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A Female Perspective on Overcoming Barriers to Become a City Manager in Californian Municipalities

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Abstract

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by

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

There are significant implications related to understanding perceived barriers experienced by women in local government. The purpose of this study was to identify career barriers of women executives in municipal administrations based on their own experiences. Approached using the situational leadership theory and role congruity theory and the narrative research design along with thematic analysis, this study was comprised of one-on-one interviews with nine female city managers currently working in Californian municipal administrations. Five themes (early influences, home life, work life, leadership experiences and development of others) were not only present within each of the participants' experiences, but also represent influential times in their lives and careers. Barriers identified include gender bias, limited peer networks, having to participate in a form of role play (i.e., changing their personalities) to meet other's expectations, lack of transparency among female city managers regarding demands of the job, and additional stress placed on personal relationships and family life. This study corroborates previous gender research involving discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and roles and supports understanding their lived experiences in order to help support advancement of women into executive leadership roles in local governments. The findings may be used by government administrators for positive social change to improve women's job expectations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In a council-manager form of city government, city managers are equivalent to a chief executive officer and are the highest-ranking city staff member. They are appointed by elected officials and serve at the will of the city council and mayor. Typical duties include implementing and overseeing policies, budgets, day-to-day operations, and personnel. In the state of California, where women account for 50.3% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2019), only 17% of incorporated cities were led by women (League of California Cities, 2018). This statistic is lower than the national average for female executives in the private sector, including information technology (20%), law (22%), and financial services (29%), as well as in higher education (29 %) and state or federal governments (30%) (Sabharwal, 2013; Warner & Corley, 2017). Researching perceived barriers of female city managers may provide insight for decision-makers seeking to implement positive change within their organizations.

Background of the Problem

Women in leadership, even women in government, is an area that has been frequently studied (Madsen & Scribner, 2017). For example, Cheung and Halpern (2010) asked how women could rise to the top of their professions while simultaneously juggling family responsibilities; Jorgensen et al. (2015) said locally elected government officials perpetuated gender inequality through their own bias since it is they who appoint city managers. Aguado and Frederickson (2012) said women were less likely to put their careers ahead of their family or spouse which led to them hitting a glass ceiling. Opstrup and Villadsen (2015) found that positive outcomes associated with gender diversity in top

management teams of public administrations were dependent upon how organizational structures were designed. Yet, none of these studies specifically address the issue of perceived barriers or what female executives did to overcome any barriers that they perceive to have experienced.

Storberg-Walker and Madsen (2017) suggested that future research should seek to address why women still hold far fewer executive management positions than men and what can be done to change these statistics. They also asserted that much of the published research focused on negative outcomes instead of any positive results that might resonate more loudly with practitioners who had the power or authority to implement positive changes within their policies and programs Madsen and Scribner (2017) also identified the lack of understanding, in extant literature, regarding why women still struggle to obtain top management or leadership positions I specifically sought to address how female city managers in California felt about their career progression to city management, perceived barriers that they may have faced in their careers, and what steps may have been taken to overcome said barriers.

Problem Statement

Past research on women in the workplace has looked at the potential relationship between organizational practices and the career progression of women in state government agencies (D'Agostino & Levine, 2010); gender diversity and organizational financial stability (Opstrup & Villadsen, 2015); socioeconomic development, culture, and gender gaps (Yeganeh & May, 2011); the effects of mentoring and education on the development of women leaders (Bullough et al., 2015); the impact of gender on

managerial values in city hall (Hamidullah et al., 2015); leadership, gender roles, and identity (Madson & Scribner, 2017); and even the importance of gender in public-sector administrations (Aguado & Frederickson, 2012). There have also been studies that looked at leadership competencies based on gender. For example, a study by Zenger and Folkman (2011) revealed that women in leadership roles outscore men on 12 out of 16 competencies including development of long-term goals, taking initiative, collaboration, communication, problem solving, and expertise. In other studies, women have been found to have clear leadership advantages (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003), can improve an organization's competitiveness (Devillard et al., 2016), and are more likely to use effective leadership approaches (Antonakis et al., 2003). Yet, there is very little research on women executives in municipal government and none that specifically sought to determine how female executives in city government may perceive barriers to career advancement. This study was focused on those perceived barriers and how they were overcome.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify career barriers of women executives in municipal administrations based on their own personal experiences. This study comprised of in-depth interviews of women executives currently working in municipal administrations took into account education, organizational norms, and professional development. Understanding their lived experiences was needed to help support advancement of women into executive leadership roles by exploring strategies that could be applied to organizational training, mentoring, and even recruitment in municipalities.

Research Questions

The primary goal was to address any shared perspectives or experiences of female executives in Californian municipalities that could be used to create training, recruitment and diversity programs within municipalities seeking to diversity their organizations. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What barriers did female executives perceive to have encountered in their careers?

RQ2: How did these female executives overcome any perceived barriers they encountered?

Theoretical Framework

This research was approached using the situational leadership theory (SLT) and role congruity theory (RCT). The SLT involves how leaders are able to adapt to situations, taking cues from influences around them. Individual leaders can change their leadership styles and behaviors in order to be more effective leaders (Hersey et al., 2012). Mujtaba and Sungkhawan (2009) created a conceptual leadership model linking the many dimensions of diversity, including gender, to situational leadership. Situational leaders are flexible problem solvers. Women who rise to the ranks of city manager are able to adjust their leadership style, actions, and reactions to address whatever barriers may have presented themselves as a mechanism for success.

The RCT involves gender-based stereotypes that shape women's career experiences by comparing stereotypical gender roles with other roles women hold such as leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lemoine et al., 2016; Streets & Nguyen, 2014).

Due to gender stereotyping, leadership is historically synonymous with masculinity and the idealistic expectation that women are more suited to take care while men take charge (Guy, 2017; Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Perceived barriers to promotion could be internalization of biases these women have faced (Bell, 2015; Burnier, 2003; Cook & Glass, 2014; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Faulkner, 2015).

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative research design involving interviews with female city managers in California. The goal of the interview process was to elicit content-rich narratives that accurately describe women's experiences as they advanced in their careers. Understanding perspective is not linear or mathematical (Souba, 2014) meaning it can be explained or applied with a formula – it is unique to each individual based on their lived experiences. This is why a thematic analysis worked best to build context and identify any shared experiences or themes the interviews that would explain or provide context for any perceived barriers.

