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Abstract

This paper builds on a critical review of literature focussing on gender and entrepreneurship to consider the position of women in social enterprise and third sector organisations. This qualitative research explores the life histories of women manager participants, and gives voice to these women's social experience. The emerging findings illustrate the diversity of perspectives within the particular context of third sector organisations in Wales, but also a consensus on the relevance of entrepreneurial behaviour to the third sector, and the widening definitions of entrepreneurial behaviour from the mainstream literature for example in terms of opportunities for relationship building. Other key findings include the importance of collaborative working and the impact of learning, support and networking, mentoring and role modelling as key contributors to entrepreneurial understanding and behaviour. This study begins to shine light on the particular context of small to medium third sector organisations and the experience of women senior managers in Wales and their perspectives on the challenges and benefits of managing such non-profit organisations and social enterprise activities, in the face of an increasingly complex and difficult environment of austerity, reduced public sector funding and higher competition for resources.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is highly valued in many economies, and is often associated with the creation of new firms. From this focal point much of existing entrepreneurship research and theory concentrates on key themes such as: innovation; uniqueness of opportunity and product/service; the processes of organisation creation and growth; and creating value. Within this context, much has been written about the individual as entrepreneur identifying and elaborating on specific personality characteristics and the range of abilities of successful entrepreneurs (Chell 1991; Gartner 2002). In general, these types of discussion have centred on studies of men and have foregrounded male characteristics, attitudes, and behaviours. More recently attention has been turning to female entrepreneurs and females characteristics of leadership and entrepreneurial behaviour (Birley 1989; Moore & Buttner 1997; Sundin 2000; Mattis 2004; Williams & Youssef 2013; Caliendo et al 2015).

Another significant issue in the deliberation of entrepreneurial activity is the shift from for-profit companies to include entrepreneurial dimensions in, for example, public sector or 'state-owned enterprises' (Luke, Verreynne & Kearins, 2010), social enterprise, and social entrepreneurship. Here the debate includes what constitutes entrepreneurial behaviour in commercial and social enterprises, and particularly the similarities and differences between the two. In relation to gender, women and men's experiences are often seen as being aligned and more similar in terms of career/leadership trajectory in social enterprise than in commercial entrepreneurship (Huysentruy, 2014). This may, in part be due to the structure and type of enterprise (the numerical presence of women features prominently in health, care and education non-government organisations and enterprises) and the size of the enterprise (much has been written for example from a social development perspective on women involved in micro social

enterprise). It can be argued, however, that many academic studies to date have used a ‘gender blind’ analysis of social entrepreneurship (Lewis, 2006), and there has been limited UK research into the extent of any horizontal or vertical segregation within social ventures, in comparison with the wealth of research into ‘gendered’ work organisations in the private and to a lesser extent, the public sector (Third Sector Research Centre 2010). It is pertinent, then to consider the role of women in leadership positions in non-profit distributing organisations and the specific characteristics of entrepreneurial behaviour in this context.

This paper builds on a critical review of literature focussing on gender and entrepreneurship to consider the position of women in social enterprise. The value of taking such a critical review can be seen in opening up dialogue and questioning assumptions around the economic rationality that underpins much of the literature to date (Calas, Smirch & Bourne 2009). This discourse takes for granted that venture creation and entrepreneurial behaviour is primarily defined as positive economic activity linked to financial performance and rewards. An alternative view, provided from a postmodern feminist epistemological perspective, is that entrepreneurship is a more complex and dynamic phenomenon, and entrepreneurship is a process of social change, which can be understood without attention to economic or managerial logic (Calas et al., 2009). Furthermore, Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio (2005) highlight the need to explore the gendered sub-text of an ‘entrepreneur-mentality’ (the how and what of being an entrepreneur) and argue that many studies have reinforced an androcentric view which renders masculinity invisible and thereby reinforces the ‘otherness’ of female entrepreneurship as divergent from the norm. It can be argued, therefore, that more pluralistic perspectives and research are needed, in order to discover what has been left out of extant literature and research. A feminist methodology in this context is “concerned with how, or whether, knowledge produced about social life can be connected with the social realities of women” (Landman, 2006, p. 430) in managerial and leadership positions in third sector and social enterprise in Wales.

The paper starts with a brief overview of the UK and Welsh context, the significance and growing prominence of social entrepreneurship and challenging funding situation facing the third sector. This is followed by a description of the research design and approach and then identification of themes emerging from the initial stages of the research. The paper draws both on the life stories of individuals - capturing and giving voice to women’s social and lived experience (Rooney 2006; Foss 2010) - and on gender and entrepreneurship literature. From this, gender distinctions and future directions for qualitative research study in the context of these particular sectors will be considered.

The UK and Welsh third sector and social enterprise landscape

Social enterprise is big business in the UK with an estimated 70,000 social enterprises employing approximately a million people (Cabinet Office 2013, cited by Social Enterprise UK 2013) and contributing over £24 billion to the economy (ONS 2010, cited by Social Enterprise UK 2013). In Wales the sector is thriving with 38,000 people employed in social enterprise, and a total value of £1.7 billion (Wales Co-operative Centre 2014). The significance of women’s roles in these enterprises is also noteworthy, as in the UK there is a higher proportion of women leaders in social enterprises (30%) compared with SME businesses

(19%), (Social Enterprise UK 2013). In the Welsh context there are similar distributions of women in leadership roles: 35% in social enterprise; 19% in small-medium sized businesses.

