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**Advancing Pay Equity in Nonprofits through Feminist Leaders**

by

Emily Anderson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership**

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**St. Paul, Minnesota**

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### Abstract

Low wages in nonprofits have led to a focus on pay equity as a major concern for sector leaders. Some hypothesize that the low wages result from the sector's association with "women's work." As such, the undervaluing of nonprofit labor reflects the lack of value placed on women's labor. There are major gaps in the literature about feminist leadership and about how nonprofits can address pay equity. This qualitative study explored how feminist leaders are advancing pay equity in nonprofits through semi-structured interviews with five self-identified feminist leaders with experience leading nonprofit pay equity efforts. Acker's (2006) inequality regimes and Brown's (2017) emergent strategies were used as theoretical frameworks to interpret the findings. The results of this study demonstrated that willingness to question existing norms and introduce small, iterative changes over time are ways that feminist leaders work toward pay equity in nonprofits. The four themes of this study illustrate recommended actions for feminist nonprofit leaders working toward pay equity: *Challenge the Status Quo, Operate with Transparency, Create a Supportive Work Environment, and Lead Sector Change.*

Pay equity is a much-discussed topic in nonprofits, with many nonprofit leaders grappling with questions about aligning their compensation systems with their expressed values and commitments to equity. Women make up the majority of the nonprofit workforce, yet we know little about the connections between feminism, leadership, and pay equity. This study seeks to give voice to the practices of feminist leaders advancing pay equity within nonprofits.

## **Context of Study & Reflexivity Statement**

### **Background**

Pay equity is a broad term that holds multiple meanings today. Two ways of understanding pay equity are 1) analysis and corrective action around instances of gender or race-based wage gaps such as Travis, Gross, and Johnson (2009) and 2) compensation systems and policies within an organization that center employee needs, including for benefits. I started this project interested in the first meaning of this term, to better understand gender wage gaps. Through my research, my findings led me to increasingly focus on the second meaning. I now recognize that pay equity is not just about stopping gaps or taking corrective action against glaring instances of injustice. Instead, pay equity is about shifting the entire paradigm of how labor is valued in the nonprofit sector. Prevailing norms around pay systems reinforce income inequalities for marginalized people—including women, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and working-class people (Acker, 2006).

Within the nonprofit sector, a major challenge related to pay equity is the reality that the sector as a whole is underpaid and suffers from a “nonprofit starvation cycle” in which the ability to secure funding rests on the organization’s ability to demonstrate operational efficiency (Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). The demand for low overhead costs in funding proposals puts nonprofit leaders in a Catch 22. Nonprofits rely on funding from donors to provide services, but donors are

rarely willing to pay for necessary operational expenses (Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). Nonprofits are at a critical moment for re-evaluating the underlying assumptions around how they operate. The extractive model of nonprofit labor is no longer working, and leaders must develop new models and ways of working that are more sustainable and equitable.

Some theorize that low pay within the sector is directly related to women making up more than two-thirds of the nonprofit workforce (Faulk et al., 2013). With the entire sector falling into the undervalued category of “women’s work,” it seems the feminist concern for ending the oppression of women is at the heart of nonprofit pay equity work, even when organizations and leaders view the issue through a more intersectional lens.

Central to this study is the belief that feminist leaders advance pay equity in distinct ways from approaches that do not align with feminist values. But what is feminist leadership? There is, to my knowledge, no recognized theory of feminist leadership or peer-reviewed literature about feminist leadership that does not default to a discussion about the challenges associated with leading as a woman (see Pullen & Vachiani, 2020). In *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Northouse (2019) explains how leadership studies have advanced beyond the now moot question of *whether or not* women can lead to more contemporary research questions, “The primary research questions now are ‘Do men and women lead differently?’ and ‘Are men more effective leaders than women?’ which are often subsumed under a larger question, ‘Why are women underrepresented in elite leadership roles?’” (p. 403-404). Absent from Northouse’s summary of the research agenda related to women in leadership is any concern around what leadership researchers may have missed about leadership practice in general by focusing exclusively on men. Similarly, Northouse does not acknowledge the existence of feminism or speak to its relevance to leadership.

Chin (2007) theorized that diversity within feminist ideology accounts for the impossibility of a singular theory of feminist leadership. Similarly, she noted that leadership itself is an evolving concept, once considered an inherent trait, later understood as behavioral characteristics, and more recently framed as a process in which an individual influences the behaviors of a group (Chin, 2007). In her exploration of feminist leadership, she proposed an alignment between feminist leadership and transformational leadership, noting the shared goals of “empowering others through (a) one’s stewardship of an organization’s resources, (b) creating the vision; (c) social advocacy and change; (d) promoting feminist policy and a feminist agenda (e.g, family-oriented work environments, wage gap between men and women); and (e) changing organizational cultures to create gender-equitable environments,” (Chin, 2007; Kindle Locations 335-338). While there is still no definition or theory of feminist leadership, this study embraces the potential of feminist leadership as a means of advancing social change.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

I am a white, queer, cis-gendered woman, and those identities have influenced my understandings of pay equity and feminist leadership. I have also worked in nonprofits throughout my 15 plus year career. I have worked in positions that paid so little that I sacrificed healthcare, experienced food scarcity, and accumulated debt to make ends meet. Those struggles have influenced my leadership, including my work toward pay equity at the nonprofit where I currently work. To say that these experiences have influenced this study is an understatement. Pay equity is the single most urgent, complicated, and meaningful part of my academic life and leadership.

My experiences and the challenges I have encountered along the way led me to this topic. I have come to recognize that neutrality does not exist, either within the literature, within best

practices around compensation, or within my leadership. With that in mind, I embrace that this project is rooted in advocacy theory. According to Creswell (2019), an advocacy theory in qualitative study seeks social change and results in recommendations for resolving social problems. Underlying my research is the belief that nonprofit workers provide essential services and that nonprofit leaders must commit to more equitable pay and work environments.

### **Statement of the Problem**

More than two-thirds of the nonprofit workforce are women and the mental association of nonprofit work as “women’s work” is one of several reasons low wages have been normalized across the sector. Despite the predominance of women in nonprofits, top leaders of nonprofits have overwhelmingly been men (Lee, 2019). Acker (2013) suggests that organizational systems and processes reinforce social hierarchies and benefit the white men who hold the most power within these organizations. As nonprofit leaders prioritize pay equity, they must also address inequities in the work environment that are intertwined with compensation. Feminist leadership can be understood as transformative leadership that focuses on broader social change and equality for women (Chin, 2007), but there is a significant gap in the literature about feminist leadership in nonprofits or about feminist leadership as it relates to pay equity. No study to date has centered on the experiences of feminist leaders working toward pay equity in nonprofits.

### **Purpose of Study**

This study seeks to add to our knowledge about how to advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations. The purpose of this study is to center the experiences and perspectives of nonprofit leaders who identify as feminists and are working toward pay equity. Specifically, my research question asks, “How do feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations?”

## **Literature Review**

As I sought to understand how feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations, I reviewed literature related to nonprofit compensation norms, wage-setting practices, and pay equity practices. The existing literature illustrates the nonprofit sectors' unique challenges. It suggests that leaders working toward pay equity should analyze workplace pay equity, take corrective action, and re-evaluate the embedded assumptions within their compensation systems.

### **Nonprofit Compensation Norms**

Most researchers addressing nonprofit compensation questions begin with the premise that nonprofits pay less than for-profit industries. Kim and Charbonneau (2020) discuss the difficulty with proving this hypothesis, given that apples-to-apples comparisons between nonprofits and for-profit sectors are not always possible. One reason for the difficulty in comparing is that the jobs within the sector and the skills required (for example, a Development Director and fundraising) are sometimes specific to the industry. While there is room for debate about how to meaningfully compare individual organizations or jobs, I take the position that Faulk et al. (2013) propose, which is that we have more to learn about the reasons why nonprofit employees are paid less than we do about the mechanics of how much less. There are two main explanations for lower compensation norms in the sector which I will explore in this section: 1) the idea that in exchange for working toward a mission, employees willingly donate labor and 2) that nonprofit labor is undervalued because it is associated with "women's work" (Faulk et al., 2013).

### *Donative Labor Theory*

The donative labor theory proposes that nonprofit workers willingly choose lower-paying positions in the nonprofit sector than they might expect to earn in the for-profit world because they place a higher value on the personal fulfillment of working toward a mission (Faulk et al., 2013; Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). This concept comes from the fact that many nonprofit organizations have historically relied on volunteer labor. As the nonprofit sector has moved toward professionalization, there is more demand for highly-skilled, paid workers rather than volunteers (Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). Simultaneously, because nonprofits' services are often intangible, it is complicated to evaluate nonprofit performance effectively. Unlike corporations, nonprofit organizations cannot always use a clear metric like financial outcomes to measure their success. As a result, pay for nonprofit workers cannot easily be linked to organizational performance metrics (Akingbola, 2013). Instead, nonprofit workers are expected to be intrinsically motivated, and their rewards for their work are connected to the organizations' mission (Faulk et al., 2013; Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). Kim and Charbonneau (2020) also discuss the paradox for nonprofits, which are increasingly pressured to provide high-quality services while demonstrating operational efficiency to funders. The need for low overhead costs has meant that highly skilled nonprofit professionals are not paid according to the value of their work.

Kim and Charbonneau (2020) studied the phenomenon and found that a potential explanation for nonprofit workers accepting low wages for their work is due to social expectation rather than altruism. They explain their findings:

The results of our study serve to reveal the pervasive yet unspoken social expectation that those doing “lofty” or “meaningful” work should sacrifice the financial compensation

that they deserve. We find that such a social expectation is closely related to the sector's inability to pay competitive wages for much-needed professionals (Kim & Charbonneau, 2020, p.343).

The authors' study of the donative labor hypothesis also points to the possibility that nonprofit leaders and workers may expect to be paid lower wages for nonprofit work because of how widely accepted it is that nonprofits pay less (Kim & Charbonneau, 2020).

### ***Women's Work***

Another way of understanding the prevalence of low wages in the nonprofit sector is the predominance of women in the sector. Women make up approximately 70% of the nonprofit workforce compared to roughly half of the for-profit and public sector workforce (Faulk et al., 2013). As with "caring occupations" such as nursing or teaching, the high concentration of women in nonprofits led to an association of nonprofit work as "women's work" (Faulk et al., 2013). Bishu and Alkadry's systematic review of the gender wage gap found that industries with high concentrations of women are paid less than other industries. Similarly, industries with the lowest concentration of women, such as architecture and engineering, are among the highest-paid professions (Bishu & Alkadry. 2017). In her critical review of the human capital model as an explanation of gender wage gaps, Lips (2013) argues that these occupational differences and the corresponding differences in pay are less related to occupational choice than some researchers assume:

The assumption that women simply choose or prefer occupations that happen to be more poorly paid is just that: an assumption. It is reasonable to ask the extent to which women

are choosing occupations that are poorly paid, or occupations are poorly paid because they are filled by women. (Lips, 2013, p. 179.)