Participants were selected based on current employment status. Audio recorded interview sessions were transcribed so a thematic analysis could be applied in order to address potential similarities or differences in terms of perceived career growth barriers. This design facilitated an insider's perspective on female city managers and their experiences as it pertains to gender and leadership development.

Operational Definitions

Barrier: Any real or perceived obstacle that impedes promotional opportunities and career advancement (Navarro-Astor et al., 2017).

City Manager: Official appointed by elected City Council members to execute policy and oversee day-to-day operations of a local government (International City/County Management Association, 2019).

Council-Manager Government: Form of city government where city managers are equivalent to a chief executive officer. They are appointed by and serve at the will of a city council and mayor (Connolly, 2018).

Executive Management: For the purpose of this research (and based on standard California practices), executive management is defined as the highest level of staff (unelected public servants) within a municipality which typically includes the city manager, assistant city managers, city attorney, city clerk, and department directors.

Gender Diversity: Equal representation of people of different genders. (Herring, 2009).

Gender Inequality: Disproportionate human resource practices (such as pay, promotions, and hiring) benefiting one gender more than another (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

Gender Stereotype: Culturally shared beliefs or perspectives about appropriate behaviors for men and women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gipson, et al, 2017).

Municipal Administration: Organized management of a local public agency (Cornell Law School, 2022).

Local Government: Administration of a town, city, or county (or similar jurisdiction) whose laws and policies are determined by representatives elected by that

jurisdiction's residents (White House, 2022). For the purpose of this study, city or municipal government is synonymous with local government.

Perception: Participants' personal interpretations of events that create their own understanding or impression of what they experienced (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021).

Private Sector: Privately owned organizations which are typically focused on profits and providing shareholder value (Parhizgari & Glbert, 2004).

Public Sector: Organizations led by government officials (Parhizgari & Glbert, 2004).

Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

Results of this study were limited to one geographic location- the state of California - which limited the scope and application of the study. Results may not be generalizable outside of California.

Potential participants were women actively serving as city managers within the state of California. There were few women meeting this criterion; therefore, a high level of participation was required in order to have a minimum of five participants.

The study relied on participants' self-reporting, which could be hampered by an unwillingness to respond or honesty and integrity issues. Self-reporting also means that results are only a representation of experiences the participants were willing to share with me and those experiences might not be shared by other female city managers.

Researcher bias was potentially a limitation given that I am a female manager working in a municipal administration, though not at the executive level. It was important

for me to clearly explain my role within my own organization to participants and readers. However, not being at the executive management level means I did not have shared experiences with participants, nor could I fully understand their own career trajectory. Journaling, or field notes, allowed me to keep records of what topics were interesting or unique during data collection, document thoughts about the coding process and consider rationales behind each theme, were some of the ways in which I attempted to avoid bias by focusing solely on the experiences and narratives provided by the participants. Within 24 hours of the interview, I added observational, methodological and analytical notes consisting of thoughts, impressions, and reminders to my initial notes taken during the interview. These notes were invaluable during the data analysis because they allowed me to remember some of my initial reactions and thoughts, and allowed me to see any shifts in my thought processes that could have been manifesting bias.

Significance of the Study

With more than 13.8 million people employed by local governments within the United States (Willhide, 2014), there are significant implications related to understanding perceived barriers experienced by women in local government. Experiences and perceptions of female executives were used to address leadership from within local municipal government administrations where current existing research tends to focus on private organizations or state agencies. O'Neil and Hopkins (2015) said systemic norms and structures should be the focus of organizational change if women are to advance to senior leadership positions. Lange and Nelson (2014) conducted research to better understand why there were so few women occupying chief administrative officer

positions in the state of Illinois. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) found that women leaders in educational and religious organizations were more likely to accept barriers to gender balance instead of actively trying to overcome them. An historical look at federal leadership positions over the past two decades indicated that women were more likely to attain leadership positions when the agencies they work for hold democratic political ideologies, when the women are younger, where the failure is more likely, and where the work is typically considered to be feminine in nature (e.g. social work or healthcare) (Smith, 2014). Findings from a national sample of local education agencies supported the glass cliff theory that women are more likely than men to be promoted into riskier roles (Smith, 2015). My identification of any perceived barriers that women personally overcame in local municipalities could lead to improved recruitment and selection processes, development of training and leadership tools, and identification of climates and cultures that enhance gender balance. This study memorialized the stories of the participants, allowing their voices to be heard in a way that adds to the extant literature.

Summary

Experiences of female city managers and their potential barriers to promotion has significance for local governments, especially those seeking to attract, retain, and develop diverse workforces that are more representative of their citizens. Smith (2014) stated, "having women in leadership positions is important for society, organizations, and individuals" (p. 481). This study provided important insights regarding career experiences of these women for future leaders.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Advancement of women to top levels of municipal administration and perceived barriers that successful women have overcome are topics that are not widely explored. The number of women currently holding top administrative position is significantly less than population averages and lower than other industry sectors (United State Census Bureau, 2019). This literature review provides historical context regarding women's roles in city management while providing a contextual framework involving women in city management positions. In addition, literature on entry barriers to executive level management for all genders is explored.

The purpose of this literature review was to identify and discuss studies that (a) provide historical context for city managers in California, (b) identify leadership characteristics of women in city management, (c) identify or examine perceived barriers encountered by women in city management, and (d) discuss the relevance of these studies to the current study. Areas of future study, as presented in literature, are also discussed.

Literature Search Strategy

Relevant peer-reviewed literature, including articles and studies, were accessed using the Walden University Library and the following online databases: ABI/INFORM, Academic Search Complete, Annual Reviews, APA PsycArticles, Business Source Complete, DOAB, DOAJ, Emerald Insight, Emerald Management, JSTOR, Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University, EBSCO, EBSCO ebooks, Gale Academic OneFile Select, Gale eBooks, Open Library, Political Science Complete, ProQuest Central, ProQuest One Academic, PsycARTICLES, Psychology Databases Combined Search,

ResearchGate, SAGE Journals, SAGE Knowledge, Science Direct, SocINDEX, SpringerLink; Taylor and Francis Online and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Additional studies, articles, and statistics were obtained from the California City Management Foundation, the Institute for Local Government, the International City/County Management Association, and the League of California Cities. These databases were explored using the following key terms: career barrier, career development, career paths, city management, city manager, diversity, executive couple, executive leadership, executive municipal leadership, executive spouse, female CEO, female city manager, female executive, gender inequality, gender workplace, glass ceiling, glass cliff, leadership barriers, leadership gap, leadership theory, local government, mentoring women, mentorship, municipal, public administration, public agency, public jobs, public sector leadership, public service, role congruity theory, women career advancement, women career development, women government, women leadership theory, women leadership, women mentors, women role congruity theory, women, workplace gender discrimination, workplace gender diversity, and workplace gender inequality. Included in this review are peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, white papers, textbooks, government website data, and professional and organizational group website data.

