MPPs, but unfortunately, received no response. Additionally, there were several initial emails to current MPPs which resulted in automatic responses with no further communication. As a result, the researcher had to resort to searching for public contact information online, including social media platforms, which was a time-consuming task.

Barriers for women in political leadership have been the focus of various studies. However, there has yet to be a comprehensive examination of the strategies that women leaders employ to overcome these barriers. This research study provides a snapshot of why the underrepresentation of women political leaders continues to exist in the Legislature. Qualitative research was the best method to use to study the strategies used to overcome barriers within a leadership role in politics. The use of role congruity theory and social identity proved to be beneficial in developing the research questions.

To ensure a diverse representation of participants within the Legislative Assembly, future research should be based on interviews with both men and women to compare individual experiences. Additionally, obtaining initial support from political party leaders would mitigate participant concerns and increase the sample size, ultimately improving the quality of the research. Furthermore, expanding this research into other provinces would increase the sample size and generate different perspectives.

Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study achieved the intended goal of this research of understanding how women Members of Provincial Parliament navigated various

barriers they encountered in a leadership role. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, this research explored the barriers and strategies based on the lived experiences, of women political leaders within the Ontario Provincial Legislature. Role congruity and social identity theories were applied to explore strategies women politicians have taken to advance in their leadership roles.

This study focused on women political leaders who were elected or appointed Members of the Provincial Parliament. In-depth interviews were conducted with three pilot study participants and twelve main study participants. The research revealed that women Members of Provincial Parliament, past and present, encountered barriers throughout three stages of their political careers, namely identifying as a candidate, the initial experience as an MPP and the evolution of the role. These barriers stemmed from cultural/societal factors such as gender stereotypes, childcare responsibilities, harassment and media portrayal. Socioeconomic factors included prioritizing work, and financial constraints were also identified. Strategies, such as setting boundaries, maintaining an equitable lens and surrounding yourself with a support network were employed by the participants to overcome the barriers at different career stages. The findings presented a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the increased representation of women's political leaders.

The findings of this research study underline practical implications towards the advancement of women in political leadership roles. They suggest there is a shift in the way women politicians are viewed, creating a way for better opportunities that empower them to break down barriers and advance in politics.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Advancing Women in Political Leadership

Below is the proposed interview protocol for this study. The interview protocol was drawn from the relevant literature and contains both closed and open-ended questions to solicit information about the experiences of the participant's political leadership role. The researcher will begin with some general questions that invite the interviewee to share a bit about themselves and their work. The researcher will then ask more focused semi-structured questions about the research topic.

To be completed for each interview:
Time/duration of interview:
Date:
Format of Interview:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Identifiers:

Script:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. In this study, I am exploring the factors that have contributed to the advancement of women in provincial politics in Ontario.

Past research has examined barriers to women in politics and identified several recurring themes such as stereotyping, and challenges with maintaining work-life balance. I am looking to learn more about how women navigated any barriers that were encountered at various stages in their political career, including as a candidate, during your time as an MPP, or in subsequent formal leadership roles.

I am interested to know what the barriers are that you have encountered at various stages in your political careers, as well as what the specific strategies that you have adopted to overcome these barriers.

I am also interested in what other factors have contributed to the increased representation of women in politics, specifically in the Province of Ontario.

For the purposes of this study, I am interviewing former and current Members of Provincial Parliament within Ontario who served as a political leader during the timeframe 2011 to 2022. For these interviews, I have identified specific questions to ask; however, additional questions may be asked based on your responses to the questions.

Before I start, do you have any questions? Do you consent that I record this interview?

The researcher will address any questions prior to the commencement of the interview.

The questions are bracketed around potentially three or four points in time: pre-politics, candidacy, appointment, subsequent leadership roles, if applicable.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

<u>Pre-politics</u>
The interviews will begin with warm-up questions that ask participants to share some personal background information, such as past experiences before entering politics.
1. What/who inspired you to become involved in politics?
2. What prompted you to run as a candidate for x party?
3. How did you find your experience as an initial candidate?

Potential probing questions:
   i. Did you experience any particular challenges? If yes, how were they overcome?
   ii. What factors do you think led to your success? (e.g., family support, mentors, party)

<u>Initial experience as an MPP</u>
1. Can you describe your initial or early experiences as an MPP? (e.g., positive/negatives)
2. If relevant, how have these experiences changed over time?

Potential probing questions
   i. What is your biggest challenge in relation to travel and work-life balance?
   ii. How do you feel about the hostility towards politicians?
   iii. If you could change one thing about how media portrays politicians, what would that be?

<u>Potential leadership roles</u>
1. What formal leadership roles have you held? (e.g., committee, cabinet)
2. How would you define your leadership style?

Potential probing questions
   i. What roles have had the biggest impact on you?
   ii. How has your leadership style evolved?

<u>General questions about women in politics</u>
In your experience, what are the leadership barriers for women in politics?

Potential probing questions:
   i. Do party policies have an impact on the barriers?
   ii. What advice would you give to women entering politics?
   iii. Data indicates that women have made significant progress in the province of Ontario, in your opinion what factors do you think have contributed to their success.