Faulk et al.'s (2013) found that the wage gap persists within nonprofits, but it is generally smaller than within for-profit and public sectors, and it varies widely across industries (Faulk et al., 2013). The researchers noted that there is increased pressure on nonprofits with social justice missions to prioritize pay equity. Still, their findings also supported the idea that just as men who enter "caring professions" such as nursing or teaching accept lower wages, men who work in nonprofits also accept the "penalty" of lower nonprofit salaries. Their research concludes that while the gender wage gap is smaller within nonprofits, a primary reason is that pay overall in nonprofits is less (Faulk et al., 2013). Faulk et al.'s (2013) research supports Lips' (2013) hypothesis that it is not the case that women enter fields and positions that pay less, and instead, it is the case that occupations dominated by women are valued less.

### **Wage-setting Practices**

There is a gap in the research about how wage-setting practices in nonprofits differ from the for-profit world. In broad terms, most wage-setting practices are based on the premise of Mincer's (1974) human capital theory, which proposes that the value of an employee is based on the employee's investments, which include education, experience, and skills. While the premise of human capital theory is part of most methodologies for determining pay, there are questions about the impact of these methodologies on marginalized people. Wage-setting practices, such as merit-based compensation and salary negotiation, reinforce systemic biases and contribute to workplace inequality (Acker, 2006).

### *Merit-based compensation*

Pay systems that reward workers based on their accomplishments and the quality of their performance are a norm in many organizations. Amis, Mair, and Munir (2020) explored how the myth of meritocracy manifests as inequitable pay decisions for marginalized workers. Building on Acker's (2013) work about how organizational systems and processes such as hiring, promotions, and wage-setting converge to form an inequality regime, Amis et al. (2020) explain the myth of meritocracy, "Despite the institutionalization of merit-based practices, our review clearly shows that, regardless of claims to the contrary, entry, advancement, and reward in organizations, including the attainment of highly prized leadership positions, often remain systematically nonmeritocratic," (Amis et al, 2020, para 8). According to the authors, meritocratic systems often reward those who already hold significant social privileges. When compensation systems are designed around meritocratic ideals, they may widen wage disparities for marginalized people. (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020).

Some may argue that organizations can avoid reinforcing bias in compensation decisions by relying on neutral or objective means to measure employee performance. Rivera and Tilcsik (2019) demonstrated how the numeric system a university used to measure performance reinforced gender bias. They studied the differences in faculty evaluations when a university switched from a 10-point rating scale to a 6-point scale. They found that men are more often rated a ten more often than women, potentially because of "brilliance bias," which is a bias in which people associate brilliance and perfection with men more than women. The researchers hypothesized that there are cultural associations with the number ten and perfection and that these associations negatively impact women when a 10-point scale is used. Indeed, when the university switched to a 6-point system, which does not have the same cultural associations with

perfection, more women received the highest-ranking than when the highest-ranking was ten (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). In addition, they found that women faculty were evaluated not only based on their competence but also their friendliness and likeability. The qualities of friendliness and likeability were not part of men's evaluations. Many organizations use numeric ranking systems in performance evaluations, and these evaluations are often directly tied to decisions around compensation and promotions (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019). Because they are numeric, they are often considered more neutral or rational ways of evaluating performance. This research is significant because it gives a concrete example of how wage setting practices covertly reinforce biases.

### ***Salary Negotiation***

There is a rich body of literature about how salary negotiation practices are particularly biased against women. Linda Babcock conducted experimental research with various other researchers over the course of more than 20 years to understand why women do not negotiate their salaries as often or as successfully as men (Bear & Babcock, 2016; Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). Her research uses Eagly and Karau's (2002) gender role congruity theory as a framework (Bear & Babcock, 2016). According to gender role congruity theory, people perceive salary negotiation as an assertive and masculine behavior, which means that women who negotiate violate gender role norms. By choosing to negotiate, women appear less feminine and less likable (Bear & Babcock, 2016). According to Babcock and her research partners, female applicants, in contrast to male applicants, must demonstrate professional competence *and* project feminine qualities such as warmth and friendliness. Failure to adhere to gender role norms results in penalties for women, including being labeled difficult to work with or denied the salary increase (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Bear & Babcock, 2016). Babcock

asserts that women's hesitation to negotiate reflects a risk calculation around the consequences of violating gender norms and does not mean that women do not have the skills necessary to negotiate (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). In a study in which women were asked to negotiate on behalf of a friend, a social behavior congruous with gender norms, women had better outcomes than when negotiating for themselves (Bear & Babcock, 2016; Bowles & Babcock, 2013).

These studies on women's negotiation behavior posit that differences in negotiation outcomes contribute to the wage gap for women and that women can and should resolve these gaps themselves by learning to negotiate in ways that are congruous with the gendered expectations of them (Bear & Babcock, 2016). Strategies that are offered to improve women's negotiation outcomes include framing the behavior as "asking" instead of "negotiating," telling the other party that they have been directed to ask by a colleague or pointing out that ability to negotiate would benefit the organization (Bowles & Babcock, 2013). Other researchers argue that women may actually initiate negotiations as often as men but are less successful in negotiations because they ask for too little or are denied raises more often (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Artz et al., 2018).

### **Pay Equity Practices**

There is a gap in the literature about nonprofit pay equity practices. In a review of pay equity literature, most researchers emphasize the reasons that pay equity matters, with less attention to the effectiveness of available practices. Two practices stood out in my research: 1) conducting wage gap analyses to illuminate instances of unequal pay, and 2) efforts to increase openness in pay decisions. Lastly, I found an example of how workers themselves brought

attention to inequitable pay in the arts and cultural sector by publishing their salaries as an act of resistance.

### ***Wage Gap Analysis***

One common approach to wage gaps within an organization is to conduct a wage gap analysis to identify where adjustments are needed. Travis, Gross, and Johnson's (2009) case study highlights the ways that wage gap analyses illuminate pay equity problems but do not necessarily end wage gaps within organizations. They examined the wages of faculty at a university and conducted a study controlling for college attended, years of service, academic department, rank, and gender. They found a significant wage gap for women faculty and explored options for corrective action, such as an across-the-board salary increase for all women or flagging outliers in the data and correcting the wages of those most under-compensated. Ultimately, they concluded that it would be next to impossible to identify and correct the wage gap because the same administrators whose decisions led to a wage gap would be responsible for taking corrective action. Additionally, there were no clear metrics for how merit-based pay was determined in the university, leaving the researchers unclear about what faculty members ought to be earning based on human capital differences and achievements (Travis et al., 2009). This example underscores the complexity of pay equity work and the reality that there are no fast or straightforward solutions to the issue.

### ***Pay Transparency***

Castilla (2015) conducted a longitudinal study of compensation and inequity within a large organization with more than 20,000 employees in the United States (US). From 1996 to 2003, Castilla found evidence of pay disparities for women, people of color, and immigrants when controlling for position type, performance evaluation, and manager. Castilla shared these

findings with the company's management along with recommendations for new procedures that would introduce greater transparency and accountability surrounding compensation decisions (Castilla, 2015).

In 2004, the organization within the study implemented two changes in its compensation procedures. These changes introduced greater accountability and transparency into the compensation system. The first change introduced in 2004 required that a team approve compensation decisions rather than leaving individual managers to make final decisions. The change meant that all managers knew that their decisions and recommendations related to salary would be visible to others, which added pressure for managers to consider whether their choices appeared fair and justified. Castilla (2015) noted there were no gender or racial disparities within the organization regarding highly visible decisions, such as promotions or hiring. The team and process was designed to add the same level of visibility and accountability to compensation decisions as to promotions and hiring. Additionally, the team had the authority to intervene and take corrective actions if managers made decisions or recommendations that favored a particular group. The second change required that all managers responsible for merit-based pay decision-making be trained in the process and criteria related to compensation. This change was designed to minimize differences in how managers might evaluate an employee and their value. Six years later, Castilla returned to the organization and found that pay inequities based on gender, race, and immigration status had been eliminated through the procedures introduced in 2004 (Castilla, 2015).

Castilla's (2015) longitudinal study took place over fourteen years. The leaders in this organization were committed to pay equity enough to devote a six-year study to understand the issues and identify process improvements. Even then, it took another six years to eliminate the

wage gap through the new practices introduced. Castilla's (2015) findings suggest that introducing more transparency around compensation decisions is an important way that organizational leaders can reduce bias.

Heisler (2020) explored pay transparency and its relationship to the wage gap. He identified multiple dimensions of transparency in pay, including transparency around processes and decision-making, disclosure of pay grades and ranges to employees, and a degree of openness around individual employee pay, shown in Table 1 (Heisler, 2020 p. 75).

Table 1. Pay transparency continua

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>No Transparency</b>	<b>Low Transparency</b>	<b>Medium Transparency</b>	<b>High Transparency</b>
<b>Company pay process</b>	No information provided to employees about how pay is determined	Provision to all employees of a general overview of pay policy and principles (e.g., compensation philosophy, market-based approach, competitive pay levels, etc.)	Provision to all employees of a substantive description of how pay is determined (e.g., explanation of job-analysis and job-evaluation processes, use of salary surveys, etc.)	Training for managers and employees in the fundamentals of how pay is determined
<b>Pay for the job</b>	No disclosure of pay grades/ranges to employees	Disclosure of pay grades/ranges to employees and to job applicants	Disclosure to each employee of pay grades/ranges for that employee's job family and career path	Disclosure to all employees of pay grades/ranges for all jobs in the company
<b>Individual employees pay</b>	No disclosure of individual wage/salary data to anyone except the employee	Avoidance of restrictions on employee discussions of pay; provision of annual total compensation	Disclosure of employees of salaries of coworkers in the same job classification	Disclosure of salaries of all employees in the organization

		statement to employees		
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Adapted from Heisler, 2020 p. 75

Within each dimension, it is possible to have no transparency, which means that no information is shared with employees at all. Low or medium transparency occur when organizational leaders selectively share pay information, and high transparency occurs when leaders share all pay information with all employees and applicants. Heisler (2020) urges organizational leaders to begin by assessing the degree of transparency within their organizations today and introduce changes that gradually increase transparency over time. He argues for increases in transparency as a means of distributive justice, or greater fairness, within organizations. Still, he advises that organizational leaders should be cautious about moving too quickly in the direction of high transparency at the individual pay level, which would look like all members of an organization knowing the pay rates of all others. He argues that employees would have difficulty understanding why employees in similar positions or pay grades might be paid differently based on performance differences (Heisler, 2020). He reasoned that high transparency at the individual level could create problems because people tend to overrate their performances and minimize the performances of others (DeAngelis, 2003; Dunning et al., 2003).

### ***Resistant Transparency***

Heisler's (2020) caveat that organizations should increase transparency to improve pay equity but should continue to treat individual pay information of employees as secret information demonstrates that transparency around pay can shift power dynamics between employees and employers. In 2019, nonprofit art and museum workers in the US began publishing their salaries

in a google spreadsheet that spread was widely shared through social media (Südkamp & Dempsey, 2021). As a result of the publicly available salary information, employees in the arts and cultural sector were empowered to advocate for themselves. It also made the low wages that these nonprofit workers are paid visible to the public, including arts patrons and donors. Südkamp and Dempsey call this effort “resistant transparency” because collectively sharing compensation information became a powerful act of resistance to low wages and unequal pay within the field (2021).