Research into gender in the UK third sector and social entrepreneurship is beginning to emerge. For example, Teasdale et al. (2011) who consider social entrepreneurship from a focus on entrepreneurial pursuit of social change explore gender differences in employment, leadership and participation in the third sector. They found that there is a more equal representation of women leading or initiating third sector organisations compared with private sector social enterprises, and the gender pay gap is smaller than in other sectors. However both vertical and horizontal segregation is still apparent in the third sector even though women continue to make up about two thirds (68%) of the voluntary sector workforce compared with 65% in public sector and only 40% of the private sector workforce (NCVO 2015a).

Social enterprise and voluntary and community organisations are seen as part of vibrant and resilient communities (Temple & Wigglesworth, 2014). In 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government committed to supporting and facilitating the development of social enterprise seeing its flourishing presence as evidence of an inclusive and growing economy (National Assembly for Wales, 2010). A year before this announcement, the then Assembly Member for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills opened a conference hosted by the Women's Entrepreneurship Hub (www.southwales.ac.uk) stating, 'it is vitally important that we [women] foster partnership and encourage more women to convert their ability into action' (Hutt, 2008). This focus on the role and impact of entrepreneurial women managers forms part of the overall objectives for the current study and links both to policy and practice debates in Wales.

In the UK during the last decade third sector funding from national and local government has considerably decreased, and voluntary sector organisations have had to operate in an uncertain and changing economic and political environment, while at the same time demand for their services has increased. Small and medium-sized voluntary sector organisations have been hit the hardest, losing between 34 and 38% of their income, (those with incomes between £100,000 and one million pounds having experienced the largest drops in income), whilst trying to maintain levels of service provision to communities and beneficiaries (NCVO 2015b). Direct grant funding has reduced from £350 million in 2010/2011 to £240 million in 2013/2014 for the third sector in Wales (Welsh Government 2014), and this downward trajectory continues, reflecting a similar trend across the UK. In Wales 34% of third sector funding is from government sources including 18% from Welsh Government and national, and 13% from local government and health board (WCVA 2014). The impact of diminishing funding has been significant and it has presented huge challenges for voluntary sector management in achieving the survival and sustainability of their organisations.

Research design and approach

The Diana International 2010 Research Conference raised the need for an increase in theoretical robustness of women's entrepreneurship research "asking new questions to unravel the diverse, heterogeneous and nuanced approaches to, and realities of, women's entrepreneurship globally" (Jones 2011 p. 2). The current research responds in part to this challenge through a focus on the meanings, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions of participants

and an interpretative approach is taken whereby a meaningful construction of “culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” elicited from participants is presented (Crotty, 2003, p 67).

Participants are women who are the most senior paid managers of 14 small-medium voluntary enterprises (SMVEs) in Wales, primarily Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). All 14 participant organisations are registered charities, from a cross section of issue/activity areas including domestic abuse, disability, youth, arts, adult training, equality, gender, housing and homelessness, and county voluntary sector infrastructure support organisations, and all except one carry out some form of trading and social enterprise activity, with several having a social enterprise entity alongside the charitable organisation structure. Enterprise activities include running cafés, crèches, training, selling produce, special events, cycle hire, room hire, consultancy, administrative and a range of other services for their beneficiaries and wider stakeholders.

Participants were identified through purposive and snowball sampling methods and their perspectives were elicited firstly through face to face open interviews with only one structured question: ‘how did you come to work in the voluntary sector?’ Semi-structured interviews were then undertaken and focused on issues raised both by the initial interviews and drawn from a critical review of relevant literature. Finally, respondents were invited to participate in focus group interview activities.

The initial interviews included an exploration of elements of the life histories of the women, which offered the chance to discover rich, in depth information based on a narrative of their experience and perceptions of education and training, work and career, the voluntary sector, becoming and being a manager, and key life incidents. Life histories have been widely used by feminist researchers as an appropriate method for capturing and giving a voice to women’s social experience (Marshall 1995 cited in Brymant & Bell 2007; Rooney 2006). Dhunpath (2000, p. 544), for example, asserts that a life history approach is “probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world”.

The life story method can also offer an emancipatory element to research by giving the participants a direct voice regarding their experiences, lives and perspectives and through greater involvement in the research process itself. As part of an inclusive process, participants were invited to review information collected, through some of the questions in the follow up interviews, and in more detail in the focus group discussion. This provided space for ‘reflexive capacity’ in this case further reflection and analysis of issues and interpretive schema (Bloor et al 2001 p. 11). This also addresses the need for a more balanced weighting to the input and power relationship between the researcher and participant (Goodley et al 2004). The methods adopted help facilitate the feminist approach to the research, giving power to the women being researched, and shifting from research *of* women to research *for* (and with) women (Stanley & Wise 1993; Oakley 2005).

From these processes a number of themes emerge, some of which confirm and some that extend on earlier and current research. These include: understanding and identification of

entrepreneurial behaviour and entrepreneurial identity, and gender – the experience and the perceptions of women as managers. These themes will be explored in the next sections.

Entrepreneurial identity and behaviour

There was clear and emphatic consensus from all participants that entrepreneurial behaviour was relevant to the third sector and their experience as managers within it. For some innovation and entrepreneurial thinking and action was an inherent, if not always acknowledged, aspect of working in third sector organisations as shown from the following responses:

“We’ve always been very good at it at identifying need and finding solutions through entrepreneurial thinking” (Leanne)

“I think in the third sector perhaps that used to be something that we didn't say but I think it is being said increasingly and I think it's being expected increasingly” (Marilyn)

This ‘natural’ and ‘integral part’ of the sector, for some, was built on specific characteristics of the ways in which the organisations work or should work. For others, it was something that appears to be externally imposed and a gradual change in response to reductions in and changes to statutory funding and the need to diversify income streams. In some cases, while the concept and language of business has become a part of third sector rhetoric, some respondents acknowledged the normative approach to entrepreneurial working as something imported from private sector practice:

“...the bit that's innate is the fact that we can react fast so I think that is probably a characteristic of any third sector org or should be...”(Brenda)

“We do hear a lot [from funders/government] about how to be more entrepreneurial and use the tools that business use “ (Suzie)

“in the recession you've got to behave like a small business, you've got to adapt, so in that sense I think it [entrepreneurial behaviour] is key” (Brenda)

For some being or becoming entrepreneurial was linked to context (recession) and external pressures (from government and funders) and viewed to a certain extent as reactive and compliant. A recent report by the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA, 2015) outlines the critical challenges facing the voluntary sector, including the growing emphasis and encouragement by government to engage with social enterprise activities and seek alternative financial sources. In particular, there is increasing pressure on small and medium sized voluntary organisations that have suffered the most from reduction in public sector funding (Third Sector 2015), and increasing competition from organisations both within and outside the sector (NCIA 2015). This experience is seen in part as a top-down pressure where definitions and boundaries for action are pre-determined, leading to compliance on the one hand, or resistance on the other:

...in the last 5/6 years it's almost been a policy driven word ... You've got to be entrepreneurial.. but they are using it in a different way, new, innovative, sustainable.. You've got to be a social enterprise (Leanne)

It just annoys me the social enterprise word... the government needs to accept ... there are some services that are not about making surpluses it's just about making sure the provision is there... the benefits are in society and in community ... some things just need to be provided” . “It's (social enterprise) not related to what your focus is... sometimes people think it's the be all and end all when actually it is a thing in its own right.” (Geraldine)

Here we can see that enterprise is seen as a vehicle for achieving social outcomes, rather than being an aim in and of itself. Others warned of the potential dangers of the demand for social enterprise activities: “there's a danger, with social enterprise you know that politicians see you as a social enterprise therefore there's no need for grants any more” (Grace) and another “if we start saying we're fantastic entrepreneurs and can make loads of money, we're going to do a disservice to other charities who don't have a trading arm, there are charities who rely heavily on grants” (Leanne). This reflects the more communal, social perspective within the third sector, the mindfulness of the implications not just for their own but fellow organisations.

In contrast, for others being entrepreneurial was about proactive thinking and resistance: offering opportunities to become more sustainable and less reliant on grants:

“Rather than fighting everybody else for what crumbs are left on the table wouldn't it be better to be having our own plans to try and reduce our reliance on that kind of funding” (Joanne)

“I think it's vital that we have entrepreneurial people in the third sector, other than that we become an arm of government, and I think we lose our whole basis for being” (Mair)

From these examples, we might envisage the social entrepreneur as Roper and Cheney (2005 cited by Humbert 2012, p.5) as ‘an individual drawing on the social and economic capacity of his/her environment while embedding these resources in the current capability of their organisation and position in society’. This also links to the findings of NCVO (2015b, p.16) that charities have responded to a challenging economic environment by raising more income through fundraising activities and fees for charitable services, “rebalancing finances away from government and towards general public where possible”.

Participants identified similar characteristics of what they considered to be ‘entrepreneurial behaviour’ or developing an entrepreneurial identity. These included being a pioneer, an innovator, a risk taker. It entailed the capacity to create and communicate a vision, to demonstrate drive, commitment, tenacity and a passion for an idea, service, process or product. This appeared to parallel the passion participants identified which had attracted to, and kept them in, the third sector. Even so, there is clear overlap here with private sector generated definitions of entrepreneurship (Gartner 2002; Shane & Ventakaram 2000).

Diversity of definition begins to appear in other aspects identified by participants. For example, one of the key ways that they identified the third sector as being entrepreneurial, innovative, and risk taking was in its (their) ability and capacity to take chances, in their abilities to identify and develop opportunities, to try things out through testing and ‘piloting’. This reflects some of the findings of Huysentruyt (2014) regarding the more radical type of innovation found in

social enterprises compared with profit making businesses. This type of freedom and flexibility was closely linked by participants to the value as well as the attraction and motivation of working in the voluntary sector and social enterprise – i.e. the capacity to try and test out new ideas and services in ways in which other sectors, particularly public sector organisations were unable due to organisational size, structure, culture, bureaucracy and regulatory constraints. As one participant said “it's also not being afraid of failing, because failing teaches you every time, much more than when you're successful, and that's how we've got our best projects” (Leanne).

Significantly entrepreneurial behaviour could be demonstrated in terms of identifying opportunities to build relationships with other organisations within the third sector and importantly outside with private and public sector organisations. Here this brokerage role of developing networks between and across organisations has resonance with creating and developing individual and organisational social capital. According to Yetim (2008 p. 881) “collectivistic, mutually dependent community relations are the main elements effective both in female entrepreneurship and in social capital”. While Redien-Collot (2009) found variances in women’s use and perception of authority and its influence on the development of social capital, participants identified collective outcomes: to contribute towards the survival and/or sustainability of their own organisation in terms of for example partnership working, collaboration, even merging of organisations within the sector. Many of the women managers identified how they’d met the recent economic challenges by working with other voluntary organisations “it (reduced funding and resources) makes you think more creatively and more laterally ... collaborative working partnership working all that’s been on the agenda for so long.. but it does force that a bit more” (Joanne). Ways in which individuals achieved and used social capital networks included knowledge sharing, campaigning and awareness raising, sponsorship, joint bids and “just getting your foot in the door” (Shirley). This was particularly pertinent for organisations increasingly involved with contracts and commissioning of services from public sector “there’s financial pressures on organisations to rethink their business model and the main response are to become a consortium in order to be strong enough to tender for contracts together, to merge” (Marilyn). This is highlighted by Macmillan et al (2013) as one of the key strategies adopted by voluntary sector managers facing these challenges.

