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Minority Women Leaders' Experiences of Shattering the Glass Ceiling in Public Administration

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Walden University

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Trina N. George

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Minority Women Leaders' Experiences of Shattering the Glass Ceiling in Public
Administration

by

Trina N. George

MA, Mississippi State University, 2004

BS, Mississippi Valley State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2020

Abstract

Little research explores the experiences of women who have successfully attained careers in the highest echelons of federal service. Using Gregory-Mina's conceptualization of the great man theory as the foundation, the purpose of this general qualitative study was to understand the experiences and achievements of 7 women who advanced in the federal leadership hierarchy. This study used secondary data that is part of the Public Administration Genome Project holdings and these data were analyzed using inductive coding followed by a thematic analysis procedure. Data analysis revealed common experiences including that all of the women experienced a lack of mentors and role models, they encountered significant work culture barriers, and they shared the sense that advancement opportunities existed but were not easily attained and in many cases involved women having to relocate or accept less than ideal positions in order to align themselves with opportunities for success. The study provides hope to current and future generations of women by highlighting success stories about those who broke the glass ceiling. The implications for positive social change include recommendations to the Office of Personnel Management to expand civil service opportunities for women leaders in a way that is appealing to the target population.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, my heartbeats, Stephen II, Sterlin and Shaunna, who have endured my many days, nights and weekends of writing and have given me the endless love, unwavering support, hope, and unlimited patience to make this work possible. I pray this inspires you to seek your passion and achieve your own goals. Always remember, anything is possible. You are my greatest gift from God. To my family, Mom (A true woman of God), Will and Will II, and to the George/Whirl Families, and Pastor Ernest Hargrove and my entire church family thank you for your encouragement and endless support. To the phenomenal women in my life, Vada, Cintheia, Jean, Gwendolyn, Cheron, Eileen, Ida, and Kiamshi Study Group, I thank you my sister circle. Last and certainly not least, to Congressman Bennie G. Thompson who gave me a grand opportunity in life and encouraged me to pursue my educational desires. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart to the depths of my soul. To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, thank you for always answering my calls and guiding me in the right direction in life. Amen.

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future leaders. Your unwavering passion for righteousness and equality makes it all worthwhile. Do not ever stop leading the way. Finally, it is with sorrow that I thank the late Dr. John Dickey, the founder and administrator of the Public Administration Genome Project (PAGP). Dr. Dickey believed in my work and encouraged me to collect the data used in this project to develop a case for the PAGP. Unfortunately, Dr. Dickey's untimely death prevented the use of the data for its originally intended use.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically as well as today, females have been disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions. The glass ceiling is not a new phenomenon, and the term evolved in the 1980s. Phenomenon is analogous to what some have referred to as the “Good Old Boys Club.” Research has revealed gender discrimination is a significant factor in the unequal treatment of women in the workforce (Bingham, 2008; Chamallas, 2010; Eckmann, n.d.). Although women have progressed significantly across public and private sectors, a leadership gender gap still exist in the 21st Century (Weisberg, 2015). According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the agency charged with overall personnel management of federal employees, women have been underrepresented in leadership positions for decades (OPM, 2007b; U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2008.). Even with a 3.42% increase in women’s advancement to leadership, growth was inconsistent across the organization (GAO, 2008; Wiesman, 2011).

This research study, by assessing archival interview data of women leaders in a federal agency I will call “Agency R,” seeks to better understand how women break the glass ceiling. As of Fiscal Year 2015, of the 450 executive positions in the United States Department of Agriculture, Agency R’s parent agency, women occupied 150 (33%) of those positions and men occupied (67%) (CRS, 2015). Furthermore, there were twice as many men in leadership as women in every leadership category. For example, in the Senior Executive Service, 135 were women and 214 were men; of 14 Executive Schedule positions, 4 were women and 10 men; of 24 Senior Level positions, 5 were women and

19 were men; of 42 Scientific and Professional positions, 4 were women and 38 were men; and of 21 Research Assistant positions, 2 were women and 19 were men (CRS, 2015). During her tenure as the Director of OPM, Archuleta (2015) stated that the glass ceiling is significantly prevalent in today's workplace and the agency was working hard to remove the barriers women face in gaining seats at decision tables at every level of Federal service. Catalyst, an organization that emphasizes the expansion of women's roles in the workplace, contended that there are not enough females in the highest levels of power to illustrate how women function at this level (Catalyst, 2005). In the private sector, 50% of the decision-making positions in law firms should be occupied by women if leadership represents the general population: however, they are still dominated by men (Leung, 2013). The focus of this study was to explore the barriers and successes women in senior-level positions in Agency R experienced as they rose to the top levels of the federal leadership hierarchy. The women in this study worked at some time in their career with Agency R in Georgia, Missouri, South Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

Background of the Problem

In 1976, realizing the need for reform in the Federal hierarchy, former President Jimmy Carter vowed to implement changes. As a result of Carter's commitment, the Civil Service Reform Act passed in 1978 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was established to safeguard against discrimination including gender-based promotions and advancements (OPM, n.d.).

Gender balance requires the equal and active participation of women and men in all areas of decision-making (FAO, 2015). However, over the years, women have encountered multiple obstacles that impacted their ability to gain leadership positions. Gender has been identified as a key barrier in leadership succession planning (Lantz & Maryland, 2008). Congress established the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (FGCC) in 1991 to address gender inequity. According to the Commission's report, women and minorities comprised 3% of senior leadership positions in Fortune 1000 industrial corporations but made up 57% of the workforce (Civil Rights Monitor, 2015). Research findings revealed that corrective actions were needed to remove the invisible barriers that deprived women and minorities opportunities to reach top ranks in the workplace (Civil Rights Monitor, 2015). Additional research is necessary (Duffy, 2013).

The FGCC's 1995 report recommended the need to eliminate three types of barriers for women and minorities to gain equal access to executive suites: (a) societal barriers, possibly outside the direct control of business; (b) internal structural barriers that are within the direct control of business; and (c) governmental barriers (Civil Rights Monitor, 1995). Over the past 30 years, there has been significant growth in the number of women in leadership. In Fortune 500 companies, men advanced to leadership positions at a faster pace than women (Wolinski, 2010). Women comprised 16% of all Corporate Officers, 14% of Board of Directors members, 1% of Chief Executive Officer positions, and 5% of the top wage earners. (Wolinski, 2010). Women have made progress breaking the "glass ceiling"; still, they remained minorities in senior leadership positions (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008; McGrath, 2007; Wolinski, 2010).

In January 2010, Carlton Hadden, Director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Office of Federal Operations (OFO), appointed a work group that identified multiple obstacles impeding the advancement of women in the Federal sector. The obstacles included: (a) inflexible workplace policies challenges with caregiver obligations; (b) higher level and management positions remained harder to obtain; (c) women were underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields; (d) women and men did not earn the same average salary; (e) subconsciously gender biases and stereotypical perceptions about women played a significant role in employment decisions; and (f) perceptions that agencies lacked commitment to achieving equal opportunities for women (EEOC, 2010).

According to the publication “Work in the 21st Century”, 99.6% of all top executives of Fortune 500 companies were men (Ross, 2017). The exclusion of women from the executive ranks also is reflected in compensation with women being in the minority in occupations with median salaries of \$90,000 and above. The situation in the private sector was a bit better compared to governmental organizations. In the federal workplace in 2016, women were increasingly progressing to leadership positions. Women comprised 34.4% of senior executives, compared to 14.6% (approximated) in the private sector.

In 2011, women comprised 43.81% of the federal workforce; however, their numbers in the upper levels of employment are underrepresented. Only 37.77% of the GS-14 and GS-15 positions were occupied by women. The situation in the Senior

Executive Service was even more skewed toward male employees with only 29.1% of its ranks occupied by females (OPM, n.d.a).

In broad terms, my research identified and analyzed barriers women encountered and overcame to advance to leadership positions in the federal civil service. Specifically, I explored the journey of seven Agency R female leaders from five different states. The General Accounting Office (GAO) has provided “year-end data snapshots” of the gender disparity of the federal workforce; however, it has not provided an examination of the reason for it (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008, p. 421). When women progressed to leadership, they were indoctrinated by the existing power structures (generally men) to preserve the status quo; although the gender makeup was different, the fundamental structure remained intact (Jakobsh, 2012).

No concrete data were available regarding the reasons for gender disparity in federal leadership positions and plans to close it. Consideration of multiple factors is necessary to identify required changes to policy, design, and development in the public and private sectors to eliminate gender inequality. This research may assist women in minimizing or alleviating barriers to career advancement, draw attention to the importance of gender diversity in leadership ranks, and assist public sector managers devise strategies to remove barriers.

Statement of the Problem

Obstacles have continued to exist for women pursuing progression to leadership positions within the federal government, especially the GS-14, 15, and senior executive service positions (Wilkerson, 2008). Women comprised 43% of the federal workforce;

however, they were underrepresented in the upper level positions of the civil service. (Grossman, 2014). The average federal employment grade for women was a full grade level below the average for men, and average women's pay was 11 cents less per dollar than for man. Nevertheless, research was limited regarding the specific experiences of women advancing to top levels of federal leadership. The federal government needs to increase the number of women in leadership positions to improve gender diversification (Eagly and Chin 2010)

Specifically, the problem was the inadequacy of Agency R's efforts to prepare and promote women to top leadership positions. Agency R did not offer enough opportunities for women to close the gender leadership gap and break through glass ceiling. Data from Agency R reflected that in 2014, 1,373 or 33% of the workforce were men, 2,835 or 67% of the workforce were women; however, 65% of the leadership positions were occupied by men. Of the 2,835 women in Agency R's workforce, 290 were GS-13s, GS-14s, and GS-15s, and 3 were senior executives. Women in top leadership positions (GS-15 through SES) in Agency R progressed at a slower rate than their male equivalents. Leadership believed the gap was attributable to women not possessing necessary qualifications for advancing to the key positions (OPM, n.d.; Rosenberg, 2007; Trent, 2007).

This qualitative study documented the lived experiences, including the barriers and accomplishments, of successful women who secured top leadership positions within the GS-14, GS-15, and Senior Executive levels in Agency R. This study explored how these women broke through the glass ceiling in the federal government and may assist

Agency R and other organizations increase leadership opportunities for women through coaching, training, mentoring, and recruitment.

Study's Significance

The leadership gender gap gained attention in the 1980s and 90s; however, the gender gap or “glass ceiling” was still prevalent at the time I conducted my study. The number of women in the highest levels of power were so low that it was impossible to illustrate how women operated at the top levels (see Gary, 2012). The historical context of the gender gap in leadership establishes the slow growth patterns of women’s ascent to leadership, provides evidence of the continuation of the “glass ceiling,” and helps reveal trends and developments about the topic. In 1987, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) statistics revealed women comprised only 2% of top management positions and 5% of corporate boards (Childress, 2010). In 1991, the Glass Ceiling Commission’s reported that women and minorities comprised 3% of senior leadership positions in Fortune 1000 industrial corporations but made up 57% of the workforce (Civil Rights Monitor, 1995). As of March 31, 2015, women held 34.4% of the senior executive Federal service positions and 14.6% of similar jobs in the private sector (Archuleta, 2015).

Although, women have made advancements into leadership positions, additional progress is warranted because barriers still exist. Data analyzed by this study can provide a basis for the changes to overcome the gender leadership gap. The data showed that most senior executives in the public and private sector were male; therefore, women in leadership must keep the glass ceiling in the forefront to increase awareness, implement

solutions, and further eradicate the barriers to leadership imbalances. This study provides information that Agency R's parent organization can use to better understand the obstacles, actual and perceived, of women in the Federal government (in their organization) who seek leadership opportunities above the GS-13 level. The agency itself has an opportunity to gain direct insight on areas in need of attention (barriers) and use the information to build opportunities for women to advance to leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and senior executives in its organization.

When women are part of the management team, companies experienced better financial performance (Catalyst, 2005). Moreover, it is necessary for organizations to employ talented and motivated individuals regardless of gender. This study revealed the barriers seven women experienced and successfully overcame, supplementing existing research. The views of the women in this study sometimes differed from those currently identified in the literature. Limited research exists about how women have overcome obstacles to advance to GS-14 through SES ranks in the federal government (Lewis, 2006; Simmons, 2009; Weaver, 2008; Witherspoon, 2009 and Womack-Gregg, 2010). Consequently, my study provides researchers data to assist in determining the impetus for women to pursue leadership in the 21st Century in spite of the various obstacles they endured to break the "glass ceiling." Findings from this study also may assist current and future generations of women to navigate the federal system and to accelerate their climb to key leadership positions. Hopefully, the shared experiences of the seven study participants also will inspire current female federal leaders to reveal the challenges they encountered in their career advancement. Existing research on gender disparity is broad

based and not focused on the issue in the federal civil service. The testimonials from the women in this study can provide Agency R, as well as other federal agencies, with new insights about how to end gender disparity. I found the stories of the women interviewed for this study were powerful and inspiring and they can provide a roadmap to gender equality in Agency R.