### **Gaps in Existing Literature**

There are many gaps in the existing literature about pay equity work in nonprofits and feminist leadership. The literature on pay equity work in nonprofits is limited and often centers on the idea of pay equity related to the entire sector being underpaid (Faulk et al., 2013; Kim & Charbonneau, 2020). Few studies investigate the effectiveness of specific pay equity methodologies. Castilla’s (2015) research is from the for-profit sector but provides the most detailed account of a long-term pay equity effort. Travis et al.’s (2009) work centers a nonprofit university but does not provide any conclusions about what steps might be taken to correct the inequities discovered during that research.

A significant gap in my review of the literature was the absence of the perspectives of organizational leaders working toward pay equity work. More specifically, there was no literature on the role of feminist leadership in pay equity work. To my knowledge, there is no peer-reviewed academic literature about self-identified feminist leaders working toward pay equity. This study seeks to add to the knowledge around the role of feminist leadership in advancing pay equity within the nonprofit sector.

## Theoretical Frameworks

In my analysis and interpretation of data, I applied two theoretical frameworks. First, Inequality Regimes (Acker, 2006) laid the foundational premise that organizational systems are intertwined and work together to replicate an inequitable social structure. Pay equity is one of several manifestations of inequality regimes. Therefore, pay equity solutions cannot ignore this context of inequity or the manner in which pay is connected to other human resources systems and processes. The second theoretical framework comes from Adrienne Maree Brown's (2017) *Emergent Strategy*, a book about working for social change through social justice organizations, including nonprofits. For the purpose of this research, I will refer to the theoretical framework as "emergent strategy." The basic theory proposes that patterns of organizational behavior repeat over time and can spread outside of organizations and into the nonprofit sector as a whole. Similar to how organizational systems and processes intertwine to form an inequality regime, Brown posits that steps toward justice and equity also intertwine, create new patterns, and ultimately effect large-scale social change.

### Inequality Regimes

In her seminal article, *Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations*, Joan Acker (2006) argues for an intersectional feminist approach to understanding inequality in the workplace. She claims that race, gender, and class identities are so closely intertwined that it is impossible to study one element of identity without acknowledging the impact of the others. She argues that organizations perpetuate inequality for women, people of color, and working-class people through the systems they use to organize their work and maintain order. According to Acker (2006), disparities in pay for women, people of color, and working-class people, result

from complex systems designed to prioritize white middle-class men's experience and value. She described the underlying assumptions behind requirements of work in organizations:

In general, work is organized on the image of a white man who is totally dedicated to the work and who has no responsibilities for children or family demands other than earning a living. Eight hours of continuous work away from the living space, arrival on time, total attention to the work, and long hours if requested are all expectations that incorporate the image of the unencumbered worker (Acker, 2006, p. 448)

Acker's (2006) article provides a general framework for understanding how all of the human resources systems used to organize work reinforce social hierarchies and benefit white men.

Acker acknowledged two goals in writing *Inequality Regimes*. The first was to demonstrate how organizational systems build on each other to reinforce hierarchies. The second was to understand why pay equity and change efforts failed so often. She examined pay equity efforts over time and concluded those with power (white men) would be reluctant to give it up willingly, despite the introduction of legal protections against discriminatory pay. It is important to note that she wrote the *Inequality Regimes* article in 2006, which was before some of the Obama administration's pay equity advances occurred. It was also before Occupy Wall Street, the Black Lives Matter movement, #MeToo, and the uprisings for racial justice in 2020 that began after the murder of George Floyd. These movements brought some of the systemic inequalities that were hidden in plain sight at the time of Acker's writing into sharper focus.

### **Emergent Strategy**

Emergent strategy refers to a method of facilitating change by working to engender trust and develop a shared vision and build a movement around it (Brown, 2017). According to Brown

(2017), change is nonlinear and “happens in cycles, convergences, explosions. If we release the framework for failure, we can realize that we are in iterative cycles, and we can keep asking ourselves—how do I learn from this?” (p. 105). Further, she emphasizes how even small-scale changes within organizations can lead to larger-scale change. She uses fractals as a metaphor to explain this. Fractals are complex patterns that repeat infinitely and on multiple scales. Brown (2017) notes that they “are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop,” (p. 51). Fractals occur in nature, and according to Brown (2017), they have much to teach us about the ways that small-scale patterns of behavior that repeat over time build larger patterns with significant power. On the patterns that exist within nonprofit organizations, Brown (2017) wrote:

So many of our organizations working for social change are structured in ways that reflect the status quo. We have singular charismatic leaders, top-down structures, money-driven programs, destructive methods of engaging conflict, unsustainable work cultures, and little to no impact on the issues at hand. This makes sense; it’s the water we’re swimming in. But it creates patterns. (p. 52)

According to Brown (2017) these small-scale organizational patterns repeat at the local, national, and even global levels. This means that intentional changes to existing patterns within organizations can have an influence on a much larger scale. What happens within organizations does not happen within a vacuum. As I discuss later, the concept of organizational behaviors as a series of repeating patterns that replicate beyond the organization itself is a powerful way of understanding the importance of equitable pay.

## **Method**

At the heart of my study, the research question is, “How do feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations?” Because my research aims to understand the perspectives of leaders who are invested in pay equity work in nonprofits, I chose a qualitative research method (Creswell, 2016). I interviewed five nonprofit leaders who self-identify as feminists and who have experience leading pay equity work in their nonprofit organizations. I chose semi-structured interviews as the method for my study because I wanted to collect in-depth personal accounts of the processes that leaders use in advancing pay equity efforts. Interviews provide an opportunity for deeper reflection, which is an ideal way to generate the kind of “rich” data that qualitative research requires (Creswell, 2016).

## **Recruitment**

I recruited participants by asking people in my professional network of nonprofit leaders to connect me with participants who met my criteria: 1) self-identifying as feminist and 2) having experience leading pay equity work in a nonprofit. I also reached out directly to several potential candidates from my professional network who might meet the criteria and directly invited them to participate. I attempted to use the snowball method by asking participants to identify other self-identified feminists who have knowledge of or experience with pay equity work in nonprofits; however, none of the leads I received using the snowball method resulted in new participants.

## **Participants**

The participants in my study were all located in the greater Twin Cities metro area in Minnesota. Three participants were executive directors of organizations, and two held operational roles with human resources responsibilities. All participants, except one, were mid-

career professionals with at least ten years of experience working in nonprofits. One participant identified as being in the “twilight” of her career. They represented organizations as small as five employees and as large as 200 employees. Though participants were not directly asked demographic questions, all participants described themselves as white and cisgendered. One participant identified as male, and the remaining participants identified as women. One participant identified as queer, and others did not disclose their sexuality.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Using semi-scripted interviews, I asked participants to tell me about how feminist identity shapes their work, their experiences leading pay equity, and their thoughts about pay equity in the nonprofit sector more broadly (see Appendix 2 for interview instrument). All interviews were 45-60 minutes and took place through Zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I recorded these interviews and transcribed them by hand. I redacted the participants’ names and their organizations’ names and referred to them as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.

I reviewed the transcripts line by line and used coding software (Dedoose) to analyze my data and assign codes. I allowed the data to lead me to the codes and themes, rather than reviewing the data for findings that would support my beliefs (Creswell, 2016). I reviewed my coded data multiple times and used mapping to group related codes together to identify themes (Creswell, 2016).

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations, including the small sample size and the lack of racial diversity within the sample. The study is intended to be an initial inquiry into feminist leadership within nonprofits and how feminist leaders advance pay equity. It is not intended to represent the

sector as a whole. Additionally, because feminism is a broad term, the leaders in my study had different interpretations of what feminist leadership means. This study should not be taken to represent the views of all feminist leaders. And lastly, while this study should not be interpreted as a representative sample, it should be noted that the perspectives addressed here are those of *white* feminist leaders.

## **Findings**

Through my review and analysis of interview data, I identified four key themes relating to how feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofits. These themes are: *Challenge the Status Quo*, *Operate with Transparency*, *Create a Supportive Work Environment*, and *Lead Sector Change*. Each of these broad themes also included sub-themes.

### **Challenge the Status Quo**

The leaders in my study recognized that many of the systems and processes around compensation unfairly disadvantage marginalized people. Some leaders worked to develop new systems, while others adapted existing models to reflect their organizational values and needs. Across the board, these leaders applied a critical lens to the ways they dealt with *merit*, *experience*, *cost of living*, and *identity* as factors in wage-setting.

### ***Merit-based pay***

Only one participant (Participant 1) embraced a merit-based compensation system in which employees' compensation is tied directly to an assessment of their performance. She said she felt strongly about the need to recognize employees' achievements in their compensation and explained that it was up to supervisors to make determinations about the merit-based pay increase for each employee.

Other participants discussed how merit or performance-based pay drew them further away from their equity goals. Participants 3 and 5 had recently stopped using merit as a factor in pay decisions. Participant 5 outlined her belief that merit-based pay is not equitable, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic:

I was very much against a performance review. Given the year of COVID ...we should absolutely not have a performance review, and we should never have performance reviews tied to monetary financial compensation. I just think that is not equitable, especially when you go through a year of collective trauma, but like every year, there's past trauma, always right?

Participant 3 put his organization's decision to end merit-based pay in the context of seeking a more equitable system:

We've actually stepped away from that this year. ... we're looking at what are other ways to benchmark and adjust salaries and what are ways that we can use our own salary and pay decisions to balance out against structural inequities.

Interestingly, Participant 2 explained that her organization does not do merit-based raises and that staff members had expressed a desire for some degree of merit to be part of the pay system.

### *Experience*

Most organizations include experience as a factor in their compensation, but evaluating experience is often somewhat subjective. Participant 2 shared her belief that nonprofit leaders ought to examine their beliefs about experience, "I do think a lot of us in the nonprofit sector likely still have pretty outdated approaches to experience and qualifications, so I would love to see more critical analysis of that."

Participant 4 removed experience from the pay equation altogether. She described experience-based pay as an ageist practice and described how she bases pay on expectations and deliverables rather than experience and tenure:

When we had a junior designer move up into a design director-level role alongside another design director, that design director had ten years more experience than she had. She'd only been designing for two years, but it was the same level position, and it was the same level of responsibility, made exactly the same amount of money. So, I don't pay based on experience... I pay based on [the] expectation of the role.

### ***Cost of Living***

Most of the leaders I spoke to described practices they were choosing to let go of as part of their compensation strategy. Participant 2 took one of the more innovative approaches to developing a wage-setting methodology. She had worked with her leadership team to develop a Thriving Wage Calculator. She explained that the Thriving Wage concept was a critique of MIT's Living Wage Calculator (Glasmeier, 2020) which is based on the bare minimum expenses that a person needs to survive. As an alternative, the Thriving Wage calculator considers things like owning a pet, quality food, and student loan debt in addition to realistic housing and medical costs. Through this calculator, her organization has developed a base Thriving Wage, which is then adjusted across the organization each year through the budgeting process.