There was also agreement that adaptability and diversification of the organisation and its services or products was a key result of entrepreneurial behaviour. Using and diversifying skills to take up opportunities was seen as vital for both current activity and as reinforcing the continuing relevance of entrepreneurial behaviour to the sector in the future:

“ It's not always about innovation, but it's about a gap, a gap in services, I think we're really, really good at that and we don't think of them as being business skills but they are, they are entrepreneurial.” (Brenda)

“One of the unique factors about the voluntary sector...[is] flexibility...we're able to adapt quickly.. now more than ever.. . “(Bronwen)

The issues of survival and sustainability recur in relation to the need for diversification of income base: “spreading that risk” (Anna). Similarly one respondent argues that “in the longer term you want a charity that's self-sustaining you don't want to be reliant on grants... they're

limiting and they're time consuming" (Shirley). In breaking free of grant-reliance, one respondent explains that it is a realisation of "the difference between surviving and not" where "you have to be brave enough to take a risk" (Geradine), and takes this argument even further:

"I think it's the only way that the third sector is going to exist ... you have to have that brave kind of outlook to know that you can compete in the world... in the end it's a competitive market now like anything else." (Geraldine)

Allied to this are the critical factors identified by participants of time and space needed for planning, reviewing strategies for the future of the organisation and making funding applications. One describes the struggle "you spend your time applying, you apply for a grant and you may apply for 30 grants before you get one, so it's very time consuming" and "I'd much rather be making my own money or making money within the charity to feed the charity as opposed to going for grants, because the grant process can be difficult... if you've spent 4 months writing that bid, and then you don't get it" (Shirley). Whereas some participants had deliberately restructured their organisations to allow themselves as CEOs to work more proactively and strategically "what we've done in terms of reorganisation is enable us to have some breathing space to invest in raising our profile and trying out new ways of making money" (Joanne).

The need for business planning and business acumen, finding a niche or gap in the 'market'- all these terms were consistently used by the majority of participants in relation to the subject of entrepreneurial behaviour. The role of marketing, branding and advertising services, products and the overall organisation was flagged up as being of increasing relevance to the success of their organisations. As Matairea, Morelli, Matsuoka and Uehara-McDonald (2014 p. 235) argue "branding a social cause and marketing are necessary elements in helping to generate new sources of revenue" and "Those who develop mastery in marketing their causes will stand a better chance of securing funds". This reflects some of the findings of Macmillan et al (2013) that rebranding and repositioning were key strategies used by UK third sector organisations to maintain or strengthen their situation in such challenging and uncertain political and economic contexts. Some participants were very clear that identifying ways to 'make money' underlay entrepreneurial behaviour, while others argued that there were broader, non-financial benefits, which moved away from profit to 'the common good'. Where alignment between organisational values, identity and commercial strategies such as branding was achieved, then these processes were embraced and embedded leading to significant investment of time and money. The benefits of this were seen not only in financial returns but also added value in raising awareness and relationship building (Lloyd & Woodside, 2015). Here, success was also seen in terms of achieving a balance between social and economic objectives:

"You've got to look at those two parameters... [Social] innovation and then the money one... (Marilyn)

"Social entrepreneurs, that's the two together... I think you could be very entrepreneurial but that doesn't earn any money, you could come up with the most fantastic innovative ideas, not generate any income, all I'm saying is if you can get both those parameters then bingo" (Marilyn)

Even where balance was achieved, there were clear tensions here in combining commercial and values-based activities. As one participant explained “we are in a competitive market place, but at the same time we've got to keep our values intact” (Suzie). The tensions become more obvious and contentious when these two drivers are seen as conflicting. She further states that, “entrepreneurial means that... on one level you're making money and making sure you're surviving on that money as a business, and being realistic, and on the other hand having a deficit, but your values are driving you” (Suzie). This dilemma manifests itself in decisions for example regarding pricing and charging for services; the paradox of needing to cover costs but wanting to retain accessibility and encourage use of services and develop relationships. As one participant highlighted “it [commercial activity and charging for some services] is mostly advantage as long as you control it and manage it well. What you have to make sure is, that you are very visible from the charitable arm” (Leanne). Several other participants argued that values are not necessarily compromised by carrying out enterprise activities, for example beginning to charge private and public sector organisations having provided initial sessions for free “now we're saying do you know what if you want us to come and do a training session for your staff we've got to charge you, because we're releasing staff, we've got to cover our services” (Ruth). Again this is echoed in Lloyd & Woodside's (2015) argument on aligning non-profit organizational identity – its vision and culture, with its commercial activities - as a means for paradox resolution. This effort to create congruence as Fombrun (1996, cited by Lloyd & Woodside 2015 p.4) suggests, enables “coherence between an organisation's identity and the images that the organisation projects” in order to reduce individual cognitive dissonance and legitimise these kinds of social enterprise activities.

The individual as entrepreneur

A significant area of concern for a number of participants was a continuing tension between associative or collaborative entrepreneurship for ‘the common good’ and the “cult of the personality” – the individual as entrepreneur. The socialised aspect of entrepreneurship can be seen in the following responses:

“...entrepreneurial spirit is something that everyone can contribute to, not this one figure head.. we shouldn't ascribe magical qualities to some figurehead ... because everyone's human and can make mistakes, everyone should be just doing their best working within team, seeing the bigger picture ... that includes the leader or manager of the organisation... to ascribe magical qualities to people, well that strikes me as patently wrong, from an equalities point of view... from a common sense point of view” (Brenda)

“I think it's about how you do things isn't it? Not about you as a person...I think we've hit on a concept that is really, really relevant, I think it really needs to be highlighted.. We are the innovators, we are the entrepreneurs in that sense, but that has to be holistic to be within the whole organisation, not just one person” (Brenda).

