2021

Executive Coaches' Perspectives on Leadership Role Identity Construction in Aspiring Female Leaders

Candice St. Pierre
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Candice St. Pierre

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Dr. Stephen Lifrak, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
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Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Current efforts to develop and promote women to senior-level positions in organizations remain insufficient. Many leadership development programs are not designed to help women develop a sense of leader identity and self-efficacy. Executive coaching is a process to develop leaders that is customizable for individuals to address their specific needs and goals. A phenomenological study was conducted to gain insight into the lived experiences of executive coaches to discern their strategies and practices for working with women who aspire to attain senior leadership roles. Ten executive coaches working with aspiring women leaders as part of a Network of Executive Women leadership development program were interviewed to capture their strategies and practices. Twelve general types of barriers or challenges were identified from the interviews. Eight different strategies were used to help clients move past barriers/challenges. Coaches are effective in moving aspiring female leaders past barriers; however, more work is needed in leadership identity development. Women face more barriers to advancement than men and consequently more developmental support is needed to achieve greater diversity at the highest ranks of leadership. In order to promote positive social change, the findings of this research should be used to educate corporate leaders on the value of executive coaching, particularly for developing aspiring female leaders.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Organizations need to become more diversified to remain competitive in today's global economy (Hunt et al., 2015). Diversity has many benefits, such as improved productivity, creativity, innovation, financial performance, decision making, employee satisfaction, and customer orientation (Hunt et al., 2015; Roberge & Van Dick, 2010). One of the top challenges that U.S. companies face is attracting, developing, and retaining management diversity and more specifically, gender diversity (Devillard et al., 2014; Murray, 2016). Gender diversity is associated with greater organizational effectiveness, improved profitability, and greater innovation (Buse et al., 2016; Post & Byron, 2015; Quintana-Garcia & Benavides-Velasco, 2016).

In the United States, women represent nearly half (47%) of the workforce and 40% of all management positions but are underrepresented in the upper levels of executive management, occupying 6% of chief executive officer (CEO) positions, 26% of board seats, 21% of C-suite, and 26% of senior vice president positions (Catalyst, 2020a, 2020b, 2021b). As evidenced by the small numbers of women in senior management, current efforts to develop and promote women to these positions may not be sufficient or effective (Ibarra et al., 2010). Moreover, to improve gender diversity in senior-level positions merely by promoting women to these roles may not be adequate (DeRue, 2011; Ibarra et al., 2013). Ibarra et al. (2013) argued that "[b]ecoming a leader involves much more than being put in a leadership role, acquiring new skills and adapting one's style to the requirements of that role. It involves a fundamental identity shift" (p. 62).

Current leadership development and mentoring programs are not designed to help women develop their sense of leader identity and self-efficacy (Ibarra et al., 2013). Compounding the issue, women's leadership identity formation and self-efficacy are often undermined by several barriers and challenges (O'Neil et al., 2015). Women face more and different barriers to leadership than men (Clarke, 2011; Simon & Hoyt, 2018). These barriers typically fall into four categories: societal, organizational, interpersonal, and personal, any of which can undermine a woman's leadership identity development as well as her self-efficacy for being in a leadership role (Allen et al., 2016; Metz & Kumra, 2019).

Executive coaching is one type of leadership development program that has been gaining popularity over the last three decades (Corrie & Lawson, 2017). Research shows that this form of leadership development is effective in developing leadership self-efficacy and improving leadership attitudes and behaviors (Moen & Allgood, 2009; Sonesh et al., 2015). Additionally, women who receive leadership coaching have shown greater levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts who have not received such coaching (Pendleton, 2016). O'Neil et al. (2015) suggested a framework for developing female leaders using executive coaching to develop leadership identity.

Skinner's (2014) research supported the importance of developing women differently than men. Specifically, Skinner found that senior female leaders struggled with forming their leadership identity, particularly in male-dominated leadership environments. While males and females appear to have equal access to coaching, this tool does not seem to be narrowing the disparity between the numbers of males and females in

senior leadership roles (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2016). One potential explanation

for the limited success of executive coaching in diminishing the gender gap in senior

leadership may pertain to a lack of attention by executive coaches to gender differences

in leadership identity formation during the coaching process (Skinner, 2014). In this

study, I aimed to develop greater insight into the strategies and practices that executive

coaches employ when working with women who aspire to senior leadership roles.

Background

Changing demographics in America and around the world have created the need

for a diverse workforce to match the needs of a diverse customer base (Cilluffo & Cohn,

2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The Council of Economic Advisors (CEA, 2014),

under the Obama administration, studied the top economic trends facing American

workers and their families. Their findings showed that women had steadily increased

their workforce participation since 1970 and comprised nearly 50% of the current

workforce (CEA, 2014). Additionally, women are 20% more likely than men to graduate

from college, and fathers are increasingly becoming caregivers (CEA, 2014).

The American workforce is more racially and gender diverse now than several

decades ago when workforce participation was first tracked (CEA, 2014). Currently, most

senior leadership in American corporations is male (84%) and White (97%; Hunt et al.,

2015). Hunt et al. (2015) determined that the average percentage of women on U.S.

executive teams was 16%; however, the financial benefits of gender diversity did not

appear until women represented 22% of the executive team. Furthermore, Hunt et al.

found that 13% of the U.S. companies studied did not have any female representation on

their executive teams. The business case for improving diversity seems clear; for example, Hunt et al. found that organizations with more ethnic and gender diverse leadership teams had better financial performance. Other studies have shown that management diversity helps to attract talent and improves customer service, employee satisfaction, decision making, and overall company image (Herring, 2009; Page, 2017). To remain competitive, Hunt et al. asserted that organizations have more work to do in improving the talent pipeline of attracting, developing, and retaining the next level of executive leaders and to capitalize on the benefits of leadership diversity.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) and the Network of Executive Women (NEW), the three main factors that can advance women's careers and increase gender diversity are organizational commitment to gender diversity, developmental support (e.g., leadership development), and professional networking (Hoole et al., 2016). Leadership development can be defined as any activity that improves the skills, abilities, or confidence of leaders or aspiring leaders (HRZone, n.d.). Leadership programs can be formal training programs, informal coaching, or mentoring (HRZone, n.d.). However, becoming or developing a leader necessitates a complex process of changes within and between persons and involves more than learning new skills or abilities (Day et al., 2014).

Common tools and techniques for developing leaders are assessment instruments, coaching, mentoring, emotional intelligence development, work experience, stretch assignments, rotational assignments, group-based leadership development, and multirater (360-degree) feedback (Society for Human Resource Management [SHRM], 2018).

Rekalde et al. (2017) compared executive coaching to other management training techniques and found executive coaching to be more effective in achieving behavior changes than long external courses (e.g., MBA), short external training courses, internal training courses, day schools, seminars, conferences, job rotation, e-learning courses, outdoor training, or mentoring. Additionally, they found the key advantage of executive coaching to be the customization and ability to adapt the training to an individual's specific needs (Rekalde et al., 2017). The key disadvantages were high costs, time investment, and difficulties in finding the right coach who was highly qualified and appropriately matched to the coachee (Rekalde et al., 2017).

The field of coaching experienced rapid growth from 1980-1994 with new areas and types of coaching such as life coaching, outplacement, and career coaching (Thompson et al., 2008). Prior to 1980, coaching was primarily done by organizational development professionals to correct deficiencies in performance, and after 1994, executive coaching and workforce coaching gained in use and popularity (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Thompson et al., 2008). PricewaterhouseCoopers (2016) studies the size and scope of coaching across the globe, and their latest findings revealed that executive coaches work with a nearly equal proportion of male and female clients.

There is little empirical research on the use of coaching for specifically developing female leaders (O'Neil et al., 2015). While executive coaching appears to be a very promising professional development tool, developing female leaders may require coaches to have a specialized understanding of the unique challenges faced by aspiring female leaders (O'Neil et al., 2015). More specifically, women face different societal

barriers, organizational barriers, interpersonal barriers, and personal challenges than men (Allen et al., 2016; Combs et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2018). Societal barriers include unfavorable cultural values, gender roles, attitudes towards women, media portrayal of women, and government policies (Allen et al., 2016; Combs et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2018). Organizational barriers can include an unfriendly corporate culture, preference for homophily in personnel decisions, inaction by male CEOs, managers, peers, higher standards of performance for women, and lack of career (Allen et al., 2016; Combs et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2018).. Interpersonal barriers include biases, stereotyping, preconceptions, exclusion from informal networks, and lack of mentors for women (Allen et al., 2016; Combs et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2018).. Personal challenges can include lack of confidence, political savviness, and negotiation skills, as well as struggles with balancing home-life responsibilities (Metz & Kumra, 2019; O'Neil et al., 2015).

Ibarra et al. (2013) asserted that "second-generation" bias is a key reason for lack of female leadership representation. Second-generation bias refers to the lack of role models for women, gendered career paths, gendered work, lack of access to network and sponsors, and double binds (Ibarra et al., 2013). O'Neil et al. (2015) posited that the "double-bind" effect refers to the disconnect between societal norms for women (e.g., be kind, sympathetic, nurturing) and leadership expectations (e.g., be assertive, direct, commanding). Given these barriers and challenges, it is not surprising that women have lower job satisfaction rates (Lipinska-Grobeleny & Waskiak, 2010) and are more likely than men to burn out (Carter, 2011).

Because women face different barriers and challenges than men, Ibarra et al. (2013) advocated for a safe setting such as a coaching relationship where women can discuss and interpret feedback as part of their identity development. The coaching relationship, when appropriately focused, may also help aspiring female leaders learn to navigate second-generation bias and double-binds. O'Neil et al. (2015) also argued that coaches need to be aware of these gendered dynamics to support women and help them create their own leadership presence. For example, in a qualitative study of senior executive women who received coaching, Skinner (2014) found that formation of a professional identity as a leader emerged as a core theme in the data. There were three enabling factors that mitigated the impact of male norms and helped women develop their own unique leadership identity: viewing one's coach as a role model, managing motivation, and leading with authenticity (Skinner, 2014). Skinner also found that each participant differed in their developmental process, which highlights the individualistic nature of seeing oneself as a leader.

Problem Statement

In comparison to men, women are more likely to struggle with their identity as leaders (Ely et al, 2011). Women face more organizational barriers, gender bias, and gender/leader role conflict, and they may lack role models to emulate, which can complicate the developmental process of leader formation (Ely et al., 2011). Executive coaching is one strategy for addressing leadership development that has been shown to be effective (Sonesh et al., 2015). Though equal numbers of men and women appear to access executive coaching (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016), women are still

underrepresented as senior leaders (Catalyst, 2020a). One reason for this apparent lack of efficacy at diminishing the gender gap may be the strategies used by executive coaches when working with females who aspire to be senior leaders (Skinner, 2014). Through this study, I sought to add to the growing body of research on executive coaching by investigating the strategies and practices that executive coaches employ when working with women who aspire to senior leadership roles.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how executive coaches working with aspiring female leaders are addressing leadership identity challenges. The intent was to explore leadership identity formation within the context of executive coaching and to understand what strategies can be used to specifically help women aspiring to senior leadership roles to develop their unique leadership identity.

Research Questions

Three research questions (RQs) were designed to address the gap in the literature:

RQ 1. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, , how do executive coaches address matters of leadership self-efficacy?

RQ 2. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches incorporate leadership identity development strategies into the coaching process?

RQ 3. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches tailor their coaching to address organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical basis for this study was drawn from adaptive leadership (AL) and self-efficacy (SE) theories, which reflect key constructs within social cognitive theory (SCT). DeRue (2011) asserted that leadership and becoming a leader is a socially complex and adaptive process. "Leadership [is] a social interaction process where individuals engage in repeated leading-following interactions, and through these interactions, co-construct identities and relationships as leaders and followers" (p.126). The leader and the followers create their leader or follower identity via a claiming and granting process (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Leaders make claims, and followers grant claims. As this process is repeated, individuals internalize their identity as a leader or as a follower (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

DeRue and Ashford (2010) asserted that leading and following, identity construction, and leader/follower emergence are interlocking acts influenced by the environment on three levels—individual, relational, and organizational. On an individual level, there are leader or follower actions that lead to role internalization and emergence as either a leader or a follower (DeRue, 2011). On a relational level, there are "double interacts" between leader and follower that lead to role recognition and allow the leader/follower relationship to emerge. At the group level, there is a pattern of leading and following "double interacts" that leads to a collective endorsement, and a group-level leadership structure emerges (DeRue, 2011).

Leadership identity construction is central to AL and is the basis for leader-follower relationships in groups (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). To become a leader,

individuals must internalize their role as part of their identity, but in order to do so, they

must be recognized by others and be endorsed as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). It is

a cyclical process where positive or negative spirals may result as part of the identity

construction process (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). To explain, a positive spiral occurs when

an individual makes a claim, and a follower grants it. This granting process supports the

individual and reinforces their role as a leader. The opposite could also occur whereby

the claiming behavior is not accepted, resulting in a negative spiral, and future claims are

less likely to be repeated in the future. In other words, when a leader receives validation,

it strengthens their confidence as a leader and increases their desire to lead, and if a

leader does not receive validation, it lowers their confidence and the individual is less

likely to seek new opportunities to lead or experiment with new leadership roles (Ely et

al., 2011).

The concepts of identity construction and SE are closely related. The SE concept

developed by Bandura (1977) has become an important variable in understanding

individual career development and career success (Betz, 2007). Some researchers (e.g.,

Bandura, 1986; Grant & Greene, 2004; Marsh,1993) have even stated that SE is the most

important factor in achieving success (as cited in Moen & Allgood, 2009). SE refers to a

person's beliefs about his or her abilities to accomplish a task or perform a skill or

behavior (Bandura, 1977). There are three behavioral consequences of SE expectations:

(a) approach versus avoidance behavior; (b) quality or level of performance with the

desired task, skill, or behavior; and (c) persistence in the face of obstacles or

disconfirming experiences (Bandura, 1977; Hackett & Betz, 1981). SE beliefs are

specific rather than general, and for the purposes of this study, the focus was on

leadership SE (LSE). LSE can predict effective leadership and is important in developing

aspiring leaders (Anderson et al., 2008). Leaders high in LSE achieve superior results in

their individual performances as well as in their ability to inspire groups to achieve better

results (Paglis & Green, 2002; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Efficacy beliefs are a cognitive process whereby individuals use different sources

of information to interpret and determine their SE (Bandura, 1997; Moen & Allgood,

2009). There are four main sources of information gathering: experiences of mastery,

verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological arousal (Bandura, 1977;

1997). Executive coaching has been shown to increase LSE (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014;

Moen & Allgood, 2009). Some examples of how executive coaching could increase LSE

include "experiences of mastery," where a coach helps an individual reflect on past

experiences and improve upon their ability to be realistic and constructive in their

assessment (Moen & Allgood, 2009). Another example of how a coach could help

increase LSE with "verbal persuasion" and "vicarious experiences" is through words of

encouragement and role-play with the coach (O'Neil et al., 2015).

Nature of the Study

For this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the

lived experiences of executive coaches who work with aspiring female senior leaders, in

order to determine specifically what strategies, if any, are employed to address matters of

leader identity construction and leader SE. For this approach, an existential

phenomenology design was used to capture the methods and processes that executive

coaches use with clients (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The existential phenomenology

design is appropriate because it explores the "lived experiences" of those being studied

(Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The study examined the lived experiences of executive

coaches who work with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, especially as that

work pertains to matters of leader identity and leadership SE.

To obtain an accurate and thorough understanding of what strategies are

employed, semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted via Zoom (video).

Semistructured interviews with open-ended questions were most appropriate for this

study as these allowed the flexibility to probe participants further after initial responses

(Mack et al., 2005). The semistructured, open format also supported the existential,

phenomenological design by enabling participants to fully convey, in rich detail, the

nature of their lived experience as coaches in this capacity. As the participants for this

study were geographically distributed throughout the United States, telephone or video

interviews were considered the most effective and efficient means for gathering the

interview data (Sekaran, 2000).