Appendix C: Draft email message to potential participants

To: *Members of Provincial Parliament (current & former)*
Subject: *Advancing Women in Political Leadership*
Dear [*participant]*

My name is Ethel Craft, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Business Administration at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research study that explores the factors that have contributed to the advancement of women in provincial politics in Ontario.

The findings from this study are expected to offer important insights into not only the barriers that women political leaders continue to face, but also the steps taken to overcome them.

The population for this research consists of current and previously elected women Members of Provincial Parliament from 2011 to 2022.

I am looking forward to learning more about how you navigated any barriers that were encountered at various stages in your political career, including as a candidate, during your time as an MPP, or in subsequent formal leadership roles.

I would be grateful if you could participate in this study. Participation involves responding to semi-structured questions in an interview format (either electronically or at a designated location of your choice), which should take approximately 45-60 minutes of your time.

Please note that my final report will only incorporate the common themes identified across all interviews. No personally identifiable information from any participants will be disclosed.

Additional information about the study is attached. If you have any questions, please let me know. I look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix D: Recruitment - Invitation to Participate

Advancing Women in Political Leadership: A Qualitative Study

Principal Investigator (Researcher): **Supervisor:**
Ethel Craft   Dr. Angela Workman-Stark
Doctoral Candidate, Business Administration Associate Professor, Faculty of Business
Athabasca University   Athabasca University

My name is Ethel Craft, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Athabasca University in Alberta. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research study that explores the factors that have contributed to the advancement of women in provincial politics in Ontario. I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Angela Workman-Stark.

Through my research, I am looking to learn more about how women navigated any barriers that were encountered at various stages in their political career, including as a candidate, during their time as an MPP, or in subsequent formal leadership roles.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and will involve approximately a 45-to-60-minute individual interview in English (either by video, such as Skype, Microsoft Teams or Zoom or at a designated location of your choice) with a break as needed.

Each interview will be electronically recorded (with permission); however, no information that could identify an individual will be used in the study. In other words, no individual names will be linked with any of the information that is collected. The interviews will also be arranged at a time outside of work that is most convenient to participants. As the information that is shared will be confidential, participants are not expected to experience any personal risks through their involvement in this research.

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you are interested in participating and/or would like more information, please either contact me directly.

Appendix E: Email message to the Riding association

To: *Riding Association(s)*

Subject: *Advancing Women in Political Leadership*

Dear [*point of contact at Riding Association]*

My name is Ethel Craft, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Business Administration at Athabasca University. As a requirement to complete my degree, I am conducting a research study that explores the factors women political leaders within the province of Ontario have undertaken to advance within their leadership role

The population for this research consists of current and previously elected women Members of Provincial Parliament within the Ontario government during the timeframe 2011 to 2022. I am reaching out to you for your support in contacting [*add name*] as I would like to include her in my research study.

The findings from this study are expected to offer insights into not only the barriers that women political leaders continue to face, but also the specific strategies undertaken to counter them. There is a need for women in political decision-making environments as women leaders are perceived to bring more inclusive policymaking and leadership styles to government.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

Appendix F: Letter of Information and Consent Form

My name is Ethel Craft, and I am a Doctoral Candidate at Athabasca University in Alberta. I am conducting a research study that explores the factors that have contributed to the advancement of women in provincial politics in Ontario.

Through my research, I am looking forward to learning more about how women navigated any barriers that were encountered at various stages in their political career, including as a candidate, during their time as an MPP, or in subsequent formal leadership roles.

Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation. Participants may decline to answer any of the interview questions and may terminate the interview at any time, without any negative consequences.

With your permission, the interview will be audio- recorded so that we have an accurate record of the information that you provide. However, if you prefer that I do not record the interview I will take handwritten notes during the interview. Also, if you decide to withdraw from the interview, the interview (and the recording) will be stopped immediately. The recording (and any other information related to you) will also be deleted and will not be used in the study.

All information you provide will be considered confidential. No participant names or the locations they work at will used in the final research reports. Instead, I may use false names to clarify when we are referring to one participant versus another.
The audio recordings and any other information will be kept in my password protected computer in my home office. Additionally, all information that might identify participants, including the recorded interviews, will be deleted when the study is complete (approximately the end of March 2023).

Upon request, participants will receive an executive summary of the research results. The research results are also expected to be presented at future conferences (to be determined) as well as to be submitted to relevant journals.
Thank you for considering this invitation. If you are interested in participating and/or would like more information, please contact me directly at
Ethel.Craft@fb.athabascau.ca.

If you are ready to participate in the study, please complete and sign the attached Consent Form and return a scanned copy of this form to me by email prior to the formal scheduling of an interview. If you do not have access to a scanner, you also may print out this form, sign it, and send a picture of the signed document by email. If you do not have access to either a printer, you may or also confirm your consent through an email message.

Please note that this study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns regarding your treatment as a

participant in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Office by e-mail at rebsec@athabascau.ca or by telephone at 1-800-788-9041, ext. 6718.

Consent:
I have read the Letter of Information regarding this research study, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I will keep a copy of this letter for my records.
My signature below confirms that:
- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences;
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, or the Research Ethics Officer if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures or ethical approval processes.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

_____

Note:

By initialing this statement below:

_____ I am granting permission for the researchers to use an audio recording device.