In contrast some identified risks to their roles and responsibilities as a manager in the third sector of being ‘too’ entrepreneurial. Several participants, for example, described themselves as ‘mavericks’ with risk taking proclivities. One respondent warned against such behaviour suggesting that “they [entrepreneurs] are not always the safe choice [for] leadership roles”

(Ruth). This raises questions of how much entrepreneurship is enough and in which contexts is it seen as most legitimate or 'real'?

In terms of encouraging or promoting entrepreneurial behaviour in the third sector there were some concerns about how this could be achieved. If, as one participant posited, "people are driven by values" then enterprise and entrepreneurial behaviour needs to be couched "in terms so that people feel there is congruence between their values and that behaviour being entrepreneurial" (Anna). Whereas one participant stated that entrepreneurial behaviour was now written in to the job description of some key staff, another talked about the recruitment of people into third sector organisations and warned "there's a danger that there will be people who see this as the business model and therefore we have to have the business ethos, well actually we need people who have got a bit of both, and that's why real social entrepreneurs are so good" (Grace), and similarly "you've got to be really careful who you bring in, you've got to have somebody who believes in the vision and mission and believes in doing it...it's a tricky one to get the balance right.." (Joanne). This reflects wider concerns regarding the impact of recruiting workers, especially managers from other sectors, which can have benefits in terms of for example private sector business and commercial experience but has the potential for dilution of core voluntary sector values and ideology (Myers & Sacks 2003). Certainly, the increased speed at which private sector tools and techniques have been incorporated or subsumed into the sector can in part be seen as an outcome of a shift in recruitment patterns (Myers & Sacks, 2013; 2003). What we can see here in responses is the need for "a clear relationship specific to the sector's interests and its primary aims" in order that values-led and sector-specific innovation and creativity is safeguarded rather than stifled by inappropriate use and contextualisation of private sector tools and behaviours (Myers & Sacks, 2003, p 295). This may well be what is meant by 'real' in the quote above.

Rather than an enmeshing of social and economic aims, one participant summed up the duality of social enterprise and the third sector "on one side you have egalitarian... You're there to make a difference to people's lives... entrepreneurial is the other opposite side, in that the third sector recently can't do one without the other..." (Suzie). This participant used a paper doll analogy to encapsulate this duality, where you dress the doll's top and bottom half in different clothes: "You had to mix and match, well sometimes the entrepreneurial might be the bottom and the top is like a hippy top." (Suzie). This again brings to the fore the challenge of balancing potentially contrasting approaches that include combining market based organising with charity based organising within social entrepreneurship (Miller, Grimes, McMullen & Vogus, 2012).

Participants highlighted a number of important tensions between the value driven third sector and the increasing focus on entrepreneurial and social enterprise activities, making this a challenging dimension to their roles as managers. One participant aptly commented, "so the word 'entrepreneurial' - I think there needs to be a bit more debate about what it means, for the third sector, what it means for women in the management position" (Suzie).

The gender binary

Some entrepreneurship literature focuses on comparative study of male and female entrepreneurs. Mukhtar (1998, p. 48) for example argues that men and women form two different kinds of owner/managers, representing two different entrepreneurial groups and exhibiting different forms of entrepreneurialism, hence “gender-based entrepreneurialism... is a subset of the wider entrepreneurial activity within an economy” and, from this standpoint, needs to be researched as such. Here, the researcher needs to be conscious of focal studies in relation to ‘doing gender’ or ‘doing entrepreneurship’ (Ahl & Nelson, 2010).

However, this is not a universal view. There are suggestions that there is greater variation by sector than by the gender binary, meaning that gender trends may be diminished or varied by the intervention of sector forces. Rosa & Hamilton (1994 p. 25) also point to serious methodological implications of such studies in that “variables vary so widely between sectors, precise ‘gender’ findings of a study may be a consequence of the sector mix of the sample as much as genuine social trends”. It can be seen then that the sector context is significant when exploring the issue of gender and entrepreneurship. Indeed, Ahl & Nelson (2010, p 6) suggest that there is something lost by ‘not considering variance within groups or across groups based on [something] other than biological sex’. They call for research, which considers institutions (for example the nation, state, religion, welfare, language, data) as a key independent variable, and the intersection of these institutions with entrepreneurship. Intersectionality has been a growing focus in gender and feminist studies (McCall, 2005). For example Sundin & Tillmar (2010; 2008), and Foss (2010) have studied the meeting point of gender and entrepreneurship with different institutional settings - the ‘healthcare’ and ‘elderly care entrepreneurs in the former; networks in the latter. Others point to the extent to which country and cultural specific variables have an influence on women’s entrepreneurship (Verheul 2006; Mueller 2004). An emphasis on the diversity of women’s entrepreneurial behaviour in different contexts has been identified, whether that is geographic, cultural, institutional or social (Hanson 2009; Foss 2010; Ahl & Nelson 2010). Hence the significant and subtle variances in gendered experience is located in the specific context of the organisations and sectors in which women entrepreneurs are located.

Hanson (2009) takes an innovative approach to economic geography and entrepreneurship, supporting a shift in focus from not only economic well-being but key issues such as work-life balance, sense of community and quality of life. This, she suggests, entails moving from national and global perspectives to local ones. Her research explores how the collective action of women as entrepreneurs is changing their own lives and those of others, and in doing so are changing the places they live and transforming women’s identities.