The literature review failed to uncover studies focused on incumbent female city managers' perceptions of barriers during their promotion to city manager. Studies have compared male and female city managers (Fox & Schumann, 1999), evaluated the impact of gender on careers in city management (Aguado & Frederickson, 2012), considered the demographics of newly appointed city managers (Barber, 1988), discussed gender

disparity (Beaty & Davis, 2018), and revealed the career paths of city managers (Barber, 1988; Buckwalter & Parsons, 2000; Douglas & Hassett, 2004; Feiock & Stream, 1998; Hassett, 2004; Watson & Hassett, 2004). While these studies are useful in terms of developing a conceptual framework to explore barriers that female city managers may have experienced, they do not explain these barriers from these women's perspectives and do not provide insights regarding how any perceived barriers were overcome.

Theoretical Foundation

This research was approached using the SLT and RCT. The SLT involves how leaders are able to adapt to situations, taking cues from influences around them. Individual leaders can change their leadership styles and behaviors in order to be more effective leaders (Hersey et al., 2012). Mujtaba and Sungkhawan (2009) created a conceptual leadership model linking the many dimensions of diversity, including gender, to situational leadership. Situational leaders are flexible problem solvers. Women who rise to the ranks of city manager are able to adjust their leadership style, actions, and reactions to address whatever barriers may have presented themselves as a mechanism for success.

RCT suggests that a group member is evaluated positively when their attributes align with the group. Gender-based stereotypes shape women's career experiences by comparing them against stereotypical gender roles and other roles they might hold such as leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lemoine et al., 2016; Streets & Nguyen, 2014). Due to gender stereotyping, leadership is historically synonymous with masculinity and the idealistic expectation that women are more suited to take care while men take charge

(Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Several studies found that perceived barriers to promotion could be an internalization of biases these women have faced (Bell, 2015; Burnier, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Faulkner, 2015; Cook & Glass, 2014).

Leadership Theory

Largely attributed to Thomas Carlyle, the great man theory (GMT) of the mid-nineteenth century is the earliest recognized form of leadership theory upon which subsequent forms of leadership theory are built (Van Seters & Field, 1990). The GMT assumed that leadership was intrinsic and men seize their destiny when presented with a situation requiring leadership. As the name suggests, women were largely ignored (Landis et al., 2014). Ralph Stodgill built on the GMT with the creation of the trait theory, popular throughout the 1930s, which sought to identify the innate traits of effective leadership (Horner, 1997; Van Seters & Field, 1990). By the 1940s, behavioral theories of leadership emerged involving specific observable behaviors of effective leaders as they applied to organizations but were not generalizable in other situations (Horner, 1997; Landis, Hill & Harvey, 2014; Van Wart, 2003; Van Seters & Field, 1990). Contingency leadership theories came about in the 1950s and continue to be the basis of many models today, with the argument that leadership has to be fluid enough to respond to each situation based on unique sets of circumstances instead of applying a one-size fits all approach (Landis et al., 2014; Van Seters & Field, 1990; Van Wart, 2003). The transactional leadership theory, focusing on mutually beneficial relationships, and transformational leadership theory, focusing on relationships built on trust, emerged in the 1970s and continue today.

SLT

First created in 1969, the original SLT is based on the principle that there is not one leadership style that is better than any other; rather, successful leaders are able to adapt in order to apply the best style for a particular situation (McCleskey, 2014). Scholars continue to have mixed reactions to the empirical validity of SLT (Graeff, 1997; Thompson & Vecchio, 2009).

Leadership theories such as the SLT are often male dominated meaning they focus on the male perspective. This study focused on lived experiences of female city managers in a way that embraces all facets of positive and negative experiences. Where the SLT involves how courses of action are dependent upon internal and external organizational factors, this study can be used to identify how female city managers in California were able to adapt in order make it to the top levels of city administration. Perceived barriers and steps they took to overcome such barriers were used to identify how they were able to successfully apply their own style of leadership to situations they encountered.

RCT

The RCT has its roots in the social role theory and involves considering gender-based stereotypes that shape women's career experiences by comparing stereotypical gender roles with roles involving leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lemoine et al., 2016; Streets & Nguyen, 2014). RCT suggests that a group member is evaluated positively when their attributes align with the group. Gender-based stereotypes shape women's career experiences by comparing them against stereotypical gender roles and other roles

they might hold such as leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Lemoine et al., 2016; Streets & Nguyen, 2014). Due to gender stereotyping, leadership is historically synonymous with masculinity and the idealistic expectation that women are more suited to take care while men take charge (Hoyt & Simon, 2016). Several studies found that perceived barriers to promotion could be an internalization of biases these women have faced (Bell, 2015; Burnier, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Faulkner, 2015; Cook & Glass, 2014).

Women are more generally stereotyped with gentler and kinder characteristics while men are attributed with more assertive and self-reliant characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sabharwal, 2013; Smith, 2014). Research has exposed the impact of gender-based stereotypes as giving the impression that women are less capable leaders and less effective in leadership roles if they display similar traits or behaviors as men in similar positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hoyt, 2012). Women have acknowledged an awareness of the stereotypes they face and admit they believe their male counterparts are more likely to be lauded as good or effective leaders (Powell, 2012; Sabharwal, 2013; Streets & Nguyen, 2014). Women tend to feel isolated from their female colleagues (Streets & Nguyen, 2017) and have experienced backlash for seeking power or authority (Eagly et al., 2014; Eagly & Koenig, 2014). Perceived barriers to promotion could be an internalization of the biases these women have faced (Bell, 2015; Burnier, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Faulkner, 2015; Cook & Glass, 2014).