While this compensation tool was unique, other participants shared the sentiment that employees' real needs should be considered as part of their compensation. Participant 4 noted that many who work in the nonprofit sector carry student loans and other debts. Participant 3 also spoke about the goal of paying staff members enough to thrive rather than simply surviving. He

also noted the long-term impact of paying a thriving wage, noting how employees who are paid well will expect the same or better from their next organization.

### *Identity*

Several participants talked about the opportunity to acknowledge a broader context of inequity for BIPOC workers and to use their compensation systems to address those inequities.

Participant 1 talked about fairness in compensation through a racial equity lens:

We have some of our positions that primarily have BIPOC women in those roles because we're working with, you know, girls from similar cultures. So, so we make an effort to ensure that that's maybe higher than what the market is, right? That we're at a higher percentile in the market. Because it's just, you know, we do it for retention, but also, we want to look at and to be fair...

Participant 5 shared her perspective on how equity differs from equality. She ventured that reparations for historical and current oppression of marginalized people should be taken into consideration in pay policies:

I do think...there's a level of reparations that need to happen.... I don't want people of privilege to be easily accessing like more and more money, like more and more raises, and leaving people who don't have that kind of privilege, or who have been historically excluded from pay raises and for advancement, to not have access to that. So, I think there should be a lot of concentration on making sure that people on staff who have been historically excluded from advancement and pay raises are being paid attention to.

Participant 3 also noted a goal of using the compensation plan to address structural inequity but acknowledged that it is a work in progress. Participant 2 also acknowledged that pay equity,

rather than pay equality, demands that organizational leaders see identity, but also recognized the difficulty with such a lens:

And we're not sure, but we're asking those questions and trying to have a lens that says, you know, some people because of their identities and how they are raced in the US, and what happens in the context of our work at [my organization], their labor, you know, is, is a factor of how they should be paid...but we don't know how to do that yet.

All participants I spoke to recognized that pay practices that attempt to ignore identity tend to reinforce inequity. They offered insights into how pay systems that acknowledge identity might further pay equity goals. While the specific pay practices that the leaders I spoke to had chosen to adopt differed, they shared was a willingness to question compensation norms and try new approaches.

### **Operate with Transparency**

All participants spoke about the connection between salary transparency and pay equity, although each organization pursued different goals and interpretations of transparency. All participants talked about the significance of including salary ranges in job postings and discussed the effects of pay secrecy, particularly on women and people of color. Similarly, all participants talked about the impact of salary negotiation and the ways that these private conversations interfere with pay equity goals and promote cultures of pay secrecy. Several of the participants emphasized the need to be able to explain pay decisions using pay bands and benchmarking. One executive director practiced total salary transparency, meaning that all organizational employees had full knowledge of one another's salaries. Subthemes of this transparency theme include *job postings*, *salary negotiation*, *explainable pay decisions*, and *total transparency*.

### ***Job Postings***

Four of the five participants talked about the reasons for including salary ranges in open positions, which included not wasting the hiring manager and job candidate's time on a process that would not end in a hire and giving existing staff members an understanding of how salary ranges are benchmarked and set within the organization. Two of the participants I spoke to lead organizations that operate job boards. They had recently worked together with another major nonprofit in Minnesota on a new requirement across the three job boards to include salary ranges. Participant 3 explained the impact:

I was actually just talking with [my coworker] this week... that he's seen people adjust their salary ranges up because they see other people doing things. Like that's anecdotal, but that is an enormous measure of success for me, seeing that happen. Live in real-time on a job board! Like, that is what I want to see. Pay people more!

Participant 3's comment highlights the impact across the sector and community of including salary ranges in job postings. Not only are there benefits for existing staff, for the employer, and for job candidates, but it also gives other nonprofits a clearer picture of how other organizations value similar positions.

### ***Salary Negotiations***

Consistent across the interviews was the sentiment that salary negotiations interfere with pay equity work, and particularly counteract efforts toward transparency that center on including salary ranges in open positions. The interviewed leaders took different positions about how to deal with it. Participants 1 and 2 acknowledged that salary negotiations could create disparities in pay when candidates negotiate for pay or benefits and others do not. Participant 1 explained that

it creates the need to “look at equity” for other staff members after a negotiation. When prompted for more explanation of how to ensure equity while allowing negotiation, she acknowledged that it is not always possible and joked, “If you find something, let me know.” Participant 2 talked about instances where openness to negotiation allows the organization to grow its talent pool. She acknowledged the fact that her nonprofit is competing with private-sector employees in the health care industry that pay much higher wages across the board. Her organization allows salary negotiations, but she also noted that “all that that brings is so messy.”

Participants 4 and 5 talked about their reasons for no longer allowing salary negotiations, which included the unequal playing field for women and people of color at the negotiation table. Participant 4 shared her view of how bias shows up in salary negotiation:

Certain people are trained and have the supportive background because of their family, because of their privilege, because of their lived experience, to have the confidence to go in and successfully negotiate. And then other people-- often women, women of color-- do not have that level of lived experience to validate that if they go into negotiate, that they won't be punished, they won't be, like, “How dare! Can you believe? Can you believe she did that?” And whereas, it's like a man, it's like, “Oh wow, he really like...well, he's right.” You know, like there's just...we have such internalized bias.

Participant 5's explanation of her organization's decision to stop salary negotiations resonated with Participant 4's. She described how salary negotiations reward people for the asking more so than for their qualifications or experience:

We're at the point now that like, this is the salary. And that feels better because, doing those other methods, it wasn't right to ask a brand-new employee to negotiate their salary

upwards in the salary range; that felt a little bit arbitrary. If we're trying to be more inclusive and more equitable, it also didn't seem right to say, "Here's your salary, but if you could prove that you have more qualifications or whatever that means, which essentially is somewhat meaningless, then you could get more pay."

Across the board, participants in the study acknowledged that allowing new hires to negotiate salaries counteracted their pay equity goals.

### ***Explain Pay Decisions***

A consistent message across these interviews was the goal of being able to explain pay decisions through pay banding and benchmarking. The methodologies differed somewhat, but all shared the goal of having employees understand how decision-makers determined their pay and how that related to pay for similar positions in the organization. Participant 4 described a common pitfall:

I think sometimes hiring managers, or [other] people, do all this research on why a salary is something, and then the people don't know, like how they got to that answer. Or they weren't a part of getting to that answer, you know?

Participant 1 focused on employee education on compensation philosophy and systems in general. She described wanting her team to understand that salaries are benchmarked. Participant 3 emphasized the use of pay banding as a means to provide clarity to staff members:

We have been sort of increasingly more clear about both, "These are the expectations. And then these are the ranges that you can expect to be paid at." And since we've been hiring, people are at all levels of the salary band at this point...People can see and can

benchmark to can look like, "Where am I being paid? Or what's this person's job description and see how that fits into general expectations there.

The system used by Participant 2 was unique. Her organization had developed a Thriving Wage Calculator to determine a base wage for all staff, and she spoke about the challenge of how the compensation system included both the thriving wage calculator and other factors specific to each individual,

What we're focused on now really is a base thriving wage and to recognize that we, everyone working at [my organization], should be paid a wage that allows them to thrive. And then through, you know, a kind of an experience and job responsibility grid, you know, the wage bands for differentiated positions are set. And that is a really, like, unfolding place of the work that we are not doing very well yet.

### ***Total Transparency***

Participant 4 took a strong position around total transparency in her nonprofit. As an organizational founder, she instituted total transparency from the beginning of her organization. She talked about total transparency as a means of taking power away from money and secrecy. She talked at length about the interplay of personal relationships with money and the ways that individuals react to and navigate conversations about money in the workplace. She described her decision to move forward with total transparency and the pushback she received from her mentors:

So, I mean I really fought with them about doing salary transparency. And ultimately, you know...they were kind of like, "You just wait. This is gonna bite you. Just wait."

(shrugs) Never. It has not bit me once. It's been like, absolutely, hands down, the best thing to just set a culture around, like taking some of the power away from salary secrecy.

She not only felt that salary transparency was right for her organization, but she also questioned why the practice is frowned upon by others,

I'm like, what are you hiding?! That tells you that something is wrong. Like I think we know. We know things are wrong. Like, we can feel it in our body. We know something's not right, and we don't listen to it. We're taught to like, not follow that...not pull that thread.

While the other leaders I spoke to had not implemented total transparency, some reflected on what that would be like. Participant 5 explained, “if someone could track it, they could figure out what people are making.” And she went to ponder a workplace environment with total salary transparency, “We don't have salary discussions as a group, but I think that (it) would be very interesting to go forward with that. It is like the unsaid thing, even though we're a small team.”

### **Create a Supportive Work Environment**

All participants discussed how pay equity work extends beyond compensation and involves creating a work environment in which people can bring their full selves to work. They created these supportive work environments by leading authentically, seeing their staff as whole people, and inclusive leadership practices.

### ***Authentic Leadership***

The leaders I spoke to were conscious of how their personal values and life experiences shaped their leadership and the ways they viewed pay equity. All five participants noted that feminist values are woven into the ways they lead and approach their work. Participant 2

described how her feminist perspective is integrated into her leadership, "...it's just really interconnected. It doesn't feel ... like a lens that's outside that I'm bringing into my role."

Similarly, all five participants talked about intersectional feminism and how antiracism connected to their feminist values. They described bringing awareness to the ways that white-supremacy culture exists within nonprofit organizations. Several participants talked about the need to be conscious of their biases and the ongoing challenge of peeling back the layers of internalized racism and sexism. Participant 5 reflected on her experiences:

So, it's a lot of conversations, a lot of dialogue, it's a lot of investigating and like deep reflection. Because like, I mean it's one thing to like [to] look at the structures, look at policies, but it's also to like look internally, look inward and be like, how much of this do I carry with me? And how much of this can I like let go of? So that is... it's an ongoing process.

The participants connected these ideas about reflecting on and building awareness of their feminist values with actions they could take toward equitable workplaces. Participant 3 discussed his work toward being a feminist and antiracist leader who puts his values into practice to effect change:

I consider myself working at being a feminist, antiracist leader, and, more importantly, feminist, and antiracist listener and practitioner, to getting to not just theoretically how are things happening, or how they are structured but practically what can we do? What can we do now? And what can you set up to have happen in the future?

These leaders also recognized how their ability to draw on their life experiences in their leadership helped to create a more supportive work environment. Several participants shared the

perspective that it is not possible to separate who they are at work from who they are outside of work. This was especially true for Participants 4 and 5, who both spoke about how becoming mothers had shaped their leadership. Participant 4 recalled how motherhood changed her:

I fundamentally changed as a human after I became a mother, which I guess would make sense. But I became much more empathetic. I became much more, just like, loving. And I use my role and my work to like lean into those feelings in the workplace instead of trying to like wall them off.