This further suggests that the collective role of female entrepreneurs as opposed to the male orientated individualistic view of entrepreneurialism is particularly pertinent to any exploration of entrepreneurial behaviour of women in a non-profit sector embedded in social and community support values. As such, non-profit entrepreneurs are seen to be motivated by “their beliefs, personal experiences, perceptions of community needs, and desire to provide services to others” (Handy et al 2002, p. 141). Therefore it can be argued that such critical perspectives are reframing literature and research from “entrepreneurship as an economic activity with

possible social change outcomes to entrepreneurship as a social change activity with a variety of possible outcomes” (Calas et al 2009, p. 553).

More recently, the nexus between the two fields of leadership and entrepreneurship has been receiving increased attention, which is pertinent to the role of women CEOs as entrepreneurs. Here too, there is a focus on gender binary and in some instance a lack of gender perspective (Patterson, Mavin & Turner 2012a). Patterson et al. (2012a) argue that future research should question gendered assumptions across these two key areas of study and to learn from the mistakes made from overemphasis on gender dichotomy in leadership studies, to encompass the diversity of female entrepreneurs and their experiences. There are some interesting themes from such combined studies in relation to the need for vision and influence, but also the role of leading other innovative and creative people, hence the importance of transformational leadership approaches is foregrounded in entrepreneurship (Cogliser & Brigham 2004, cited by Patterson et al 2012a; Felicio, Goncalves, Goncalves 2013).

Gender & experience

There were many similarities in participants’ experiences of gender and identity, particularly in relation to the perceptions and treatment of them as women managers from men often from the public sector but also the private sector. They reported experiencing sexist, patronising attitudes in meetings often with local authority representatives and partners, and discrimination in working practices:

“The fact that the gender balance on ... council is very much male... even though they recognise the work we do is good, I don't think they see us as part of the network...definitely we are treated differently from other managers around the table” (Leanne)

“This councillor said well there's not enough bright women in our community” (Mair)

“I particularly get it from local authorities I've got to say.. It's almost like we're non existent really, just keep the women happy up in the valleys ... not much respect there for the sector.” (Leanne)

“Why do we let them, why do we still recruit these people to these positions.. and we're still recruiting this Welsh public sector male” (Joanne)

“Yeah there's a certain type...I've been in meetings, partnership... meetings for the whole of [the city] and have been the only woman, and thought oh my goodness” (Marilyn)

Several participants used the phrase “it's jobs for the boys” to describe the nature of relationships with public sector partners and funders:

“There's still very much an old boy's networks out there...they don't even know they're doing it, they form these men's groups” (Leanne)

Participants explained the different experiences of male and female managers in the third sector of exclusion from key public sector networking opportunities:

“She is not included in anything that is going on at that level... she's absolutely excluded from everything else..”(Leanne)

Some commented on the difficult nature of managing these relationships particularly in the recent difficult economic environment “often when times get tough, the big players, I was going to say big boys but usually they are, close ranks and I think then the challenge for us is maintaining those relationships when things get really really tough, because I think the mentality sometimes, and I think it's a male mentality it's to shut things down and protect and look after, this is certainly happening here” and “there feels like a ruthlessness that I've not seen before”. (Grace)

Another pointed to the assumptions made by managers from other sectors towards women third sector managers :““I get patronised and [there are] expectations that ... I haven't got those qualifications, that I've probably come up through the system” (Brenda). Often, as with this respondent, this assumption was linked with more systemic differences between genders:

“One of the things I find really offensive is that anybody coming from a high position i.e. paid probably 2 or 3 times more than me in the public sector or private sector will automatically assume that they can do my job and do it better” (Brenda)

“When it's really endemic in a culture you don't see it do you? I think my experiences have been more to do with local government, particularly councillors I think where they just don't, you're not equal you're definitely not seen as equal and there's that surprise, you're ok as a policy officer, in that supportive caring secondary role, but then when you get higher up..” (Joanne)

While some of these observations may be related to interpersonal relations, there are enduring systemic and institutional problems with regard to the experience of women in work. Despite the prevalence of women in voluntary sector workforce, there is still a gender pay gap, although there was a fall in the pay gap in 2015 to 16.3% lower than male pay (compared with 18.6% in 2014) (ACEVO 2015). In addition despite the fact that women make up two-thirds of the workforce only 1 in 10 women reach the highest levels of management in the voluntary sector compared with 1 in 5 men (NCVO 2015a).

Even in a sector that traditionally pays its senior staff less than in other comparable size organisations in other sectors, there is a significant pay differential between males and females. In 2015, there was a reported £10,000 gender gap in chief executive pay. Additionally, women made up the majority of chief executives of smaller charities, but were much less represented in medium-sized and larger organisations (ACEVO 2015) emphasising the continued vertical segregation identified by Teasdale (2011). In addition, while there is a higher proportion of part time work in the voluntary sector (39% compared with 30% and 25% in public and private sector), there is a dearth of part time senior roles, limiting options for balancing personal responsibilities and leadership roles (NCVO 2015a; Lewis 2010).

As Teasdale (2011) highlights there is also evidence of horizontal segregation in the voluntary sector. As previously mentioned, women are over represented in health and social care sub-

sectors. This further compounds stereotypical assumptions about the types of work perceived as appropriate for women.