Purposive sampling was used to identify and qualify participants for the study.

Purposive sampling entails using preselected criteria that are relevant to the research

questions to qualify participants (Mack et al., 2005). Participants were expected to be

executive coaches working with aspiring female leaders. To recruit participants, I asked

the Network of Executive Women (NEW) to assist with the process and facilitate

communication to solicit participants. NEW currently runs a leadership development

program, NEW Rising Stars, for women aspiring to senior leadership roles. Each year, 36

women are chosen to participate in the program and are provided executive coaches as part of the development process.

NVivo software was used to organize, store, retrieve and analyze the data. NVivo is a software program often used in qualitative or mixed-methods research, and it can analyze text, audio, video, and image data, including interviews. Otter, a free transcribing software, was used to transcribe each interview, and the data were then uploaded into NVivo.

Definitions

The following definitions based on the literature were used to operationally define key variables in this proposed study:

Executive coaching: Executive coaching can be defined as "a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement" (Kilburg, 1996, p. 142).

Gender: Gender constitutes the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex (Eagly, 1987).

Identity: The various meanings attached to oneself by self and others is the common definition of identity. The meanings are derived from social roles, group memberships, and personal traits (Gecas, 1982, as cited in Ibarra et al., 2014).

Identity work: Identity work is defined as "being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising their identities" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

Leader identity: Leader identity is a "sub-component of one's identity that relates to being a leader or how one thinks of oneself as a leader" (Day & Harrison, 2007, p. 365)

Leadership: Leadership is defined as "a social influence process focused on achieving a common objective" (Paglis, 2010, p. 772). It also includes social influence, voluntary followership, and goal setting (Paglis, 2010).

Leadership self-efficacy (LSE): LSE encompasses an individual's level of confidence in his or her abilities to behave as a leader and perform in a leadership role (Paglis, 2010).

Second-generation bias: "[T]he powerful yet often invisible barriers to women's advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men" (Ely et al., 2011, p. 475).

Assumptions

Because participation was voluntary, it was assumed that the participants truthfully and honestly answered my questions and described with integrity their methodologies for helping women. Participants signed a consent form that explained the confidential nature of our interviews. Therefore, it was also assumed that participants

were forthcoming with their information and did not hold back in sharing their experiences.

Participants (executive coaches) were more likely to be female; however, males were not excluded from participating. It was assumed that coachees had similar experiences regardless of a coach's gender, which is supported in the literature. O'Brien et al. (2010) found in a meta-analytic study that there are no gender differences in mentees' mentoring experiences; however, female mentors often reported providing greater levels of psychosocial support in line with gender expectations. Bozer et al. (2015) found that gender similarity did not affect coaching outcomes. Therefore, it was assumed that an executive coach of either gender could provide effective coaching to their clients.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to the methods and experiences of executive coaches working with women. Participants were certified executive coaches (e.g., International Coaching Federation [ICF] certified) known to have at least 3 years of executive coaching experience, recommended and on record as having worked with a minimum of five aspiring female leaders. It was important to have participants who had proper training as coaches and had experience in executive coaching. To answer my research questions, it was also necessary to use coaches who had experience with coaching aspiring senior leaders and not just experience with senior leaders.

Executive coaches were male or female for the purposes of this study. Any gender differences in coaching methods were outside the scope of this study and are later suggested to be a consideration in future research studies.

Limitations

This study examined the lived experiences of executive coaches who worked with aspiring female senior leaders with a particular focus on leader identity construction and leader SE. The first limitation was the nature of this study, in that qualitative research uses a limited participant pool and is therefore not generalizable to the general population. The second limitation was the possibility for proprietary tools that executive coaches may use that they would not be able or willing to share. A third limitation was the honesty and truthfulness of the data, as coaches may have selective memory, personal biases, and/or embellish the truth in a manner that sheds a positive light on their expertise but does not accurately reflect the work they do with the population of interest. A fourth limitation was any gender differences in coaching methods. All these potential limitations may affect the validity of the data. The data, as stated before, were collected via in-depth interviews with coaches and therefore cannot be verified independently.

Significance of Study

The zeitgeist of 2017 and 2018 was heavily influenced by the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, which focused on anti-sexual-assault and anti-harassment activism and women's empowerment (Langone, 2018). *Time* magazine asserted that these two movements had raised the global consciousness of barriers that women face personally and professionally (Langone, 2018). These movements and the

underrepresentation of females at the highest levels of organizations and politics paved the way for an abundance of news articles and scholarly works.

Many studies have looked at the barriers faced by women seeking positions in upper management and potential solutions to increasing the numbers of women in upper management (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017; Ely et al., 2011; Kay & Shipman, 2014). However, progress toward gender diversity in senior levels is slow to stagnant (Catalyst, 2020a). According to Myers (2017), "hiring, supporting, retaining, and advancing women have become business imperatives" (p. xxii). Despite the popularity of executive coaching, its effectiveness in developing women leaders has not yet been extensively studied (de Hann & Duckworth, 2013). If executive coaching is found to positively impact women's advancement, more companies could utilize this development tool to achieve their diversity goals. Additionally, women could choose to seek an executive coach even if it is not part of a broader corporate initiative with their employer.

Summary and Transition

With the growing popularity of executive coaching and the need for more diversity in senior leadership roles, this study examined what strategies executive coaches use with aspiring female leaders to address matters of identity construction and LSE. The study was qualitative in methodology, using in-depth interviews to determine how executive coaches work with women to develop their own unique leadership voice. Research has shown that executive coaching improves LSE and improves leadership behaviors; however, there is a lack of research on the use of executive coaches specifically working with women who aspire to move into senior leadership roles. The

purpose of this study was to add to the growing body of research on developing women leaders and executive coaching methods.

In Chapter 2, the literature review examines leadership identity theories and the importance of developing a leader identity and LSE. In the literature review, I also consider the barriers that women face in becoming leaders and how this affects their sense of leader identity. Lastly, I highlight the growing body of evidence supporting the use of executive coaching to develop leaders. In Chapter 3, the research design, methodology, and procedures are explained. Participant characteristics and how the data were analyzed are also discussed. Ethical considerations are outlined, as well as considerations to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the results of this study regarding the lived experiences of executive coaches working with females aspiring to senior leadership roles. It begins with a restatement of the research questions and a description of participant demographics. The data analysis and coding processes are discussed. Samples of participant responses are included. The chapter concludes with themes that emerged from the data analysis process. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation. It begins with a restatement of the purpose of this phenomenological study. Themes are further explored, and recommendations for further research are provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research in leadership continues to evolve (Day, 2014). For decades, researchers have sought to understand what makes a good leader and how one becomes a leader (Day, 2014). This chapter provides a review of the literature in leadership development, women in leadership, and executive coaching. First, I explore leadership development theories, and then I focus on leadership identity development theories along with LSE theory. Second, the review summarizes studies of women in leadership and then narrows to theories regarding the gender gap. Third, effective leadership development tools are reviewed with a particular focus on executive coaching. This chapter concludes with how the study adds to the current body of knowledge within leadership development, and more specifically, executive coaching as a leadership development tool for women.

Literature Research Strategy

Most articles and books for the literature review were found by using the Walden Library link in Google Scholar. Many of the articles identified via Google Scholar were pulled from Walden University Library databases such as ProQuest Central, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Emerald Insight, and SAGE Journals. Books not available in the Walden University Library were either purchased from a bookstore or borrowed from the local library via interlibrary loans with state universities. The Walden University Library was used to access webinars and tutorials on methodology as well as other relevant resources, such as past dissertations. Key search words such as *leadership, leadership identity development, women in leadership, gender, women in corporations, workplace diversity, managing diversity, women's career advancement, gender gap, executive*

coaching, and *mentoring* were used to find relevant articles. In Google Scholar, a search for *leadership* yielded 4.17 million results, and a search for *gender gap* yielded 3.2 million results. To narrow down the leadership articles, word searches were paired with other relevant terms, and older articles were mostly discarded. When the terms *executive coaching* and *women* were paired, the Google Search yielded a much smaller number of results (6,210), which reflected the limited research on the use of executive coaching with women specifically. Last, using the "cited by" tool in Google Scholar, additional articles were found that were particularly relevant to the current study.

Leadership

Stories of great leaders abound in history and in fables (Zaccaro, 2014). Leaders and leadership styles can be found in Greek mythology (Zeus), religion (Jesus, Mohammad, Buddha), politics (George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr.), military (Sun Tzu, Alexander the Great, Napoleon) and fiction (Odysseus, Robin Hood, Harry Potter, Daenerys Targaryen). What separates leaders and nonleaders, good leaders and bad leaders, is one of the oldest subjects of research (Zaccaro, 2014). However, leadership as a research field did not gain momentum until the 1940s with the Ohio State leadership studies (Lord et al., 2017). Leadership has a profound effect on organizational outcomes, so leadership research continues to change and evolve, just as society continues to change and evolve (Day, 2014).

The earliest theories surrounding leadership date back to the 1840s, with the Great Man theory (Judge et al., 2002). This theory involves the assumption that leaders are born, not made, and are destined to become leaders. The leader as a hero was popularized

by Thomas Carlyle in the mid-1800s with the publication of his book *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Judge et al., 2002). Trait theory emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, with a focus on certain traits or qualities that allow an individual to become and excel as a leader. In the 1950s and 1960s, behavioral theories emerged in contrast to trait theories. Scholars started studying the behavior of leaders and shifted to the idea that leaders can be made or developed. Lord et al. (2017) posited that there are three distinct waves of theory and research in applied psychology. The first wave of theory and research (1948-1961) focuses on behavioral style approaches. The second wave (1969-1989) consists of gender and leadership studies, social cognitive theories, contingency/situational approaches, and early transformational leadership. The third wave (1999-2007) is marked by meta-analysis of trait and leader styles, leader-member exchange (LMX), team leadership, trust, and transformational and charismatic leadership. Twenty-first century researchers have written about many different facets of leadership, such as leadership traits, leadership behaviors, situations where leadership occurs, leaders' abilities to formulate visions and transform followers, and the role of the leader or the follower (Day, 2014). Popular topics include transformational leadership, visionary leadership, servant leadership, ethical leadership, and leadership development (Day, 2014).

Dinh et al. (2014) found 66 disparate leadership theories in their analysis of the literature published in top-tier journals between 2000 and 2012. Other scholars have argued that these theories can be combined and boiled down to a smaller number of theories (Mango, 2018). In *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations*, Day

(2014) organized current theories and research into leader-centric, follower-centric, dyadic and team-centric, and emerging issues and concerns. A deep dive into these various areas is outside the scope of this review; however, the focus of this review is on the intersection of leadership identity, leadership in a diverse workplace, and women in leadership. Leadership identity theory is often presented as a leader-centric, stand-alone theory in the literature; however, a newer theory, AL theory, includes identity theory as an important part of the overall model (DeRue, 2011).

Leadership Identity Theories

Leadership identity theories are based on theories of identity and how identities develop (Ibarra et al., 2014). The idea of a self-identity dates back as far as 1890 in the works of William James (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). Carl Rogers furthered this idea in the mid-20th century with his ideal-self and self-image constructs (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). Both James and Rogers considered identity to be a stable, internal construct (Fox-Kirk et al., 2017). However, other researchers believed that identity is an ongoing process of shifting and negotiating through internal dialog and social interaction (e.g., Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; Ricoeur, 1991; Foucault, 1997; Butler, 2011).

Another notable researcher in identity is Erik Erikson (1902-1994), student of Sigmund Freud (Kroger, 2015). Erikson is well known for his eight stages of human psychological development, which span from birth to death (Kroger). Erikson wrote extensively about identity, but particularly around identity development in adolescence, including concepts such as "identity crisis" and "role confusion" (Kroger). Most 21st-century researchers of leader identity propose that a leader identity develops over time

and is an ongoing process of social interactions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Hogg et al., 2012; Miscenko & Day, 2016). Leader identity theories are different from other leader theories in proposing that a leader becomes a leader versus being born as a leader (Alabdulhadi et al., 2017). For example, trait theorists argue that leaders are born with certain traits, such as personality traits, and these traits are largely static over one's lifetime (see Bono et al. [2014] for a review). Research suggests that leader identity develops over time and is subject to change (Miscenko et al., 2017).

There are several theories of leader identity, including identity-based leader development theory, social identity theory of leadership, implicit leadership theory (also called leader prototype theory), and adaptive leadership theory (Ibarra et al., 2014). Ibarra et al. argued that current theories can be classified into three general genres: identity theory, social identity theory, and social construction. Table 1 presents an adaptation of Ibarra et al.'s summary of the 3 core leadership identity theories and the implications.

Table 1

Leadership Identity Theory Genres

	Identity theories	Social identity theories	Social construction theories
Leader emergence	Individuals take on a role or are given a new role.	Prototypical group members gain influence by embodying the characteristics that define the group's essence.	Individuals claim and are granted the leader role in a given social interaction.
Leader development	Individuals try on provisional selves. Development occurs through experimentation, personalization, and internalization of the leader role and through practice.	Members adapt their behavior to group prototypes to gain power; leaders guide group identity to maintain prototypicality and preserve power.	Positive spirals of being repeatedly granted leader claims result in increased confidence, motivation, and seeking of leadership opportunities.
Leader effectiveness	As the leader adapts and grows into the role, expectations for the role are fulfilled.	Leader prototypicality engenders member trust, allows for a wider range of acceptable action, and can protect perceptions of leader effectiveness.	With practice and exposure to different situation requirements, leaders are better able to judge what is needed by different followers and adapt their leadership style to them.

Note. Adapted from "Leadership and Identity: An Examination of Three Theories and New Research Directions," by H. Ibarra, S. Wittman, G. Petriglieri, and D. Day, in D. Day (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership and Organizations* (p. 291), 2014, Oxford University Press (https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199755615.001.0001).

Identity Theories

Identity-based theories focus on individuals and the development of their roles as leaders (Ibarra et al., 2014). Individuals experiment with different identities (provisional selves) before internalizing their self-concept of a leader (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra at al., 2014). One example of an identity theory is that of Ibarra et al. (2010), who proposed an identity-based leader development theory. Their model indicates that leader development occurs as an identity transition, shifting from "doing" to "being," while exploring new

possible selves that are eventually integrated into a new identity as a leader. Ibarra et al. (2010) argued that leadership development programs need to incorporate activities that instigate self-concept change and allow individuals the space and time to complete their identity work. Individuals change through a process of separation (loss of current identity), transition (trying on of different selves, creating provisional selves), and incorporation of the new identity (Ibarra et al., 2010). Introspection and feedback are a necessary part of the transition phase. Acceptance of a new identity is determined by feelings of authenticity and positive feedback. Ibarra et al. (2010) also conjectured certain conditions must also be present for a successful transition to a leader identity. These include developmental readiness, opportunity, and space to try on provisional selves while allowing for psychological safety, guides (such as an executive coach or mentor) and peer reference groups, previous experiences, and post integration to achieve longer term maintenance (Ibarra, et al., 2010).

Ibarra's (1999) research provides evidence that individuals experiment with provisional selves when moving from technical and managerial roles to leader/advisory roles. Participants in her study reported imitation strategies and true-to-self strategies while experimenting with their provisional selves. Miscenko et al. (2017) conducted a study with postgraduate students and found that changes in leadership skills were positively related to changes in leader identity. They found that identity changes followed a curvilinear J-shaped developmental trajectory. The initial decrease in identity was thought to be reflective of the leader identity deconstruction concept where an individual temporarily sheds their leader identity to reconstruct a new, potentially more effective,

leader identity (Miscenko et al., 2017). The findings of Miscenko et al. (2017) support the need for changes in skills, behavior, and identity to develop leaders. Identity theory and the supporting evidence underscore the importance of individual identity work, including experimentation with provisional selves, in the development of leaders.