Similarly, Participant 4 shared her account of how her traumatic experience of becoming a new mother while working in a nonprofit had led her to advocate for paid leave later in her career. She recalled how the nonprofit she worked at during that time did not subsidize health insurance or offer paid medical leave. Though she took unpaid parental leave, she was still expected to work while recovering, and upon return, she did not have an appropriate place to pump breastmilk. She also had to forego medical care for herself to afford healthcare for her infant son. The experience took a toll on her mentally and physically and pushed her to advocate for paid parental leave for others. She reflected on how this experience led her to push for benefits that would create a more supportive environment for new parents:

I was determined to not have that experience again, and I was determined to never have another person I worked with have that experience. So, when I came to [my current organization], I advocated for paid leave. Um, and that took a few years, but finally, we got a paid leave policy.

Another way that participants brought their life experiences into their leadership was through drawing on their experiences of inequality in the workplace. Three participants drew connections

between those experiences and their current lenses and practices around equitable, supportive workplaces. Participant 1 talked about feeling that her program, which was focused on women and girls, got shortchanged when she worked at a major foundation. She also talked about suspecting, but being unable to prove, that she was paid less than her male counterparts. As she put it, “that always stuck in my craw a little bit,” and was part of the reason she feels strongly about salary transparency in job postings.

### *Seeing Staff as Whole People*

Just as these participants lead as whole people, they also worked toward creating organizational cultures in which all staff are viewed as whole people. Participant 4 talked about how she has worked toward creating an organizational culture that embraces emotion and enables healing. She spoke about traditional ideas of professionalism and how they affect marginalized people:

At a lot of workplaces... like, the main goal is to shut off, and repress, and keep out...you don't have room to be a full person at work. You gotta leave that somewhere else. And it's really painful... that's a horribly painful way of being if you've experienced trauma. And if you're a person of color, if you're a woman, if you're trans, if you're LGBTQ, you've experienced so much trauma. And so, it's just like how do you make these workplaces that allow you to be fully human?

Participant 3 also talked about the impossibility of asking employees to shut off parts of themselves in the workplace. He described how his organization focuses on “work/life blend” rather than “work/life balance” because “...you're never going to stop being a parent. Whatever identity you bring into the work is not going to stop just because you're at an office or because

you're logged on to Zoom.” Several of the participants’ organizations are addressing the “work/life blend” and creating a supportive environment for parents through paid leave, the ability to bring infants to work, and flexible scheduling.

Other participants talked about the importance of paid time off for the general health and well-being of staff and as a means of preventing burnout. Participant 4 shared, with pride, that her staff enjoys 90 days off per year. Participant 3 talked about shifting to a results-only work environment in which people have unlimited time off. Even with unlimited time off, he spoke about continually encouraging people to take and use the time off and the need for organizations to consider workload and project management techniques to create an environment in which employees can take time off more easily.

While all participants talked about strategies for retaining staff, several also recognized that supportive work environments are ones that enable employees to leave on good terms. Participant 3 talked about a goal of having staff members “have salaries here that when they go someplace else, they can carry forward and say this is what I should be paid.” Similarly, Participant 1 noted that she loves “happy leavers” who find good new positions for themselves at other organizations because of the fair pay and career development that they received at her organization.

### ***Inclusive Leadership***

Most of the leaders I spoke to acknowledge the significance of inclusive leadership. They recognized that they could not achieve pay equity in their organizations without listening to and responding to the needs of their employees. Participant 4’s reflection on inclusive leadership summarizes the practice well:

That, to me, is what a good leader can do. They can like, get all these different perspectives, not be persuaded too much by any one perspective based on who that person is, and then like, put it in their own little factory and then hopefully come out with something like a good decision.

Participant 2 shared a more concrete example of inclusive leadership in action. When her leadership team developed their pay equity framework and developed a Thriving Wage Calculator, she asked for staff input on the overall definition of pay equity. She also sought their feedback about the Thriving Wage Calculator, even though introducing so many perspectives into the process made consensus difficult. It was important to her to make sure that employees had a voice in defining pay equity.

Participant 3 echoed the challenges around inclusive leadership that Participant 2 described. He reflected on what inclusive practices require of leaders:

the willingness to take time and actually be in (the) conversation as opposed to a single decision maker making all the decisions. And to sit with ambiguity. And to sit with conflicting ideas as we try and resolve them as an organization. And resolve them as a whole set of people.

Through bringing their identity and values into their leadership, seeing their staff as whole people, and using inclusive leadership practices, the leaders in this study expanded our discussions beyond compensation. They demonstrated how intertwined pay equity is with the workplace as a whole and worked toward creating more supportive work environments that align with and advance their pay equity goals.

## **Lead Sector Change**

The study participants shared a belief that a more equitable compensation model is possible and that their actions as leaders could effect change beyond their organizations. Participant 2 described how she visualizes the tension between the current reality and a more equitable one:

I really believe another world and way is possible, you know? And kind of finding how to like [to] get a limb over there while you're still half in this current world. You gotta hold on and, you know, sustain enough stability and disequilibrium to kind of like be in both tides.

As they talked about their experiences of change leadership, participants grappled with the slow *pace of change*, overcoming a *scarcity mentality* in their budgeting processes, and how they *advocate* for sector-wide change.

## ***Pace of Change***

Across the board, participants noted that change toward pay equity, both within their organizations and more broadly in the nonprofit sector, moves slowly. Participant 4 voiced her frustration about the tendency of nonprofits to delay pay equity until forced to hire:

And one of the things that I just see happen so much is we use transition as the opportunity to right the ship on pay equity. Whether it's [an] executive transition or probably any staff position... Why do we do that? Like, as humans, like, why do we wait to right-size the ship until the person who's been doing all that work leaves?

Participant 5 also voiced frustration with the slow pace of change. She theorized that Boards of Directors delay progress because their fiduciary responsibility makes them averse to financial risk:

But wouldn't it be amazing if board members would say, "We're committed to pay equity, and let's figure out how to do this, like, and we want to do this now." We have not paid attention to this for decades, and now it's time. We need to do some pay equity, we need to do some serious work, and we need to do it right now. And the question is, like, well, "What if we do it wrong? What if we, what if we make the wrong decisions?" And it's like, plenty of wrong decisions have already been made, like this, to me, can't be as wrong as the things that have already [been] decided on. So, like, it can't be that wrong. Right?

Participant 3 recognized that the slow pace of leading change is also a result of nonprofits' lean staffing strategies. He spoke about the limitation of time and capacity that he faces in his work:

I mean, the challenge is time. The challenge is always time and capacity to like take things on and to do things intentionally. I mean, that's one of the reasons why the banding and this question of like, what are the other rubrics and structural equity changes? The things that we want to do, like those, have been slow-moving just because we have a million other things going as well. And so right now, they are sort of guiding frameworks and things that we're keeping in mind as we're hiring people, but also there's just more research to do and structures to put a place for it, which is a matter of time and capacity.

### *Scarcity Mentality*

A commitment to creating a more equitable sector requires nonprofits that have operated with lean budgets and overworked staff members to embrace a paradigm shift when it comes to budgeting. This shift is easier said than done, given that some of the participants I spoke to work in organizations that operate on deficit budgets. Participant 2 talked about the tension of operating on lean resources and advancing pay equity goals:

when the kind of abundance mindset in the context of just your income coming in every month is like a little bit in opposition to one another... Figuring out how to like realistically move goals forward is really challenging.

Participant 4 connected nonprofits' scarcity mentality with the slow pace of change in the sector, noting how leaders may shy away from pay equity work because they recognize that the result will be a "bill" that they have to pay. In her nonprofit, she prefers to pay fewer people well than to have a larger staff. She recalled a transformative conversation in which someone pointed out to her that her events budget included items like tablecloths but not fees for the speakers. She reflected on how she's changed her budgeting to overcome scarcity mentality:

And that just like changed so much for me, in so many different things. Not just the speakers but around building budgets and the power of budget-building to speak to our values. And the power of not doing something if you can't really afford to do it, you know? And like maybe that position shouldn't exist if it can't be an equitable, livable wage.

### *Advocacy*

The nonprofit leaders I spoke to were concerned with equitable pay for their employees and how they might affect change across the sector through their work or advocacy.

Participant 3 noted that he sees two sides to pay equity work, the internal and the more public-facing work related to salary transparency on the job board his organization runs. He talked about his desire to use his organization's more public-facing work with the job board to push other nonprofit leaders toward salary transparency and more equitable pay in the sector:

one of the things that I was always thinking about...is like what the next evolution is? And we talked about that internally and, you know, as we're rolling out salary transparency on the job boards, the questions are... "How do you push other organizations to do more salary transparency in their organizations?" So that's always, that's a thing that's floating out there. And then, given that the minimum wage is not the same as a living wage in this country, "What is the next standard around living wages?"

Participant 1 also spoke about her desire to see change across the sector. She recounted that in addition to the pay equity work that her organization models, they have also developed an advocacy platform that includes pay equity:

We can kind of do what we do, and that's like one little piece, and it sets a precedent, and it models kind of what we want to be able to do. But I think organizationally, we also take a stand; that, you know, this is kind of our advocacy platform. It's, you know, pay equity, and we're going to talk about it when we go to the legislature. We're going to talk about it when we have opportunities to do that. So that's kind of part of our brand, part of our platform.

In addition to public-facing efforts and advocacy, the leaders I spoke with sought change within the sector through dialogue and connection with other nonprofit leaders. Participant 2 described her hunger for resources and information sharing at the sector level.

I want to learn more about what other nonprofit leaders are doing. You know, it would be so cool to have some bigger sector conversations about what are we doing. What are people trying? How are people thinking about it? Where are people stuck? What are the tensions popping up in our organizations as we have, you know, seismic shifts around (and) just illumination of how far, but how deep the work is and what needs to happen?

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to understand how feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations. At the beginning of my research process, I expected to find answers about the tactics or tools these leaders found successful. Beyond tactics, these leaders spoke primarily about how they lead and how they envision a more equitable nonprofit sector. Through analyzing the interview data, I identified four key themes that correspond with the leadership behaviors of the research participants: *Challenge the Status Quo*, *Operate with Transparency*, *Create a Supportive Work Environment*, and *Lead Sector Change*.

Because these ideas are tied together with ideas about how inequity works in organizations and how leaders can affect social change, I interpreted my theme-based findings through two theoretical frameworks, Acker's (2006) inequality regimes and Brown's (2017) emergent strategies. Acker's (2006) inequality regimes provides a basis for understanding the interconnectedness of pay equity efforts with issues like organizational culture or paid time off. Inequality regimes consist of many organizational systems and processes combining to reinforce

social hierarchies (Acker, 2006). Just as inequality regimes illustrated how inequality operates, Brown's (2017) emergent strategy is an answer to Acker (2006) in that it depicts a more positive vision of change. If inequality occurs through repeating patterns in organizational processes, Brown (2017) showed how social change also happens through repeating patterns. Leaders working to address pay equity do so by continually pulling apart and examining each of interrelated organizational processes and systems and the assumptions behind them. Brown (2017) observed that change is nonlinear and iterative, much like unraveling a tangle of threads. She also provides the visual image of a fractal as a way of understanding how organizational processes are repeating patterns, which can replicate beyond the boundaries of the organization. The concept of fractals illustrates how pay equity efforts within one organization can in turn lead other organizations to adopt similar, more equitable practices. If Acker (2006) explained how inequality works, Brown posited that leaders can make small changes in organizations that become new patterns.