All of these combine with the predominance of a masculine construction of leadership in the workplace, which both affects and is affected by perceptions and attitudes to women managers in the sector. This confirms and reinforces the gendered expectations of leaders, and the prevalence of masculine models of leadership. This suggest Patterson et al. (2012b), leads to women in leadership roles being undervalued, which can be seen in some of the responses below:

“Some people see the third sector, not just women, although it's predominantly women I guess as a cuddly warm sector...it's not like that any more, it's a professionalised sector... I think we're not taken as seriously as we should most of the time... I think they think we pick these 'little' jobs because it's not challenging it's not difficult, it's easy money...”(Leanne)

“I think proportionally I'd imagine we've got more senior managers who are women again because it's seen as the soft sector and everybody's caring and all those stereotypes, we're still up against it again in meetings you've got to be hard edged... you still have to play the game” (Brenda)

As can be seen from the responses above some of the “assumptions being made about women’s roles within the workplace revolve around a variety of aspects including sector employment type, competencies based on gender, soft/hard skills, etc.” (Claus, Callahan & Sandlin, 2013 p.340). In the final comment above there are aspects of working against stereotypes and game playing, which was echoed by other participants who described the need to assert themselves in meetings to counteract discriminatory attitudes and behaviour. The language used by participants emphasised continuous struggle and the need for personal tenacity and strength; constantly ‘fighting to be seen as equal’ as needing to ‘prove ourselves in our leadership roles’. Interestingly, the more the third sector has become a legitimate place of work, the visibility of gender gaps and differences has become greater:

“Before that [professionalisation of the sector/shift from ‘organisation’ to ‘business’] men had seen it as a woman's thing that it was very much, they were doing good works, ... It wasn't seen as a proper profession. Once it was seen as a proper profession we had this whole influx of men ... we found it really, really difficult because I knew good women and we had phenomenal skills, but we weren't getting the opportunities when applying for jobs. You'd maybe get shortlisted you know five men and me.. it was tokenism that they had to have one woman at least..” (Katie)

As well as identifying barriers between genders in terms of assumptions regarding role and capabilities, participants were also clear in the contribution they thought women brought to management in the sector and identification of entrepreneurial capabilities. Many of the key themes resonate with academic and practitioner discourse on feminisation of business and a focus on collegiate relationships and networked approaches to leadership, with a concomitant focus on awareness and reflexivity, values and ethical consideration, post-heroic leadership and ‘emotional competence’ (Binns, 2008). Several mentioned specific ‘nurturing’ approaches

such as coaching, others identified emotional intelligence and resilience although it was noted that not all women possess these characteristics:

“I think the whole issue around how women lead and actually change things for the better is very different to what men do” (Grace)

“I think the coaching or nurturing whatever you want to call it as the core of good management and good leadership” (Brenda)

“Women are more inclusive, they are more emotionally intelligent on the whole, although I know some women who are not, but on the whole I think there's something about wanting to empower others, so I think that's what women - I think that's what good women - bring to leadership roles, an understanding and [are] actually mindful of how things might feel for somebody else...You can be ruthless but still think things through..”. (Grace)

Certainly when describing their own leadership styles and practice there was consensus around use of coaching and mentoring, inclusivity, transparency, shared responsibility, and of empowering and developing staff, and involving of staff in decision-making. Bruni et al. (2004) explore the issue of “doing gender, doing entrepreneurship’ as practices learnt and enacted in particular environments. In their entrepreneurship ethnographic research they found women practising gender and entrepreneurship in forms other than the one dictated by masculine models of entrepreneurship - the heroic, innovative, risk-taking, rational leader. To a certain extent, this reinforces the earlier suggestion (Ahl & Nelson 2010) that there is a need to consider variance within groups such as women and to study the diversity of experiences, taking into account specific contexts within which entrepreneurship and gender are being practised. In this way, the idea of ‘otherness’ of women entrepreneurs can be challenged (Kyrö, 2009). Moreover, concepts of female entrepreneurship can become more defined and visible.

Learning and modelling entrepreneurial behaviour

Having good leader role models – particularly women – was also seen as important in supporting and developing women’s entrepreneurial capacity and actions. There have been several studies on the importance of entrepreneurial self-efficacy and gender, for example BarNir et al. (2011) found that role models had a greater influence on entrepreneurial self-efficacy for women than for men. The significance of access to female role models was not only limited to the workplace. Many spoke of the influence not only of colleagues in the sector, but often of older family members who influenced their perspectives and motivation to work in the third sector and social enterprises, and of early politicisation processes:

“She [grandmother] lived with us for a while when I was a child, so it's probably partly her influence. She was a member of the co-op, she was a founder member of the Townswomen’s guild.... a background of socialism... she was amazing... She’s one of my role models... She was a staunch labour supporter.” (Brenda)

“My mum was somebody who ... was like an unpaid volunteer. As a little girl I looked up to my mum... she used to take me with her, so I was steeped in it, I knew about it. I'd go along and help her cook... meals on wheels...it came from my mum... She was my

first mentor, but she wanted to make the world a better place to live in , and that's been my motivation” (Suzie)

“She [mother] was an amazing woman ... she really had this thing about looking after people ... What’s really bizarre is what she was doing, is what I started the umbrella body for in Wales... it was exactly the services that I kind of grown up in.” (Joanne)

These biographical notes also help to ‘place’ women in their familial and community networks. Here there is an emphasis on the importance of close family and social groups (Hanson & Blake 2009). These are seen to impact both on the individual in terms of their personal and social development, and also link to an awareness of a wider community benefit. These early influences are also later mirrored in how as managers, many of the women talked about the importance of support mechanisms such as meeting and talking with other women managers in the sector. The majority of those interviewed had benefitted from this kind of informal support. Some discussed their attempts to seek out informal peer and mutual support or in some cases to set up more formal networks, often as a counter to male dominated environments:

“I was thinking in a way it's a reaction to the men's networks you know or going to the pub after work and oh ... say playing golf....” (Leanne)

Again the relevance of social capital is emphasised. Many highlight the value of knowledge sharing and support and there was acknowledgement of the value of continuous development and learning. This ties in with the argument made by Mataira et al (2014 p.238) that “Investing in the areas of organisational capacity and social capital is an integral part of long term sustainability”. Most of the participants highlighted the help they’d given and received as part of networks or peer support in facing the difficult economic environments of recent years, for example “in our (name of network) group we’ll feed back everything that’s coming from (three local authority areas), so we can be looking at it and say ok where do we need to go next.. it’s great so that we know exactly what’s out there and what we’re up against”. In the same way that many sought out informal peer support, women were actively seeking out both formal and informal learning opportunities. For example:

“I learn so much from other people, sort of peer kind of learning” (Grace)

“Sitting on the board... being involved with a really good third sector organisation has had a huge impact on me” (Leanne).