Social Identity Theories

These include theories such as the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001) and implicit leadership theory (Eden & Leviatan, 1975), and they focus on the prototypical leader, group norms, group identity, and the depersonalization process (seeing oneself as part of a group rather than as an individual; Ibarra et al., 2014). Social identity theories move away from the individual, internal role of a leader and treat self-identity as relational and a composite of social interactions. Eden and Leviatan (1975) coined the concept of implicit leadership theory after finding that students in their study had internal beliefs and expectations of leaders. Implicit leadership theory is based on the idea that people associate certain traits and behaviors with leaders, which are used to determine if an individual is leader-like or not (Alabdulhadi et al., 2017). Therefore, one's influence as a leader can be affected by whether one is seen as leader-like. A person who is not seen as leader-like or as having certain traits and behaviors will not be regarded as equally effective and will thus be ineffective in engaging followers to fulfill wanted tasks and goals (Lord & Maher, 1990).

Alabdulhadi et al. (2017) explained the mechanisms within implicit leadership theory, which are recognition-based processes (categorization) and inferential processes (attribution). Categorization is driven by "schemas" and "prototypes." Schemas "are pre-

existing cognitive models that individuals use to interpret incoming information"

(Alabdulhadi et al., 2017, p. 22). Prototypes "are commonly used forms of schemas

which summari[z]e the most salient characteristics of members in some category"

(Alabdulhadi et al., 2017, p. 22). Recognition-based processes or attribution happen when

an individual attributes success or failure to the leader based on their schemas or

prototypes. Prototypical leaders are seen as the cause of success, and success enhances

the perception of the leader's protypicality (Lord et al., 1984).

Hogg's (2001) social identity theory of leadership proposed that three core

processes are necessary for leadership emergence. These are prototypicality, social

attraction, and attribution and information processing (Hogg, 2001). Prototypicality refers

to how similar an individual is to the prototypical leader, while social attraction refers to

how prototypical members of a group are more well liked than nonprototypical members

(Hogg, 2001). Hogg's (2001) attribution and information processing are like the

discussion of Alabdulhadi et al. (2017) on implicit leadership theory.

To summarize the basic ideas of social identity theories, each person has a set of

beliefs about what a leader looks like and how a leader behaves (Hogg, 2001). Through

cognitive processes, individuals will compare themselves to their idea of a leader. If they

believe that they are like the prototypical leader, they are more likely to be identified as a

leader and to perform effectively as a leader (Hogg, 2001). The most prototypical

member will influence the less prototypical group members (Hogg, 2001). Prototypical

members are liked more than less prototypical members, allowing the most prototypical

member to exert influence more easily over others and gain support for their ideas or

recommendations. Positive feelings toward prototypical members constitute the social attraction process (Hogg, 2001). The leader or the most prototypical member is then attributed with a leader personality over time, which reinforces their authority to lead (Alabdulhadi et al., 2017; Hogg, 2001; Ibarra et al., 2014).

Social Construction Theories

These theories focus on social interactions where leaders make claims and followers grant them or deny them (Ibarra et al., 2014). Positive spirals of reinforcement allow the leader to emerge, boosting self-confidence and motivation to lead. Negative spirals weaken one's self-identity as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The leader-follower interactions are a key component of this line of theory. Adaptive leadership theory (DeRue, 2011) is an example of a social construction theory.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) adopted a social construction viewpoint of leader identity development, asserting that leader and follower identities are co-constructed via social interactions of claiming and granting processes. In their model, there are three levels of identities—individual, relational, and collective (see Figure 1). Therefore, a leader identity is comprised of individual internalization, relational recognition, and collective endorsement (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Identity work is central to this model, which encompasses claiming and granting behaviors that lead to the clarity and acceptance of leader-follower relationships (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). As this claiming-granting process is repeated, individuals internalize their identity as a leader or as a follower (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Claims are verbal and nonverbal actions, such as

asserting one's expertise in each area, sitting at the head of a table, or even dressing the part (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

Figure 1

Leadership Identity Construction Process
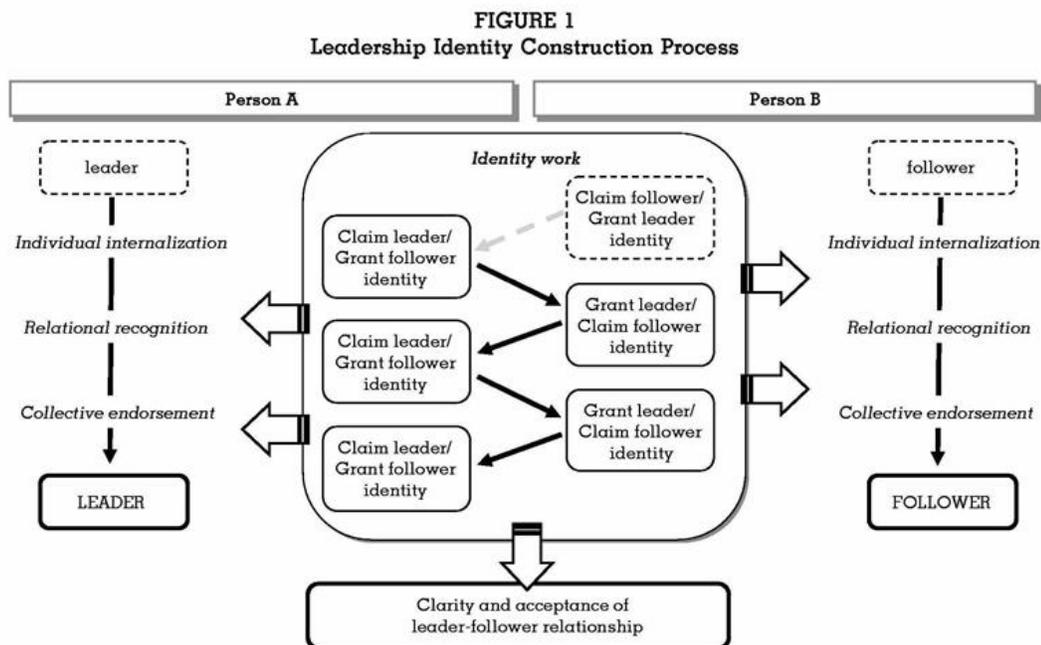
Note. From "Who Will Lead and Who Will Follow? A Social Process of Leadership Identity Construction in Organizations," by D. S. DeRue and S. J. Ashford, 2010, *Academy of Management Review*, *35*(4), p. 631 (https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.35.4.zok627). Copyright 2010 by Academy of Management. Reprinted with permission.

DeRue et al. (2009) asserted that individuals decide to make leader claims for one of three reasons. First, an individual makes a claim because his or her self-view is that of a leader. Using cognitive schema, individuals compare themselves to the attributes of the leader prototype (DeRue, et al.). If there is a fit between self and leader schema, a claim is made (DeRue, et al.). Second, leader-like behaviors are organizationally and socially

valued, so there is extrinsic value in being seen as a leader (DeRue, et al.). Third, a leader

claim may be adopted to fit with multiple leader-type schema from past experiences and

observations of role models (DeRue, et al.). This is where provisional selves are likely to

appear and experiment with making claims (DeRue et al.). According to DeRue et al.'s

model, the process of claiming is sometimes automatic and at other times, it is deliberate.

Grants can be verbal or non-verbal actions, such as deferring to the claimer's

opinion (DeRue et al., 2009). Grants are approved if the claimer fits the granter's schema

of a leader (traits, skills, and behaviors) using a claimer versus leader schema comparison

process (DeRue et al.). Sometimes internalizing leadership behavior begins with a grant,

such as being appointed to lead a task force. Positive or negative spirals may result as

part of the identity construction process (DeRue et al.). A positive spiral occurs when an

individual makes a claim, and a follower grants it (DeRue et al.). The claimer then makes

another one, boosting his or her confidence as a leader each time a claim is granted. This

granting process supports the individual and reinforces their role as a leader. The opposite

could also occur when claiming behavior is not accepted, resulting in a negative spiral

with future claims being less likely to be repeated (DeRue et al.).

Adaptive Leadership Theory

DeRue (2011), building upon previous work and others' research, developed

adaptive leadership theory which includes the individual, relational, group levels of

identities with claiming-granting behaviors; however, at the relational level a "double

interact" occurs and a pattern of "double interacts" happen at the group level. DeRue

(2011) describes the "double interact'" as the dual, simultaneous social interaction

between a leader and a follower "whereby the behaviors of one actor are contingent on but also influence the behaviors of other actors" (p.129). DeRue (2011) also added to this model by including four leadership structures that emerge because of the leader-follower identities and relationships: centralized leadership, distributed leadership, shared leadership, and leadership void (see Figure 2). Which structure emerges is based on the magnitude of leader-follower interacts, the degree of centralization and the variability of leader/follower identities (DeRue, 2011). The social construction viewpoint incorporates the prototypicality of a leader from social identity theories and the use of provisional selves from identity theory (DeRue, 2011)

Figure 2

Adaptive Leadership Theory: A Conceptual Model
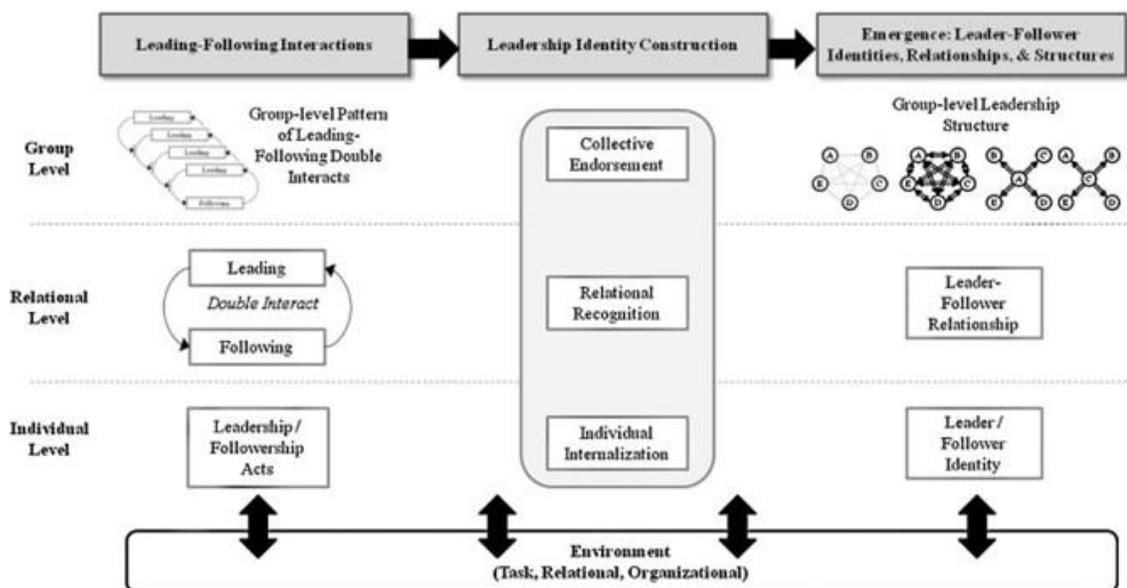
From "Adaptive Leadership Theory: Leading and Following as a Complex Adaptive Process," by D. S. DeRue, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, *31*, p. 132 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2011.09.007). Copyright 2011 by Elsevier. Reprinted with permission.

Leader Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's (1977) SCT posited individuals learn by observing, imitating and modeling via a continuous and dynamic system of reciprocal relationships between the person, behaviors, and the environment. SE is a key component in this model and is a cognitive process (Dwyer, 2019). SE is an individual's belief or perception in his or her abilities to complete a task or to perform a skill or behavior (Murphy & Johnson, 2016). It is closely related to self-confidence (Murphy & Johnson, 2016). SE can be general or specific. General SE is an individual's perception of his or her ability to perform across a variety of situations (Murphy & Johnson, 2016). Specific SE reflects beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Murphy & Johnson, 2016). SE has been studied with health behaviors, work performance, career choice, career success, math, and motivation, to name a few of the many studies in the literature (Hackett & Betz, 1995; Jackson, Tucker, & Herman, 2007; Judge, Jackson, Shaw, Scott, & Rich, 2007; Lee, 2009).

LSE is a leader's estimate of his or her ability to fulfill the leadership role and Leader Developmental Efficacy (LDE) is one's beliefs about his or her ability to change and develop leadership skills (Murphy & Johnson, 2016). LSE is strongly related to leadership performance ratings (Chemers Et al., 2000) and is a predictor of effective leadership (Andersonet al., 2008; Lesteret al., 2011). Leaders high in LSE achieve superior results in their individual performance as well as in their ability to inspire groups to achieve better results (Paglis & Green, 2002; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). LDE leads to increased development experiences; is associated with better performance, greater resilience, and increased LSE (Murphy & Johnson, 2016).

There is some disagreement among researchers as to the exact construct definition and measurement of LSE (Paglis, 2010). Ladegard and Gjerde (2014) argued that leader role-efficacy (LRE) should be used in place of LSE and adopted the following definition: "a leader's confidence judgment in his or her ability to carry out the behaviors that comprise the leadership role" (Paglis, 2010, p.772). LRE focuses on the behavioral aspects of leadership. Using a mixed-methods study, Ladegard and Gjerde confirmed that when LRE increased, leaders had more confidence in their abilities to master tasks, to self-reflect and had increased sense of agency.

Machida and Schaubroek (2011) discussed four concepts that are pertinent to leader development: preparatory SE, efficacy spirals, learning SE and resilient SE. Preparatory SE is one's willingness to learn and change. Machida and Schaubroek argued that leaders with extremely high or low LSE have lower motivation to learn and are likely to have low preparatory SE. In other words, if an individual is already confident in her leadership abilities, she is less likely to be open to change and to learning new leadership skills. SE spirals can be upward, downward or self-correcting (Machida & Schaubroek). Upward spirals happen with successful performance, causing SE to increase. Downward spirals are the opposite and self-correcting is a pattern of a decrease in performance and SE, followed by an increase in performance and SE (Machida & Schaubroek).

Salanova, Llorens, and Schaufeli (2011) conducted a longitudinal study on gain spirals to better understand the positive and cyclical relationship between efficacy and engagement in development. Results indicated support for a dynamic relationship in which efficacy and engagement influenced each other across time (Salanova, et al, 2011). It could be argued that efficacy spirals are like the positive and negative spirals discussed

in AL theory. Learning SE is one's perception of his or her ability to learn and master a new skill and Resilient SE is one's ability to continue forward in the face of failure or adversity (Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011). Bandura (1997) emphasized the importance of resiliency in his work.

Research studies show that LSE positively influences leadership effectiveness (Dwyer, 2019). Research also suggests that LSE can be increased through leadership development programs (Dwyer). Therefore, LSE is an important construct to incorporate when considering or evaluating leadership development programs.

Women in Leadership

Scientific research on women in leadership began to emerge in the 1970s (Chemers, 2000). Prior to the 1970s, gender and leadership issues were largely ignored by researchers (Simon & Hoyt, 2016). However, women have been influencing leadership long before researchers began to study women's roles outside of the home. Women's suffrage began in the mid-1800s and continued until women were granted the right to vote on August 18,1920 via the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (History.com Editors, 2021). In the 1950s, women organized labor activities and fought for equal rights in the 1960s (Deslippe, 1996). The Equal Pay Act was signed by President Kennedy in 1963 and prohibits gender-based wage discrimination (History.com Editors, 2019). The first American female CEO was Anna Bissell (Bissell, n.d.). She became CEO in 1889 and is credited with making Bissell sweepers an international company (Bissell, n.d.). Katharine Graham was the first female Fortune 500 CEO (Worthen, 2019). She became CEO in 1972 after her husband's death and led The

Washington Post for more than two decades (Worthen). Margaret Thatcher was the first

female Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1979 and led Great Britain for 11 years

(Biography.com Editors, 2020).