Nature of the Study

This study is a secondary analysis of data originally collected for the Public Administration Genome Project (PAGP). The PAGP seeks to identify topics, variables, and relationships in public administration field. The qualitative method was used to collect the original data and made it suitable for examining barriers, which hindered participants' (in this case, women) progression to top positions in the Federal leadership (GS-14, GS-15, and senior executive) positions. Experiences can be prime sources of knowledge. A comprehensive description of experiences provide the "... basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essence of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13).

Empirical studies allow the observer to focus on producing a description of a phenomenon of everyday experience to achieve an understanding of its important structure (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). Qualitative methodologies can give deep insight into the lifeworld or lived experience of participants by exploring the human condition. The data collection is often conducted through interviews and usually begins with specific questions to gather concrete examples of everyday experience and then moves into general questions (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014). A qualitative research design

originally was used to collect the data for the PAGP and allow the researcher solicit subjective accounts of participants' experiences as they journeyed to top leadership positions in the Federal Government, furnishing inclusive accounts. The data collection method used allowed me to discover the essence of the participants experiences by allowing them to describe them in their own words. The data used in this study was collected for other purposes; however, the scope and depth of the data made it well suitable for achieving the goals of this study.

Different patterns and themes emerged from my secondary analysis of the stories told by accomplished women who broke through the glass ceiling and ascended to the top level positions of leadership (GS14, GS-15, and senior executive positions) in the Federal Government.

There is no clear demarcation regarding glass ceiling factors. Visibility and explication are necessary "before solutions can be recommended to dismantle, circumvent, or redefine the glass ceiling" (Wrigley, 2002, p. 7). The research questions used to collect the initial data for the PAGP case provided participants the forum to share their positive and negative experiences encountered on their journey to leadership. The data provided a rich record of the lived experiences of the study participants. The secondary analysis performed in this study revealed the impetus that led the women leaders to transcended obstacles and succeed in breaking the glass ceiling.

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: What was the essence of the lived experiences of women who succeeded in overcoming obstacles, breaking

through the glass ceiling, to achieve leadership positions in the Federal Government?

The following sub questions were useful to address features related to the primary question:

RQ1: How does gender impact securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service?

RQ2: What obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service positions in Agency R?

RQ3: What factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

All data for this project came from the PAGP database. Dr. John Dickey, the proprietor of the PAGP, authorized my use of previously collected raw data for use in this study. The purpose of the PAGP is to provide Public Administration Scholars and Practitioners with information to improve study and practice. Therefore, the data is available for this and other studies. The participants, who worked in various states (Georgia, Missouri, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, District of Columbia), provided empirical data that reflected obstacles, accomplishments, and stories about how they successfully overcame the obstacles. That is, participants in the identified states were selected because of the variations in position availability. For example, only one state has GS-14 positions, each state has one GS-15 position, and only Washington, D.C., has SES positions. The limited positions in the states, could be perceived as actual obstacles precluding progression to GS-14 and 15, and SES positions.

Theoretical Framework

The research objective was the identification of obstacles women in the Federal Government encountered while pursuing top leadership positions (GS-14, GS-15, and SES), ultimately succeeding in breaking through the glass ceiling. The great man theory served as the basis for this study's theoretical framework. Great man theorists presumed that leadership is innate – great leaders are born, not made (Gregory-Mina, 2012). The great man theory, however, never considered women as leaders. During the 19th century, further research took place that determined certain individuals had characteristics that made them leaders, hence resulting in the development of trait theories. (Gregory-Mina, 2012)

Feminist theorists examined gender inequality and utilized the data to improve women's lives. Feminist theories not only advanced women, it interrogated “the power to specify insiders-outsiders, movement agendas, and even the progressiveness of theory and practice that claim to be feminist” (Peterson 2004, p. 36). Power is a crucial concept for feminist theory (Allen 2018).

Study participants (GS-14s, GS-15s, and senior executives) broke through the glass ceiling, overcame obstacles associated with the great man and feminist theories that women often confronted in pursuit of career advancement. While some traits were inherent, some could be taught and developed through coaching, mentoring, and training for individuals who become leaders.

In the 21st century, men continue to dominate leadership positions and women have continued to be underrepresented. Part of this phenomenon is a perception that

women were incapable of leading individuals as effectively as males (Eckmann, n.d.).

This research should: (a) serve as motivation for women, in the future, who aspire to achieve top leadership positions as GS-14s, 15s, and senior executives in the Federal Government; (b) assist women to minimize or alleviate barriers to climbing the leadership ladder; (c) draw attention to the importance of gender diversity in the leadership ranks, and (d) assist Federal managers devise strategies to remove barriers.

Women are assumed to be equally or more able of leading given their ability to lead with structure and silent influence (Bingham 2008). Conversely, subscribers of the great man theory believed leaders in this category are the only true managers (Eckmann, n.d.) due to their inherent abilities to lead; gender concerns are overlooked, which is a barrier women experience pursuing unbiased advancement opportunities. Women have encountered multiple inequities: first, in securing leadership positions, and second, in obtaining salaries comparable to those paid to similarly situated men (Bingham, 2008; Chamallas, 2010). Creation of the Merit Systems Protection Board in 1978 has assisted with eradicating barriers to equal pay (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008).

Effectual leadership extends beyond the great man (Mohamad, Silong, Hamzah, Asmuni, & Hassan 2008) and feminist theories; diversity is a vital component of successful organizations and the progression of women to leadership positions (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008; Giraffe, 2011). Succession planning potentially improves the qualifications and talents of women seeking leadership roles within various departments (Helton, 2007). Leadership models and competencies differ for women and men in equivalent positions (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Loenig et al., 2011; Prewitt,

Weil, & McClure, 2011; Psychogios, 2007), likely illuminating the leadership gender gap.

Agency R's Leadership Roadmap highlighted six essential core competencies for managers and executives. Manager competencies (GS-14 and 15) included: (a) creativity and innovation, (b) financial management, (c) partnering and network building, (d) political savvy, (e) strategic thinking, and (e) technology management. Executive competencies included: (a) entrepreneurship, (b) external awareness, and (c) vision. The stated core competencies are essential to women progressing to top leadership positions. Likely challenges and obstacles for women pursuing leadership included: (a) discriminatory practices and preconceptions about leaders, (b) glass ceiling, (c) insufficient or nonexistent leadership training and development or subjective selection procedures, and (d) business and family conflict.

Thomas Carlyle, a 19th century Scottish historian, was the originator of the great man theory. He proclaimed that the "history of the world is but the biography of great men" (Carlyle, 1888, p. 2) and suggested leadership is a trait inborn in individuals. Carlyle believed heroes shape history through intellectual visualization, artistic beauty, leadership competence, and heavenly inspiration (Eckmann, n.d.). Contrary to Carlyle's belief, not all leaders are born; some characteristics are developed through education. Various researchers have debunked the notion that traits are sole determinants for effective leadership (Mohamad et al., 2008). Eckmann (n.d.) pinpointed numerous characteristics of the great man theory: (a) assuming the credit exclusively, (b) appearing concerned for others, (c) being competitive, (d) remaining close to the key managers, (e)

using an assertive voice regarding their knowledge, (f) being devoid of accountability, (g) being controlling, (h) being consumed with talking work, and (i) “seeking to be their own man” (p.8). The significance of women was absent in several organizations wherein the dominance of the great man theory prevailed (Eckmann, n.d.; McEldowney, Bobrowski, & Gramberg, 2009; Mohamad et al., 2008).

According to Anderson (2008), feminist theory is “concerned with questions of agency and power and then conflates an analysis of gender with feminist approaches, [and may appear] unaware of the distinctions between feminist analyses and those that focus on the differences that gender make” (pp. 66, 67). “Feminist theories ... are not only about advancing some group called *women* but also interrogating the power to specify insiders-outsiders, movement agendas, and even the progressiveness of theory and practice that claim to be feminist” (Peterson, 2004, p. 36).

Definition of Terms

Assumptions: In studies there always are things out of your control, but if they disappear your study would become irrelevant (Simon, 2011).

Career advancement: Moving up the career ladder to accept a different position (Rosenfeld & Jones, 1987).

Delimitations: Are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of your study (Simon, 2011).

General Schedule (GS): The pay system of most civilian white-collar Federal employees. Each agency classifies its GS positions following statutory and OPM guidelines. GS positions include grades GS-1 (lowest) through GS-15 (highest). (In

General Schedule Classification and Pay. Retrieved August 10, 2015, from www.opm.gov). Basic compensation schedule resulting from the Classification Act of 1949 (OPM, 2003).

Glass Ceiling: Artificial barriers precluding women from advancing upward in their organization (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1991) including marginally defined image of a leader, gender typecasts, hypocrisy, exclusion from informal connections, adverse mindset and “chilly climate,” and deprivation of organizational/job-related support or mentoring (FGCC, 1995). Barriers preventing women and minorities from advancing in leadership and management positions, (GAO, 2002).

Glass Wall: Job marginalization, inhibiting elevation of women to positions guiding profit and loss (Mattis, 2004).

Limitations: Are potential weaknesses in your study and are out of your control (Simon, 2011).

Management Official: Duties and responsibilities of the position require or authorize formulation, determination, or influence over agency policies (GPO, 2015).

Senior Service Executive Positions (SES): Positions immediately above the GS-15 grade or equivalent level (GAO, 2008). Members serve in key positions immediately beneath top Presidential appointees. These executives operate and oversee approximately 75 Federal agencies and are key connections between appointees and the remainder of the Federal workforce (OPM, 2008).

Supervisor: Individual with authority, in the interest of the agency, to hire, direct, assign, promote, reward, transfer, furlough, layoff, recall, suspend, discipline, remove employees, adjust or recommend grievance resolution (GPO, 2015).

Senior Executive Service (SES) - Candidate Development Program (SESCDP): an approved formal training program used to prepare designated SES candidates for consideration in positions (OPM, 2003). Succession management resource used by agencies to identify and develop SES leaders and candidates' competencies in each of the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs). Graduates typically start with experiences normally obtained at the GS-15 level, or equivalent; some agencies open their programs at the GS-14 level, or equivalent. Certification does not guarantee placement and participation is not required for SES selections. (OPM, n.d.a.).

Assumptions

When data were originally collected for the PAGP case, participants were promised anonymity and confidentiality and reminded they could withdraw at any time because participation was voluntary. Participants were advised of the importance of such research in breaking through the glass ceiling. Therefore, the underlying assumption was that participants' responses to interview questions were truthful. Because participants were informed that their responses would be anonymously shared at the outset, it was assumed they would feel comfortable answering honestly with no threat to their positions or future career advancement. Also, they know that they could withdraw without personal consequences.

Additionally, it was assumed participants would furnish unbiased information regarding their personal experiences. Use of agency data was limited to protect the integrity of participants' information and added additional safeguards to maintain confidentiality. Information that could potentially result in contradictory data was bracketed, thus removing bias. Participants shared their lived experiences related to past and present positions in the Federal service. The validity of the information provided was determined by participants furnishing organizational names, locations, position titles, and/or branches of service for some answers. Also, the participants interviewed provided enough data to meet any additional data collection unnecessary.

Limitations

The scope of this study included seven women employed in top leadership positions (GS-14, GS-15, and senior executive) in Agency R, geographically dispersed in various states (Georgia, Missouri, South Carolina, and Washington, District of Columbia). Survey results were obtained through virtual and face-to-face participant interviews. The geographic location of participants was the major limitation of this study because the participants were located in four states and the District of Columbia.

Delimitations

All data for this project originally was collected for case development for the PAGP. Participants were geographically dispersed in five locations (four states and the District of Columbia), and race, age, and background were not delimitations. The study's population only included women in top leadership positions in the Federal Government. Because there was limited information on the subject, the researcher who designed the

data collection was interested in learning what enabled the study participants to succeed and break through the glass ceiling when so many others did not.

Summary

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study and included background information on obstacles women encountered over the years in pursuing leadership positions. The chapter provided a discussion of the problem and the study's significance, nature, related research questions, conceptual framework, definitions, assumptions, scope, and limitations and delimitations. Specifically, the research concentrated on a branch of a large Federal Cabinet level agency that is referred to as Agency R. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. Chapter 3 covers the methodology and discusses the reasons and methods used in the original collection of the data and how it was repurposed for this study. The chapter also covers ethical issues including the formal granting of permission for the use of the original. Research data and findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 includes individual profiles of and extensive information from the participants in the study. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the research, draws conclusions from the findings and examines its implications and opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Historically, women have been underrepresented in leadership. Congress, in 1991, established the Glass Ceiling Commission to assist women in breaking the glass ceiling” (FGCC, 1995). Although research existed regarding women’s advancement to leadership positions in the federal government, there was no data available regarding the lived experiences of women experience who ascended to leadership positions in Agency R. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and share the journey (lived experiences including successes and barriers) of 7 women in 5 different geographical locations who broke through the glass ceiling, advancing to top leadership positions in Agency R. The literature review is divided into the following sections: literature sources, gender and leadership, past and present, roles of women in management and leadership, trait and great man theories, historical and contemporary women’s leadership, leadership and management defined, leadership models and competencies, organizational diversity, succession planning and talent management, glass ceiling, barriers to success, conclusion, and summary.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review presents historical and statistical information and research studies retrieved from various sources including doctoral dissertations, journals, online resources, Internet websites, government articles. The key terms and phrases that generated substantial and important information included: *glass ceiling, leadership positions and females or women, gender and leadership, barriers to women’s progression, feminist theory, great man theory, balancing work and family, trait theory,*

organizational diversity, SES, leadership models, great man theory, leadership roles, women leaders in the federal government, federal glass ceiling, good old boys club, civil rights, federal leadership training, executives, leadership development, SES candidate development program (SESCDP), leadership qualities, and executive core qualities (ECQ).