Other Theories Applied in Literature

Other theories that have been used during the course of gender-based leadership studies include rational bias theory, social role theory, and Schein's (1975) 'think

manager think male' studies. The first, rational bias theory, has been used to explain how individuals with an external locus of control are more likely to make and justify discriminatory decisions than those with an internal locus of control; and men tend to have external locus of control (Trentham & Larwood, 1998). Second, Schein's think manager think male studies of the 1970s found that both men and women viewed management as a masculine role, but subsequent studies in the 1980s demonstrated a shift in stereotypes as women no longer viewed management as a male role. Third, societal expectations and not genetic differences are what cause men and women to behave differently (Eagly, 1997; Hamidullah et al., 2015). People are believed to internalize society's expectations of gender roles making the stereotypes a preferred quality or behavior (Eagly, 1997; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Seo et al., 2017).

Literature Review of Key Concepts and Variables

Historical Context of City Management

The ICMA held its inaugural meeting in 1914, just 6 years after Staunton, Virginia hired the nation's first city manager in 1908. At that time, there were only 32 local governments nationwide that had adopted the council-manager form of government, by 1918 there were 100. Warrenton, Oregon appointed America's first female city manager, Rose Tyler Barrett, in 1920 at a time when there were just 100 city managers nationwide (Frost-Knappman, & Cullen-DuPont, 2014; ICMA, 2018; Read & Witlieb, 1992). By the year 2000 there were nearly 3,000 cities across the country operating a council-manager form of government, yet only 12% employed female city managers (ICMA, 2018; Watson & Hassett, 2004). In the state of California, that number is only

marginally higher today with women holding 17% of city managers positions (League of California Cities, 2018a). The clear lack of statistical data on female city managers led to me manually calculating percentages based on information available from the California League of Cities and ICMA, which was then cross-referenced against city websites to verify gender.

Women in the Workplace

Despite the fact that women account for 58.2 percent of the national civilian labor force (US Census Bureau, 2019), men continue to hold more leadership positions than women across most sectors of business (Caceres-Rodriguez, 2013; D'Agostino & Levine, 2010; Lyness & Grotto, 2018; Madsen & Scribner, 2017; Yeganeh & May, 2011). In the state of California, where women account for 57.1 percent of the civilian labor force (US Census Bureau, 2019), only 17 percent of incorporated cities were led by women (League of California Cities, 2018). This statistic is somewhat lower than national average for female executives in the private sector to include information technology (20%), law (22%), and financial services (29%) as well as in higher education (29 %) and state or federal governments (30%) (Sabharwal, 2013; Warner & Corley, 2017). Yet, gender diversity has been linked to "superior organizational outcomes" (Opstrup & Villadsen, 2015, p. 291) such as improved financial performance when coupled with a supportive organizational structure that facilitates the use of individual differences. Yeganeh and May (2011) said gender-based inequalities contributed to the gender gap. Strong correlations were found between socio-economic development, cultural values, and the

gender gap; leading them to suggest that organizations should adopt policies that steer clear from traditional cultural values in order to bridge the gender gap.

Women in Government

Although women have been successfully reaching executive management positions in the public sector, they continue to be "be evaluated less favorably, receive less support from their peers, are excluded from important networks, and receive greater scrutiny and criticism even when performing exactly the same leadership roles as men" (Sabharwal, 2013, p.400). Research on women in the workplace has been expanded to look at the potential relationship between organizational practices and the career progression of women in state government agencies (D'Agostino & Levine, 2010).

In general, government employees are a representation of its citizens' diversity, but this does not hold true when considering government leadership which is still predominantly male (Aguado & Frederickson, 2012; Mastracci & Bowman, 2015; Riccucci & van Ryzin, 2017). The lack of women in government leadership is found to be largely due to societal expectations (Caleo & Heilman, 2014; Lange & Nelson, 2014; O'Neil & Hopkins, 2015; Roman, 2015; Smith, 2014). It is entrenched in the policies and activities of government organizations (Hamidullah et al., 2015) and affects organizational structure and even staffing (Sabharwal, 2013). Many government agencies have been found to have adopted gender-based divisions of labor where women tend to be promoted in agencies that focus on social services as opposed to those more involved in policy making such as transportation, finance, or public safety (Alkadry & Tower, 2014; Cook & Glass, 2014; D'Agostino, 2015; Hamidullah et al., 2015; Sabharwal,

2013). This type of segregation could lead women to feel forced to look for more gender-appropriate roles, subsequently decreasing their opportunities for training and development (Hoyt, 2012). Government legitimacy is built on equality, which is why this type of exclusion will remain a concern as long as it is a factor in determining where women will hold leadership positions (Smith, 2014). D'Agostino and Levine (2010) posited that it was simply not enough for agencies to have gender gap policies in place, but that they also needed to consider how their own organizational cultures might impact the successful implementation of such policies.

O'Neil and Hopkins (2015) posited that systemic norms and structures should be the focus of organizational change if women are to advance to senior leadership positions. Future research would be needed to better understand the career progression of women if the gender gap is to be eradicated (D'Agostino & Levine, 2010).

Women in Leadership

Research on the influence of gender on leadership is extensive. Studies have found that people are predisposed to discriminate against women in the workplace (Trentham & Larwood, 1998; Williams, 2014) which may explain why women have to work harder, perform better, and cope with being left out, overlooked and ignored on a regular basis while fighting stereotypical gender assumptions that they are less ambitious or more sensitive than their male counterparts (Bell, 2007; Cikara & Fiske, 2008; Connell, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Williams, 2014). More disconcerting are the findings that women frequently face glass cliffs – a phenomena that sees women promoted into leadership positions with perceived greater risks. In other words,

organizational leadership is setting women up for failure because the organization is already facing significant challenges and there is, reputedly, nothing left to lose by promoting a woman into a leadership role (Reid et al., 2004; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Sabharwal, 2013; Smith, 2015). Perhaps this is why women tend to have a lower level of self-confidence in their abilities compared to male counterparts (Bosak & Sczesny, 2008). Women in leadership positions have been found to feel like outsiders with fewer social and professional networks, leading to frustrations with a perceived lack of support or even efforts to undermine their leadership (Cook & Glass, 2014; Faulkner, 2015; Greer, 2015; Seo et al., 2017). Leadership is a lived experience (Souba, 2014), which is why it is so important that women hear and learn from each other (Burnier, 2003; Cook & Glass, 2014).