Researchers in the 21st century no longer doubt that women can lead and can lead

effectively (Chin, 2014). Today, the question is not whether women can lead, but why

aren't there more female leaders (Chin, 2014). Women have been earning more bachelor

and master's degrees than men since the late 1980s (Catalyst, 2020b). Women started

earning more doctorate degrees than men in 2006 (Catalyst, 2020b). However, there were

only 32 female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies in 2017, 24 in 2018, and 33 in 2019 and

30 in 2021 (Catalyst, 2021b; Zarya, 2017, 2018; Zillman, 2019). Some of the most visible

female CEOs of 2021 include Mary Barra of General Motors, Jane Fraser of Citigroup,

Inc., Mary Dillon of Ulta and Michele Buck of Hershey (Catalyst, 2021b). Why does the

underrepresentation of women continue at the highest levels? In the next section, we will

explore barriers to leadership.

Barriers to Leadership

Women continue to be underrepresented in politics and in business – corporate

board rooms, CEOs, and senior management (Goryunova et al., 2017). Women face

many barriers to reach leadership positions in politics and business (Diehl & Dzubinski,

2017). Millions of articles, blogs, reports, and studies have been written about the barriers

women face to reach leadership positions and why they continue to be underrepresented

in politics and business. A google search of *barriers women face to leadership* revealed

45,700,000 results and a google scholar search resulted in 698,000 articles. The zeitgeist

of 'Time's Up' has brought renewed light to inequality in the workplace and women's

empowerment (Langone, 2018). There are a myriad of complex reasons and phenomena

that deter or block women from advancing. Diehl and Dzubinski's (2017) research

uncovered 27 gender-based leadership barriers. They organized these barriers by level of

society – macro (societal), meso (organizational) and micro (individual). Interestingly,

Diehl interviewed women in higher education and Dzubinski interviewed women in

evangelical mission organizations (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2017). In these very different

environments, women faced similar challenges.

Chin (2014) argued that women are underrepresented as leaders due to lack of

access to leadership roles (glass-ceiling phenomenon), bias towards women, and the

perceptions/expectations of female leaders. Research has shifted from trying to "fix the

women" to "fixing the environment" (Metz & Kumra, 2019). In line with this thinking,

Bligh and Ito (2017) argue that organizational processes and systems are to blame for the

lack of female advancement. Organizations perpetuate a predominantly masculine culture

that makes it difficult for women to fit into the model of an "ideal" employee or leader

(Bligh & Ito). Furthermore, women remain stifled due to lack of access to networks (e.g.,

"old boy" network), mentors and role models (Bligh & Ito).

Both internal and external barriers can be blamed for holding women back in their

career progression (Longman & Bray, 2017). They are interconnected. Women hold

themselves back when they lack confidence, but often their confidence is undermined by

gender stereotypes and expectations (Ibarra et al., 2013). Women are less likely to

negotiate for promotions or greater pay; however, when they do, they are viewed less

favorably (Bligh & Ito, 2017). Table 2 lists the many researched barriers to leadership

that women face at the societal, organizational, interpersonal, and personal levels.

Table 2

Barriers to Leadership

Societal barriers	Organizational barriers	Interpersonal barriers	Personal barriers
• Difficulty in being heard or talked over by males • Cultural constraints on field of study or careers • Gender stereotypes (e.g. Men are leaders and women are caregivers) • Gender unconsciousness; Lack of awareness of the role that gender plays in the workplace • Portrayal of women in media (sex objects, victims, queen bee, iron maiden, selfless heroine)	• Unfriendly corporate culture • Preference for homophily (gender similarity) as a basis for personnel decisions • Inaction by male CEOs, managers and silent majority male peers • Higher standards of performance and effort for women • Lack of systematic career development opportunities for women • Tokenism • Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff • Pay gap/Salary inequality • Lack of sponsorship • Lack of support & resources • Workplace harassment	• Biases, stereotyping and preconceptions • Exclusion from informal networks • Lack of mentors • Lack of role models	• Lack of confidence, political savvy, negation skills • Home-life responsibilities • Psychological glass ceiling • Personalizing (internalizing failure vs external events) • Communication style constraints • Gender unconsciousness

Note. Sources included Diehl and Dzubinski (2017), Elliott and Stead (2017), Hoole et al. (2016), Ibarra et al. (2013), Longman and Bray (2017), Metz and Kumra (2019), and O'Neil et al. (2015).

Ibarra et al. (2013) found that when women are educated on the barriers to

leadership, they are better able to recognize the pervasiveness and subtle effects on them

and other women. When women recognize these effects, "they feel empowered, not

victimized, because they can take action to counter the effects" (Ibarra et al., 2013, p.64).

Clarke (2011) also found that when women were educated about the barriers, particularly

self-limiting behaviors, they felt empowered to make a change in their own behaviors. However, it is not just as simple as understanding the barriers to leadership to overcome the barriers and ascend to leadership positions. Sealy and Singh (2010) found that gender stereotyping and lack of role models interrupted the leader identity process. If society and organizations celebrate males as the prototypical leaders, a woman may have a difficult time asserting herself as a leader or even seeing herself as a leader (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Ibarra et al (2013) argue that identity work is imperative to become aware of biases that exist in society and in the workplace.

Murphy et al. (2017) argue that developmental relationships are the keys to leadership ascension. They suggest mentors, sponsors, peers, executive coaches and learning partners as five developmental relationships that are critical for women leaders (Murphy et al.). Women face more barriers to leadership roles than men and therefore need more developmental support (Murphy et al.). It is not enough to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to become a leader (Murphy et al.). High-quality relationships can support the process of leader identification and help women see themselves as authentic leaders (Murphy et al.). "To create strong identities as leaders, women need a plethora of relationships where the relational other portrays (that is, projects back) a view in which the woman is able to see herself as a leader" (Murphy et al. 2017, p. 364). Murphy et al. argue that women and organizations need to be intentional about seeking developmental support through relationships inside and outside of the workplace. Table 3 provides an overview of the development relationships needed

to advance one's career and is derived from Murphy et al.'s research on critical

developmental relationships for female leaders.

Table 3

Five Developmental Relationships Critical for Women Leaders

Developer type	Primary purpose	Who can fulfill the role
Mentors	Provide support for mentee, such as career support, psychosocial support, and role modeling.	Individuals within the organization who have more seniority or those external to the organization who have more experience.
Sponsors	Advocate for the individual to be promoted or provided with developmental tools, including. access to growth opportunities or other organizational leaders.	Individuals with power and influence who hold as senior-level position within the organization.
Peers	Provide information sharing, career strategizing, psychosocial support, and job-related feedback.	Individuals at same level or just above current level
Executive coach	Create dialogue that enables self-reflection, feedback, and opportunities to practice new self-enhancing behaviors.	Individual internal or external to the organization, who is trained in coaching methods and often is certified as a coach.
Learning partners	Learning and growth partner(s) who provide psychosocial support.	Spouses, neighbors, or friends with no specific qualifications. .

Note. Adapted from "Advancing women through developmental relationships," by W. M. Murphy, K. R.

Gibson, K.E. Kram, K. E. In S. R. Madsen (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and leadership* (p. 367),

2017, Edward Elgar Publishing. (https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785363863).

Gender Differences in Leadership

There has been some debate in the literature about which gender is better at

managing and leading people within organizations (Chin, 2014). To answer the question

of leadership effectiveness, Eagly et al. (1995) conducted a meta-analysis to review the

research. Leadership effectiveness is defined as "the ability of a group or organization to meet its goals and maintain itself over time" (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 128). Ultimately, the authors found that males and females did not differ in their effectiveness as leaders. However, males tended to be more effective in male-dominated roles and women tended to be more effective in female-dominated roles (Eagly et al., 1995). Men were also more effective in roles that required more task abilities (directing and controlling) whereas women were more effective in roles that required more interpersonal abilities (Eagly et al., 1995).

Leadership researchers generally use three broad categories of leadership styles. These are transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Eagly, et al., 2003). Transformational is more inspirational and motivating. Transactional leadership focuses on monitoring, intervening, and rewarding subordinates and laissez-faire is more "hands-off", allowing subordinates to manage themselves (Eagly, et al., 2003). Studies indicate that transformational leadership along with contingent reward behaviors is more effective (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe et al., 1996) and women are more likely to utilize a transformational leadership style and contingent reward behaviors (Eagly, et al., 2003). Eagly (2007) argues that transformational leadership reflects a cultural shift and that organizations value a more collaborative and participative style of leadership versus the authoritarian model of the past. Utilizing a transformational style, allows for a greater probability of role congruity for women (Eagly, 2007). Women can maintain both roles as a leader and as a female without breaking social norms (Eagly, 2007).

Rosette and Tost (2010) conducted two studies on women in top leadership positions. They argue that women have a double standard of competence, meaning that women in top positions are perceived as having to meet exceptionally high standards to get promoted and are therefore seen as more competent than men. They also argue that women can be perceived as both agentic and communal at the same time. Their results supported the idea of a double standard and the duality of agentic and communal traits (Rosette & Tost, 2010). In fact, when women were perceived as being responsible for the organization's success, they were rated more favorably than men, however these results only hold if a woman is in the top leadership positions (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Female middle managers were rated as comparable to men. Additional findings include the expectation of feminized management tactics at the top levels (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Feminized management is described as "sharing responsibility, developing others' skills and abilities, helping others, and building and maintaining connections and relationships" (Rosette & Tost, 2010, p. 229). This style also incorporates the idea of coaching and a more democratic/collaborative approach to leading.

Zenger and Folkman (2012 & 2019) study the key leadership capabilities that differentiate excellent leaders from average or poor ones by analyzing 360-degree feedback. Their study in 2011 surveyed 7,280 leaders from public, private, government, commercial, domestic and international organizations. Most leaders surveyed were men (64%); however, women were rated higher in 12 of the 16 competencies identified with outstanding leadership (Zenger & Folkman, 2012). In their most recent study, women outscored men in 17 of the 19 capabilities studied (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Men were

rated better on "develops strategic perspective" and "technical or professional expertise". Women excelled in "taking initiative", "resilience", "practicing self-development", "drives for results", and "displays high integrity and honesty". Since 2016, Zenger and Folkman (2019) have been collecting data on self-assessments of confidence. This is another area where men and women differ. Male leaders have more confidence than women between the ages of 25-40 (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Zenger & Folkman (2019) conjecture than men are overconfident, assuming competence, in their earlier years which may account for why men are more likely to apply for jobs when they lack the qualifications or experience. Women, on the other hand, are less confident under the age of 40 and are likely to be more competent than they think they are (Zenger & Folkman, 2019).

There are more similarities than differences in how men and women lead; however, women are more likely to adopt a collaborative, cooperative, democratic leadership style and men are more likely to use directive, competitive, autocratic styles (Chin, 2014). Gender stereotypes may hold women back and cause women to be less favorably evaluated. Follower perceptions and expectations influence how women lead (Ibarra et al., 2013). Gender bias and the underrepresentation of women in executive roles frame the context in which women lead (Chin, 2014). Women's leadership experiences are different than men's leadership experiences (Ibarra et al.) More work is needed to understand the female leader's identity development into a leader, her lived experience, work-family intersects and how multiple identities influence her ability to lead and see herself as a leader (Chin, 2014).

Value of Diversity in Leadership

Workplace diversity can provide many competitive advantages. Diversity by its very nature allows for a variety of perspectives. A diverse workforce can help businesses reach new customer segments or new markets, promote greater innovation and creativity, better decision-making skills or even faster decision-making abilities, improved hiring, better company reputation which ultimately leads to a competitive advantage and increased profits (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2014; Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015).

Pew Research Center (2019) is a non-profit organization that studies U.S. politics, journalism, religion, global attitudes, trends and U.S. social and demographic trends among other topics. Their latest report on demographic trends in the U.S. shows the following statistics:

- Millennials (aged 23-38) now outnumber Baby Boomers (aged 55-73). Millennials are currently the largest living adult generation at 73 million.

- Gen Z (aged 7-22) are more educated and diverse than all previous generations. 48% of Gen Z are racial/ethnic minorities.

- Hispanics will be the largest minority group of eligible voters in 2020, with 32 million people, surpassing black voters at 30 million. Hispanics represent 13.3% of eligible voters and blacks represent 12.5%.

- One in four parents are unmarried, a change from 7% in 1968 to 25% in 2017. 32% of children in 2017 live with an unmarried parent. This is a significant change from 1968 when only 13% of children lived with an unmarried parent.

- Immigrants represent 13.6% of the population, the highest percent of the population since 1910. (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2019)

Given these demographic changes, the U.S. is becoming more diverse in population and workers. Changing demographics necessitate a need to lead in a diverse environment (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2014). Organizations that insist on homophily will limit their labor pool and ultimately their ability to succeed (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2014; Hunt et al., 2015). Inclusion and diversity are increasingly seen as a competitive advantage and an enabler of growth (Hunt et al., 2018). Organizations with diverse leadership teams consistently outperform financially (Hunt et al., 2018). Hunt et al. found that "companies in the top-quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 21% more likely to outperform on profitability and 27% more likely to have superior value creation" (2018, p. 1). However, it is not just gender diversity that matters. Hunt et al. (2018) found that ethnic and culturally diverse executive teams were 33% more likely to outperform on profitability.

Other studies also point to a diversity advantage. Desvauxet al. (2010) conducted a global survey of 279 companies. Their results showed a 47% higher return on equity for companies with a higher proportion of women on their executive committees as compared to companies with no female members. Jeong and Harrison (2017) conducted a meta-analysis, using 146 studies from 33 different countries and found a positive association between female representation on executive teams with long-term value creation for a firm's fiscal outcomes. However, they also found a short-term drop in stock market returns when a female was appointed CEO. As Jeong and Harrison note "investor

perceptions are at odds with eventual financial rewards (2017, p. 1235). In another study conducted by The Peterson Institute for International Economics, six percentage points could be added to an organization's net margin if 30% of its leaders are female (Noland et al., 2016). This study analyzed 21,980 global publicly traded companies in 91 countries. Gender diversity makes business sense given the studies on financial performance and other positive organizational outcomes.

Leadership Development Tools

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2019) is a well-known professional membership association dedicated to the advancement of the field of human resources. SHRM (2019) provides research, education, certifications, and networking opportunities to its members. Their research "indicates that both HR professionals and executives view leadership development as a major human capital challenge now and in the foreseeable future" (SHRM, 2018, para. 10). SHRM provides a myriad of resources and tool kits, such as guidance to HR professionals on how to build a leadership development strategy with factors to consider, suggested metrics, and possible approaches or tools. In their tool kit for *Developing Organizational Leaders*, they offer the following suggestions as leadership development tools: assessment instruments, executive coaching, mentoring, emotional intelligence development, work experience, stretch assignments, rotational assignments, group-based leadership development, and multi-rater 360-degree feedback. Survey results show that only a small percentage of HR professionals perceive their leadership development programs to be effective currently and expect coaching, leader-to-leader development, on-the-job/in-role learning,

mentoring and social media to become more important as methods of leadership

development (SHRM, 2016).

Despite the popularity of mentoring, many new leaders do not find the

relationship helpful to their success (Keller & Meaney, 2018). In contrast, new leaders'

likelihood of success doubles with executive coaching or other customized approaches

(Keller & Meaney, 2018). Research supports executive coaching as an effective

leadership development tool, particularly when compared to other leadership

developmental tools, such as training courses or mentoring (Rekalde et al., 2017).