Gender and Leadership, Past and Present

Gender remains a significant factor in the unequal treatment of women in the workforce (Bingham, 2008; Chamallas, 2010; Eckmann, n.d.). Ten years after enacting Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Congress determined women were underrepresented in various federal agencies and within higher-level government positions (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008; OPM 2007a). Although women have progressed significantly across public and private sectors, a leadership gender gap still exists (Anne, 2015). Gender also has been identified as a key factor in leadership succession planning (Lantz and Maryland 2008).

According to the Glass Ceiling Commission's report (1991), women and minorities comprised 57% of the workforce but made up only 3% of senior leadership positions in Fortune 1000 industrial corporations. Additional work is necessary to breakdown the invisible barriers depriving women and minorities opportunities to reach top ranks in the workplace (CRM, 2014). The Glass Ceiling Commission's 1995 report recommended the elimination of three types of barriers for women and minorities to gain equal access to executive suites: (a) societal barriers, which may be outside the direct control of business, (b) internal structural barriers that are within the direct control of

business, and (c) governmental barriers (Civil Rights Monitor, 1995). Over the past 30 years, there has been significant growth in the number of women in leadership. Yet, in Fortune 500 companies' men advanced to leadership positions at a faster pace than women (Wolinski, 2010). Women have been breaking the glass ceiling; still, they remain minorities in senior leadership positions (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008; McGrath, 2007; Wolinski, 2010). The following statistics on the percentage of women in various positions illustrate the scope of gender disparity: corporate officers 16%; board members 14%; chief executive officers 1%; and top earners 5%; (Wolinski, 2010).

Although the number of women in the workforce has increased, a 2002 GAO report revealed women remained minorities in leadership and executive positions in the Federal government. During the period from 2000 to 2007 the number of women in the SES pool grew; however, the women were still nonrepresentative across all the OPM organizational components (GAO, 2008). Social theorists, such as Gurian and Annis, contended that gender differences are natural with socially constructed roles (Davis, 2009). Beliefs about ascribed gender roles, ethnicity, religion, abilities, and class influenced the affect gender had on any organization (Davis, 2009).

In the past 40 years, the role of women has transformed greatly. More women than men are enrolled in college and embracing professional opportunities in fields previously considered off limits to females (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Sex and gender are not synonymous; prior leadership studies intertwined them resulting in misinterpretation, rendering findings dubious (Violanti & Jurczak, 2011). Generally, individuals are not feminine or masculine, they are someplace between the

two; consequently, comparisons based exclusively on gender and leadership are unreliable. Sex and gender-based comparisons should be measured (Violanti & Jurczak, 2011). According to Cheung and Halpern (2010), women comprise 50% of management positions in finance, human resources, education, medical, accounts and auditing, and real estate occupations but only 2% are a Fortune 500 CEO and another 2% are Fortune 1000 CEOs.

Roles of Women in Management and Leadership

Prior to the 19th century, women were focused on the home rather than the workplace and their work was primarily caring for and managing family and household. Consequently, they rarely sought external employment opportunities. In 1973 women accounted for only 5% of organizational managers leading Schein to conclude that when you "Think Manager, Think Male" (Schein, 1973). Over 30 years later, in a 2009 report published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, women occupied approximately 40% of the managerial jobs in the United States; however only 2% of the Fortune 500 companies employed female CEOs. While women progressed to the lower and middle levels of management they still were disproportionately excluded from upper levels in organizations. Perpetuation of discrimination against women in leadership could be a causal factor. (Coder & Spiller, 2013).

Employee promotions were based on masculine norms such as self-confidence, decisiveness, aggressiveness, and forcefulness; and, women were at a disadvantage for leadership promotions because of misconceptions regarding their qualities of unselfishness, compassion, and warmth. Women in leadership positions were required to

demonstration strength and anger to fulfill policy in order to achieve gender equity in management (Payne, Fuqua Jr., and Canegami 1997).

Stereotypes are cognitive shortcuts individuals utilize to process information about specific groups. Stereotypes generally evolved from historical or cultural norms suggesting specific groups are naturally prone to or biologically wired to behave in a certain manner (as cited in Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015).

Trait and Great Man Theories

The Great man and trait theories suggested that men were the true managers and thus studies about women in leadership were often ignored. Four of the 6 basic groups of the Great Man and Trait Theories include: (1) environmental, situational, personal-situational, interaction-expectation, humanistic, and exchange theories - all typical for the 19th century; (2) environmental or situational theories - characteristic for the first half of the 20th century; (3) personal-situational theory - characteristic for the period between the 1930s and the 1960s; and (4) three theories developed at the end of the 20th century - the interaction-expectation, humanistic, and exchange theories. Collectively, the theories, particularly the humanistic ones, emphasized the association between leadership styles and motivation, and adjusting style is the key to high motivation and productivity (Stogdill as cited in Buble, Juras, & Matic, 2014).

Regardless of the desire, leadership skills are not learnable traits. Leadership traits were defined as possessing the “right stuff” and are what disconnects leaders from followers (Kirkpatrick and Locke as cited in Cawthon, 1996). Not all individuals possess vital leadership skills and being a great man or woman was unrelated to success (Cawthon, 1996). While Great Man and Trait Theorists suggest leadership, qualities are not

teachable., Transformational leadership model held the opposite view. According to the transformational model if leadership qualities were unteachable and truly natural born traits of men than women would never become successful leaders.

Historical and Contemporary Women's Leadership

While Great Man and Trait Theorists claim only men are true leaders, although not commonly noted in leadership literature, a long and rich history of women displaying leadership skills in non-official roles. Joan of Arc and Marie Antoinette were impressive leaders, despite not heading governments are being officially endorsed as leaders. Inspired by Joan of Arc's morale building, the French managed to win important battles, and Marie Antoinette supposedly played a major role in provoking the French Revolution, as has been the case for so many women leaders of social movements, revolutions, and political causes (Watson, Jencik, & Selzer, 2005).

While not extensively noted, traditionally, women working in the home assumed leadership roles as domestic heads ensuring the household operated efficiently. Over the years, women have demanded and progressed towards increased gender equality, at home and in the workplace. Gender roles are changing; men are managing households and caring for children, and women are breadwinners. With less ascribed gender roles and lifestyles, women are more likely to navigate lives external to the home readily and freely. In the U.S, many women work outside their homes, 46% of the work force. So much has changed; so much has not (Chin, 2011).

In 2010, the U.S. Labor Department reported that approximately 72 million females were counted in the labor force, 58.6 % were 16 years old or over and about

40% were in managerial or professional occupations (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2011). Women did not gain visibility in leadership positions until the 1990s (McEldowney, Bobrowski, & Gramberg, 2009). The leadership gap was evident in the government, business, education, and politics even in light of changing population demographics (Chin, 2011).

Feminist Theory

Feminist theorists examined gender inequality and utilized the data to improve women's lives. Feminist theories not only advanced *women*, they interrogated “the power to specify insiders-outsiders, movement agendas, and even the progressiveness of theory and practice that claim to be feminist” (Peterson 2004, p. 36).

Women were victims of social marginalization, systematically excluded from rights, opportunities, and resources normally available to members of society Ponterotto (2014). In January 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, affording women the right to challenge unequal pay (Ponterotto, 2014). The fact that the Act was the first bill signed by the President demonstrated the existence of gender inequality in the modern workplace. Yet, the U.S. purported to be a world leader regarding gender equality.

The role of “feminist leadership consists of an unquestionable commitment to women; nevertheless, a greater than verbal commitment is necessary; practical issues are involved” (Mitchem 2009. p. 198). Feminist leadership, strived for oppositional empowerment; helping those weaker societal members to connect knowledge to power and have their voices discovered and change effectuated (Lott cited in Bingham, 2008).

The Kellenher model reflected modifications feminist leaders could make exclusive of leading by prevailing rules. Feminist leaders utilize deep structure and organizational relationships to-change people and organizations, permitting gender bias to unfold (Bingham, 2008).

Leadership and Management Defined

Leadership has been defined by as interpersonal influence directed towards a targeted objective (Limbare (2012). Connectivity exist between management and leadership and bilaterally, they contribute to achievement of organizational objectives; nevertheless, only a developed leader can exceed expectations attributable to effectiveness and problem solving (Glamuzina, 2015).

Effective leaders must (a) care about people; (b) set organizational direction including vision, goals, priorities, and strategies; (c) effectively communicate; (d) embrace and instill positive attitudes; (e) be proactive; and (f) mentor and develop subordinates (Shulstad, 2009). Traits of leadership included (a) knowing oneself and having confidence, (b) being empathetic, having great collaboration skills, embracers of diversity, and (c) making the world better while caring about others (Ketter 2008, p30). Leadership also has been considered to be different and separate from management; and leadership traits can be grasp in a learning environment. Leaders possess public power by holding a position in society or an organization and having personal influence over others through innovation and inspiration, whereas managers are more administrators and controllers who manage tasks rather than people. Leaders occupy positions in society or organizations and personally influence-others via innovation and inspiration;

managers are primarily administrators and control and manage tasks rather than people (Prewitt, Weil, & McClure, 2011). Heroic leadership and engaging management focused on gaining trust and respect of others (Mintzberg, 2006).

Leadership Models and Competencies

In a managerial environment, the competence model described performance criteria or the description of the characteristics of a competence performance against which a managers' performance is measured, reviewed, and evaluated. The competence model recognized and described the knowledge, skills and behaviors necessary to perform a role successfully. The model concentrated on how organizations accomplished organizational goals, reflected on how organizations acknowledged competent performance, and guided them to define what was, is, an needs to be accomplished, what is being accomplished and what needs accomplishing (Asumeng, 2014). Typically, organizations tailor competencies based on identified needs. Core competencies were viewed as specific requirements of a position or situation; generic competencies are all-encompassing, shared by all occupations, and extended across all organizations. Generic competencies were assumed fundamental to successful performance in most occupations (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996).

Leaders were deemed to display or exhibit traits which influenced them to act effectively in leadership positions (Klenke as cited in Nixdorff & Rosen, 2010).

Supposedly, women were devoid of the following leadership traits and prerequisites: aggression, competitiveness, dominance, Machiavellianism, ambition, decisiveness, high levels of energy, tallness, a commanding voice, persistence, and assertiveness (Nixdorff

& Rosen, 2010). Prime foundation for leadership contained a balance of fairness, nurturing, integrity, empowerment, and a common goal to focus on the organization's vision and mission, enabling a suitable moral climate which are traits traditionally associated with women (Lantz & Maryland, 2008),.

Successful male performance, according was often attributed to men's internal factors, including his skills and abilities to (Adams & Yoder as cited in Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). Successful female performance was often attributed to external factors tied to circumstances, including luck or the simplicity of the task. Typically, the belief held that women possessed better interpersonal skills and more passive qualities than men; men are perceived as doers and achievers (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015).

Historically, leadership prototypes included predominantly traits attributed to males, rather than females; however, in the 21st century workplace, history is evolving partly because of changing demographics. In fact, some recent research suggested that employees prefer traits customarily linked to female leaders (Girlando and Eduljee, 2010).

Zenger and Folkman (2011) studied the overall effectiveness of 7,280 leaders based on ratings from peers, immediate supervisors, and direct reports. Participants were asked to rate 16 specific competencies critical to successful leadership. Female leaders scored higher in the ascribed feminine traits, such as developing others, building relationships, acting with integrity, and pursuing self-development. In traits considered to cross gender categories women scored higher than men as better leaders. Women scored highest on taking initiative and driving for results, that are typically considered as

male strong suits. Women scored highest on initiative and striving for results, traits typically assumed to be male strong suits. Zenger and Folkman concluded that women outscored men in 12 of the 16 competencies including top leaders and outstanding leadership. Women outscored men to the greatest extent in the categories of taking initiative and driving for results, both competencies were traditionally deemed male traits. See table 1.

Table 1

Top 16 Competencies Top Leaders Exemplify

	Males Score Higher	Females Score Higher	Little Difference
Takes Initiative		X	
Practices Self-Development		X	
Displays High Integrity and Honesty		X	
Drives for Results		X	
Develops Others		X	
Inspires and Motivates Others		X	
Builds Relationships		X	
Collaboration and Teamwork		X	
Establishes Stretch Goals		X	
Champions Change		X	
Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues		X	
Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically		X	
Connects the Group to the Outside World			X
Innovates			X
Technical or Professional Expertise			X
Develops Strategic Perspective	X		

Note. Zenger and Folkman, 2008

Women have not been aided by men in their struggles to achieve leadership, or more colorfully noted "for too long, women have carried the water alone in the name of advancing themselves into leadership positions with limited success" (Traub 2011, p.