Stringer (2002) found that women are more open, confront conflict head on, are better mentors, and are more adept at giving feedback – good and bad. Women in senior executive positions exhibit successful leadership attributes necessary to succeed during difficult or challenging times, including being action oriented risk takers that are skilled at dealing with difficult and complex issues (Caliper Research and Development, 2019). Other studies have concluded that women have clear leadership advantages such as outscoring men on 12 out of 16 competencies including development of long-term goals, taking initiative, collaboration, communication, problem solving, and expertise (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Zenger & Folkman, 2011). Women have also been found to improve an organization's competitiveness (Devillard et al., 2016) and are more likely to use effective leadership approaches (Antonakis et al., 2003).

Women in Municipal Leadership

With more than 13.8 million people employed by local governments (Willhide, 2014), there are significant implications related to understanding perceived barriers experienced by women in local government. Although women have been successfully reaching executive management positions in the public sector, Sabharwal (2013) said they continued to receive negative evaluations, had less peer support, lacked access to professional networks, and were subjected to increased scrutiny compared to their male colleagues. Jorgensen, Martin, and Nursey-Bray (2015) found that locally elected government officials perpetuated gender inequality through their own bias since it is they who appoint a city manager. But, there is also support in the literature that gender differences lead female government leaders to be more likely to "place higher emphasis on equity, long-term outlook, sense of community, and representation" (Hamidullah, et al, 2015, p. 254), while men place a higher priority on the "values of efficiency, effectiveness, expertise, and individual rights" (p. 255).

Women in City Management

A survey of University of Kansas MPA graduates was administered in order to determine why so few women advance to city manager positions (Aguano & Frederickson, 2012). They found that city council biases were a factor, often casting doubt on a women's ability to be tough enough, decisive enough, or aggressive enough. Using a two-pronged approach and two sets of data, they applied a simple logistic regression model to confirm their hypothesis that women were less than likely than men to become city managers. Their findings revealed that relocation was a critical

component of city manager careers, and many women choose to prioritize their spouses' careers, their families, and even their communities ahead of their own careers – a finding also confirmed by Watson and Hassett (2004).

Fox and Schumann (2001) posited that professional mentoring opportunities placed women at a disadvantage and explained why their integration into city management is at a much slower pace. Their research found that both men and women were more reliant on same-sex mentors. The lower numbers of female educators in public administration programs could account for female city managers being less likely to form lasting mentor relationships which they deemed critical to the early stages of one's career.

Female city managers also prefer to act as facilitators by communicating openly and involving others in the decision-making process, while demonstrating higher levels of attraction to policy making than their male counterparts (DeHart-Davis et al., 2006; Fox and Schumann, 1999).

Career Paths of City Managers

Literature surrounding the career paths of city managers has delved into the demographics of newly promoted city managers, turnover, and paths to promotion. The role continues to be filled by predominantly white males, who work an average of more than 50 hours per week (Barber, 1988; Buckwalter & Parsons, 2000; Feiock & Stream, 1998; Hassett, 2004; Watson & Hassett, 2004).

Most city managers have followed one of four primary paths to city manager. The most common is the traditional path of climbing the corporate ladder which typically

involves frequent moves as they gain experience and seek promotional opportunities in smaller cities before accepting roles in larger, higher paying cities (Watson & Hassett, 2004). Some may choose lateral moves that see them accepting similar positions in similarly sized cities; or serve long-term in smaller cities where they feel most comfortable or satisfied and are able to enjoy a higher quality of life (Buckwalter & Parsons, 2000; Watson & Hassett, 2004). Others have worked their way up within a single organization, gaining experience and respect with each promotion (Watson & Hassett, 2004).

Career Barriers

Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) found that women leaders in educational and religious organizations were more likely to accept barriers to gender balance instead of actively trying to overcome them. This may be because research suggests that crossing the lines of traditional gender roles leads to backlash and hostility, often reinforcing women's feelings that that their gender is, in itself, a barrier to promotion or advancement (Lange & Nelson, 2014).

Pande and Ford (2011) found that women tend to experience higher costs of entry (i.e. they face more career interruptions which leads to lower numbers of working hours). For example, caring for children or other family members may require missed days, increased costs to be at work, and competing priorities for their attention. Aguado and Frederickson (2012) said women were less likely to put their careers ahead of their family or spouse which leads to hitting a ceiling. The lack of role models and female professional networking is also thought to be a barrier by not providing examples and

mentorship that helps motivate women to seek leadership positions (Fox & Schumann, 2001; Pande & Ford, 2011). This underrepresentation also reinforces the status quo (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Gender bias, personified by hiring authorities, also creates a barrier by promoting social norms that lend credence to the idea that women should not be leaders (Pande & Ford, 2011). This barrier is further enhanced by gender stereotyping which leads women to feel that they have more to prove and must work harder than male counterparts (Hamidullah et al., 2015). This may be unintentionally promoted by organizations that encourage women to seek leadership roles without addressing those "policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders" (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 61). Women also earn less and are given less authority than their male city manager counterparts (Alkadry et al., 2019).

Summary

This chapter was focused on major areas of research involving women and their roles in leadership, government, and city management. This included the SLT, RCT, and known barriers to the career advancement of women. This study specifically sought to fill a gap by focusing on steps taken to overcome perceived barriers that female city managers faced.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify potential career barriers of female city managers located within California based on their own personal experiences. A thematic analysis was applied to address detailed experiences of 9 female city managers working in California municipalities. This analysis aligns with the study's goal of addressing similarities or differences to perceived career growth barriers among female executives working in local municipalities.

Research Design and Rationale

According to Riessman (2008), narrative research is a way for researchers to reconstruct events into a sequence that promotes action involving specific issues. It involves providing insight into human experiences and perspectives that are unique to participants and shaped by their own personal experiences, cultures, backgrounds, and environments. Interviews allowed participants to share their stories while at the same time giving meaning to their lived experiences. While multiple varieties of narrative research exist, the oral history is best suited for this study because it involves collecting stories from 9 female city managers and helped uncover any similarly perceived barriers.