Executive Coaching

There are many different types of coaches (e.g., athletic coaches, life coaches,

performance coaches); however, executive coaching is the coaching of executives, leaders, and

managers (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). It is a formalized one-on-one relationship between the

coach and the coachee with the purpose of improving the coachee's leadership effectiveness

(Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014). Leadership coaching and executive coaching are often used

interchangeably. Researchers do not agree on one common definition of executive coaching.

However, Kilburg's definition of executive coaching is widely accepted and referenced in the

literature (Corrie & Lawson, 2017).

> Executive coaching is defined as a helping relationship formed between a client
>
> who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a
>
> consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help
>
> the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her
>
> professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently, to improve

the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching

agreement. (Kilburg, 1996, p. 142).

An executive coach is different than a therapist, mentor, consultant, teacher, or a

facilitator. For example, a mentoring relationship tends to be less formal and more

focused on career development and succession (Ciporen, 2015). Executive coaches can

be internal or external to an organization (Ciporen). External executive coaches tend to

have more formal coaching experience and coaching credentials (Ciporen). Internal

coaches tend to have less formal experience and are less likely to use assessment tools

(Ciporen). A key advantage to using an internal coach is his or her knowledge and

understanding of the company culture. The key advantages of using an external coach are

greater confidentiality and lower likelihood of bias (Ciporen).

Executive coaching is not only gaining in popularity but is quickly growing as

one of the most utilized methods for developing leaders (Cox et al., 2014). The key

advantage of executive coaching is the ability to customize and adapt the training to an

individual's specific needs (Rekalde et al., 2017). The key disadvantages are the high

costs, time investment, and difficulties in finding the right coach who is highly qualified

and appropriately matched to the coachee (Rekalde et al., 2017).

Executive Coach Qualifications

The field of coaching is largely unregulated. At present, there are no universal

licensing requirements for coaches in the United States (Ciporen, 2015). Many

researchers have called for clear and widely accepted definitions, standards of practice,

qualifications, licensing regulations, and greater empirical research (Ciporen, 2015;

Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011).

 The ICF considers themselves to be the gold standard in credentialing. According to their

website, they are the leading global organization "dedicated to advancing the coaching

profession by setting high standards, providing independent certification and building a

worldwide network of trained coaching professionals" (ICF, n.d.a, para. 1). There are three

possible credentials via ICF. These are Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified

Coach (PCC), and Master Certified Coach (MCC). The difference between the credentials are

the number of training hours and the number of coaching experience hours. For example, to

achieve the ACC level, an individual must have at least 60 hours of coach-specific training

through an accredited program and a minimum of 100 hours of coaching experience (ICF, n.d.b).

The ICF (n.d.c) has identified 11 core competencies, grouped into four clusters, to serve as the

foundation for the required skills and approaches for the coaching profession:

 A. Setting the Foundation

  1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards

  2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement

 B. Co-creating the Relationship

  3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client

  4. Coaching Presence

 C. Communicating Effectively

  5. Active Listening

  6. Powerful Questioning

7. Direct Communication

D. Facilitating Learning and Results

8. Creating Awareness

9. Designing Actions

10. Planning and Goal Setting

11. Managing Progress and Accountability

The Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) also offers coaching credentials with their Board Certified Coach (BCC). CCE "is a not-for-profit organization that provides practitioners and organizations with assessments, business support services and credentialing" (CCE, n.d.). CCE was started in 1995 and provides other credentialing services, such as the Board Certified TeleMental Health Provider (BC-TMH). Requirements to apply for the BCC depend upon your educational degrees. For an individual who has a Ph.D. in Psychology, he or she will need 30 hours of training as a coach with an accredited program, 30 hours of experience, one professional endorsement, and pass the BCC examination (CCE, n.d.). Sherpa Coaching offers their own certification as a Certified Sherpa Coach (CSC) (Sherpa Coaching, n.d.). The Sherpa executive coaching program is also accredited through the ICF and can be used to apply for the ACC or to renew certification through ICF (Sherpa Coaching, n.d.).

Coaching Models

Carey et al. (2011) conducted an integrative literature review to compare coaching models used for leadership development. Initial search results yield 1,414 articles; however, only 10 papers were included in the final analysis of themes and critical elements. From their research, the models were grounded in cognitive behavioral theories

and emotional intelligence. Additionally, coaching techniques drew upon behavioral, psychodynamic, humanistic, and existential psychology theories. Gloss (2012) explored five theories that inform coaching and consulting. These were multi-dimensional executive coaching (rooted in psychodynamic and organizational theory), adult transformational learning, emotional intelligence, cognitive behavior theory, and positive psychology.

Carey et al. (2011) identified five common elements in the coaching models. These were "relationship building, problem-defining and goal setting, problem-solving process, action and transformation and the mechanisms by which the model proposed that outcomes are achieved" (Carey et al., 2011, p. 62). Of the studies reviewed, the proposed outcomes ranged from behavior changes, leadership development, improved interpersonal skills, greater ability to lead teams, to increased competence in leadership skills. All of studies expected an improvement in performance as an outcome, either individually or as an organization. Factors that affected the coaching outcomes include differences between external and internal coaches, the coach's role, coachee motivation and willingness to learn, and organizational support (Carey et al., 2011)

Executive Coaching Outcomes

Maltbia et al. (2014) conducted a review of the literature on executive coaching. They identify two levels of outcomes – individual and collective. Individually focused outcomes include goal achievement, increased personal fulfillment, definition of purpose (finding meaning), work/life balance, more competence (Maltbia et al., 2014). Collective outcomes include delivering business results, improved teamwork/productivity, better

interpersonal relationships, improved strategic thinking, improved overall leadership effectiveness (Maltbia et al., 2014). The empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of executive coaching continues to grow. In a more recent review of the literature, Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2018) found similar positive outcomes at the individual level, the organizational level and at the coach level. See Table 4 for a summary of outcomes.

Table 4

Executive Coaching Outcomes

Level of outcome	Outcomes	Examples
Individual—Personal development	• Overcoming regressive behaviors or experience • Coaching viewed as effective, positive or life-changing • Better personal management/self-control • Improved personal skills/abilities or acquisition of new ones	-Reduced stress/anxiety -Increased work and life satisfaction -Improved resilience -Improved ability and quality of goal setting
Individual—Interpersonal development	• Better leadership skills • Better quality of interactions and relationships	-Better management and development of others -Coachee perceived as more effective post-coaching -Improved team player & team building skills -Better communication skills
Individual—Work performance	• Improved work performance, productivity and planning • Nurturing work environment	-Positive impact on psychological variables that affect work performance (e.g. self-awareness) -Improved agenda setting skills -Feeling more valued at work -Better ability to build cross-functional relationships -Enhanced workplace well-being
Organization	• Positive organizational-level outcomes	
Coach	• Positive perceptions of coach's effectiveness • Coach's personal development	

Note. Adapted from "A Systematic Review of Executive Coaching Outcomes: Is It the Journey or the Destination That Matters the Most?" by A. Athanasopoulou and S. Dopson, 2018, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *29*(1), p. 75 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.11.004).

Murphy et al. state that "[t]he coaching relationship can be an important developmental relationship for advancing one's career, particularly for women. Coaching can be described as a dialogue in which the woman receiving coaching is able to reflect on her own process and actions in such a way that enables her to see how she can improve her own effectiveness" (2017, p. 369). Coaches offer a safe environment in which women can focus on either acquiring or improving a particular skill set or cultivating the self-reflection skills necessary for their own growth and development (Murphy, et al.). Good coaches can help both current and future women leaders self-reflect using strategic questions so that the women can identify what is preventing them from moving forward in their leadership development (as cited in Murphy et al.). Women often struggle the most with their own identity as a leader, making the coaching relationship a particularly safe place for them to explore these challenges. An executive coach provides the woman with a new lens through which to view herself as a leader (Murphy et al.).

Research shows that this form of leadership development is effective in developing leadership self-efficacy and improving leadership attitudes and behaviors (Sonesh et al., 2015; Moen & Allgood, 2009). Women who receive leadership coaching have shown greater levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts who have not received such coaching (Pendleton, 2016). LSE can predict effective leadership and is

important in developing in aspiring leaders (Anderson et al., 2008). Leaders high in LSE

achieve superior results in their individual performance as well as in their ability to

inspire groups to achieve better results (Paglis & Green, 2002; Stajkovic & Luthans,

1998). Efficacy beliefs are a cognitive process where individuals use different sources of

information to interpret and determine their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Moen &

Allgood, 2009). There are four main sources of information gathering which are

experiences of mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological

arousal (Bandura, 1977; 1997). Some examples of how executive coaching could

increase LSE include 'experiences of mastery', where a coach helps an individual reflect

on past experiences and improve upon their ability to be realistic and constructive in their

assessment (Moen & Allgood, 2009). Another example of how a coach could help

increase LSE with 'verbal persuasion' and 'vicarious experiences' is through words of

encouragement and role-play with the coach (O'Neil et al., 2015).

Summary and Transition

Chapter 2 represents a review of the literature covering leadership identity

theories, particularly AL theory, LSE theory, barriers to leadership for women, gender

differences in leadership, the value of diversity, and the use of executive coaching as a

leadership development tool. Women face greater difficulties in advancing their careers

as compared to men. Leaders must have the intrapersonal competence to form an accurate

model of themselves and to engage in identity development. In order for women to

ascend successfully to leadership roles, they must be able to envision themselves as

leaders and to experiment with provisional selves as they move up the hierarchy. The

leader identity construction process is fundamentally social. Identities are claimed and sustained through relational role requirements that form a set of behavioral expectations giving purpose and meaning to the role. Women often lack access to intra-organizational role models who can help them develop an authentic style that is accepted by others.

Women face barriers at the societal and organizational levels, most prominently in the form of gender bias. However, she also faces barriers at the intrapersonal level and personal level. A woman's confidence is often undermined by these barriers to leadership, further hindering her from moving upward. It is difficult for a woman to develop self-efficacy as a leader if her confidence is undermined.

Executive coaching is a popular and widely accepted leadership development tool. This method of development shows much promise for women, in that it creates a safe place for her to develop her identity as a leader. As she practices what she learns in coaching, she can begin to develop her sense of leader identity and her SE as a leader. Research supports the idea that women need to develop their identity as a leader to become an effective leader, however, the question remains as to how coaches are helping aspiring women develop their leader identities or leader self-efficacy. In Chapter 3, I outline the research design, methodology, and procedures of study, to understand the lived experiences of coaches who work with aspiring female leaders. Participant characteristics and how the data were analyzed are discussed. Ethical considerations are outlined as well as considerations to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 4 includes the description of the results of this study regarding the lived experiences of executive coaches working with females aspiring to senior leadership

roles. It begins with a restatement of the research questions and a description of

participant demographics. The data analysis and coding processes are discussed. Samples

of participant responses are included. The chapter concludes with themes that emerged

from the data analysis process. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation. It begins with a

restatement of the purpose of this phenomenological study. Themes are further explored

and recommendations for further research is provided.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of executive coaches working with aspiring female leaders and how they are addressing leadership identity challenges and leadership self-efficacy. The intent was to explore leadership identity formation within the context of executive coaching and to understand what strategies can be used to specifically help women aspiring to senior leadership roles to develop their unique leadership identity. Outlined in Chapter 3 are explanations of the research design and rationale, the methodology, participant selection and recruitment, data collection and analysis procedures, and finally, ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore how executive coaches work with aspiring female leaders—specifically, what strategies, if any, are employed to address matters of leader identity construction and LSE. For this approach, a transcendental phenomenology design as described by Moustakas (1994) was used to capture the methods and processes that executive coaches use with clients. The transcendental phenomenology design was appropriate because it may be used to explore the "lived experiences" of those being studied (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). The study examined the lived experiences of executive coaches who worked with aspiring female senior leaders, especially as that work pertains to matters of leader identity and LSE.

Three RQs were designed to address the gap in the literature:

RQ 1. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, how do executive coaches address matters of leadership self-efficacy?

RQ 2. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches incorporate leadership identity development strategies into the coaching process?

RQ 3. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches tailor their coaching to address organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges?

A qualitative approach was chosen as it allows for greater flexibility than a quantitative approach. There is little research on how executive coaches work with aspiring female leaders. The qualitative approach allowed for exploration through open-ended questions and probing. Participants were able to respond in their own words and in greater detail than a quantitative study would have allowed. Quantitative studies require fixed responses, whereas qualitative, open-ended questions prompt responses that are unanticipated by the researcher and are meaningful and culturally salient (Mack et al., 2005).

A phenomenological qualitative approach was chosen as opposed to other types of qualitative approaches such as ethnographic inquiry, grounded theory, or narrative inquiry. Ethnographic studies seek to "capture and understand specific aspects of the life of a particular group by observing their patterns of behavior, customs, and lifestyles" (Rudestam & Newton, 2015, p. 44). This approach would not have been as effective because executive coaches work with many types of individuals. The research questions are geared towards coaches' work with a specific population, aspiring female leaders. Observing executive coaches would have yielded a great deal of data that might not apply

to the specific research questions. It would not have been feasible to observe executive

coaches for long periods of time. Additionally, observing coaches with their clients

would have created confidentiality and informed consent challenges.

Grounded theory is often used to develop a theory. In this study, theories were

already identified in the form of AL and LSE. The research questions were designed to

explore the use of these theories in practice. Narrative inquiry "deals with biographic

experiences as narrated by the person who has lived them" (Rudestam & Newton, 2015,

p. 48). This approach also involves looking at lived experiences; however, it focuses on

an individual's narrative and generally yields a great deal of data. Phenomenology is a

better approach as it allows for the lived experiences of coaches working with aspiring

female leaders and the practices or strategies used with this specific population.

Consequently, it was used in this study.

Methodology

For this study, a transcendental phenomenological approach as described by

Moustakas (1994) was employed. Moustakas (1994) outlind the methods and procedures

necessary to produce "an organized, disciplined and systematic study" (p. 103). The

procedures are categorized into methods of preparation, methods of collecting data, and

methods of organizing and analyzing data (Moustakas, 1994).

Population

The target population for this study was executive coaching practitioners—more

specifically, executive coaching practitioners who work with aspiring female leaders. It is

estimated that there are 17,500 coach practitioners in North America alone and an

estimated 53,300 worldwide (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2016). Sherman and Freas (2004)

stated that there are no barriers to entry for executive coaches and no universally accepted

criteria for a qualified coach. Anyone can claim to be an executive coach. Therefore, it

was important to establish criteria for selecting the participants for this study.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was used to identify and qualify participants for the study.

Purposive sampling entails using preselected criteria that are relevant to the research

questions to qualify participants (Mack et al., 2005). Participants were executive coaches

currently working with aspiring female leaders. The criteria for participation were as

follows:

- Certification: The two most common certifications are BCC or ICF

  credentials. The ICF offers three types of credentialing, which are Associate

  Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC), and Master

  Certified Coach (MCC). The differences in the types of ICF certifications

  relate to the number of training hours and the number of coaching hours. BCC

  offers four specialty designations: Executive/Corporate/Business/Leadership

  Coach, Health and Wellness Coach, Career Coach, and Personal/Life Coach.

  Any of the ICF or BCC credentials at any level were deemed to be

  appropriate.

- Experience: Participants had at least 3 years of experience and worked with a

  minimum of five aspiring leaders. While 3 years of experience and five

  aspiring female clients were fairly arbitrary numbers, it was important to use

participants who had sufficient experience and could articulate their strategies for coaching clients.

- Recommendation: Participants were sourced from NEW and were vetted by NEW. As there are no commonly accepted criteria for what constitutes a qualified coach, it was important to source participants who had a reputation for providing quality services and following commonly accepted protocols, such as ethical behavior and contractual agreements for coaching services.