36). Women have been making progress into leadership and managerial positions even though progress has been slow. A 2010 Wall Street Journal article noted that at the current rate of progress, gender equity in management positions will not be achieved anytime soon (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

The concept of gender intelligence has led to the characterization of various leadership styles and capabilities (Davis, 2009). The characteristics of transformational leadership has been associated feminine gender traits (Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Martos, 2012). Transformational leadership is theorized to inspire followers to performance beyond expectations by encouraging them to transcend their own self-interests, raising their level of consciousness concerning outcomes, and raising or expanding follower needs levels (Bass as cited in Goodwin, Whittington, Murray, & Nichols, 2011) After examining the moderating effect of trust on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, Neeraj (2009) found the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction was stronger when employees had high levels of trust in leaders; and, conversely, lower satisfaction resulted when employees trust levels were lower. Managers practicing transformational leadership affected changes swiftly and motivated subordinates to improve organizational knowledge and emphasized the importance of being well-informed. These leaders united followers changed their beliefs and purposes, and positively impacted the staff's performance. Transformative leader also had the ability to positively impact the performance of the manage (Shahhosseini, Silong, & Ismail, 2013).

Charismatic leadership effectiveness was generally identified through its effects on followers' motivation, attitudes, and perceptions (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2010). Furthermore, charismatic leadership effectiveness has been demonstrated in outcomes such as the transformation of followers' self-interests into collective interests, follower internalization of the leader's values, and follower commitment to the vision (Howell & Shamir, 2005).

Organizational Diversity

Diversity has been defined as the “acknowledgement, understanding, accepting, valuing and celebrating differences amongst people with respect to age, class, ethnicity, gender, physical and mental ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice and public assistance status” (Wambui, Wangombe, Muthura, Kamau & Jackson, 2013, p. 2).

Essentially, diversity leverages differences, variety, and its benefits to organizations include increased productivity and profitability, cultural awareness, greater acuity, less segregation, and stereotyping, decreased litigation and harassment complaints, improved employee engagement, and personal effectiveness (Distelnorst, 2007).

Women who have through the glass ceiling and gained leadership positions in organizations contributed to changes in workforce demographics (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In 2008, Caucasians were the largest ethnic group in the United States' labor force, comprising 81% of the workforce; African Americans represented 12%, Asians 5%, and other ethnicities 2% (Giraffe, 2011). Change, multidimensional constant in organizations, challenged managers to be innovative leaders; shifting workforce demographics was one of the most relevant changes in of the 21st Century. The change

was significant for the organizations in the United States, and around the world (Cundiff, Nadler, & Swan, 2009).

The U.S. Government Accountability Office found that institutionalizing diversity management in a plan is critical and can led to effective organizational change in five to seven years (as cited in Hur & Strickland, 2015). A diverse workforce has been found to be beneficial to employees due to skill and experience variations (Giraffe, 2011).

This study integrated leadership models and competencies not previously identified by researchers and provided support for additional research and analysis on women. Participants identified competencies required for success in leadership positions.

Succession Planning and Talent Management

Succession planning has been identified as a dynamic activity for key leadership positions and all organizations should execute this responsibility to ensure on-going functioning of vital programs in the event of planned or unplanned vacancies (Cole & Harbour, 2015). Succession planning has been shown to be a dynamic and necessary part of leadership development in organizations (Rothwell (2005). Furthermore, systematic succession planning is used as an organizational strategy that can assist with recruitment and retention of valued employees (McDonald, 2008). An effective strategy for succession planning also has been found to beneficial organizations and stakeholder. Six fundamental benefits of succession planning have revealed that it:

1. Enables organizations to assess talent needs by establishing competency models or job descriptions.

2. Allows leaders to identify and tap (in record time) key people who are available to fill critical work functions.
3. Provides avenues for present and future succession planning and discussions about how to develop talent.
4. Defines career pathways for employees to increase the breadth and depth of organizational knowledge.
5. Provides for a lighter return on investment from employees.
6. Leads to the appropriate promotion of people to meet organizational goals. (Hilton 2007, p. 255).

In May 2003, the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) Administrator endorsed a new Leadership Council for succession planning. This new Leadership Council introduced several succession planning activities that include:

1. Evaluation of the prior succession planning activity.
2. An extensive workforce analysis and identification of mission critical occupations and agency-wide skill gaps.
3. A detailed succession planning project plan with deliverables and due dates plus a validation study of the agency's competency model.
4. A pilot succession planning project utilizing assessment center technology to select candidates to address a mission critical occupation.

The FSIS actions enabled the organization to incorporate succession planning activities and workforce development projects, and integrate them into a comprehensive

human capital development program; empowered agency leaders and provided greater flexibility in resource allocation and the ability to align these programs to meet specific agency needs (Endres & Alexander, 2006).

Additionally, FSIS employed various other measures to enhance its succession planning and leadership development programs including:

1. Obtained a contractor to revalidate its leadership competency model and conduct a baseline assessment of all supervisors.
2. Development of a Transitioning Leader Program (TLP) to support leaders during the first 180 days of new permanent assignments, providing intensive one-on-one executive coaching and assistance of an experienced organization development consultant for strategic planning.
3. Designed and implemented a cross-cutting training program that meets leadership developmental needs, training opportunities include conflict resolution, consulting skills, coaching for leaders, high performance teams, and project management fundamentals. (Endres & Alexander, 2006)

According to GAO data, in fiscal year 2007 (October 1, 2006--September 30, 2007) women comprised 29.1 percent of the SES, as compared to 46.3 percent of the U.S. labor force and 43.2 percent of the U.S. federal government workforce. The data indicated increases in 1990, 11percent; 2000, 19.1 percent; and in 2007, 29.1 percent. Agencies typically used government employee recruitment pools as resources for selecting future career SES candidates; nevertheless, in 2007, women only made up about 34.3 percent of Federal employees in higher-graded positions (see Table 2). There

were gaps in the percentages of women in SES positions compared to those in the total workforce and those occupying positions from which SES candidates are often obtained.

(Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008)

Table 2

Representation of Women Government wide: Career Senior Executive Service (SES) Members and the SES Developmental Pool, September 2007

Rank	Total	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
SES Members	6,555	4,647	71	1,908	29
SES Developmental Pool	149,149	97,991	66	51,158	34

Note. Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2008

Glass Ceiling

The Glass Ceiling Commission, a by-product of the Glass Ceiling Act, consisted of a 21 bipartisan members, tasked to study, and make recommendations to eliminate the artificial barriers of advancement confronting women and minorities (Wilson, 2014).

The Commission's findings substantiated: appropriateness of the "glass ceiling" metaphor, stating a barrier rarely penetrated by women or persons of color existed at the highest levels in businesses; 97% of the senior managers of Fortune 1000 industrial and Fortune 500 companies were white; and 95 to 97% were males (Wilson, 2014).

The term *glass ceiling* was intended to represent the lack of women in the upper echelons of corporate America. The term has evolved and refers to the invisible barrier encountered by all minorities endeavoring to advance into executive level positions (Wilson, 2014). By December 2010, Amazon.com's database included 242 books containing "Glass-Ceiling" in the title and 337 with it in the keyword phrase. Scholarly

journals contribute to the body of knowledge, disseminating information about the "Glass-Ceiling" phenomenon by reporting numerous studies confirming its existence in large firms (Bosse & Taylor, 2012).

Barriers to Success

Extensive research identified barriers women encounter while pursuing and serving as leaders, resulting in the Glass-Ceiling. Barriers that affected women's advancement on an individual level included work and family conflicts and communication style. Organizational barriers included tokenism, exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentorship opportunities, lack of sponsorship, the dynamic that women "get disappeared" in organizations when contributing relationally, salary inequalities, gender discrimination and workplace harassment (Diehl, 2014).

Any of Diehl's barriers had the potential to adversely impact an individual's advancement and successful climb to leadership. Combined, gender-based leadership barriers contribute to the Glass-Ceiling (Cook & Glass, 2014). Some additional common gender-based barriers women encountered were: (1) corporate policies and practices, (2) training and career development, (3) promotion policies, (4) compensation practices, (5) behavioral and cultural explanations, (6) behavioral double binds, (7) communication styles, (8) stereotypes, (9) preferred leadership styles, (10) power in corporate culture, (11) maintaining the status quo "old boy" networks, and (12) tokenism in top management circles (Washington, 2010).

Creating and supporting female networks has been shown to assist women overcome the many challenges they face in organizations; specifically, assisting with:

- 1) Survival, providing a connection to each other females, discussing organizational issues, and assisting with adjusting to the culture.
- 2) Thriving, providing trusted feedback regarding personal development and competencies, enabling women to attain personal career goals.
- 3) Women participating at their fullest potential, helping the organization attain its goals and objectives. (Donnellon and Langowitz as cited in Jones & Schneider, 2010)

Findings by the National Network for Women's Employment (2009) indicated that women constitute more than half of the workforce; consequently, women were viewed to be key to economic recovery. Some researchers recommended that women push Congress to create legislation that would have:

- 1) Actively provide opportunities for women to train for traditionally "male" occupations, generally with wages 20 to 30 percent higher than jobs traditionally encumbered by "females".
- 2) Make certain all job seekers have access to childcare, transportation, and other support services enabling them to complete training, and secure and retain jobs.
- 3) Legislation that provides: Comprehensive Pay Equity; support for working family's day care, and family/medical leave; and government sponsored access to postsecondary education and training (National Network for Women's Employment, 2009).

Given the totality of barriers, it may have appeared that women faced an insurmountable task to break through the Glass-Ceiling; however, many of the strategies have proven helpful to women in organizations seek to break the Glass-Ceiling. The advancement of women to leadership appeared to be timely and daunting but it is achievable and the pursuit worthwhile. This study helped close the gap in literature, extrapolating knowledge about the barriers and successes through the lived experiences of women who broke through the Glass-Ceiling. The women in this study progressed to top leadership positions in the Federal government and their experiences can help provide a path for other women aspiring to leadership positions.

Conclusion

The literature review documented that women's presence in the workforce has increased over the years; however, they still are under-represented in leadership positions in the United States (Fine, 2009). Men focused predominantly on success. Women are more social and nonchalant about careers. Men displayed transactional leadership style and women transformational leadership style (Gillian (2009). According to OPM (2008), of the 1.6 million federal executives, 6,000 (90%) will reach retirement age by 2016; hence, there is a need for increased development and mentorship to ensure a seamless transition from retirees to new candidates. The Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) and Science and Engineering Apprentice Program (SEAP) were designed to assist those pursuing SES positions in the future. Leadership training opportunities have been available for women. For these programs to be beneficial, individuals must take the initiative to seek the information and fulfill

eligibility requirements, conduct the research and compile the data and information to ensure leadership success, and endeavor to assume more industrial rather than service positions (Noble and Sharon 2006).

Summary

Chapter 2 reviewed research related to gender disparity in leadership and management positions. The literature review was divided into multiple sections that included demographic information about the overall and specific extent of gender disparity and data specific to Agency R, components of leadership, and theoretical approaches to the issue. Chapter 3 covers the research methodology employed to conduct this study. The chapter discusses how the data for this project was repurposed from its initial and adapted to the purposes of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The PAGP was founded by Dr. John Dickey to gather data and create a series of cases structured in a way that would assist public administration scholars and practitioners improve theory and practice (Dickey, 2009). The data used in this research project initially was collected to develop a case for the PAGP. Seven minority women who rose to leadership positions in Agency R, a unit of the United States Department of Agriculture, were interviewed for the PAGP. The participants shared their thoughts about gender awareness, barriers they faced in their careers, and the impetus that lead them to advance in the face of adversity. The purpose of this study is to analyze the data originally collected for the PAGP to answer the following research question: What is the essence of the lived experiences of women who succeeded in overcoming obstacles, broke through the glass ceiling, and became top leaders in the Federal Government? The remainder of this chapter will discuss the PAGP in more detail and provide information about how the initial data were collected and analyzed for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

All data for this project came from the PAGP data base. The data collected for the PAGP and repurposed for this study were collected in accordance with the highest ethical standards of qualitative survey research. Dr. Dickey, the founder of the PAGP, provided a written request that the data be collected to include in its database. I received written permission from the current proprietor of the PAGP to use the data for this study. The purpose of the PAGP is to make information widely available to advance scholarship and

practice. Therefore, the data are available for use in this study and other studies pursuing similar research questions.