### **Theme 1: Challenge the Status Quo**

The first finding of this study showed how feminist leaders are willing to question the assumptions behind prevailing compensation norms and forge new processes. The leaders in my study took a critical view of ideas like merit-based pay, paying for experience, cost of living, and proposed alternative compensation systems that account for identity. Their recognition of how dominant compensation practices disadvantage marginalized people aligns with Acker's (2006) view of how organizational processes replicate the social hierarchy so that those with power (white men) remain in power.

Several research participants spoke about their reasons for ending merit-based pay practices in their organizations as part of their pay equity efforts. They spoke about this decision

as both a response to the Covid19 pandemic and a year of collective trauma, and also as a steppingstone to introduce pay systems based on other factors. Several participants shared early thoughts about pay systems that account for historical (and current) economic inequalities for BIPOC staff members. Participant 5 commented that “there’s a level of reparations that need to happen.” These decisions and ideas about alternative pay systems echoed Amis et al’s (2020) conclusions that meritocracy is a myth and that merit-based pay systems reinforce bias and inequities.

In addition to critiquing merit-based pay systems, participants also pointed to flaws in pay systems that are rooted in human capital theory. Participant 4 shared her view that paying based on experience is unjust when the expectations of the job are the same. Similarly, Participant 2 spoke about the belief that there should be a base wage that supports a high quality of life for all employees in her organization. She had worked with a team to develop an original wage-setting calculator called a Thriving Wage Calculator, which factored in the costs of stable housing, healthcare, and quality food. This calculator was a response to and critique of MIT’s living wage calculator, which is based on bare minimum estimates for living expenses (Glasmeier, 2020), but it also rejects the human capital basis of so many compensation systems. Rather than compensating for education or years of work experience, the Thriving Wage Calculator places quality of life at the center of the wage-setting equation.

Across the interviews, participants reflected on the iterative nature of their work, and how they were continually questioning their existing practices, and testing new approaches that they had not seen before in other organizations.

## **Theme 2: Operate with Transparency**

The second finding showed that feminist leaders are focused on transparency as a core element of their pay equity efforts. While all participants spoke about transparency, their understandings of transparency differed from one another. Heisler (2020)'s model helps clarify that pay transparency is a continuum from low to high across dimensions from the process level, job level, to the individual employee level. Within this study, participants spoke about the significance of salary transparency in job postings (job level), salary negotiations (employee level) and about the ability to explain pay decisions (process level) (Heisler, 2020).

There was unanimous agreement among participants that salary transparency in job postings is an essential practice that helps prevent applicants from applying to jobs that do not meet their salary requirements. Many of the leaders commented that transparency in job postings was also important for existing employees, who could compare their own salary and job requirements against open positions. This practice helped to hold leaders accountable to the employees in the organization, which supported Castilla's (2015) finding that leaders made more equitable pay decisions when there was visibility into their decisions. Further, two of the participants spoke about salary transparency in job postings from the perspective of organizations that host job boards. They recognized how this information might prompt other organizations to raise their salaries when they had information about what other organizations paid for similar positions

The literature on salary negotiations showed that women do not negotiate as often as men and do not negotiate as successfully as men when they do (Bear & Babcock, 2016; Bowles & Babcock, 2013). Several participants noted the same outcome when they allowed candidates to negotiate their starting salaries: women did not negotiate as often out of fear of being perceived

negatively. The literature focused on negotiation outcomes for the job candidate, but study participants also spoke about the dilemma that allowing salary negotiations creates for equity-minded leaders. When candidates negotiated for higher pay, it created equity problems that these leaders would need to resolve or live with. As a result, several participants had ended the practice of salary negotiation so that the transparency achieved through including salary ranges in job postings would not be lost once the employee was hired.

Participants also expressed a commitment to transparency at the process level. They described educating staff members on the compensation philosophy, sharing job responsibility grids, and putting effort into pay bands as a way of ensuring that staff members had a way of understanding how pay decisions were made in the organization. This dimension of transparency reinforces some of Castilla's (2015) findings about how transparency around pay processes reduced wage gaps.

Only two of the interviewed leaders expressed an interest in high transparency around employee pay. Heisler (2020) cautioned that moving too quickly toward high transparency around individual pay could backfire for organizations. For Participant 4, high transparency at all three dimensions was core to her pay equity strategy and the kind of culture she sought to build, despite the warnings she received from colleagues and mentors. Her skepticism about the motivations of leaders who refuse to be transparent about pay echoed Acker's analysis that those at the top of organizations hoard power. She asked, "...what are you hiding?! That tells you that something is wrong." One factor that worked in Participant 4's favor was that she had founded her organization, and so there was no culture of pay secrecy in the first place in her nonprofit.

### **Theme 3: Create a Supportive Work Environment**

Overwhelmingly, the interview data reinforced that pay equity cannot be isolated from the process of creating a supportive environment in the workplace. The findings showed that leaders cultivated supportive work environments through self-awareness in their leadership, seeing their staff as whole people, and through inclusive leadership practices.

Many of the leaders acknowledged how their own life experiences and values had shaped their leadership. They spoke about both personal experiences that had changed them (like becoming parents) and professional experiences that had influenced their views about pay equity (like unpaid parental leave or being underpaid compared to a male counterpart.) The participants brought self-awareness to the ways that their personal values, experiences, and biases influence their decision making about pay equity.

In addition to their self-awareness, the participants also spoke about viewing their staff as whole people with needs to attend to their families, attend to their mental and emotional health, as well as needs for fair pay. As Participant 4 put it while discussing how most organizations demand that people shut off emotion, "...how do you make these workplaces that allow you to be fully human?" Several participants spoke about work/life balance and paid time off for restoration as part of their pay equity strategies. While these efforts do not necessarily result in higher pay for individual employees, they do recognize that employees' needs are more than monetary. In some cases, the need to be considered a whole person directly relates to compensation, as with family friendly policies. Participants discussed the direct financial impact of paid parental leave for employees, which is more closely tied to an employees' total compensation. Two participants described policies that allow new parents to bring their babies to

work for the first six months, which results in significant financial savings for the employee but does not cost the organization anything to provide.

Lastly, participants described how their pay equity work involved an inclusive leadership style, in which they consider the input of their staff members as they shape their pay equity frameworks and policies. By including others in their decision-making, they disrupted the inequality regime that Acker (2006) describes as a means for people in power to stay in power.

#### **Theme 4: Lead Sector Change**

The last theme of this research was about how nonprofit leaders' actions can bring about change across the sector. Brown's concept of fractals as a metaphor for social change reminds us of the relationship between small and large, meaning the small changes that these feminist leaders brought about in their organizations can have large scale impact across the sector. Participants spoke about their frustrations with leading change, namely the sentiment that the pace of change is so slow that it is hard to see progress. They also spoke about the depth of the scarcity mentality in nonprofits, and how difficult it is to advocate for pay equity in their organizations when there is a sense of financial risk associated with increasing salaries. This finding supports the literature on the donative labor model (Kim and Charbonneau, 2020). Still, the efforts named in previous themes are examples of how feminist leaders can introduce small changes over time that help change the patterns within their organizations and beyond. Two participants noted a goal of having employees leave their organizations and move on to their next nonprofit job with a sense of their worth and value. This example is a perfect illustration of Brown's (2017) concept of fractals in action. As leaders invest in their staff and push against the idea of a donative labor model in their staffing budget, they create new organizational patterns

and change employee expectations. This study raises the possibility of changing expectations around compensation within the nonprofit sector by changing expectations within organizations.

### **Significance and Impact**

The work of advancing pay equity in nonprofits is complex and iterative. To date, no studies before this one focused on how feminist leaders approach pay equity in nonprofits. By centering the perspectives of feminist leaders in the field, this study identified no single solution to pay equity. Instead, there are ways of leading that move the sector toward a more equitable future, including willingness to challenge the status quo, operate with transparency, build a supportive work environment, and lead the way for the rest of the sector.

### **Future Research**

As a qualitative study, the purpose of this research was to center the experiences of feminist leaders in advancing pay equity in nonprofits. It also opens the door to many potential lines of inquiry for future research, including a deeper and more racially diverse study of feminist leadership. In addition, future research is needed to understand the perspectives of employees affected by pay equity decisions. Other future research could also address the roles of funders and Boards of Directors in breaking the nonprofit starvation cycle. And finally, a prospective study could focus on document review of pay policies to get more detailed information about existing wage-setting policies within nonprofits.

### **Summary**

This study demonstrated that feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations not through specific tactics but instead through how they lead. Pay equity is a process that involves questioning the assumptions behind compensation systems, building trust

with employees by operating with transparency, focusing on supportive workplace culture in addition to equitable pay, and considering the ways that one organization's efforts can influence the sector.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand how feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations. Through qualitative research and literature review, I found that pay equity is a more complicated concept than I originally assumed. Inequity is not a direct result of only a singular decision, policy, or event. Instead, inequity is complex and results from a constellation of organizational systems and practices that ultimately preserve power for those at the top of the social hierarchy (Acker, 2006). The feminist leaders I spoke to recognized this complexity, and expanded my thinking about pay equity to include ways of leading.

Chin (2007) observed that feminist leadership is perhaps most aligned with transformational leadership in that the goals of feminist leaders are to create change within followers, organizations, and within society at large. The feminist leaders I spoke to understood feminism differently from one another, yet they shared a commitment to creating a more equitable workplace for people of all genders and a belief that these changes could be an impetus for change within the nonprofit sector. I believe that the ways of leading described in this study have the potential to transform organizations.

The theme-based findings of this study serve as recommendations for practitioners about leading pay equity efforts through a feminist lens: (1) Challenge the status quo: Ask who benefits from inherited practices such as merit-based pay systems or allowing salary negotiation. Question the underlying assumptions in pay decisions, and be willing to test new ideas, (2)

Operate with transparency: Move in the direction of transparency and recognize that there are many benefits to sharing salary information in open positions. Additionally, there is always opportunity to share more information about how pay decisions are made, (3) Create a supportive work environment: Recognize that pay equity cannot exist without a broader commitment to equity in the workplace. Leaders create more equitable environments by bringing their personal values and life experiences into their leadership and seeing their staff as complex people with multiple identities, and (4) Lead sector change: The pace of change is slow, but despite obstacles like scarcity mentality, introducing more equitable practices and ways of leading within one organization can influence others and the sector as a whole.

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[6402.2009.01518.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2009.01518.x)

## Appendix A: IRB Application



ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY REQUEST FOR APPROVAL  
FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPLICATION  
**IRB APPLICATION DOCUMENT CHECKLIST**

The items listed below are the application, forms and supporting documents to be uploaded to Mentor IRB for your protocol/application submission. Consent forms and additional supporting documents may be uploaded separately; directions for Mentor IRB can be found on [www.stkate.edu/irb](http://www.stkate.edu/irb) or <https://stkate.box.com/s/7rt8t0x2sieqfsj9gkzcrossf5fr5uwcf>.