In determining an appropriate sample size, the goal was to obtain enough data for the study from a sufficient number and variety of individuals. According to Creswell (1998), the appropriate number of participants for qualitative interviews is between five and 25; Morse (1994) suggested a minimum number of six participants. Data analysis for phenomenological studies is often labor intensive, so it is important to have enough data, but not so much that the data are unmanageable. A total of 10 participants were recruited and interviewed. Saturation was reached at the eighth participant, and two additional participants helped to confirm findings. Further interviews were not needed as 10 participants yielded sufficient and rich data.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

NEW was asked to assist with the process of recruiting participants and to facilitate communication to solicit participants. NEW currently runs a leadership development program, NEW Rising Stars, for women aspiring to senior leadership roles. Each year, 36 women are chosen to participate in the program. Each participant is provided an executive coach as part of the development process.

The protocol for contacting and recruiting participants involved two main steps: (a) gaining access to executive coaches, which entailed soliciting help from NEW, and (b) developing a recruitment plan in coordination with that community partner. The recruitment plan included working collaboratively with the program coordinator of the NEW Rising Stars to ensure appropriateness of language, tone, and degree of cultural sensitivity of communication material to potential participants. The first point of contact with potential participants was via an email that described the purpose of the study, role of the researcher, and other relevant information such as voluntary participation and informed consent. The recruitment protocol was as follows:

1. Contact the program coordinator of the NEW Rising Stars to discuss the purpose of the study and gain approval to approach the group.

2. Work closely with program coordinator to establish recruitment plan.

3. Disseminate an introductory email letter to the executive coaches working with NEW that included the requirements to participate, the expected amount of time needed for the interviews, voluntary participation, and confidentiality.

4. Disseminate a thank you letter for coaches who agreed to participate in the study.

5. Distribute the informed consent form to the participants.

Prior to data collection, it was important to obtain signed consent forms from all participants to ensure that they understand their rights, particularly their right to withdraw at any time from the study. Informed consent is typically a written document that participants complete prior to participating in a study. This document included a clear

description of participants' roles and had appropriate language. The consent form did not include legal jargon or technical terminology and was easy to understand.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the primary focus is on consistency and dependability to improve the quality of the data, whereas quantitative research is concerned with the reliability and validity of the research instruments. For this study, the method of data collection was semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews allow for exploration of participants' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Mack et al., 2005). This method of interviewing allows participants to freely describe and express their answers in whatever context they deem appropriate. Additionally, this method allows the researcher to probe for more information and seek clarification where needed. An interview guide was created to ensure structure for conducting all interviews in the same manner (Appendix A).

Data Collection

To obtain an accurate and thorough understanding of what strategies are employed by coaches working with aspiring female leaders, semistructured, in-depth interviews were conducted via video conference. Video interviews were scheduled via Zoom from April through June 2020. Only the audio from the video interviews was recorded and then transcribed using Otter.ai.

The participants for this study were geographically distributed throughout the United States; consequently, video interviews were considered the most effective and efficient means for gathering the interview data (Sekaran, 2000). Additionally, it is

important to note that interviews took place during the early phases of the COVID

pandemic, in which many individuals were effectively forced to stay at home and work

from home.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Creswell's (2009) six-step process as a guide

for analyzing the data. These six steps are as follows:

Step 1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis.

Step 2. Read through all the data.

Step 3. Begin detailed analysis with a coding process.

Step 4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as

well as categories or themes for analysis.

Step 5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the

qualitative narrative.

Step 6. Offer an interpretation or meaning of the data.

This was the overarching process that was used in the data analysis process. To organize

and prepare the data, the data (the interviews) were transcribed into a Word document for

uploading into NVivo software. Otter.ai is a transcription service that was used to assist

with transcribing the interviews. Each interview was listened to several times while

correcting the transcription data. Speaking is very different than writing, in that people do

not speak in complete sentences. Filler expressions such as "um" and "er" were removed

from the transcripts. In a few instances, the participant and I spoke at the same time, and

the data had to be separated to make sense of the question being asked. Tone of voice can

also convey different meaning than words alone. There were two instances where the words transcribed did not match the meaning of what was said. These answers had to be clarified for coding purposes. After transcribing the data, the interviews were reread at least twice each before determining an initial coding scheme. Reading the data helps in getting a general sense of the information as well as reflecting on the meaning of the data. Researchers often make notes or add "memos" to gather impressions or observations prior to coding data.

NVivo software was chosen to help with organizing, storing, and analyzing the data. NVivo is a software program often used in qualitative or mixed-methods research. The software can analyze text, audio, video, and image data, including interviews. NVivo software is owned and developed by QSR International. Other software like NVivo, such as Dedoose, ATLAS.ti, MAXQDA, and QDAMiner, were considered but not chosen. NVivo was chosen for several reasons. First and perhaps most important was the support available for using NVivo. QSR/NVivo has support teams in the United States. A U.S. telephone number is available for questions and support. An initial phone call to this number yielded excellent customer support and additional information about the product and training options. Walden University also provides tutoring and learning resources for NVivo. Second, NVivo is highly ranked as one of the best software programs for qualitative studies (Pat Research, 2020). NVivo also appeared to be the most widely used in qualitative studies from a review of the literature and blog posts. Last, NVivo is not the cheapest software available, but it does offer an affordable student rate that allows access to the program for 2 years.

Step 3 is the complex process of coding the data. Coding is a process of segmenting or chunking data into categories in order to make meaning from the data. Codes can be predetermined, can emerge from the data as they are reviewed, or can be a combination of the two (Creswell, 2009). For my study, I used a combination of predetermined codes as well as letting codes emerge from the data. I specifically studied leader identity development, self-efficacy, and the effects of gender bias on leader identity development, so these areas naturally lent themselves to predetermined codes. However, I wanted to also allow codes to emerge that might not be anticipated. Step 4 was where the themes or categories emerged from the coding process. These themes or descriptions were used to define my findings. Step 5 determined how to represent the data, such as in a narrative, quotations, or illustrations. Step 6 was the interpretation of the data and what was learned from the study.

Trustworthiness Concerns

Reliability, validity, and generalizability are different with qualitative studies than with quantitative research. To achieve qualitative validity or trustworthiness, additional procedures were necessary to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Other researchers should be able to look at my data and conclude the same findings. To ensure trustworthiness, I employed several procedures:

1. I double checked the transcripts to verify that they were accurately transcribed.

2. I used the expertise of another researcher to cross-check the coding. To be considered reliable, the coding needed to agree 80% of the time (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3. In follow-up interviews, I used member checking for the themes or descriptions found in the data to ensure accuracy and consistency with what the participant intended.

4. A review for bias or preconceptions was conducted via the journaling process. In transcendental phenomenology, researchers are expected to bracket or put aside their own personal experiences, biases, or preconceived notions.

Generalization usually does not occur with qualitative research because of the limited sample; therefore, the results are not generalizable to the broader population.

Ethical Procedures

Participant confidentiality is important to be maintained prior, during, and after the study is conducted. It is also important to recognize and protect the coach-client relationship. During the interviews with the participants (coaches), specific clients should not be named to protect client-coach confidentiality. Coaches were cautioned against using any names or identifying factors. To further protect confidentiality, all data were stored on a password protected computer.

Requirements of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed, and final approvals were obtained prior to beginning the research (Approval No. 04-13-20-0172905). Each participant was asked to sign a consent form, according to IRB protocols. The consent form was reviewed with each participant, and they were

reminded that participation was voluntary and there was no compensation. There were no anticipated risks or discomfort for this study.

Summary and Transition

With the growing popularity of executive coaching and the need for more diversity in senior leadership roles, this study examined what strategies executive coaches use with aspiring female leaders to address matters of identity construction and self-efficacy. This chapter outlines the rationale and purpose for utilizing a phenomenological qualitative approach to exploring the lived experiences of executive coaches. The components of the methodology, including the sample, sampling procedures, recruitment strategy, and participation of the participants were reviewed. Also included in this chapter is how the data were analyzed, how the quality of the data was ensured, and lastly, how potential ethical concerns were addressed.

Chapter 4 provides a description of the results of this study. It begins with a restatement of the research questions and a description of participant demographics. The data analysis and coding processes are further discussed. Samples of participant responses are included. The chapter concludes with themes that emerged from the data analysis process. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation. It begins with a restatement of the purpose of this phenomenological study. Themes are further explored and recommendations for further research is provided.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate how executive coaches working with aspiring female leaders are addressing leadership identity challenges. Specifically, I explored matters of leadership identity formation and leadership efficacy within the context of executive coaching to understand what strategies can be used to help women who aspire to advance in their careers. This chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions and provides a systematic review of the study results. Participant demographics are described, along with how participants were selected. The data analysis and coding processes are discussed, and samples of participant responses are shared. The chapter concludes with a summary of themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study and addressed the associated gap that exists in the current literature were as follows:

RQ 1. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, how do executive coaches address matters of leadership self-efficacy?

RQ 2. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches incorporate leadership identity development strategies into the coaching process?

RQ 3. When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches tailor their coaching to address organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges?

Setting

Interviews of participants were conducted in April through June 2020. World events, such as the coronavirus pandemic, social unrest, protests, and the upcoming presidential election weighed heavily on the minds of several of the participants. A semistructured interview process was used, so participants were allowed some leeway to share thoughts related to these world events. As a result, some of the participants (4, 40%) in this study mentioned world events and how they were impacting their work or their clients. Some participants spent time in our interviews reflecting on and processing these events. One participant (10%) stated that her coaching with clients had changed dramatically as a result of all of the changes in how people lived their lives. Once adequate time was allowed for participants to share, questions were redirected to the research questions. All participants were able to effectively communicate their answers to my questions.

Demographics

The sample included nine female executive coaches and one male executive coach. All of the participants (100%) had experience in other fields prior to becoming a coach, such as education, human resources, finance, business, and psychology. Four of the participants (40%) completed their coaching education through the CCL, and five of the participants (50%) went to the Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC). Each of the participants had additional certifications; 60% held ICF certifications, and 30% were BCCs. Four of the participants (40%) had been coaching for more than 20 years and before executive coaching emerged as a field. Three of the

participants (30%) had been coaching for 7–15 years, and three of the participants (30%)

had been coaching for just over 3 years. All of the participants (100%) were active

coaches in the NEW's Rising Stars program. To preserve confidentiality, participants'

real names were not used and were changed to Participant 1–10 (P1–P10). Table 5

provides a summary of the key demographics for the sample.

Table 5

Participant Demographic Breakout

Data point	#	%
Gender		
Male	1	10%
Female	9	90%
Coaching education		
Institute for Professional Excellence in Coaching (iPEC)	5	50%
Center for Creative Leadership (CCL)	4	40%
Resource Associates Corporation (RAC; now defunct)	1	10%
Coaching certification		
International Coaching Federation (ICF)	6	60%
Board Certified Coach (BCC)	4	40%
Other	1	10%
Years of coaching experience		
3 years	3	30%
3-7 years	3	30%
20+ years	4	40%

The sample was comparable to the demographic of coach practitioners as studied

by PricewaterhouseCoopers in its 2020 ICF Global Coaching Study. The ICF study

showed that 75% of coach practitioners were female in North America

(PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). For the purposes of the ICF study, coach practitioners

included external coaches, internal coaches, and coaches who identified as both internal

and external coaches. Coach practitioners (99%) reported that they had completed some

coach-specific training, and 74% of total respondents held a credential or certification

from a professional coaching organization (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). The majority

of coach practitioners in North America are Baby Boomers (53%; born between 1946 and

1964), followed by Generation X (39%; born between 1965 and 1981), Millennials (5%;

born between 1982 and 1996), and The Greatest Generation (3%; born prior to 1946;

PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). The age of participants in this research study was not

asked but would appear to align with the demographics of the ICF study.

Coaching Clients and Coaching Process

Coaches were asked about their clients. Most of their clients were highly

educated, with at least a college degree, and came from a variety of industries, such as

information technology (IT), consumer product goods, finance, and so forth. One coach

(10%) stated that 60% of his client base was female and that his clients were

predominantly college-educated midcareer professionals, ranging in age from 35-45

years. Four coaches (40%) stated that they had worked with every career level, every age,

nearly every industry, and every level of education, but predominantly worked with mid-

to upper-level career individuals with at least a college education. Several of the coaches

worked predominately with women (5, 50%), but all had experience with coaching both

genders. When asked about the race of their clients, coaches responded that the majority

were White, with smaller numbers of Black or Hispanic clients (10, 100%).

Clients were sourced through a variety of places. Some coaches sourced clients

through social media channels such as LinkedIn (2, 20%), but the majority worked within

programs through larger organizations such as CCL or NEW (8, 80%). Client motivation

was also discussed. Generally, clients were voluntarily seeking a coach for personal

growth or are using a coach as part of a leadership development program, such as NEW's Rising Stars. For two of the coaches (20%), more of their clients paid out-of-pocket versus being company sponsored. Eight of the coaches (80%) were mostly working with individuals from company-sponsored programs.

When working with a client for the first time, the coaches assessed for "fit" between coach and client. If the coach or client felt that it would be a poor fit, the individual was referred to another coach or other resources. Interestingly, none of the clients in the last several years had been mandated for coaching. Historically, an individual might have been mandated to coaching sessions to correct deficiencies in performance. With this group of coaches, their clients typically viewed the coaching process as a positive way to move forward in their careers and improve their performance.

Regarding the coaching process, there was wide variability in the process and number of coaching sessions, driven by whether coaching was part of a leadership development program or was being provided on a private-client basis. The NEW Rising Stars program includes three group coaching sessions (3 hours) and one individual coaching session (1 hour) with the option to add one-on-one coaching sessions for a fee. For private clients, coaches had a relatively defined process that they used and a required number of sessions. All of the coaches discussed an intake or discovery process before jumping into the coaching work (10, 100%). Most coaches required a minimum of 3 months or three sessions (6, 60%). Two of the coaches (20%) required a minimum of 12 sessions, which could be used in as little as 3 months or as many as 9 months. One coach

(10%) was adamant that the relationship be strictly short term and focused on achieving a goal. The other nine coaches (90%) had had some of the same clients for many years who periodically came back for "tune-ups."

With regard to clients, this sample also appears to be comparable to clients of coach practitioners in the ICF Global Study (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2020). The ICF study reported that clients were mostly managers (27%) or executives (25%; 2020), with age ranges as follows: 37% ranging in age from 35-44 years, 30% from 45-54 years, and 24% under the age of 35 years. Coaches who had 10+ years of experience were more likely to work with sponsored clients (64% of coaches), and coaches with a business specialty (e.g., leadership coaching, executive coaching) reported that 40% of engagements were for 7+ months.

All of the coaches (10, 100%) had used assessment instruments in their coaching practice, but not necessarily with every client. The assessment tool used was often driven by the leadership development program or specific client needs. Coaches mentioned using many different instruments when needed. The most widely discussed assessment instruments were the Energy Leadership Index (ELI), 360 feedback assessments, SSI, FIRO B, StrengthsFinders, The Revised Neo Personality Inventory (Neo Pi-R), The Myer-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Disc Assessment, Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), The Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF), Kolbe Index Personality Test, and Fascination Advantage. For the NEW Rising Stars program, participants complete a Fascination Advantage Assessment, and 360 feedback assessments are conducted. It is important to note that additional certifications or training are often

required in order to be used with clients. The ELI is a proprietary assessment tool that is only available through an iPEC Certified Coach.

Autocoding and Word Cloud

Word clouds are a visual representation of word frequencies. Word clouds are helpful for identifying possible themes in the early stages of a project. NVivo was used to generate a word cloud using the 100 most frequent words from the autocoded themes with four or more letters (see Figure 3). Words were grouped by the root word, such as *know*, *knowing, knows*. Filler words such as "yeah" and "well" were removed using the Stop Words feature, and frequently occurring words appear in larger fonts. As shown in Figure 3, the most frequently occurring words are *know* and *coaching*. *Works* and *women* are secondarily the most frequently occurring words. *Know* represents knowledge—what the clients know and what the coach knows. Through the interview process, it became apparent that knowledge was a fundamental building block; however, knowledge has many forms. From the client perspective, knowledge includes skills, self-awareness, and an understanding of how others perceive one. From the coaching perspective, knowledge includes understanding the goals of the client and digging deeper to understand barriers or challenges to reaching the client's goals. Other words that were frequently used were *women, people, executive*, and *just*.