A thematic analysis of the current research problem allowed me to build context while identifying existing works on the topic. Classification of data involved thematic grouping based on analysis of all data sources, including interview data, historical documents, and existing or emergent theories. This allowed a rational narrative to emerge in order to accurately present their stories. While the SLT and RCT were theoretical

frameworks for the study, they did not guide interpretation of data or affect analysis of any emerging themes.

Role of the Researcher

The role of a qualitative researcher is to access people's experiences via their thoughts and feelings (Sutton and Austin, 2015). This study allowed me to provide context regarding these experiences while looking for shared patterns. As a woman in municipal government, it was important for me to clearly explain my role within my own organization to participants and readers. However, not being at the same level of executive management means I did not have shared experiences with participants, nor could I fully understand their own career trajectory. Maintenance of field notes and carefully transcribed interviews aided in terms of accurately portraying participant experiences while avoiding researcher bias.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Purposive sampling was used to identify primary participants. The number of participants was not selected purely for the purpose of interviews, but for the purposes of comparison. Logistical considerations also dictate that participants work or live in California.

All participants were female, currently employed as city managers, and worked in California. Potential participants were identified through purposeful sampling and snowballing techniques. Purposeful sampling was achieved through use of professional and personal networks to encourage others to participate. Snowball sampling helped

expand the sample and I asked current participants to recommend others who met criteria. Efforts were made to attract participants with diverse backgrounds who worked for different types of municipalities. Differing municipalities refers to the demographic and geographic makeup of the cities where the participants work. For example, they include large metropolitan cities and smaller urban communities, those located in coastal areas as well as those from mountain and desert areas.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Potential participants were first contacted by email with an introduction to the study and invitation to participate. Respondents were contacted individually by me and were provided with an informed consent form. Prior to conducting interviews, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire identifying their own education levels, ethnicity, age, and marital status in addition to their professional backgrounds. Completion of this questionnaire prior to the interview created the most efficient use interview time by allowing me to focus on participants' narratives without needing to obtain basic demographic information. The answers on the questionnaire were used to guide semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

Interviews were then scheduled at times most convenient for participants. While there were two primary questions being researched, the data needed to emerge naturally through the stories and experiences shared by participants. Therefore, semi-structured interviews helped to create an atmosphere of sharing and conversation without the formality of a script. To help guide conversations, open-ended interview questions were developed to encourage storytelling:

- What are some of the key influences in the development of your leadership skills?
- How has your specific education and experience shaped your views on leadership?
- What drew you to public service?
- Was city manager always an aspiration?
- How did your leadership journey begin?
- What challenges did you encounter along the way?
- How did you overcome those challenges?

Participants were made aware that digression was not only appropriate, but expected, since the purpose of these interviews was to hear their personal experiences. Interviews were expected to last between 1-2 hours in length and were recorded and transcribed. Random numbers were assigned to each interview to ensure anonymity and used in the report of findings.

After each interview, field notes were added to each participant's file within 24 hours, comprised of observational, methodological, and analytical notes consisting of thoughts, impressions, and reminders – all of which are best practices discussed by Lofland and Lofland (1999) and Groenewald (2004). Once field notes were completed, interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents. Transcribed interviews were then listened to several more times to verify accuracy of transcription.

Data Storage and Management

A list of participants, including any identifying information, was kept separate from raw data. Digital recordings of interviews were kept electronically on my personal computer and backed up in a password-protected cloud server. Original audio files were deleted from the recording device. Participants' personal identifiers were redacted. Any physical documents such as field notes were scanned and kept electronically, and original copies were destroyed.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through recorded semi-structured interviews with participants. Field notes were also collected during interviews and referred to during data analysis. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis. Step one was familiarization of data where I began to immerse myself in data by transcribing, reading, and rereading data while notating initial ideas or thoughts. Each interview was listened to multiple times not only to fully understand what was being said, but also to verify accuracy of transcriptions. Field notes were also read multiple times, often in conjunction with recorded interviews, as were transcribed interviews. Each participant was offered a copy of their transcribed interview; however, no participant requested one. Step two of the analysis process was generating initial codes systematically across the entire data set in order to begin grouping data into more meaningful groups. To begin, transcribed documents were uploaded to NVivo software to help categorize and classify qualitative data. Specific words, sentences, phrases, and/or paragraphs were assigned using codes. An inductive approach was applied to the coding process, allowing codes to

be drawn from data, without introducing other concepts or ideas, and therefore giving voice to experiences of participants. The coding process was further aided by applying Groenewald's simplified version of Hycner's explication process which seeks to transform data through interpretation instead of analysis – as a way of keeping the phenomenon's context whole instead of breaking it apart to focus on individual parts (i.e. focusing on stories rather than words). Once data were coded, collated, and cross-referenced, step three could begin, which was searching for themes. This involved clustering codes based on similarities or meanings as broader level categories began to emerge. During step four, these categories were further refined with each major theme fully described and summarized during step five. Finally, step six of thematic analysis was to draft a written report of findings.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Thematic analysis is an appropriate methodology where detailed theoretical applications have not yet been applied (Nowell et al., 2017). Particularly useful in the creation of a well-structured data analysis process, thematic analysis is particularly credible when participants are allowed to check the findings and interpretations to provide corrections or clarifications (Creswell, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). Similarly, dependability can be achieved by clearly documenting a logical process that can be replicated by other researchers, though the geographical nature of this particular study would limit its transferability.

Ethical Procedures

In order to be ethically justifiable, the benefits of human participant research should outweigh the risks, or at least be reasonable by comparison (Rennie et al, 2019). While there was no expectation of harm to the participants, protecting their identities was paramount to prevent any potential negativity arising from their participation. Participants were informed that all personal identifiers such as name, cities, organizations, etc., were redacted and random numbers used in their stead. Prior to the start of each interview, participants were again reminded of the purpose of the study, their ability to withdraw at any point in time, and that the interview was being recorded

All applicable American Psychological Association (APA) general principles and ethical standards were followed, specifically Section 8: Research and Publication. Institutional approval was requested and provided prior to conducting any research. Informed consent was obtained from each participant via a signed form they were required to return to me prior to the interview. The consent form included the following information in accordance with APA principles specifically related to informed consent to research. First, potential participants must be fully informed about the purpose of the research, the anticipated duration of the research and all research procedures. Potential participants must be told that and they have a right to decline to participate and that they can withdraw from the research at any time once it has begun. Any possible consequences related to declining or withdrawing from the study must be explained. Potential participants must be told of any potential risks or benefits that could arise from their participation including any incentives (there were none for this study). They must be

told of efforts to protect their privacy and limits confidentiality. The participants were also given information on who to contact should they have any questions or concerns.