- IRB Application
- PI Documentation/CITI Training for Investigator(s)\*
- PI Documentation/CITI Training for Faculty Adviser (if applicable)\*
- Informed consent form
- Child assent form (if applicable)
- Recruiting materials (phone script, fliers, ads, etc)
- Survey/questionnaire(s), focus group or interview questions (if applicable)
- Conflict of interest/financial interest disclosure (if applicable)
- Letter(s) of support (if you are conducting research at another agency, school, etc).
- Data management plans meets Data Management Policy (policy below)

\*PI Documentation/CITI Training is the completion report received for fulfilling the required Human Subjects Research education requirements in CITI Program. Each person will need to upload their PI Documentation to their individual Mentor IRB account. Directions are located in Mentor IRB.

### IRB RELATED POLICIES:

Listed below as well as throughout the application are St. Catherine policies related to human Subjects research

IRB Policy: <https://stkate.box.com/s/4vxto2w6azt1k9jclim5gc1bqktoe3uv>

Intellectual Property Policy: <https://stkate.box.com/s/51my44r6a5no8nurqydhcxplj1rwzkm>

Research Misconduct Policy: <https://stkate.box.com/s/qzx5oev241s3uw1btpd5fwgickgfzjvx>

Research Data Management Policy:

<https://stkate.box.com/s/0m4yf9cumy12f2yq5kwo4wlhm9qf86c8>



**ST. CATHERINE  
UNIVERSITY**

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY REQUEST FOR APPROVAL

FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH APPLICATION

Complete the following application in its entirety. You may excerpt material from your thesis or grant proposal, but your application should be relatively concise. Consent forms and additional supporting documents may be uploaded to Mentor IRB separately. For questions, contact the IRB Coordinator at 651-690-6204 or [irb@stkate.edu](mailto:irb@stkate.edu).

Date of application:

Investigator name(s) and credentials (e.g., PhD, RN, etc.): *(List all co-investigators)*

Emily Anderson, MAOL student  
Amy Ihlan, PhD., Associate Professor of MAOL  
Note: Eskender Yousuf, Adjunct Faculty in MAOL will serve as the advisor for this project in the Mentor System, per agreement with the IRB

Project Title:

Department:

Level of Review:

*In the Mentor IRB system, you must select the Review Type; selecting Exempt and Expedited will prompt additional questions for you to fill out. For more information on the levels of review, go to the Mentor IRB Info page: Determine the Level of Review.*

Exempt     Expedited     Full     Quality Improvement     Not Research

Will another IRB review this research application?

No     Yes – First reviewed by an External IRB     Yes – First reviewed by St. Kate’s IRB

*If YES – First reviewed by an External IRB, you may not need to complete a St Kates IRB application and can instead use your external IRB application. Please include a copy of the approved external IRB application and the letter of approval from the external IRB with your Mentor IRB submission.*

*If YES – First reviewed by St. Kate’s IRB, please indicate your plans for review and identify the external IRB:*

*Note: Cooperative Research occurs when a research protocol requires approval from outside institutions (e.g., a hospital IRB or other college/university) as well as St. Catherine University. Sometimes it is possible for an IRB to accept an external IRB’s review to reduce duplication of review effort. If you have questions about cooperative research and how to determine when only one IRB will need to review your IRB application, contact the IRB coordinator at [IRB@stkate.edu](mailto:IRB@stkate.edu) or reference the [Cooperative Research Policy Addendum](#).*

**RESEARCH SUMMARY:** *Complete each section in clear, easy to read language that can be understood by a person unfamiliar with your research and your field.*

Purpose of the research: *Provide a clear, concise statement of your purpose.*

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations.

Background: *Provide a concise summary in 1 - 2 brief paragraphs to explain the importance of the research and how it fits with previous research.*

The wage gap is more than just a statistic about the number of cents on the dollar that women earn compared to men. It is a phenomenon that represents women's economic inequality in general. Because of its complexity, enormity, and the social implications, women's economic inequality is best understood as a "wicked problem" (Turnbull, 2010). Many researchers have sought to understand the reasons the wage gap persists in organizations, examining gender bias in compensation systems (Lips, 2012; Travis, Gross & Johnson, 2009), women's negotiation behaviors (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010), segregation of women in gendered positions (Abendroth et al, 2017), and other potential "root causes." All of these related issues contribute to the wage gap, but researchers have not yet identified a one-size-fits-all solution for ending gender-based pay disparities in organizations. I believe that a paradigm shift, rather than a technical solution, is needed to eliminate the wage gap.

My thesis is a response to the prevailing ideas about fairness in compensation, which call for using "rational" and "neutral" metrics to place value on labor. I argue that principles of feminist leadership and ethics, such as transparency and accountability, can do more to resolve wage gaps in nonprofit organizations than attempts at neutrality. My research seeks to give voice to feminist leaders who work on this issue and to learn from their experiences advancing pay equity in nonprofits.

Research Methods and Questions: *Give a general description of the study design and specific methods you will use in your investigation. Specify all of your research questions and/or hypotheses. Reviewers will consider whether the information you are gathering is necessary to answer your research question(s), so this should be clear in your application.*

The research question for my study is, "How can feminist leaders advance pay equity in nonprofit organizations?"

First, I will recruit participants from my professional network of HR leaders and MAOL students via email. I will identify 4-5 leaders who identify as feminists and understand issues related to pay equity in nonprofits, either as practitioners or as experts.

Once I have identified 4-5 leaders who are willing to be interviewed, I will ask for informed consent via email and schedule a 60-90 minute interview with each participant via Zoom.

During the semi-structured interview, I will ask questions from the interview protocol (attached) as well as follow-up questions. I will record the interview and store the recording on my password protected computer.

Expectations of Participants: Give a step by step description of all procedures that you will have participants do. Attach any surveys, tests, instruments, interview questions, data collection forms, etc. that you will use with participants.

First, participants will be recruited to participate in the interviews via email. Then they will receive a consent form detailing the risks and benefits of participation. They will receive options for scheduling a 60-90 minute interview, and when confirmed, a Zoom link.

During the interview, participants will be reminded that participation is voluntary and that I will record the interview. Participants will be asked questions about feminism, compensation systems, and the approaches to pay equity that work and do not work in nonprofits.

e. Estimated Time Commitment for Participants:

1	Number of sessions for each participant
60-90 minutes	Time commitment per session for each participant
60-90 minutes	Total time commitment for each participant

f. Access to Existing Data: If you are analyzing existing data, records, or specimens, explain the source and type, means of access, and permission(s) to use them. If not accessing existing data, indicate "NA"

N/A

SUBJECTS: Provide your best estimates below.

Age Range of Subjects Included: 18-80

Number:

(Indicate a range, or maximum, if exceeded, you will need to submit an amendment)

3-8
 Total   
  Not Gender Specific   
  Female only   
  Male only

Target Population: Describe your target population (the group you will be studying; e.g. seniors, children ages 9-12, healthy adults 18 or over, etc.)

Adults over 18

**Specific Exclusions:** *If women and/or minorities are to be excluded from the study, a clear rationale should be provided in section “f” below.*

n/a

**Special Populations Included:** *Select any special population that will be the focus of your research.*

NOTE: *These groups require special consideration by federal regulatory agencies and by the IRB.*

- |                                                                                                                   |                                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minors (under age 18)                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV/AIDS patients                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> St. Catherine Employees                                                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> People in prison                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Students                                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital patients or outpatients           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elderly/aged persons                                                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> People who are educationally disadvantaged |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individuals with impaired decision-making capacity                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> People who are economically disadvantaged  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Minority group(s) and/or non-English speakers ( <i>please specify</i> ) _____            |                                                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Special Characteristics and Special Populations<br>( <i>please specify</i> ) _____ |                                                                     |

Provide reasons for targeting or excluding any special populations listed above.

Do you have any conflict of interest (financial, personal, employment, dual-role) that could affect human subject participation or protection? *Dual-role examples: faculty–student (does not apply to action research projects for education students), medical practitioner-patients, supervisor-direct reports, etc.*

- Yes       No

*If Yes, please indicate the steps you will take to minimize any undue influence in your research, recruitment and consent process. You can also reference the university Financial Conflict of Interest policy: <https://stkate.box.com/s/ymgyislnxtvn3887om50bzdtu7ezaulu>*

RECRUITMENT: LOCATION OF SUBJECTS (*Select all that apply*) :

- St. Catherine University students
- School setting (PreK – 12)
- Hospital or clinic
- Other Institution (*Specify*): \_\_\_\_\_
- None of the above (*Describe location of subjects*):  
I will use my professional network \_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:** *If participants are recruited or research is conducted through an agency or institution other than St. Catherine University, submit either written or electronic documentation of approval and/or cooperation. An electronic version should be sent from the email system of that particular institution. The document should include the name of the PI, Title of the approved study, as well as the name and title of the appropriate administrator sending the approval. You should include an abstract/synopsis of your study when asking for approval from an external institution.*

**Recruitment Method:** *Describe how you will recruit your subjects? Attach a copy of any advertisement, flyer, letter, or statement that you will use for recruitment purposes.*

I will recruit participants via email through my professional network of HR leaders working in nonprofits. I will email the listserv of HR leaders, asking any who self identify as feminist leaders to contact me if they are willing to participate. I will also use the snowball method by asking participants to identify other self-identified feminists who have knowledge of or experience with pay equity work in nonprofits. I will also email HR leaders at organizations focused on women’s rights and wellness, such as NARAL, Family Tree Clinic, etc.

**Incentives:** *Will the subjects be offered inducements for participation? If yes, explain. Note: Please contact the SPREE office about the use of incentives within your research, as there are important university policies that fall outside of the protection of human subject, [SPREE@stkate.edu](mailto:SPREE@stkate.edu) or x8811*

*Incentive policy link: <https://stkate.box.com/s/sg18t87402as14xdtc0pppy2rt5w7swp>*

No incentive

## RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

Select all that apply. Does the research involve:

- Use of private records (medical or educational records)
- Possible invasion of privacy of the subjects and/or their family
- Manipulation of psychological or social variables
- Probing for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews
- Use of deception
- Presentation of materials which subjects might consider offensive, threatening or degrading
- Risk of physical injury to subjects
- Other risks:

**Risks:** *Briefly describe the risks of participation in your study, if any. Describe the precautions taken to minimize these risks. Please use “no foreseeable risk” rather than no risks.*

There are no foreseeable risks.

**Benefits:** *List any anticipated direct benefits to your subjects. If none, state that here and in the consent form.*

1. **Direct Benefits:** *List any anticipated direct benefits to your subjects. If none, state that here and in the consent form.*

Opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

2. **Other Benefits:** *List any potential benefits of this research to society, including your field of Study.*

Participants are contributing to our knowledge about pay equity in nonprofits.

**Risk/Benefit Ratio:** *Justify the statement that the potential benefits (including direct and other benefits) of this research study outweigh any probable risks.*

The potential benefit of the study listed above outweigh the risks.