Cases in the PAGP are structured by digitally mapping topics, variables, and relationships and presenting the results in a partially structured and systematic format (Dickey, 2009). Data for PAGP cases come from three sources. The first source of data is scholarly and popular literature. Researchers review publications on a topic to search for elements to map. A second source of information is theory. Theories cover many aspects of public administration and by design provide a wealth of variables and relationships to map. The final data source for the PAGP is from practice. Public administration practitioners can draw on their own experiences and those of their colleagues to identify elements to map and classify. The PAGP classification scheme, known as the PAGP Ontology, is a series of descriptors comprised of several words or groups of words that are organized into various categories.

The data for the PAGP case were collected from the perspective of an observer-participant. I reflected on personal experiences in my rise to leadership in Agency R and interviewed colleagues to ascertain if they had similar experiences. The PAGP classification terms that closely related to the data in this this case included: *cultural group, age group, gender group, personnel, management, racial group, geographic group, institution, equity/equality, leadership, and strategy/tactic*.

The raw data for the PAGP were collected using standard qualitative survey research techniques. The participants responded to the questions through various means and provided a wealth of data for the PAGP and other related research endeavors. The

collection of the PAGP data was guided by the following three open ended interview questions. First, how did gender impact you securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service? Second, what obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in grades GS-14 and 15, and SES positions in Agency R? And third, what factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

Role of the Researcher

I was an observer-participant when the data were originally collected for the PAGP. I reflected on my personal experiences as she rose to a senior leadership position in Agency R. I asked other women in similar positions to also reflect on their experiences. The participants in the study were my colleagues and I held no supervisory power over them. All participants signed consent forms indicating their willingness to participant, were guaranteed autonomy, and were not compensated for their participation. The data collection protocols, and verbatim recording of responses helped to eliminate researcher bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Seven women employees of Agency R who were at least 25 years old were selected for interviews for the original PAGP case interviews. Each of the participants was my colleague and occupied a senior leadership position in Agency R. The women were from the states of Georgia, Missouri, South Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, and the

District of Columbia. I had previous workplace relationships with the participants, and they were chosen because they expressed a willingness to participate in the research.

Instrumentation

This project used secondary data. The data originally were collected to develop a case for inclusion in the PAGP. The data were collected that allowed various topics, variables, and relationships to be digitally mapped and classified according to the parameters outlined in the PAGP. The death of Dr. Dickey, the founder and proprietor of the PAGP, substantially delayed progress on the development of a final PAGP case. However, the data collection process and the open access nature of the PAGP made the data useful and available for other research purposes.

The raw data for the PAGP case were collected using an open-ended survey instrument. The questions included on the survey instrument were:

1. How did gender impact you securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service?
2. What obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in grades GS-14 and 15, and SES positions in Agency R?
3. What factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

Data Collection

All data for the PAGP case were collected through interviews that took between 30 minutes and 1 hour to complete. The interviews were collected either in person, by telephone, or through email. Responses to the in person and telephone questions was

recorded electronically and in writing. Participants were provided transcribed copies of their interviews to validate the contents and make appropriate changes, sign, and date a final copy, and return the document to the researcher. The researcher subsequently provided participants final interview copies.

All data for this project came from the PA Genome Project. The data for the PA Genome Project was collected in the manner previously described. Dr. John Dickey, the proprietor of the PA Genome, requested the data be collected to include in the PA Genome Project Data Base. The purpose of the PA Genome Project is to provide Public Administration Scholars and Practitioners with information to improve study and practice. Therefore, the data is available for this and other studies. The researcher received written permission by current proprietor of the PA Genome Project to use the data for this study.

Data Analysis Plan

The interview data originally collected for the PGAP were repurposed for this study and examined for emerging themes provided by the participants. The new analysis focused on discovering the essence of participants' journeys to top leadership positions. NVivo 11 qualitative software was utilized to organize and structure the raw data. The software permitted qualitative data organization, shaping, classification, and analysis of participant information. The PAGP data were coded in the following manner:

RQ1: How does gender impact securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service?

- Code: Gender

- Category: Gender Identity
- Description: This category indicates that the participant identified that gender has impacted her career.

RQ2: What obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in grades GS-14 and 15, and SES positions in Agency R?

- Code: Obstacles
- Category: Obstacles Encountered
- Description: This category indicates that the participant indicated specific obstacles have impacted their career.

RQ3: What factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

- Code: Impetus
- Category: Impetus for advancement
- Description: This category indicates the impetus or motivation that had an impact on their career.

Issues of Trustworthiness

All the data for the original PAGP case were collected by the researcher. The researcher later coded the data from the PAGP for use in this project. Therefore, there are no intra-and intercoder reliability issues. To ensure trustworthiness, the respondents were given the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews and make corrections if

necessary. Finally, original transcripts were retained by the researcher and securely stored.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher presented letters to the Walden Institutional Review Board documenting Dr. Dickey's original request for the data to be collected for the PAGP project and another letter from the current proprietor of the PAGP granting permission to use the data for additional research purposes. All the data originally collected for the PAGP were collected using standard ethical research procedures. Participants were assured confidentiality in the process. Pseudonyms (substituting participants' names with sequential identifiers) were given to protect participant's identity., The Researcher self-transcribed all audio-recorded interviews and all collected data were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home office. Only the researcher had access to participants' data.

Informed consent is one of the dominate traditional ethics in research involving human subjects (Bogden and Biklen 1998, p. 43). Study participants signed consent forms describing significant information about the study and maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity through use of pseudonyms (sequential identifiers, rather than participants' names). Participants' data was stored in locked cabinets accessible only by the Researcher. Collected data will be destroyed five years from the date of interviews.

Limitations

This study has four major limitations. First, the demographic characteristics of the participants was not reflective of the overall federal civil service. Second, geographic distribution of the participants was limited to six states and the District of Columbia. Third, the study did not provide a precise method to distinguish how the participants managed conflict. Finally, the participants were limited to a single branch of a large Federal agency. Regardless of the limitations, the study does have the potential to make contributions to scholarship and practice regarding gender equity.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the research methodology utilized in this study and answered questions regarding how an existing data base was repurposed for the research purposes of this study. The chapter provided detailed information about the PAGP, the data source for this project and the relevance of the its raw data in answering new research questions. The methodology solidified the relevancy of a qualitative research design to add context and depth to the topic of gender equity. The study's qualitative research approach provided a means to explore the essence of the lived experiences of 7 women in top leadership positions in Agency R and secured participants' perspectives regarding overcoming obstacles they overcame in their career progression.

Chapter 4: Results

The current qualitative study explored and documented the lived experiences, i.e., achievements and barriers encountered, of seven women who broke through the glass ceiling and progressed to top leadership positions in a federal agency with the pseudonym “Agency R.” The research focused on the experiences of women residing in Georgia, Missouri, South Carolina, Virginia and Washington, District of Columbia. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the demographic profiles of the participants, findings, and analysis. The research questions that guided the original data collection were:

RQ1: How does gender impact securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service??

RQ2: What obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in grades GS-14 and 15, and SES positions in Agency R?

RQ3: What factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

The research questions were addressed by using data originally collected for the PAGP. Data were collected through email and telephone interviews with the study participants. The participants were informed of the research protocol, assured confidentiality, and signed consent forms agreeing to the terms of the research. All data including electronic files, notes, transcripts, and interview forms were stored in a locked file cabinet and on a password protected computer. All data were preserved and will be saved for the required period of 5 years, after which all data will be destroyed. The

results of the are presented in this chapter beginning with a demographic profile of the participants and a summary of the interviews.

Data Collection

The original data for this project came from the PAGP and was collected using telephone and emailed structured interviews. Demographic information was obtained from each participant during the interview process. Ten women originally were invited to participate in the study. Three (Two White and One Hispanic) of the 10 women declined participation. The final participant pool included seven women who were current or previous employees of Agency R at the time of the interviews. Demographic data were obtained by asking each participant to identify their gender, age, race, education, current GS/SES level, years in public administration and years in their current position in Agency R.

All the participants in this study were minority females over 40 years of age and with at least 2 years of public service. A demographic summary of the participants is provided in Table 3. All the names in the table are pseudonyms in order to insure confidentiality.

Table 3

Summary of Demographics

Participant Assignment	Age	Race/Ethnicity	GS/SES Level	Years of Public Service	Current Years of Service	Highest Degree Attained
Audrey	58	Black American	GS-14	31	2 years	12 Post Master's Degree Hours
Faith	56	African American	SES	36	Almost 5 years	Master of Public Administration
Nora	Over 40	Hispanic	GS-15	20	Since April 2014	Bachelor of Art
Ava	69	Black	GS-15 Achieved Level (Former Employee)	50	30 years	N/A
Grace	57	Black	Senior Executive Political	29	1 year and 6 months	Bachelor of Art
Ella	51	African American	GS-15	28	1 ½ Years	Bachelor of Science
Olivia	55	African American	Senior Executive Political	2	2 Years	Master's Degree

Data Analysis

This study used qualitative research methods to investigate the glass ceiling phenomenon. The study participants were asked to respond to the open-ended interview questions and were encouraged to reflect on their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis focused on the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The interview data were analyzed using the Nvivo v.11 qualitative software. The software

tool allowed the researcher to code the data, sort the participants' words and phrases, and analyze the interview transcripts. The transcribed interviews were analyzed for core themes and patterns that were emerging from the textual description.

The interview questions were divided into four sections as follows:

1. (Situation: An overall Picture) How do women leaders in the federal government perceive and describe their experience with the glass ceiling?
2. (Self: Personal and Psychological Resources) What are the characteristics of women leaders in public administration which allowed them to break through the glass ceiling to their current position?
3. (Support: Available Resources) What are the tools and resources needed in public administration for women to advance to leadership positions?
4. (Strategies: Coping) Why are some women leaders able to overcome obstacles or challenges associated with the glass ceiling and break through the glass ceiling?

The questions provided the participants a means to reflect on their experiences and use their own words to express opinions and concerns. The participants' responses were examined and analyzed using the Nvivo v.11 qualitative software. The results of the analysis revealed the following relevant responses.

Research Question 1 asked: (Situation: An overall picture) How do women leaders in the federal government perceive and describe their experience with the glass ceiling?

Interview Question: 1. Can you please describe your career path to your current

leadership position in public administration? This question was asked to discuss the different avenues taken by the participants to obtain a leadership position. Relevant responses for Interview Question 1 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Although I possessed post master's degree credit, I began my federal career in 1986 as a GS-2 File Clerk, with the Department of the Army and progressed to a GS-3 Data Transcriptionist. Left Army in approximately 1988 and began working for the United States Postal Service as a Mail Carrier, departed that position in 1989 and began working for the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis in the position of Assistant Director of the Vaughn Cultural Center. In approximately 1990, I returned to the Army as an Employee Relations Specialist, GS-7, 9, 11 (progressing in grade each year until reaching the 11), human resources (HR) trainee until reaching the GS-11 level. In 1997, I moved to the Washington, D.C., area for a promotional opportunity to GS-12 Employee and Labor Relations Specialist (HR) with the Department of Health and Human Services, progressing to GS-13 Training and Development Specialist (HR). In October 2000 I returned to Missouri, accepting a lower-graded position as a GS-12 Employee Relations Specialist (HR) with the Agency R. It took me years to get re-promoted to the GS-13 level. In March 2007, I was re-promoted, but to the position of Supervisory Human Resources Specialist (Employee Relations) servicing Missouri, only. In May 2014 I was promoted to my current position, GS-14, servicing 47 states, St. Louis, MO, and the Washington, D.C.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: In May 2014 I was promoted to my current position, GS-14, servicing 47 states, St. Louis, MO, and the Washington, D.C.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): I started as a student trainee. My work environment was that predominately of white males. I saw very few black women in these positions. The workforce for African American females was mostly visible in secretarial positions. I served in several training positions and was then promoted to a managerial position. If I had not taken a chance and moved to Washington, DC. I am not sure how far I would have made it in the organization. I had several mentors that helped me to believe that my career could go farther mainly my mother. A couple of professors from college and friends. After moving to Washington, DC, the glass ceiling experience was really visible. I experienced many acts of discriminatory practices. There were very few 14/15 black manager male or female. I was one of the first to be promoted to a GS 14 and the ridicule I experienced was unbelievable. The same was experienced as I moved to the GS 15 level.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: I saw very few black women in these positions. The workforce for African American females was mostly visible in secretarial positions. There were very few 14/15 black manager male or female.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: If I had not taken a chance and moved to Washington, DC. I am not sure how far I would have made it in the organization. I was one of the first to be promoted to a GS 14 and the ridicule I experienced was unbelievable. The same was experienced as I moved to the GS 15 level.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: I had several mentors that helped me to believe that my career could go farther mainly my mother.