Figure 3

NVivo Word Cloud

Findings

Participants in the study had a broad range of experience with clients in different

levels of organizations. For this study, I requested that they focus on women at the

midcareer level who aspire to advance to the executive level. NVivo software was used to

manage the study project and to assist in the analysis. NVivo was used to generate the

word cloud in Figure 3, which helped to identify emerging themes prior to the coding

process. Initial codes were generated from these emerging themes and then further

defined and condensed within the NVivo program. NVivo served as an aid to quickly sort

the interview data by theme and subtheme codes.

Themes and Patterns

Coaches work with clients to improve or maximize their work performance. The coaching may be targeted to improve performance in a client's current role or in preparation to advance to the next role. Coaches seek to understand the barriers or challenges that affect clients' work performance or what may be holding them back from advancing to the next level. The first key theme from the data was the type of challenges or barriers that clients face when working towards advancement. Twelve general types of barriers or challenges were identified from the interviews. These 12 barriers could be further condensed into four groupings of societal, organizational, interpersonal, or personal barriers (see Table 2). Table 6 lists the 12 barriers or challenges from the interviews. Both males and females face barriers or challenges in their ability to perform, to advance, or to develop their sense of leadership identity. There were some gender differences identified, which I discuss further in the next section. The second key theme from the data was the strategies that coaches use and teach to their clients to overcome challenges and improve their work performance. There are eight general groups of strategies used with clients. These were as follows:

- *skill development*: networking, presentation of self, interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence, intentional conversations, self-promotion
- *self-awareness*: understanding blind spots, how others perceive you, strengths, weakness, behaviors that no longer help, feedback, reframing negative thoughts, reflection

- *managing self and others*: attitude, mindset, work-life balance, self-care, stress management, behavior change

- *knowledge*: perception versus reality, neuroscience, positive psychology research

- *positioning*: understanding the competition to rise to the top

- *self-efficacy*: role modeling, role play, practicing new behaviors, visualizing success

- *goal setting*: understanding what success looks like and identifying how to get there

- *creating a safe space*: allowing the client space to practice new behaviors or conversations without judgment or fear of failure

See Table 6 for a list of these strategies used by coaches, the percentage of coaches who mentioned these strategies, and the number of references to these strategies in the data.

Table 6

Barriers and Challenges and Strategies Used

Data point	#	%	# of references
Barriers & challenges clients face			
Nonworkable work environment	3	30%	3
Gender bias	10	100%	23
Confidence issues	10	100%	29
Control issues	3	30%	4
Cultural issues	6	60%	19
Lack of clarity (e.g., What does success look like?)	9	90%	26
Positioning challenges	3	30%	9
Lack of self-awareness	10	100%	33
Missing key skills	3	30%	9
Stress management	1	10%	2
Understanding the competition	4	40%	5
Work-life balance issues	4	40%	8
Strategies used by coaches			
Skill development	9	90%	31
Self-awareness activities	10	100%	49
Managing self & others	9	90%	26
Knowledge development	10	100%	36
Positioning for future success/promotion	2	20%	2
Self-efficacy strategies	8	80%	25
Goal setting	5	50%	7
Creating a safe space environment	2	20%	2

Gender Differences

As previously mentioned, both males and females face barriers or challenges to advance to the next level. Coaches were specifically questioned on where or how they see differences in barriers or challenges between the genders. The findings are mixed. P1 stated that "women are more communicative, they're more willing to open up and be more descriptive...[men are] direct and short circuited…it is a bit harder to pull information out of them". P3 stated that "men are much more goal oriented". P3 also stated that many individuals struggle with self-awareness, but finds it occurs more often

with men versus women. P5 stated that "men have tended to be sort of more composed…I witness more emotional breakthroughs with women…they might cry more frequently". P6 stated that she works with more men on emotional intelligence and with women on the confidence-competence gap. "Women might tend to have the emotional intelligence skills, but they don't understand that how they show up is perceived as less confident than the males next to them." P7 stated that "women always seem way more perceptive and willing to do the work than men". P7 goes on to explain, "I have to spend more time with the men explaining why it's important for us to do [the foundational work before diving] right into the issue that they're having". P8 states that women struggle with self-promotion. P9 says that "women look for connection…they look for somebody to be able to collaborate with". She also stated that "men and women compete differently".

When specifically questioning the coaches on confidence levels, again, the answers were mixed. Some coaches felt that women struggle more with confidence (3, 30%) others felt that it was a universal issue (6, 60%) and one coach felt that men struggle more often with confidence (1, 10%). P3 states that "women do struggle with the right to be in a leadership position, and the way they manage their presence in that role". P8 states that "it's rare to hear a man express imposter syndrome, but women do on a regular basis".

P1 sees his clients (male and female) struggle with confidence when competing for a job. P5 says "I see a lot of confidence issues…I think there is a different expression

of confidence [between men and women]". P7 says "I've coached hundreds of people, [confidence] is not gender specific".

P2 states that "based on my experience [women] really feel very competent…they feel challenged by a new role" seriously, why have you waited so long to give me this promotion?". With regards to race, two (20%) coaches commented that Black women are more confident in their abilities than White women. P7 states, "I would say that the African American women I work with are more confident than my White women".

Two of the 12 barriers/challenges discussed are specific to coaches' female clients. All of the coaches (10, 100%) stated that female clients face more gender bias than their male counterparts. There were no mentions of males facing gender bias in the workplace. Non-workable Work Environment also pertains specifically to the female clients of three participants. In the case of non-workable work environment, this relates to sexual harassment, toxic environments, and inability to advance or be seen as leadership potential. Work-Life Balance Issues used to be more of a female challenge; however, coaches report that work-life balance is a struggle for males and females as men have taken on more of the household duties and child-rearing responsibilities. P2 states, "In the last five to 10 years, [work-life balance] comes up more with men. And there is that concern about traveling…not being able to be there for different things".

The following is a systematic review of participant responses to address the three primary research questions.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, how do executive coaches address matters of leadership self-efficacy? LSE is an individual's level of confidence in her abilities to behave as a leader and perform in a leadership role (Paglis, 2010). Efficacy beliefs are a cognitive process where individuals use different sources of information to interpret and determine their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura, there are four main sources of information gathering which are experiences of mastery, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological factors. Coaches help clients develop their LSE through role play (experiences of mastery), encouraging them to continue to practice the new behaviors (verbal persuasion leading to experiences of mastery) and visualizing the process. P6 describes the process well –

> It's awareness, intention, and practice. We solidify the awareness, we come to agreement on the intention with what we want the behavior change to be. And then we practice. So the practice could be a shift in language or the practice could be using some of these tools around emotional intelligence or tools on strategic thinking or tools on linguistics, whatever the tools may be but it's practice, practice, practice. And I ask my clients to apply this to a real-life imminent situation and report back. And so we practice, practice, practice and there are key learnings and there's growth and there's the next level of achievement.

P9 describes the experience of mastery process and physiological factors to clients as follows:

When did you do good before? Well, you've already done it. You can do it again.

You've already done it. You can do it again. Yep. And it's okay. And, you know,

certainly not discounting their feelings, but putting the emphasis on the strength-

based feelings and not on fear. I do stuff that scares me all the time. And I

encourage clients to do the same. If every time you do something that scares you,

and you live through it, so far you've lived through all of them and are stronger

the next time.

P9 practices role-play with clients (experiences of mastery) and advises them on how to

avoid emotional triggers (physiological factors) that could undermine LSE.

And we try on different words and we try on different language. I've got a couple

of tools that I use every now and then. One of them is called the 10-minute time

machine. And I have a cute little image that goes with it to help them remember.

We talk a lot about neuroscience, because as soon as they're triggered, and there's

chemicals running through their bodies, is a lot harder to get on top of it, if you

don't already walk in there with the tools. If you already know you're going to be

triggered and you expect it and you feel it when it happens. You just acknowledge

it and you're able to step past it if you're prepared for it. And if you're not, then

you'll be knocked off center.

P2 describes the visualization process (vicarious experiences) as follows:

I've asked people to practice, to actually imagine themselves going into that

situation or with that person, or with somebody who triggers those feelings, and to

go through the five steps, so that they can start practicing it. If they know that

they're actually going into that situation, to do that ahead of time so that you

ground yourself before you walk into that situation. Your voice is going to come

out different. You're going to look differently. Your posture is going to be

different. You're actually going to change the dynamics of that situation.

Coaches also help clients develop their LSE by suggesting clients look for a role model

(vicarious experiences). P2 uses this approach to help clients identify behaviors they want

to emulate and to assist with reframing negative thoughts.

[I try to] to encourage them to think about people who act the way that they really

would like to act, or, have the behaviors that they think would really help them

move in the direction they want to. And that could be by reading biographies, it

could be by looking at people who are in leadership positions or people who've

been important in their lives. And to put those people in their, in their head is their

board of directors, so that they get a lot of very positive ... well either very

positive types of things or different perspectives of how they might approach an

issue.

P8 describes finding a role model in this manner –

When they've identified the targeted behavior that they want to work on, one of

the things we'll often say is, is there somebody in your environment, who is doing

that well, doing what it is that you want to do well? And you don't have to pick

out a china pattern with them or anything, we're not saying you have to be

mentors for life. But is there a way that you can safely approach them? And we

talk about how to do that. That you can safely approach them for a sort of

> download to their brain. So I don't use mentoring as much. I call them skill
>
> mentors to imply that it's a little bit narrower but can really benefit women in
>
> particular.

Individuals use these sources of information to interpret and determine their own leadership self-efficacy which is reflected in an individual's confidence. P9 uses perspective to assist clients in "helping them find that perspective, that place of strength to stand in" when stepping into new leadership roles.

Research Question 2

The second research question was the following: When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches incorporate leadership identity development strategies into the coaching process? Developing a leader identity is an iterative process that takes time and practice. Individuals change through a process of separation (loss of current identity), transition (trying on of different selves, creating provisional selves), and incorporation of the new identity (Ibarra et al., 2010). Introspection and feedback are a necessary part of the transition phase. It is also important for emerging leaders to have a safe place to try on their provisional selves. Leadership identity did not emerge as a dominant theme; however, elements of the process emerged as sub-themes and warrants further discussion in Chapter 5. P5 describes this process as follows:

> I see this trend where people work really hard, and they're very reliable and they
>
> never miss a beat. And they're very results oriented, because they're in this place
>
> of being like an individual contributor, and they have total control over the output

of their work. So they just absolutely pour everything into this product. And as you move into leadership roles, then they're responsible for stuff that they don't personally do. And that is where things get really hairy for people.

P5 goes on to say:

I feel like most, most people come to me because of some moment of transition. They're uncomfortable about something…I see a lot of confidence issues. People who are super successful and are still just like, I don't know what I'm doing. There's still something that they're still deciding how they feel about something and then gaining the confidence that, yes, this is what I want to do. This is what I can do.

P10 also describes a similar phenomenon:

Men and women have a difficult time going from being an individual contributor to a management job. The thing that got you where you are, was in a sense being a really good student, a really good master of whatever got you in the door. But putting that aside and working through other people can be really hard.

P4 describes the process as follows:

Will people see me as the leader? Do I see myself as the leader, versus the collaborator, or versus the supporter versus the helper? Do I see myself as the leader?... What is the definition of leadership? Does leading mean I stand out and everyone follows me? Or does leading mean I find out what everybody thinks, and we all get together and we all plan the same thing because we've all agreed that that's what we want to do.

Self-awareness is a key component of the coaching process. All of the coaches discussed

the need for feedback and introspection. Several also discussed the need for clarity on

values and an individual's vision for the future.

P3 stated,

> I use 360 feedback to talk about their strengths. And overuse of strengths, under
>
> use of strengths. How is that showing up? And out of that some of the challenges
>
> start to arise.

P1 stated,

> After they've started the job, it's all about how they are doing things to ensure
>
> they're following through on their intentions for the position and ensuring their
>
> success as they move forward. And that's where coaching can be extremely
>
> valuable and helpful at that point.

P6 stated,

> I, foundationally, explore values, and then continue to go back to what we have
>
> identified as those real drivers and motivators of fulfillment, which is what I call
>
> values. Go back and leverage those to inspire behavior change.

P9 stated,

> Understanding what your strengths are, understanding what your values are.
>
> Looking back at prior successes. Sometimes we are so good that as soon as we
>
> achieve something, we just set it aside and go after something else. And we don't
>
> really internalize it and it's really about taking the things you've done well and
>
> internalizing that. It's so much perspective.

P2 stated,

> The assessments give you the words. I think a lot of times, clients don't even
>
> know how to be articulate about those things.

The transition to a leader identity is often not an easy transition. Leadership behaviors

may be reinforced or may be discouraged. Gender bias can also inadvertently discourage

women from developing the leader identity. P9 states,

> Oftentimes, just because men and women communicate a little bit differently,
>
> women have a harder time being heard the way they intend to be heard. Yes,
>
> heard, but not always valued, the same way, until they learn how to speak the
>
> language a little better.

P2 states,

> And depending on the company that they're in, they are either reinforced for being
>
> like that, or they're put down for being like that." "Men and women have to be
>
> very aware of what their culture is so that if their own natural style and their own
>
> interests, don't really fit into their culture that they either need to figure out how to
>
> express themselves in a way that they can be heard.

P5 states,

> Individuals learn new skills through coaching and they're working to improve and
>
> become better, but then they go back to work and their boss who knows nothing
>
> of their coaching really, and who has never received coaching and is not expected
>
> to change is still a jerk. The boss is still expecting things to be done quickly or in
>
> the old-fashioned way. And so ultimately there's a sort of a salmon swimming

upstream and that's very tiring. So eventually they'll just stop trying to use their newly learned skills and just go back to the system of the old way.

Leaders transitioning their identity need a safe space to try on provisional roles. P3 reiterates this through role-play.

I think role play is really important. I encourage my [female clients] to also roleplay with a safe male colleague. 'Hey, I just want to sit down and try this with you. And I'd love to hear how I'm coming across.' Because I think my perception and a male's perception are going to be different.

P9 explains further,

It's my job to create such a safe space for them, that they have a place to come to talk about what their fears are, what their worries are what they think might be happening without, without there ever being a repercussion for anything that they've ever said in the room with me. And to have somebody who has their best interests in mind and only their best interests in mind to be able to bounce things off of. To be able to say well I've got to go into this really hard meeting and this is what we're going to talk about, this is what I want to say, help me phrase it, so they hear me.

Transitioning into a leader identity is a complex process that requires time, practice and positive reinforcement if a leader identity is to emerge.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: When working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, in what ways do executive coaches tailer their coaching to address

organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges? Previous research shows that women face greater societal, organizational, interpersonal, and personal barriers than men in their career progression. These barriers were reflected in the challenges that female clients bring to their coaches. Perhaps P5 expressed it best when saying, "I don't know one person that couldn't explain to you the effects of bias on their career." Coaches use a variety of strategies to overcome barriers. These have been grouped into seven overall strategies – skill development, self-awareness, managing self and others, knowledge, positioning, self-efficacy tactics and goal setting and visualizing success. Knowledge and self-awareness strategies appear with all of the participants. When clients of the coaches are enrolled in a leadership development program, content teaching is coupled with assessments and coaching. Coaches also teach clients on key relevant subjects such as neuroscience, emotional intelligence, positive psychology and mindfulness. These content subjects are taught to clients to help them understand the importance of self-awareness and to encourage continual introspection to become more self-aware. P3 illustrates this strategy.