**Deception:** *The use of deception in research poses particular risks and should only be used if necessary to accomplish the research, and when risks are minimized as much as possible. The researcher should not use deception when it would affect the subject's willingness to participate in the study (e.g, physical risks, unpleasant emotional or physical experiences, etc).*

Will you be using deception in your research?

Yes  No

*If yes, justify why the deceptive techniques are necessary in terms of study's scientific, educational or applied value. Explain what other alternatives were considered that do not use deception and why they would not meet the researcher's objective. Attach a copy of a debriefing statement explaining the deception to participants.*

#### CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

Will your data be anonymous?

Yes  No

*(Anonymous data means that the researcher cannot identify subjects from their data, while confidential data means that the researcher can identify a subject's response, but promises not to do so publicly.)*

*How will you maintain anonymity/confidentiality of the information obtained from your subjects?*

*Interview Example: I will assign pseudonyms to each interview participant. I will de-identify the data, and store the key separate from the recordings and transcripts. I will have the transcriptionist sign a confidentiality statement*

*I will assign pseudonyms to each interview participant. I will de-identify the data, and store the key separate from the recordings and transcripts. I will have the transcriptionist sign a confidentiality statement.*

**Data Storage:** *The IRB expects you to review the Research Data Management Policy (linked at the top of the application) and to make sure your data storage plans meet the St. Kate's policy requirements. For additional guidance see the Research Data Management Guidance document:*

<https://stkate.box.com/s/p73h5om7knkhbcmk84cuanidx4ukhi0b>

Select your Data Level and describe your data storage plans:

Public  Confidential  Protected-disclosure could cause harm  Restricted-full review only

*Where will the data be kept, and who will have access to it during that time? Examples: I will store audio files and electronic files on a password protected computer or cloud (indicate which; please avoid using flash drives as they are one of the hardest 'tools' to protect and one of the easiest to exploit or lose, it is suggested to encrypt data on the cloud such as using a file password). I will store all paper files in a secure location (a locked filing cabinet) that is accessible only to myself and my advisor.*

*I will store audio files and electronic files on a password protected computer. I will store all paper files in a secure location (a locked filing cabinet) that is accessible only to myself and my advisor.*

Data Destruction: *How long will it be kept? What is the date when original data will be destroyed? (All studies must specify a date when original data that could be linked back to a subject's identity will be destroyed. Data that is stripped of all identifiers may be kept indefinitely). Example: I will destroy all records from the study within six months of the conclusion of the study but no later than June 2017.*

*I will destroy all records from the study within six months of the conclusion of the study but no later than December 2022.*

Data Transmission/Sharing/Access: *Will data identifying subjects be made available to anyone other than you or your advisor? If yes, please explain who will receive the data, how it will be transferred/shared and justify the need. Example: The data will only be available to me and my advisor.*

*The data will only be available to me and my advisor.*

Official Records: *Will the data become a part of the medical or school record? If yes, explain.*

No.

## INFORMED CONSENT

How will you gain consent? *State what you will say to the subjects to explain your research.*

I will send participants a consent document, with options to sign electronically, wet signature and scan the document, or to affirm consent via email. I will review the consent information at the beginning of the interview, and affirm consent again.

Consent Document: *Attach the consent or assent form or text of oral statement. A template is available in Mentor IRB. Example: "See attached"*

See attached.

Timing of Consent Process: *Note: In studies with significant risk or volunteer burden, the IRB may require that subjects be given an interim period of 24 hours or more before agreeing to participate in a study*

Participants will be given the consent form during recruitment, and will have until the day of the interview to return the form to me.

Assurance of Participant Understanding: *How you will assess that the subject understands what they have been asked to do (Note: It is not sufficient to simply ask a yes/no question, such as "do you understand what you are being asked to do?")*

I will review the risks and benefits with the participant at the start of the interview in plain language. I will then ask participants to repeat back to me what they understand they are being asked to do and what they will do if they change their mind about participating.

CITI TRAINING – Work with your faculty advisor or contact [IRB@stkates.edu](mailto:IRB@stkates.edu) if you have any questions about whether you should complete additional training modules within CITI. *You can also reference the Mandatory Research Education Policy – Human Subject Research:* <https://stkate.box.com/s/z3995tyh88e68ap8mmjr07esm9fsqbm2>

Select all the CITI training courses/modules you completed:

REQUIRED COURSE:

Human Subject Research Training Course – only one course is required

- Human Subject Research - Social & Behavioral Research Investigators
- Human Subject Research - Education Action Research Program
- Human Subject Research - Biomedical Research Investigators

OPTIONAL MODULES:

- Financial Conflict of Interest Course (suggested if you answered YES to Section 2 part g)
- Avoiding Group Harms - U.S. Research Perspectives (suggested if you checked any special populations in Section 2 part e)
- International Research (suggested for PIs doing research outside of the US that is NOT federally funded)
- International Studies (suggested for PIs doing research outside of the US that IS federally funded)
- Cultural Competence in Research (suggested when study related to a marginalized or minoritized population)
- Internet Based Research (suggested for PIs using internet resources during their research (outside of recruitment) – Skype, survey tools, internet activity monitoring, etc)
- Other (prisoners, pregnant women, children):

ASSURANCES

By submitting this application, the researcher certifies that:

The information furnished concerning the procedures to be taken for the protection of human subjects is correct.

The investigator has read the IRB policies and to the best of his/her knowledge, is complying with Federal regulations and St. Catherine University IRB Policy governing human subjects in research.

The investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the IRB for any substantive modification in the proposal, including, but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators, procedures and subject population.

The investigator will promptly report in writing to the IRB any unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events that occur in the course of the study.

The investigator will promptly report in writing to the IRB and to the subjects any significant findings which develop during the course of the study which may affect the risks and benefits to the subjects who participate in the study.

The research will not be initiated until the IRB provides written approval.

The term of approval will be for one year. To extend the study beyond that term, a new application must be submitted.

The research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB.

The researcher will comply with all requests from the IRB to report on the status of the study and will maintain records of the research according to IRB guidelines.

If these conditions are not met, approval of this research may be suspended.

## **Appendix B Informed Consent Form**

### **Informed Consent for a Research Study**

**Study Title:** Feminist Leadership Approaches to Pay Equity in Nonprofits

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called Feminist Leadership Approaches to Pay Equity in Nonprofits. The study is being done by Emily Anderson, a Masters' student at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. The faculty advisor for this study is Amy Ihlan, PhD, Associate Professor in the Master of Organizational Leadership program at St. Catherine University. Below, you will find answers to the most commonly asked questions about participating in a research study. Please read this entire document and ask questions you have before you agree to be in the study.

#### **Why are the researchers doing this study?**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how self-identified feminist leaders advance pay equity in their organizations. This study is important because it gives voice to feminist leaders who are working to end gender-based pay disparities in nonprofit organizations and could inform the field about better pay practices. Approximately 4-6 people are expected to participate in this research.

#### **Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You were selected to participate in this study because you are a self-identified feminist who understands the issue of pay equity in nonprofit organizations because you are a practitioner or an expert on the subject.

#### **If I decide to participate, what will I be asked to do?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- Meet with the researcher for 60-90 minutes over Zoom and answer questions about pay equity and feminism.

In total, this study will take approximately 60-90 minutes over a single session.

#### **What if I decide I don't want to be in this study?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate in this study, please feel free to say so, and do not sign this form. If you decide to participate in this study, but later change your mind and want to withdraw, simply notify me and you will be removed immediately. You may withdraw until September 30, 2021, after which time withdrawal will no longer be possible. Your decision of whether or not to participate will have

no negative or positive impact on your relationship with the nonprofit where you work, with St. Catherine University, nor with any of the students or faculty involved in the research.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

There are no foreseeable physical or psychological risks to participating in this study. There is minimal risk to privacy and confidentiality, which are limited by the data security of Zoom.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

Some potential benefits to participating in this study include an opportunity to reflect more deeply on and contribute to knowledge of pay equity issues in nonprofits.

**Will I receive any compensation for participating in this study?**

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What will you do with the information you get from me and how will you protect my privacy?**

The information that you provide in this study will be transcribed, and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the transcript. The researcher will keep the research results on a password protected computer, and only the researcher and their advisor will have access to the records while they work on this project. The researcher will finish analyzing the data by December 31, 2022 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you, including the recording of the Zoom interview. Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, which means that you will not be identified or identifiable in the any written reports or publications. If it becomes useful to disclose any of your information, the researcher will seek your permission and tell you the persons or agencies to whom the information will be furnished, the nature of the information to be furnished, and the purpose of the disclosure; you will have the right to grant or deny permission for this to happen. If you do not grant permission, the information will remain confidential and will not be released.

**Could my information be used for future research?**

No, your data will not be used or distributed for future research even if de-identified without gaining further consent from you.

**Are there possible changes to the study once it gets started?**

If during the course of this research study the researcher team learns about new findings that might influence your willingness to continue participating in the study, they will inform you of these findings

**How can I get more information?**

If you have any questions, you can ask them before you sign this form. You can also feel free to contact me at (512) 653-1159 or [ecanderson614@stkate.edu](mailto:ecanderson614@stkate.edu). If you have any additional questions later and would like to talk to the faculty advisor, please contact Amy Ihlan at [ajihlan@stkate.edu](mailto:ajihlan@stkate.edu). If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or [jsschmitt@stkate.edu](mailto:jsschmitt@stkate.edu).

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I consent to participate in the study and agree to be videotaped/audiotaped.

My signature indicates that I have read this information, my questions have been answered and I am at least 18 years of age.

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Signature of Participant

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

## Appendix C: Data Collection Instruments

### *Interview Protocol*

#### Basic interview information

- Date;
- Time:
- Interviewer:
- Interviewee:
- Recording/storing information about interview:

#### Interview Questions

- Tell me a little bit about yourself and your professional background.
- I'm particularly interested in feminist leadership. Tell me about being a feminist. What does it mean to you and how does it show up in your work?
- What experience do you have with pay equity work in your organization?
- Was there a starting point or beginning of this work you can point to?
- How do you set pay ranges?
- How are pay decisions made? Who is involved?
- How are pay decisions communicated?
- What does transparency in pay look like in your organization?
- How do you measure or define success in your pay equity work?
- What challenges have you run up against in your pay equity work?
- Many organizations seek to be fair in compensation by creating objective or neutral ways to measure employees' value. Do you think neutrality or objectivity is possible? Is it fair? Why or why not?
- What makes pay policies unfair or unjust? What makes pay policies fair or just?
- Why?
- Give examples from your organization or past professional experience.
- Who should be involved?
- How much transparency—processes, individual decisions, around position type, etc.
- What about more generally—what are your thoughts about how nonprofits in general deal pay equity. Tell me what you see as the successes, the challenges. What should nonprofit leaders do more of to reduce or eliminate the wage gap? Less of?
- To what extent do you see pay equity work as a feminist issue? How do you connect the dots between your ideas of feminism and the work you are doing?
- Anything else about this topic you want to add?