All emphasised the on-going learning that they had sought out and benefitted from, not only for themselves but to pass on to staff and develop their organisations:

“I want to be the best that I can be at what I’m doing, I can only be that if I’m constantly learning and challenging how I think about things” (Ruth).

“Identifying things that are obviously going to benefit me personally in terms of my learning but everything I learn I bring back to (organisation) “ (Ruth),

“Everything should be a source of learning, organisational memory” (Marilyn),

There is a clear link here to literature examining the role of entrepreneurial learning (Rae 2005), which argues that entrepreneurial practice is learned experientially through negotiated processes such as networks and joint ventures, as well as contextual learning. Experiential learning can also be important in terms of examining and reflecting on practice confirming leadership. For example, Fenwick (2002) examines women's perspectives on their experiential learning through their work as entrepreneurs, and suggests that this can influence their meanings of success. This in turn may support a view of success that is divergent from '[t]raditional signifiers of business success ... profit, size and growth rate, rooted in a capitalist discourse of enterprise viability, which aspires to continuing expansion to assure competitive position and thus survival' (Fenwick 2002, p.167) which would be indicative of women's experience in this context.

Conclusion

While participants' experiences were diverse, there were many similarities in their perspectives, influences and approaches to management in relation to their role as women managers and gender issues. Most identified themselves as feminists and a shared feminist ideology was apparent amongst most of the participants. This supports the findings of Handy (2002; 2007) who notes a lower prevalence of shared feminist ideology for women in for-profit businesses compared to their NGO counterparts. Many of the current respondents outlined the impact of their feminist views on their choice of sector and motivation to remain. This was particularly relevant to their choice of organisational setting (the issue base of their organisation,) and also influenced their approaches to leadership, their management styles and their working relationships:

“For me feminism is about equality, about fairness about justice, it's about respect for all genders, ...”. (Katie)

“Issues that matter to me as a person and that are in sync with my current job and with what I believe in... so stuff around gender equality stuff around being a feminist.” (Anna)

“Even though I'm a feminist and I absolutely believe in opportunities for women, we're all different, all women are different so there's really good examples of managers you know, not just managers, workers in the sector and then really bad examples” . (Leanne)

Humbert (2012) argues that research on social entrepreneurs fails to adequately consider gender, or women's contribution to social entrepreneurship. Similarly in mainstream entrepreneurship literature there is an over emphasis on individualistic characteristics of social entrepreneurs that privileges masculinity. If we envisage the social entrepreneur as “an individual drawing on the social and economic capacity of his/her environment while embedding these resources in the current capability of their organisation and position in society” as suggested by Roper & Cheney (cited in Humbert, 2012, p5) then we start to see images of the women who participated in this study. Rather than seeing women as 'other', as inhabiting a 'deficit position' in leadership and entrepreneurial practice and research, there is space to explore and create “new models or adapting these to the area of the 'social' and the 'female' simultaneously” (Humbert 2012) based on women's experience and perspective.

The emerging findings from this qualitative research illustrate the diversity of perspectives even within the particular context of small and medium sized third sector organisations in Wales. There is, however, an emerging consensus on key issues – the issues that matter in this context. It confirms the relevance of entrepreneurial behaviour to the third sector, and the widening definitions of entrepreneurial behaviour from the mainstream literature for example in terms of opportunities for relationship building. All participants identified collaborative working and the impact of learning, support and networking, mentoring and role modelling particularly in relation to other women in similar roles in the sector as key contributors to entrepreneurial understanding and behaviour, including how they have dealt with the financial trials of the past few years, and achieved organisational sustainability.

While there is a growing body of research in the management of the voluntary sector more generally, this has tended to focus on non-government organisations (particular in the fields of social development) and on large charities. Much of the research is primarily from a gender neutral or gender blind perspective. There continues to be limited research and underdeveloped theory in relation to women managers in the voluntary sector, and specifically entrepreneurial studies. There are gaps in third sector studies for example, on entrepreneurial teams and women social entrepreneurs' conceptualisation and experience of risk (Humbert, 2012). In response, this study begins to shine light on the particular context of small to medium third sector organisations and the experience of women senior managers and their perspectives on the challenges and benefits of managing such voluntary sector organisations and social enterprise activities. Gaining a greater understanding of these managers' experiences and context will remain relevant as demand for services is likely to keep growing, the environment continues to change with the impending local government re-organisation in Wales, and the pessimistic economic predictions for the immediate future of ongoing cuts to public sector funding under the new Conservative government. The need for diversity and complexity of response and strategy from these organisations will persist including income and service diversification, closer collaborative and partnership working between voluntary organisations (in some cases mergers), rebranding, and developing strong relationship networks with stakeholders such as potential donors, local communities and public sector representatives (Macmillan, Taylor, Arvidson, Soteri-Proctor and Teasdale 2013). As Matairea et al (2014, p.241) sum up, leaders within the voluntary sector have to equip and develop their organisations' adaptability and "Those who are able to refocus and reposition themselves in a changing fiscal and political environment will also fare better than those who, for whatever reason, do not innovate".

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