> How do we show up when we're frustrated? or angry? or feel disrespected or lacking confidence? to offer an opinion in a meeting? How are we sitting? How are we showing up? How do those feelings manifest in our body? Your body is your distributed brain. I use a lot of that as my approach is really around helping women develop executive presence from the inside out, and you start by helping them build self-awareness of who they are, what their strengths are, what their weaknesses are, what their inner critic is saying to them. Are they a perfectionist?

A micromanager? How is it manifesting in their bodies and in their actions with others?

Skill development strategies range from networking, presentation of self, interpersonal relationships, emotional intelligence, intentional conversations, and the art of self-promotion. P2 provides an example of intentional conversations to address personal barriers of managing home responsibilities.

This is an example, this past year I worked with a woman in her mid 30s, and she had a very responsible job in middle management, but toward the higher end of it. And she had two young children, and her husband. And the woman was absolutely, totally frazzled trying to get through the days and do everything. I just asked her what her husband's role was. Honestly it never, it didn't ever even occur to her to have a conversation with him to say, 'Let's look at our schedules. And let's look at what the demands are from our three daughters, and how we could work that out.' And the next time that I talked to her, she was like this whole different person. And she said, I got up my courage and we sat down and we talked about this. And he's doing this, this and this and now. I'm doing this and on certain days, we're switching it for this reason, and it wasn't just around the kids but it was also around two nights a week she'd be responsible for dinner and three nights a week he'd be responsible for dinner. And one night a week, they know that they'd always get takeout kind of thing.

Another strategy coaches use is managing self and others. This can include being mindful of one's attitude or mindset, identifying work-life balance strategies, self-care,

establishing trust with colleagues, and stress management. P3 discusses one such situation.

> So many women just feel overwhelmed. And again, it's kind of time management, like, you know, work life balance issues. They are really hard on themselves about kind of this feeling that when they're at work, they feel distracted by things going on in their family life. And when they're at home, they're distracted by work. And so they're a half-assed mom and a half-assed executive, right, like this feeling of just beating themselves up around that, is a pretty common theme.

One of the key benefits of executive coaching is the customization of the coaching. Female clients present many of the same barriers or challenges over the course of their careers, but their situations are often unique or nuanced. Through the coaching process, women can work through strategies and actions to move forward in a psychologically safe environment. Table 7 presents a recap of the key themes and sub-themes as it relates to each of the research questions.

Table 7

Research Questions and Corresponding Themes

RQ	Theme	Subthemes
1	Strategies used by coaches	Self-efficacy techniques are effectively used by coaches with clients. It is a key strategy for helping client overcome barriers or challenges. Examples are role-modeling, role place, practicing new behaviors and visualizing.
2	Understanding barriers/challenges	Transition, self-awareness, gender bias
2	Strategies used by coaches	Self-awareness work, introspection, value work, creating a safe space
3	Strategies used by coaches	Skill development, self-awareness, managing self & others, knowledge, positioning, self-efficacy, goal setting, visualizing success

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There are four components of trustworthiness in qualitative studies. These are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Credibility refers to the level of confidence that the findings are true and accurate. Transferability is whether the findings are applicable to other contexts. Confirmability relates to the degree of neutrality in the findings or, in the other words, free from researcher bias. Dependability is the extent to which the study can be replicated by other researchers and that their findings would be consistent. To address matters of trustworthiness, the following steps were taken:

- triple checked transcripts to verify that they are accurately transcribed, and meaning was accurately captured

- utilized the expertise of another researcher to cross-check my coding

- reviewed for bias

- rich descriptions were used, including quotes from participants

Transcripts of interviews were triple checked to verify that they were accurately transcribed. Errors in the data could reduce the credibility of the study. Recorded interviews introduce different speech patterns than would be found in written communication. Participants often used filler words and did their "thinking out loud" before answering research questions. To make sure that meaning was captured accurately, the researcher listened to the transcripts multiple times and corrected the transcripts manually. During the coding process, if there was anything unclear, the researcher referred to the original recording to confirm the meaning of participants statements.

The researcher's analysis and coding were partially reviewed by Walden University's Center for Research Quality. Utilizing a third party to review the researcher's work helps to ensure that the study is credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. To avoid bias and ensure confirmability, the researcher reflected on her own experiences and where bias may insert itself during data collection and data analysis. To help avoid bias or preconceived notions, the researcher asked probing questions to confirm participant's meaning or intent. Lastly, rich descriptions are used to facilitate transferability to other contexts, such as similar situations or populations. Direct quotes are used so that readers can independently assess confirmability or transferability.

Summary and Transition

Three research questions were used to guide this study. Question 1 explores how executive coaches working with aspiring female leaders address matters of leadership self-efficacy. Findings indicate that coaches are adept at using role-play, role-modelling, visualization, and words of encouragement to facilitate leadership self-efficacy in aspiring female leaders. Question 2 explores how coaches in corporate leadership identity development strategies into the coaching process. Findings indicate that coaching is beneficial in helping clients through the transition period prior to or while taking on a new role. Self-awareness, feedback, and introspection are key strategies for helping clients effectively transition into a leadership identity. Question 3 explores the ways in which executive coaches tailor their coaching to address organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges. Findings indicate there are 8 general strategies coaches are using to help women, who aspire to leadership roles, move past barriers. These strategies are skill development, self-awareness, managing self and others, knowledge, positioning, self-efficacy tactics, goal setting, and create a safe space environment.

Chapter 5 includes discussions, interpretations, and implications of these results. It begins with a review and discussion of the findings presented in this chapter. Next, Chapter 5 includes interpretation of the findings and how they confirm, disconfirm, or extend conclusions of previous researchers. Chapter 5 then includes discussion of the limitations of the study, followed by recommendations based on findings for leaders, practitioners, and future researchers. A summary and closing remarks conclude the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate how executive coaches working with females who aspire to senior leadership roles, are addressing leadership identity challenges and how they are developing their female clients' LSE. The intent was to better understand what strategies are currently being used or could be used to help women who aspire to advance in their careers. As evidenced in the low numbers of women at the executive levels, more needs to be done to help women advance. The data analysis yielded two primary themes: (a) barriers/challenges that clients face and (b) the key strategies used by coaches to help clients advance in their careers. Twelve barriers or challenges that clients face were identified in the data, with only two of the 12 unique to female clients. There were eight key strategies that coaches use with clients. These strategies are used with males and females alike. The coaching relationship lends itself to individualizing the training or strategy used with the client. The strategy chosen is solely based on the needs of the client.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section elaborates on the findings in Chapter 4 and incorporates research from the literature review. The first research question was developed to understand how executive coaches address matters of LSE. Self-efficacy has been well researched and validated since Bandura first introduced the concept in the 1970s. Research has shown that leaders high in LSE achieve superior individual and group performance (Paglis & Green, 2002). Eight of the coaches (80%) discussed usage of LSE strategies such as experiences of mastery through role play; verbal persuasion through encouragement;

vicarious experiences through finding role models, mentors, behaviors to emulate, or visualizing; and physiological factors through channeling positive emotions and awareness of negative emotions. Employing these strategies with clients is not unique to female clients; however, it may be more difficult for a female to find a role model (vicarious experiences). P8 illustrated this in her statements: "If people don't see themselves in a role, it's hard. It's hard to aspire to something completely abstract. I mean, as long as there's not that many women, it's going to be a barrier visually."

The second research question was developed to understand how executive coaches incorporate leadership identity development into the coaching process. Leadership identity did not emerge as a dominant theme. Some elements of the identity development process emerged, such as creating a safe space and practicing new behaviors or patterns of speech. All participants (10, 100%) identified gender bias, confidence, and self-awareness as a challenge or barrier to advancing in their clients' careers and/or work performance. All participants (10, 100%) also identified self-awareness activities and knowledge as important strategies to use with clients. Understanding how gender bias disrupts the development of leadership identity would appear to be an important knowledge component; however, no participants (0, 0%) acknowledged use of specific strategies to develop a leadership identity. Gender stereotyping and lack of role models interrupt the leader identity process (Sealy & Singh, 2010). If society and organizations celebrate males as prototypical leaders, a woman may have a difficult time asserting herself as a leader or even seeing herself as a leader (Ely & Rhode, 2010). Identity work is imperative to become aware of biases that exist in society

and in the workplace (Ibarra et al., 2013). Women face more barriers to leadership roles

than men and therefore need more developmental support (Murphy et al., 2017). It is not

enough to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to become a leader

(Murphy et al., 2017). "To create strong identities as leaders, women need a plethora of

relationships where the relational other portrays (that is, projects back) a view in which

the woman is able to see herself as a leader" (Murphy et al., 2017, p. 364). Women and

organizations need to be intentional about seeking developmental support through

relationships inside and outside of the workplace (Murphy et al., 2017).

The third research question was developed to understand how executive coaches

tailor their coaching to address organizational, interpersonal, or personal challenges. The

very nature of the coaching relationship allows for a tailored approach to addressing the

client's needs. The data supported coaches' ability to tailor their strategies as needed.

Coaches focused on elements that can be changed, such as interpersonal or personal

challenges. Coaches worked with clients to identify what could be changed (their

behavior, attitude, or skills) and what could not be changed (organizational culture). In

the case of organizational challenges (see Table 2 for examples of organizational

barriers), coaches work with clients to understand the organizational culture and

determine options or choices she may have. Sometimes the only option is to leave an

organization. P7 illustrated this process as follows:

My style of coaching is not to tell people what to do. To me that is consulting. So

when I have my coach hat on, I'm asking questions to help empower them to

make their own decision. And then when they make that decision, I'll guide them

through that decision. Based on what they want to do, I will offer suggestions

with permission, but I never tell them what to do.

The coaching relationship is ideal for addressing personal barriers. Personal

barriers such as lack of confidence, political savvy, negotiation skills, home-life

responsibilities, psychological glass ceiling, personalizing (internalizing failure vs.

external events), communication style constraints, and gender unconsciousness can be

addressed in the coaching relationship and through the strategies identified in the

research. Based on the responses from the participants, other barriers to leadership, such

as interpersonal, organizational, or societal barriers, are harder to conquer within the

coaching relationship but are often discussed. Coaches work with clients to identify these

types of barriers, brainstorm solutions or workarounds, or find other pathways to self-

fulfillment.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study were focused on exploring the strategies that executive

coaches use with females who aspire to senior leadership roles. The first limitation was

the nature of this study, in that qualitative research uses a limited participant pool and the

findings may not be generalizable to the general population. In other words, the findings

are not generalizable to the population of all executive coaches working with females.

The second limitation was the use of proprietary tools that executive coaches use and

cannot be used in other situations without the required credentials or certifications (e.g.,

ELI). A third limitation was the honesty and truthfulness of the data for coaches who may

have had selective memory or personal biases, and/or may have embellished the truth in a

manner that shed a positive light on their expertise but did not accurately reflect the work they did with the population of interest.

A fourth limitation was any gender differences in coaching methods. Executive coaches were male or female for the purposes of this study. Any gender differences in coaching methods used were outside the scope of this study. As noted in the demographics of the participants, there was one male participant and nine female participants. There were no obvious differences in the participant responses. The male participant data were like the data for the female participants. Boozer et al. (2015) found that coach-coachee matching based on gender similarity had little significant effect on coaching outcomes. Therefore, the male participant data were included in the data set.

All of these potential limitations may affect the validity of the data. The data, as stated before, were collected via in-depth interviews with coaches and therefore cannot be verified independently. The findings of this study cannot be generalized or applied to all executive coaches working with women due to the nature of the study and the limitations presented.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research stem from comments made by participants that warrant further investigation. Both P5 and P8 mentioned gender differences in confidence and the imposter syndrome. More research is needed on how men and women express or exhibit fear of failure, lack of confidence, or the imposter syndrome. P9 stated that men and women compete differently, and that women's power comes from a different place than a man's power. She also talked about the differing power dynamics

for women in the social world versus the work world. These power dynamics warrant

further research and discussion in relation to executive coaching. P7 stated that "women

utilize coaching more than men do on a longer-term basis." As stated in the findings

above, women need relationships to develop their leadership identity. More research is

needed to understand how the executive coaching relationship with women helps foster

their leader identity or why a longer-term relationship is more prevalent with women

versus men.

Lastly, it appears that the importance of leadership identity work or the process of

identifying as a leader is not part of the knowledge bank being taught to executive

coaches in their programs or in leadership development programs. Haslam et al. (2020)

argued that leaders of organizations are not looking at leadership development correctly

and that collectively leaders should be focusing on leader identity development and group

identity development.

Implications for Social Change

The current political environment (2017 to the present) has been and still is

heavily influenced by #MeToo, #TimesUp, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Exacerbating this situation, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionally affected women's

careers, causing many to leave the workforce due to lack of childcare (Catalyst, 2021a;

Coury et al., 2020). According to Coury et al. (2020), progress toward gender parity in

senior management remains slow. Companies are at risk of losing women in leadership

but cannot afford to lose female leaders (Coury et al., 2020). Additionally, the workplace

has always been more unequal for Black women, and now Black women are facing even

more challenges (Coury et al., 2020). Progress toward gender diversity in senior levels rose to its highest levels on a global scale in 2019 (29%) but stagnated from 2019 to 2020 (Catalyst, 2020a), and yet organizations with gender and racial diversity perform better than nondiverse executive teams. Executive coaches can and do help women push past barriers in their own development, but more is needed. Females who aspire to reach senior leadership roles and executive coaches need to be further educated on identity development and how gender bias undermines the development of a leader identity. By using the findings of this research, organizations can implement change and better utilize executive coaching to advance their female leaders.

As a society, Americans are demanding change. Fostered by the current political environment, Americans are voicing their desire to see equal opportunities for all genders and all ethnicities. Diversity is good for society and good for business, as evidenced in the research. Elevating women economically helps achieve this goal of equality. However, elevating women starts with the individual organizations in which people work to offer support, such as executive coaching.

Conclusion

In this study, I found 12 barriers or challenges individuals face in their development to leadership roles. Eight strategies used by executive coaches were identified as helping leaders advance in their work performance. Findings addressed Research Questions 1 and 3 but only partially addressed Research Question 2. The findings of this study should be used to educate corporate leaders on the value of executive coaching, particularly for developing female leaders. Women face more

barriers to advancement than men do, and therefore greater developmental support is needed to achieve diversity at the highest ranks of leadership. Lastly, more research and training are needed in leadership identity development.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Executive Coach Lived Experience Questions Related to their Working with Women

Aspiring to Senior Leadership Roles.

- Describe your background and coaching work.

- Where or how do you find clients?

- Describe your experiences with working with women.

- What sort of approaches do you use when working with women?

- What tools do you use in your practice (e.g. 360-degree feedback, assessments)?

- How do you help women move into the next role or next level of their career?

- What sort of barriers or challenges do your clients typically face?

- How do you help them move through barriers or challenges?

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Publication Title	The Leadership quarterly	Rightsholder	Elsevier Science & Technology Journals
Article Title	A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most?	Publication Type	Journal
		Start Page	70
		End Page	88
Author/Editor	International Leadership Association.	Issue	1
		Volume	29
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Title	Executive Coaches' Perspectives on Leadership Role Identity Construction in Aspiring Female Leaders	Institution name	Walden University
		Expected presentation date	2021-08-20
Instructor name	Dr. John K. Schmidt		

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Title, description or numeric reference of the portion(s)	Table 2. Evidence of positive executive Coaching outcomes and potential pitfalls according to the outcome studies	**Title of the article/chapter the portion is from**	A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most?
Editor of portion(s)	Dopson, Sue; Athanasopoulou, Andromachi	**Author of portion(s)**	Dopson, Sue; Athanasopoulou, Andromachi
Volume of serial or monograph	29	**Issue, if republishing an article from a serial**	1
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