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): I started out working in Capitol Hill on the Senate side in the 1990s. There were few people of color working in the Senate. I left the U.S. Senate and worked for the Clinton Administration and then worked for the labor movement. Currently I serve as a political appointee in the Obama Administration at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Currently I serve as a political appointee in the Obama Administration at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): The career path to public administration was unintended; was focused on doing movement work in the trenches with the people who needed help. Did not pursue an education/degree in public administration or management. Career path: Worked in New Communities fulfilling any and all jobs that needed to be done, ranging from store clerk, administrative office work, and organizing farmers. Eventually would be hired by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives to coordinate work in the southeast region of Georgia.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): I have been working for Agency R for over 28 years. In 1987 I was the first minority woman promoted to the Assistant County Supervisor. In 1999- I was the first minority female promoted to an Area Director and in 2009- I became the first woman appointed to the Agency R Director position. Since April 2015, I am serving as a Deputy Undersecretary for Agency R and am the first minority female to serve in that position.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: In 1987 I was the first minority woman promoted to the Assistant County Supervisor. In 1999- I was the first minority female promoted to an Area Director and in 2009- I became the first woman appointed to the Agency R Director position. Since April 2015, I am serving as a

Deputy Undersecretary for Agency R and am the first minority female to serve in that position.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): I started in a middle management position.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Career path has been 28 years in private sector both for profit and non-profit.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 2. Was your transition to your current leadership position in public administration consistently in the same work environment (for example human resources) or did you make moves across the administration (or perhaps different agencies) with the intention of advancing your career? Can you please explain these transitions to me? This question was asked to discuss the various positions held by the participants before they obtained a leadership position. The idea was for the participants to discuss career choices and positive encounters during her career progression. The question was developed to

obtain relevant information regarding how other individuals maneuvered and made positive decisions during their career journeys. Relevant responses for interview question follow.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): I moved from a position of specialist to a managerial position. I have been in a management position for the last 25 plus years. My transition to SES was a long time coming. I was a mid-level manager for 15 years in the same position. I had to take a lateral step to move into the SES. The training did not come until I was already in the position. Most of my work was in the technical loan processing and servicing and then moved into the area I am currently in. This makes it difficult to learn some of the administration, budget, HR and other areas at the responsibility level of top management.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I had to take a lateral step to move into the SES. The training did not come until I was already in the position. This makes it difficult to learn some of the administration, budget, HR and other areas at the responsibility level of top management.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): I left the Agency R after serving as a political appointee for four years. Agency R's parent agency is an organization with a narrow cultural fit. People of color are not welcomed. You see it every day in terms of

who is promoted and who is valued in the organization. I moved over to HUD since I saw this as an opportunity to contribute and to advance my career. HUD wanted me to join the organization. USDA was looking at ways that they could fire me. As a result of my move, I have thrived and have been promoted to serve in senior management positions.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: People of color are not welcomed. You see it every day in terms of who is promoted and who is valued in the organization.

USDA was looking at ways that they could fire me.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: HUD wanted me to join the organization. As a result of my move, I have thrived and have been promoted to serve in senior management positions.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): Prior to the transition, the goal was to continue to fight for equal rights and equity for the residents in the community which the movement work was being done. On this mission, the fight was always against the leaders in public administration, so there was no thought on transitioning into a public administrative position. Moving from working in the field with people to the office was a different environment, but the mission of the work remained the same. The overall goal was always to ensure that individuals in rural areas were treated equitably and received the services and assistance needed to live

prosperous lives. With that in mind, when hired to a position with no staff, I had to coordinate volunteers, which would eventually lead to a 17-person team, to work in the rural counties for progress and change. The environments were similar in that during those times, and to some extent still today, working in a world run by men “women are expected to stay in their place”. As a woman, my place was always behind the man, never on the side and definitely not ahead. This belief was deeply engrained in the southern culture. From the movement throughout my entire career I had to accept that I would never get the credit I fully deserved for my input and work. I knew and the men I worked with knew that I was a valuable asset to the organization. I was smart, persistent, hard-working, and dedicated. Although they would never admit it, my contributions were the driving force behind many accomplishments.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: ... working in a world run by men “women are expected to stay in their place”. As a woman, my place was always behind the man, never on the side and definitely not ahead.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I had to accept that I would never get the credit I fully deserved for my input and work.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: I was smart, persistent, hard-working, and dedicated. Although they would never admit it, my contributions were the driving force behind many accomplishments.

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Current position a leap up and a leap into public service. My presidential appointment to service was something I sought and wanted but unpredictable and hard because of the need for senate confirmation.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: My presidential appointment to service was something I sought and wanted but unpredictable and hard because of the need for senate confirmation.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 3. In your opinion, is there a glass ceiling for women in public administration? Why do you believe there is or isn't a glass ceiling in public administration? This interview question was designed to elicit a discussion about perceived barriers for women in the top echelons of public administration. The question was developed to allow participants to share her thoughts on any barriers, real or perceived, she may have experienced. Relevant responses for interviews follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Yes, I believe there is a glass ceiling. In my 30 plus year career, until recently (2015), all of my Agency heads and their deputies have been males. Females have held supervisory positions at multiple grade levels,

generally lowered grades, such as GS-7, 9, 11, 12, and 13s, but never as first and second in command of the agencies.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: Yes, I believe there is a glass ceiling.

Females have held supervisory positions at multiple grade levels, generally lowered grades, such as GS-7, 9, 11, 12, and 13s, but never as first and second in command of the agencies.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): ABSOLUTELY Why do you believe there is or isn't a glass ceiling in public administration?

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: The lack of training and opportunity to perform and put the skills into practice is given to white men first.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): There is a glass ceiling. The glass is a lot harder to shatter for women of color. I have an insider view on the topic based on my professional experience. There are few women that we can point to who are GS14's or GS15's in programmatic positions.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: The glass is a lot harder to shatter for women of color. There are few women that we can point to who are GS14's or GS15's in programmatic positions.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): Of course, I have experienced the glass ceiling through the years. I feel that the glass ceiling exists because men want it to. Many men I have encountered wanted or needed the power and did not feel that women were qualified to do the same work, especially not black women. In many organizations, with close attention, one can see the work being done by the women in the organization, but it was the men that held the positions of power. I was introduced to this method of operation in the church in the south, but I have been able to recognize it in other organizations. Some men thought women should stay home and serve their husbands, and even in the workplace, women were there to serve and not lead. When I would give my ideas, they were not readily receptive to receive the idea. However, it would not be long before I the idea would surface again, but this time it would be the men that came up with it.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: . I feel that the glass ceiling exists because men want it to. Many men I have encountered wanted or needed the power and did not feel that women were qualified to do the same work, especially not black women.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: When I would give my ideas, they were not readily receptive to receive the idea. However, it would not be long before I the idea would surface again, but this time it would be the men that came up with it

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): Yes, I believe that there is still a glass ceiling for women in public administration. One reason is that women often are placed in lower level positions that are not leading to executive leadership positions. Also, women often have to take time out from their jobs to take care of their children or aging parents. Consequently, when they re-enter the workforce, they are behind, and this makes it even more difficult to compete for promotions with their male co-workers.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: Yes, I believe that there is still a glass ceiling for women in public administration. One reason is that women often are placed in lower level positions that are not leading to executive leadership positions. Also, women often have to take time out from their jobs to take care of their children or aging parents.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 4. During your career would you say that you have experienced a glass ceiling and if so, can you please tell me what that experience was like

for you? This question provided participants an opportunity to discuss the differences in experiences they observed. The question was designed to generate discusses about barriers participants encountered during their career progression. Relevant responses to question 4 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Most definitely, I have experienced a glass ceiling in regards to gender and race. I began my public service career as a GS-2 File Clerk, although I had completed a master's degree. I consistently applied for professional positions and was unsuccessful, so a friend suggested that I apply and accept the entry level position. I applied and was successful; I continuously unsuccessfully applied for HR Specialist positions for approximately 4 years. I finally secured the trainee position and progressed to the GS-11 after 2 years. I remained in that position for approximately 7 years. It took me approximately 21 years to secure a management position (my current GS-14 years) and I am retirement eligible. However, I have observed non-minorities progress to the grade level in approximately 3 years, many lack education or have less or the same level of education as do I. Being that I am and always have been hardworking, conscientious, dependable, loyal, and keep abreast of latest training, guidance, etc., the road to success has made me realize that life is unfair and makes me keep pushing.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I began my public service career as a GS-2 File Clerk, although I had completed a master's degree. It took me approximately 21 years to secure a management position (my current GS-14 years) and I am retirement eligible. However, I have observed non-minorities progress to the grade level in approximately 3 years, many lack education or have less or the same level of education as do I.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Being that I am and always have been hardworking, conscientious, dependable, loyal, and keep abreast of latest training, guidance, etc., the road to success has made me realize that life is unfair, and makes me keep pushing.

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): It has been a painful journey for me. I was told that I do not deserve a seat at the table. I was publicly humiliated on a daily basis and was given tasks to do that you would give to an intern. There were Truman fellows who were given more substantive work that I was given. I was not allowed to move to other mission areas and was blocked from detail opportunities at the parent agency of Agency R. After 4 years of this, I was able to move to another federal agency on a detail. To this day, I am not sure how I was able to do this. In the time at the other federal agency, I have been promoted and have been given more responsibility and I am thriving.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: It has been a painful journey for me. I was told that I do not deserve a seat at the table. I was publicly humiliated on a daily basis and was given tasks to do that you would give to an intern. I was not allowed to move to other mission areas and was blocked from detail opportunities at the parent agency of Agency R.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: . After 4 years of this, I was able to move to another federal agency on a detail. To this day, I am not sure how I was able to do this. In the time at the other federal agency, I have been promoted and have been given more responsibility and I am thriving.

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): I feel very fortunate that I was promoted many times, although my success entailed some personal sacrifices and emotional challenges. I had to constantly defend my right to serve as a supervisor and many times I felt that my opinions and decisions were discounted during agency leadership meetings. For example, every year we had internal competitions for District of the Year Award. When my district won, the rules suddenly changed, and my employees did not receive any awards. Prior to that, all winning District Employees received monetary awards. This sudden changed of rules had a serious consequence to my position as a supervisor. It undermined my authority to reward my employees and impeded my power to motivate them to do great work!

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I had to constantly defend my right to serve as a supervisor and many times I felt that my opinions and decisions were discounted during agency leadership meetings.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): I experienced a hard ceiling in my first private sectors job at a major money center bank. Only men advanced and enjoyed it. I experienced the banking environment as harsh and hyper competitive. The only way to advance was to find mentors and protectors. I found these but even then, I found the work uninspiring for the stress. In this current job in Agency R, I experience in senior meetings have a lack of women in nonprofit work I did not see a glass ceiling. Women were leaders and controlled resources and moved into leadership. The president of the foundation I served in was a woman. Only two of seven undersecretaries are women. We run the smallest agencies by number of people.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: In this current job in Agency R, I experience in senior meetings have a lack of women in nonprofit work I did not see a glass ceiling. Women were leaders and controlled resources and moved into leadership. The president of the foundation I served in was a woman.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Only men advanced and enjoyed it. I experienced the banking environment as harsh and hyper competitive

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Research question 2 asked: (Self: Personal and Psychological Resources) What are the characteristics of women leaders in public administration which allowed them to break through the glass ceiling to their current position?

Interview Question: 1. What characteristics do you believe you have that are necessary for women to advance to a leadership position in public administration?

Relevant Responses for Interview Question 1 follow:

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Perseverance, self-confidence, self-respect, driven, autonomous, self- motivated, self-determination, etc.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Perseverance, self-confidence, self-respect, driven, autonomous, self- motivated, self-determination, etc.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): The most important skills are the soft skills. The people skills. I believe budgeting and financial management, technology, vision and strategic management and vision are all important; however, without the people skills to include the ability to lead the results will not be as expected.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: The most important skills are the soft skills. The people skills. ...without the people skills to include the ability to lead the results will not be as expected.

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): Resilience, focus, and toughness to perseverance is important.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Resilience, focus, and toughness to perseverance is important.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): Openness/transparency, she must be observant and an organizer. She has to have compassion and be strong minded, willing to work with people, be dedicated to the cause and preserve. Do not accept anything less than your goals, no matter how difficult!

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Openness/transparency, she must be observant and an organizer. She has to have compassion and be strong minded, willing to work with people, be dedicated to the cause and preserve. Do not accept anything less than your goals, no matter how difficult!

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): I definitely possess a knowledge of internal processes and Agency R Programs. Working for the agency for many years equipped me with knowledge and skills that allowed me to compete for the position with my male counterparts. I love what I do, and I genuinely care about our customers. I believe in our agency mission, and I am passionate about the work I do. Also, I did not have a break in my career as I cared for my children and elderly parents while being employed full time. This allowed me to stay current on all agency policies and procedures.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: I love what I do and I genuinely care about our customers. I believe in our agency mission, and I am passionate about the work I do.

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): I am very vocal and not afraid to express my position. I am also not afraid to move from one program area to another to make myself more marketable. I believe I was promoted to my first management position because I left my organization and they were not able to fill the void that I vacated. I believe at that point they realized my worth and recruited me to come back into the organization.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: I am very vocal and not afraid to express my position. I am also not afraid to move from one program area to another to make myself more marketable. I believe at that point they realized my worth and recruited me to come back into the organization.

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): I believe that the characteristics needed to advance in leadership are resilience, drive, good listening skills and an ability to get help. Need to be able to understand a role that you may not have played before. Leaders need a trusted team around them. The skill is learning to identify and then bring on this team since hiring is difficult and may require moving current staff.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: I believe that the characteristics needed to advance in leadership are resilience, drive, good listening skills and an ability to get help.