In addition to APA principles and standards, all policies and guidelines established by Walden University and its Institutional Review Board (IRB) were also followed, specifically the research ethics review process. To further prepare, I also completed both the CITI program for student researchers as well as the National Institute of Health's (NIH) course Protecting Human Research Participants.

Summary

This chapter involved aligning the research design with research questions while detailing participant selection, recruitment and data collection methods, and the data analysis plan. The role of the researcher and issues of trustworthiness were also discussed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to identify any potential career barriers of women executives in California municipal administrations based upon their own personal experiences. Comprised of in-depth interviews, the study involved education, organizational norms, and professional development in order to better understand their lived experiences as I sought to answer two research questions:

RQ1: What barriers did female executives perceive to have encountered in their careers?

RQ2: How did these female executives overcome any perceived barriers they encountered?

This chapter includes an overview of participants' settings and demographics, as well as a discussion of data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness.

Setting

Every city managed by participants was impacted by COVID-19. Public health and safety and lost revenue were among the priorities these women were dealing with – nationally as well as internationally. The first three interviews conducted were in person. Using LiquidSpace (2021), an online marketplace for renting office space by the hour or longer, to find meeting or conference rooms in locations that were convenient to participants lent itself toward more open and free flowing conversations since participants were removed from personal and/or professional distractions. These meeting rooms were furnished with couches and loveseats instead of more formal conference rooms with tables and chairs. A selection of drinks was provided and I tried to create

ambience to make interviews feel more like catching up with an old friend, as opposed to being interviewed by a reporter or researcher). Conversations flowed freely.

When pandemic-driven lockdowns were implemented, scheduled interviews were put on hold in deference to city managers' shifting priorities. After a 6-month hiatus from research, I used Microsoft Teams to conduct interviews in a socially distanced manner. While scheduling virtual interviews, all participants were asked if they were familiar with Microsoft Teams software, and all confirmed they used it frequently and were comfortable using it for their interviews.

The virtual setting meant that interviews could be conducted from anywhere, though all remaining participants (as well as myself) chose to participate from a home office. I had encouraged virtual participants to choose a location where they would be most comfortable, have the fewest distractions, and would be able to talk openly and freely. Like millions of other people worldwide, the participants found themselves working from home during the pandemic. Several participants mentioned that they had increased their Internet speeds and purchased equipment that made telecommuting more practical. These home office upgrades were a likely reason for the lack of technological issues experienced during the virtual interviews.

The virtual format did not feel as personal and I found it more difficult to develop a rapport with participants. Participants in the face-to-face format were able to get comfortable by pulling their feet on the couch while enjoying snacks, all virtual participants sat upright at their desks in a manner reminiscent of a job interview.

Another notable difference was how interviews were recorded. While face-to-face participants were aware that I was recording audio, they appeared to be completely at ease and unbothered by the small handheld recorder sitting on the side table. By contrast, virtual participants had to consent to a virtual meeting that was being video recorded while staring at a webcam.

Demographics

Potential participants were selected based on being female, current employment status as city managers (, and geographic location in the state of California. Initial contact was made by email. I emailed an introduction to myself and the study, along with copies of the consent form and a demographic questionnaire to potential participants. Two professional organizations, the ICMA and California City Management Foundation, also included information about the study in their online newsletters. I combined purposive sampling and snowballing techniques to attract participants of differing ages, education levels, and cultures in addition to leading municipalities that differed greatly. For example, some municipalities are coastal while others are in the desert; some are larger metropolitan areas while others are urban communities.

Participants

A total of nine women participated in the study. They represent 11% of all female city managers within the state of California (League of California Cities, 2018a). Based on the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix A) completed by all participants, all women were 40 or older with two identifying as 40-49, five identifying as 50-59, and two identifying as 60 or older (see Table 1). All nine participants indicated that they held

college degrees with two Bachelor's, three Master's, and four doctorate degrees (see Table 2). All participants had more than 15 years of public service experience, and seven of them had been in public service for more than 20 years (see Table 3). Only two had held the role of city manager for more than 5 years (see Table 4). More than half of participants identified as Caucasian, with one identifying as African American, two as Asian, and one as Hispanic (see Table 5). Five participants stated they were currently married, two were divorced, and two were widowed (see Table 6).

Table 1

Participants' Age Ranges

	>30 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60+ years
Number of Participants	0	0	2	5	2
Percentage of Participants	0	0	22%	56%	22%

Table 2

Participants' Highest Level of Education Completed

	HS/GED	Associates	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate
Number of Participants	0	0	2	3	4
Percentage of Participants	0	0	22%	33%	44%

Table 3

Participants' Years Worked in Public Service

	>5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20+
Number of Participants	0	0	0	2	7
Percentage of Participants	0	0	0	22%	78%

Table 4

Participants' Years Holding the Title of City Manager

	>5	5-10	10-15	15-20	20+
Number of Participants	7	2	0	0	0
Percentage of Participants	78%	22%	0	0	0

Table 5

Participants' Ethnicity

	African American	Asian	Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American	Other
Number of Participants	1	2	5	1	0	0
Percentage of Participants	11%	22%	56%	11%	0	0

Table 6

Participants' Marital Status

	Single	Domestic Partnership	Married	Divorced	Widowed
Number of Participants	0	0	5	2	2
Percentage of Participants	0	0	56%	22%	22%

Cities

To maintain the privacy and anonymity of participants, limited information about cities can be shared. However, geographically speaking, ocean front, valley, desert, and inland communities are all represented across areas of Southern, Central, and Northern

California. City populations fell within a range of 10,000 to 1,000,000 people. Median and average demographic information of participants' cities is shared in Table 7 below.

Table 7

Municipalities' Demographics Based on the Census Bureau

			Ethnicities by Percentage					
	Population	Median Income	African American	Asian	Hispanic	Native American	Caucasian	Other
Median	52,575	$101,655	1.8	5.7	12.1	0.3	41.9	3.1
Average	156,286	$91,513	4.8	16.7	19.7	0.4	54.4	3.9

Data Collection

When the study was being developed, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the plan was for me to travel to a location convenient for the participant in order to conduct a face to face interview. I would rent an office space or meeting room away from the participant's office to create a space that was both comfortable and private so the participant would be more at ease and, hopefully, more willing to be open and honest during the interview. Only three interviews were conducted in this manner.