Interview Question: 2. What challenges have you encountered about career advancement to your current leadership position in public administration? Relevant responses for interview question 2 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): I believe I was promoted in 2014, in part, because management wanted to promote a male in a similarly situated position who possessed less experience, education, less seniority, etc., than me. Upper management knew I was driven and did not want the possibility of a gender-based complaint. Moreover, approximately 9 months prior, I requested a desk audit in that I knew the level of work performed was at the GS-14 level; I never received the audit. When management announced my current position, I applied, but was not offered the position until 5 months later. The male was promoted 2 weeks after applying for the position, which also happened to be 2 weeks after I was promoted.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): Discrimination was prevalent as I moved up the career ladder. The lack of training and mentors was a concern as well.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Discrimination was prevalent as I moved up the career ladder. The lack of training and mentors was a concern as well.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): I am currently exploring career civil service positions in the federal government. I believe that ageism is real and that women experience it more so than men. The federal government is one of the few places that women have where they are not forced to retire to make way for a younger workforce.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: I believe that ageism is real and that women experience it more so than men.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): I've always been targeted by people who aren't open to change. Take an incident with a conservative blogger, who took a story and literally lied to make me look bad. My work has always been at the grassroots level, I never thought about work in public administration.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I've always been targeted by people who aren't open to change. Take an incident with a conservative blogger, who took a story and literally lied to make me look bad.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): I am a political appointee; therefore, my challenges might be different than other public administration employees. One difference that I

observed is that my scope of duties and responsibilities have been somewhat reduced in comparison to my male predecessor. Also, I do not have access to some informal networks of communication as my male predecessors.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: One difference that I observed is that my scope of duties and responsibilities have been somewhat reduced in comparison to my male predecessor. Also, I do not have access to some informal networks of communication as my male predecessors.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): I feel that I have always had to prove that I deserve a seat at the table. Not only have I had to prove to upper management, I also had to prove to others that I am where I am because of my qualification and not because of by gender or the color of my skin.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Not only have I had to prove to upper management, I also had to prove to others that I am where I am because of my qualification and not because of by gender or the color of my skin.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Challenges include truly having control over the most important resources--people and money. I found many blocks existed as I sought to move people and money.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Challenges include truly having control over the most important resources--people and money. I found many blocks existed as I sought to move people and money.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 3. Would you attribute these challenges to the glass ceiling? Why or why not? Relevant Responses for Interview Question 3 follow:

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Numerous inequities that I could not change. Non-minorities and males were promoted to senior specialist positions, generally within 3 years of entering on duty, and generally progressed to supervision and management within 1 year after becoming eligible. The Agency generally assigns them mentors, pays for executive coaching and \$17,000-30,000 for them to attend leadership classes prepping them to become executives. Women, particularly, minorities, do not have the aforementioned level of support. I have not yet accepted the inequities. I keep applying for leadership opportunities, ensuring I take requisite training, secured an executive coach, continuously inform my management team and other executives that I am interested in advanced

management training, details (temporary assignments) and promotional opportunities.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: Women, particularly, minorities, do not have the aforementioned level of support. I have not yet accepted the inequities. I keep applying for leadership opportunities...

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Non-minorities and males were promoted to senior specialist positions, generally within 3 years of entering on duty, and generally progressed to supervision and management within 1 year after becoming eligible.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): My generation is less willing to fight than this current generation of young people. My strategy of working hard and trying to ignore obvious biases and inappropriate treatment was a challenge. However, I made it in the end.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: My strategy of working hard and trying to ignore obvious biases and inappropriate treatment was a challenge. However, I made it in the end.

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): I was not able to change the inequities that I experienced at Agency R. I learned that for my wellbeing and my survival that I need to leave the Department.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Nora I was not able to change the inequities that I experienced at Agency R. I learned that for my wellbeing and my survival that I need to leave the Department.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): There will always be challenges that are hard to or take time to change, but you never accept them. You have to make a commitment to that inequity and devise a plan on what you can do to contribute to make situations better. I've worked with people who'd work to completely sabotage my efforts, have too often work twice as hard and be careful.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: . I've worked with people who'd work to completely sabotage my efforts, have to often work twice as hard and be careful.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: You have to make a commitment to that inequity and devise a plan on what you can do to contribute to make situations better.

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): Despite being a minority woman I believe that I was able make significant contributions and accomplishments that are long lasting. Some of my major accomplishments include investments in education and securing grants and loan funds to build new schools, daycares and hospitals in my state and across the nation. Also, I was able to promote more women and minorities to the leadership position.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: Despite being a minority woman I believe that I was able make significant contributions and accomplishments that are long lasting.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Some of my major accomplishments include investments in education and securing grants and loan funds to build new schools, daycares and hospitals in my state and across the nation.

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): Not really.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): I was not able to change the power cliques that already existed. I was a newcomer to the leadership team. I did not have the trust of

the head of the agency. He trusted his own handpicked team—several who worked under me. I had to select just a few battles. One early battle was control of my internal close team. It took me almost a year to move out staff who were only loyal to others and not to me, and to move in a few key staff who wanted to see me succeed.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I was not able to change the power cliques that already existed.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 5. Can you please share some examples or illustrations of when you experienced a “glass ceiling” in public administration? Relevant Responses for Interview Question 5 follow.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): I probably applied for an SES Position and to be in the SES Training Program 5-6 times before I was accepted.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I probably applied for an SES Position and to be in the SES Training Program 5-6 times before I was accepted.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): For most of my career, I was kept at the mid-management (non-supervisory) level. I was encouraged to apply for higher grades, but all at

the non-supervisory level. When applying for jobs, I was often asked "what management experience do you have." The same people asking me the question were in the very same position that I was in before they became a supervisor. There appeared to be a double standard and it help me at mid-management for the first 24 years of my 28-year career.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: For most of my career, I was kept at the mid-management (non-supervisory) level.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Not sure it's a glass ceiling, but I was not able to win over the trust of the head of my agency. The person saved their loyalties and their perks for their loyal staff who had known and worked with them for years. This meant my priorities took second place. I was still able to advance my priorities, but they moved forward with only tepid support.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Research question 3 asked: (Support: Available Resources) What are the tools and resources needed in public administration for women to advance to leadership positions?

Interview Question: 1. What would you say the tools and resources you found most helpful as you advanced in your career? Relevant Responses for Interview Question 1 follow.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): Believing in myself was one of the greatest tools in the advancement of my career. My training in the area of financial management was very helpful. Additionally, classes like how to win friends and influence people was helpful. Mentors that helped identify training opportunities was helpful. However, what was most helpful was a strong mother and knowing when to fight and stand up for myself and when being silent was effective.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Believing in myself was one of the greatest tools in the advancement of my career. My training in the area of financial management was very helpful.

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): Understanding human resources and budgets. It is important to have an understanding of how organizations work and what the needs are. In order for women to make an impact they need to have an understanding of these two items.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Understanding human resources and budgets. It is important to have an understanding of how organizations work and what the needs are. In order for women to make an impact they need to have an understanding of these two items.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): Supportive relationships (whether it is spousal, friendship, mentorship). Supportive relationships help you grow and gain experiences. ML was one of those supportive relationships; she saw my potential before I was able to see it in myself. She also invested in me and helped me to grow into a community leader.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Supportive relationships (whether it is spousal, friendship, mentorship). Supportive relationships help you grow and gain experiences.

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): First of all, women should take every opportunity to educate themselves. Secondly, we need our families' support. I could not work and care for my children without my family support. Often times, promotion entails travel and much time spent outside the home. Again, this is not possible without help from family and friends.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: First of all, women should take every opportunity to educate themselves. Secondly, we need our families' support. I could not work and care for my children without my family support.

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): For me talking to other females and learning that I did not have to be perfect to apply for a job. Training was a great tool as I learned that I was just as knowledgeable as anyone else, which resulted in confidence and eventually lead to me being more of an extrovert.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: For me talking to other females and learning that I did not have to be perfect to apply for a job. Training was a great tool...

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): I was trained early in financial statement analysis as my first career was as a bank analyst for a major money center bank. This training in accounting and financial analysis proved to be a key tool that has followed me throughout my career. The most valuable resources has been my network of friends, colleagues, former colleagues, and alums.

This broad network is the glue that has held my career together unlocking key

resources and helping me to be creative throughout my career.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: [T]rained early in financial statement analysis as my first career was as a bank analyst ... This training in accounting and financial analysis proved to be a key tool that has followed me throughout my career.

Interview Question: 2. What other resources do you wish were available to support women in higher education that are seeking to break through the “glass ceiling” and transition to a leadership position in public administration? Relevant Responses for Interview Question 2 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Mentors. Career tracks that allow for growth from entry level to executive managerial positions.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): Women need to avail themselves to as many trainings as possible. They also must have the support of other people in the organization to

help them avoid landmines. Identifying who those individuals are is incredibly important.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Women need to avail themselves to as many trainings as possible.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): A network to embrace each other and communicate with each other. We have to eliminate competition amongst each other; women can't stand in the way of each other.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: A network to embrace each other and communicate with each other. We have to eliminate competition amongst each other; women can't stand in the way of each other.

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): I wish that there was some kind of mentoring program available just for women and conducted by women. Often times, successful women do not help other women and see them as a competitor rather than a friend and coworker.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): Women should be encouraged to take advantage of training. I personally spent so much time doing the worker bee type work, that I neglected to work on my personal development.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I personally spent so much time doing the worker bee type work, that I neglected to work on my personal development.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Need mentors and executive coaching--or professionals who can function like executive coaches. Careers are full of ups and downs. You need to be pushed, picked up, helped, cheered along the way.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Olivia Need mentors and executive coaching--or professionals who can function like executive coaches.

Research question 4 asked: (Strategies: Coping) Why are some women leaders able to overcome obstacles or challenges associated with the glass ceiling and break through the glass ceiling?

Interview Question: 1. Have you experienced any obstacles or challenges during your career in public administration that you have had to overcome in order to advance in your career? [Possible challenges or obstacles might be pay inequity, recognition at the agency, etc.]. Relevant answers to question 1 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Yes, I have experienced obstacles including denied and delayed promotional opportunities, performance award inequities, pay inequities, greater responsibilities than male counterparts, less staff than male counterparts, less visibility, less travel and training funds, etc.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: Yes, I have experienced obstacles including denied and delayed promotional opportunities, performance award inequities, pay inequities, greater responsibilities than male counterparts, less staff than male counterparts, less visibility, less travel and training funds, etc.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): “Let me count the ways” as previously stated, I did not receive recognition of value and contributions to progression of the movement. Many times, I had to work two to three times harder than men to get my job done. Tasks were purposely made difficult for me to discourage me or stop my agenda.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Many times, I had to work two to three times harder than men to get my job done. Tasks were purposely made difficult for me to discourage me or stop my agenda.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): One of the challenges that I noticed was related to monitoring women. I observed that men inherently had more flexibility and was scrutinized far less than women with schedules, leave, in and out times, times to get their hair cut and other grooming needs completed on the clock. It was acceptable for men to be late or to not have a “perfect file.” Men rarely took leave to take care of their families, therefore, they were able to spend more time at work. Women were always judged more harshly and had to provide explanations on various topics.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: Grace One of the challenges that I noticed was related to monitoring women.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): I was not often given an opportunity to take credit for my work. I was too modest and allowed others to get credit for what I did. When I left my organization other realized that I was a hard worker and recruited me to

come back. Had I been given or taken upon myself to prove my worth, I might have been promoted earlier in my career.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: I was not often given an opportunity to take credit for my work.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): In my short career in public service, the challenged I faced was gaining trust and legitimacy quickly.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 2. Please describe how you were able to overcome these challenges at your agency? Relevant Responses for Interview Question 2 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Some challenges continue to linger. I was promoted based on preparation, which included the following networking, perseverance, self-confidence, self-respect, driven, autonomous, self- motivation, self-determination, etc. I always applied and communicated my interest in promotional opportunities and training and developmental opportunities, particularly, when it was free or low costs. Secured mentors and executive coaches. I worked hard and long

hours, letting my work speak for itself, evening working well beyond my tour of duty.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): Most of my coping methods are being silent, praying, exercising and believing in myself.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): Sometimes you do not overcome challenges and obstacles; you have to move forward using the adversity as learning lesson so that the next time the same or similar situation arises you are better able to handle it. The times I was able to overcome challenges, it required critical thinking, assessing the situation, and finding the best method to maneuver through or around it. The key is to never give up on doing the right thing.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): When I became the Director, I led by example and disproved the old stereotypes. It required many more hours spent in the office. I engaged the help of my family members to help me with my minor child so that she would be cared for while I was away. I spent a lot of money for additional support of my child. I worked at night and on weekends and placed more emphasis on quality of work.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): By becoming an extrovert, speaking out and up.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): I made a serious effort to immediately get out and meet face to face with leaders throughout the agency, listening to their frustrations, history and hopes. I met with stakeholders outside the agency and gained an understanding of their hopes, their views of the "glory days past" and the hopes for glory in the future. I dug into the challenges that no one liked to talk about--things that were broken in the operations and

management of the operation and showed respect by moving resources and attention on issues that had been too long ignored. I proved that I was not a leader just there for the photo ops but rather a leader who saw a serious mission ahead and would work hard to advance it.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Interview Question: 3. What is the most important piece of advice you would share with young women pursuing leadership positions in public administration?

Relevant Responses for Interview Question 3 follow.

Participant: Audrey

Relevant Comment(s): Never stop believing in your magnificence, even when others disbelieve and, in some cases, purposely implement stumbling blocks.

You're only limited by your imagination. If the aforementioned occurs, converse with those positive individuals in your life (mentors, coaches, family, etc.), retreat, recharge, and try again.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Never stop believing in your magnificence, even when others disbelieve and, in some cases, purposely implement stumbling blocks.

Participant: Faith

Relevant Comment(s): Believe in yourself. Be willing to invest in your education.

Volunteer for opportunities to learn. Be willing to help someone else.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: None

Participant: Nora

Relevant Comment(s): You should study closely the leadership of an organization. They set the tone. You should also study who gets promoted and whether there is a meritocracy or not. If the organization does not reflect your values, you should consider leaving as quickly as you can.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: You should study closely the leadership of an organization. They set the tone.

Participant: Ava

Relevant Comment(s): She should give much thought and be clear about what it is she would like to accomplish in the position and how she plans to achieve her goals. As she works, patience is vital, understanding that changes require time. In addition, change may also require allies, advocates, and a climate that desires change. When the times get difficult, remember why she began her public

administration career path. One must be persistent and steadfast, learning valuable lessons along the way, and never giving up on the mission.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles:

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: She should give much thought and be clear about what it is she would like to accomplish in the position and how she plans to achieve her goals. . One must be persistent and steadfast, learning valuable lessons along the way, and never giving up on the mission.

Participant: Grace

Relevant Comment(s): Follow your heart! You will be more successful if you love what you do.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Grace Follow your heart! You will be more successful if you love what you do.

Participant: Ella

Relevant Comment(s): Work hard to prove your worth and don't rely on people to sing your praises. You must be your own advocate. Volunteer for new projects and always, always, always take advantage of training opportunities.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Work hard to prove your worth and don't rely on people to sing your praises. You must be your own advocate. Volunteer for new projects and always, always, always take advantage of training opportunities.

Participant: Olivia

Relevant Comment(s): Get a technical skill that you can hold onto as yours --for me it was finance--and then be serious, very very serious about cultivating your network, your mentors, your truth tellers and your coaches.

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Gender: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Obstacles: None

Relevant Comment(s) Related to Impetus: Get a technical skill that you can hold onto as yours.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, Summary, and Conclusion

Introduction

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, conclusions, recommendations, and social significance of this study based on the insights collected from the personal interviews conducted. The purpose of this qualitative study was to document share achievements and experiences of seven women who achieved leadership positions in the United States Department of Agriculture's Agency R. The study examined motivational factors of women serving in leadership roles within this agency and who succeeded in obtaining presidential appointments or senior executive leadership positions within Agency R. Women leaders within the federal government working for Agency R were interviewed to provide insight on individual lived experiences and barriers.

All data for this project came from the PAGP database. The proprietor of the PAGP authorized the reuse of the raw data for this project. All the raw data was collected by the author. The data analysis and conclusions that follow were guided by the primary research question: What was the essence of the lived experiences of women who succeeded in overcoming obstacles, breaking through the glass ceiling, to become top leaders in the Federal Government? Information regarding (a) core themes, (b) interpretation of findings, (c) implications, (d) recommendations for future research, and (e) conclusions follows.

Core Themes

The female participants in the study shared their experiences regarding their ascent to leadership positions in the federal civil service. The experiences were classified

into three general themes: gender identity, obstacles, and impetus. To provide a clearer understanding of the findings the themes discussed were all shared among the participants.

Shared Theme 1: Gender Identity.

All the participants believed their progression into management was hindered due to their gender. Some participants also expressed race as a deterrent to progression into the upper echelons of management. Audrey believed females held lower grade levels and were never first or second in command of the agency. Faith suggested that training and opportunities were given to white males. Nora believed that women experienced ageism more frequently than men.

Gender emerged as a significant theme because the participants believed they were not given the same opportunities as males during their careers at Agency R. Federal workforce data support the participants beliefs. Women comprised 43% of the federal workforce, with 37% serving in GS-14 and GS-15 positions and only 30% of Senior Executive Service positions (Grossman 2015). Furthermore, the average employment grade for women is a full level below the average for men and average pay for women is 11 cents less on the dollar.

The participants viewed gender as a significant factor that negatively impacted their advancement in the federal civil service. Most of the female participants reported experiencing gender bias during their progression through the glass ceiling and into upper management. All the participants in the study had extensive experience in the public or nonprofit sectors before assuming leadership positions. Previous work experience, often

in management positions, suggested that females who had opportunities to serve in a variation of assignments equal to their male counterparts was a critical organizational step towards addressing the factors creating the glass ceiling.

Shared Theme 2: Obstacles

All the study participants expressed a belief that factors such as gender, race, and age had hindered their advancement to high level management positions in Agency R. The findings of this study seem to confirm previous research that recommended elimination of three types of barriers for women and minorities to gain equal access to executive suites: (a) societal barriers, which may be outside the direct control of business, (b) internal structural barriers that are within the direct control of business, and (c) governmental barriers (CRM, 1995). Some progress is being made; however, women still lag in leadership positions. While the number of women in the workforce has increased, GAO's (2008) report reveals women remain minorities in leadership and executive positions in the federal government. From 2000 through 2007, women made progress but still were substantially in the minority in the SES positions across all of OPM's organizational components (GAO, 2008).

Shared Theme 3: Impetus

All the participants were willing to share the impetus that drove them to advance in their careers. Audrey expressed, "I had several mentors that helped me to believe that my career could go farther, mainly my mother." Nora stated, "I moved over to HUD since I saw this as an opportunity to contribute and to advance my career. HUD wanted me to join the organization. USDA was looking at ways that they could fire me. As a

result of my move, I have thrived and have been promoted to serve in senior management positions.” Ava shared that, she “knew and the men I worked with knew that I was an asset to the organization. I was smart, persistent, hard-working, and dedicated. Although, they would never admit it, my contributions were the driving force behind many accomplishments.”

Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to share lived experiences of women who have advanced in the federal leadership hierarchy. The women interviewed were in the District of Columbia, Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina, Missouri, and Virginia. The study examined the experiences of women who succeeded in obtaining senior level management and executive leadership positions in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agency R.

A general qualitative research design was employed to create a comprehensive picture and provide context to the difficulties the study participants encountered in the rise to leadership positions. In this study, the researcher addressed the concern that there is a lack of opportunity for females due to barriers impacting their career paths. In Fiscal Year 2015, of 450 executive positions in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agency’s R parent agency, women occupied 33% of those positions and men occupied 67% (CRS, 2015). Thus, the number of men doubled the number of women in the same types of positions. When compared to men, women were lower in every executive category. The USDA had 349 employees in the Senior Executive Service with comprised of 214 males and 135 females. A detailed analysis showed the following: in

14 Executive Schedule positions there were 4 females and 10 male, in 24 Senior Level positions there were 5 females and 19 males in 42 Scientific and Professional positions there were 4 females and 38 males, and in 21 Research Assistants (RA) positions there were 2 females and 19 males (CRS, 2015).

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of women who succeeded in overcoming obstacles, breaking through the glass ceiling, to become top leaders in the Federal Government? Additional research questions that emerged from the primary research question included: (1) How does gender impact securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and the Senior Executive Service? (2) What obstacles have women experienced pursuing top leadership positions in grades GS-14 and 15, and SES positions in Agency R? and, (3) what factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R?

The first research question addressed the issue of how gender impacted securing top leadership positions in GS-14, GS-15, and Senior Executive Service positions. Women held most of the positions in Agency R; however, they were underrepresented in leader ranks. In responding to the question, the participants described how their gender and educational backgrounds impacted their ability to secure top leadership positions in Agency R. The findings suggested that the participants believed that regardless of education and work background, gender continues to be a barrier in obtaining positions in the GS-14, GS-15, and Senior Executive Service positions within Agency R. The participants educational backgrounds varied and included 29% holding master's degrees, 14% with 12 hours toward a master's degree, 42% with a bachelor's degree, and

only 14% without any post high school education. The participants also had a variety of work experiences. Three of the participants were career employees with Agency R, 1 was held a Senior Executive Service rank and was a political appointee with over 20 years of experience in the federal civil service. Three of the participants were political appointees at the GS-15 grade or higher.

The second research question examined what obstacles women experienced pursuing leadership positions in Agency R. The participant's responses to the question revealed a substantial number of obstacles they encountered during their careers. A detailed description of the various obstacle is provided in Chapter 4. The participants responses about Agency R were consistent with earlier findings about gender inequality in all sectors of society. The Agency R women's perceptions were that the Agency was male dominated, and gender was a factor in obtaining leadership positions within the agency.

The third research question asked what factors served as the impetus for women to seek and secure top leadership positions in Agency R. Previous success in educational endeavors was one factor that motivated most of the women to strive for leadership positions. The one participant who lacked a college degree sighted success in previous personal and professional endeavors as a motivating factor. Some of the participants were motivated by a desire to eliminate unfair practices or prove that they were as worthy of leadership positions as their male counterparts. Finally, one participant expressed that her family was the motivation for her success. Overall, the women were intent to bring about transformation in the male dominated culture of Agency R.

Implications

This research emerged from my desire to help women striving for leadership positions in the public sector. Three events coincided to make the research possible. First, I was fortunate enough to rise to a leadership position in Agency R. Second, during my tenure at Agency R, I also was pursuing a doctoral degree at Walden University. My Walden experience introduced me to the academic literature on the glass ceiling phenomena in the public sector and the research skills necessary to independently study the topic from a scholarly perspective. Finally, I was introduced to Dr. John Dickey, the proprietor of the PAGenome Project, who expressed an interest in my work and invited me to gather qualitative data about the public sector glass ceiling for inclusion in the project.

Two major gaps existed in the research on leadership. Most of the research on leadership focused on males. As the name implies, the great man theory of leadership was male centric. Studies on female leadership were lacking and this study helps fill the gap. This study complements the great man theory by looking at the traits of looking at women who have risen to leadership positions. The second gap in research directly related to the glass ceiling phenomena in the public sector. The existing literature focused on gaps in female leadership and strategies to overcome the gender barriers. Few studies examined the experiences of women who have broken through the ceiling. This study gives a voice to women leaders and adds to the body of research on the glass ceiling by adding much needed context to earlier works.

This research also has substantial social change implications. The information provided in the study provides women aspiring to leadership positions with insights into the experiences, strategies, and motivations of successful women. The findings are personal, specific, and easily relatable to most women. Also, the findings provide those presently in federal leadership positions with information that can be used to modify existing policies and procedures that retard the advancement of women in leadership positions.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research provide several implications for future studies. The participants in this study verified the existence of the glass ceiling, noted the barriers that contribute to its continuance, and explained the motivations and strategies they used to break through the glass ceiling. The women interviewed in this study were working in the upper levels of the federal government. Similar studies of women at mid-level federal management positions would be beneficial. Also, studies of women working in leadership positions in state and local government would be useful.

Studies comparing the experiences of career public servants and political appointees in leadership positions are needed. The differences in the two groups could lead to interesting findings. For example, the research might provide information about the different tactics used by each group to break through the glass ceiling. Does the job security associated with a position in the career civil service make one more aggressive than a political appointee in pursuing career advancement?

Finally, a more detailed study on the role of mentors on the career success of women in leadership positions. Most women in leadership positions have lived through the cultural transformations in the federal workforce that have led to more female leaders. Women seeking leadership positions could benefit from the experiences and expert advice mentors could offer. How can women take advantage of those who “have been there and done that” to prepare themselves educationally, emotionally, physically, and mentally for leadership.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to document the lived experiences of women who reached the upper levels of the federal civil service by overcoming obstacles and breaking through the glass ceiling. Overall, gender equality has improved in the federal civil service; however, women still are underrepresented in the upper levels of management. The participants in this study were women who achieved leadership positions in Agency R, a subunit of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The participants provided information about the struggles they faced and the motivations and strategies that helped them rise to leadership positions and break through the glass ceiling. All the participants indicated that they had achieved success but more actions were necessary to combat gender and pay inequality, racism, and sexism.

The study added to the existing research on leadership. The great man theory documents many of the traits common to male leaders. This study complements that theory by identifying common traits about women leaders. The study contributes additional context to leadership studies by providing personal recollections from female

leaders about how they used their education, experiences, motivation, and perseverance to rise to leadership positions. The research has implications for future leadership studies, organizational reforms in Agency R, and hopefully provides some inspiration for all women maximize their abilities.

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