Understandably, city managers were tasked with responsibilities, duties and challenges previously unseen in their careers. In deference to their roles (and responsibilities to their cities), interviews were put on hold until such a time participants were able to commit time to the interview process. When interviews resumed six months later, they were held virtually via Microsoft Teams with the use of webcams. All nine participants (face to face and virtual) sat for one in-depth, semi-structured interview

lasting between 90 minutes and three hours. The length of each interview was purely at the discretion of the participant and ended when they were ready, and the conversations had come to a natural conclusion.

One other slight variance from the data storage and management plan had to be made due to the change in recording type. Originally, it was assumed that in person interviews could be conducted and recorded with an audio-only device. The use of video recording with Microsoft Teams posed an additional risk to participants' privacy and anonymity, so the decision was made to delete the recordings once the interviews were transcribed. All virtual participants were informed of this change and were asked to give their consent at the beginning of each interview. All transcriptions were checked twice for accuracy before virtual interview recordings were deleted. All other data and storage management plans, discussed in Chapter 3, were followed with all transcriptions kept on my private, password protected computer and backed up in a password protected cloud server.

Data Analysis

Data were collected through recorded and semi-structured interviews with participants. Field notes were also collected during the interviews and referred to during data analysis. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six steps of thematic analysis.

Step one was the familiarization of the data where I really began to immerse myself in the data by transcribing, reading and re-reading data while notating initial ideas or thoughts. Each interview was listened to multiple times not only to fully understand what was being said, but also to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. Field notes

were also read multiple times, often in conjunction with the recorded interview, as were the transcribed interviews. Each participant was offered a copy of their transcribed interview; however, no participants requested one.

Step two of the analysis process was generating initial codes systematically across the entire data set in order to begin grouping data into more meaningful groups. To begin, transcribed documents were uploaded to NVivo, by QSR International – software that helps categorize and classify qualitative data. An inductive approach was applied to the coding process allowing codes to be drawn from the data, without introducing other concepts or ideas, and therefore giving voice to the experiences of the participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The coding process was further aided by applying Groenewald's (2004) simplified version of Hycner's explication process to transform the data through interpretation –as a way of keeping the phenomenon's context whole instead of breaking it into individual parts. Every word within each transcript was analyzed. Words, phrases, sentences and/or paragraphs were then manually assigned codes that most closely retained their original text. For example, comments about the participant's childhood were labeled "childhood" and statements about leadership experiences were labeled "leadership experiences." Although the initial list of codes was quite long, it was eventually pared down to 23 individual codes (see Table 8).

Once the data was coded, collated, and cross-referenced step three could begin – searching for themes. This involved clustering the codes based on similarities or meanings as broader level categories began to emerge. This further reduced the codes to 11 categories. During step four, these categories were further refined which resulted in

five major themes that were fully described and summarized in step five. Finally, step six of the thematic analysis was to draft the written report of findings.

Table 8

Summary of Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Career Aspirations Education	Determination Work Ethic	Early Influences
Personal Relationships Balance of Home and Work Expectations of Family and Friends	Family Influences Family Support	Home Life
Boys Club Balance of Home and Work Gender Roles and Bias Mentorship Professional Development Professional Relationships Patterns of Success Professional Criticisms	Attitude Gender Norms Social Norms Professional Support	Work Life
Asking for Help Barriers Boys Club Choosing Your Battles Executive Leadership Team Gender Roles and Bias Professional Criticisms	Step Up Speak Up	Leadership Experiences

Data Saturation

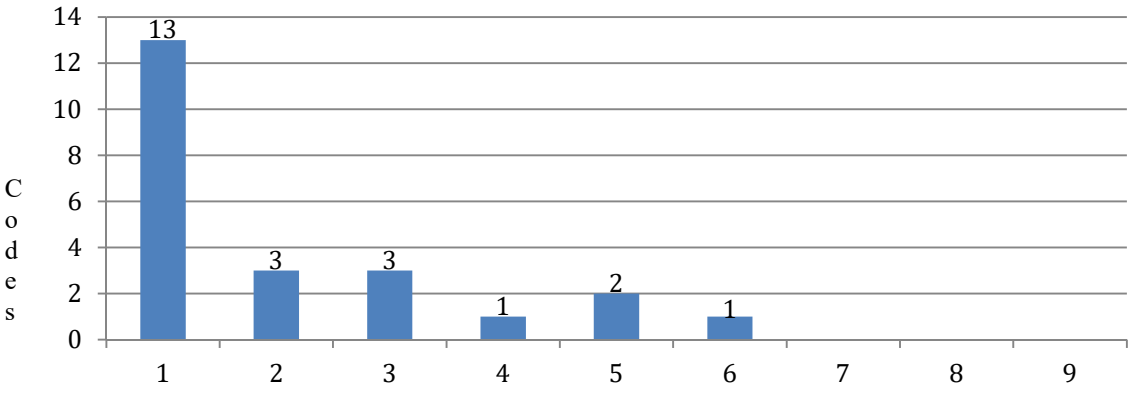
According to Guest et al. (2020), "data saturation is the conceptual yardstick for estimating and assessing qualitative sample sizes" (p. 1). Over the past few decades, the problem raised by scholars has been how to actually define data saturation and how that definition would apply to the various types of qualitative analysis methods (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink et al., 2017; Lowe et al., 2018; Weller et al, 2018). For the purpose of this

study, I focused on code saturation. Table 9 provides an overview of code development by interview.

Most new codes were identified within the first 3 interviews: 56% in interview one, 69% (cumulative) by interview two, and 82% by interview three. It is worth noting that the code identified in interview six was later determined to be present in earlier interviews. No new codes were identified in interviews seven through nine. Based on this data, it was determined that nine interviews were sufficient to reach data saturation.

Table 9

Code Development by Interview



Evidence of Trustworthiness

Evidence of trustworthiness was established through confirmability, dependability and credibility. An audit trail was used to establish confirmability. This was essentially a paper trail of the data collection and analysis processes. Keeping records of what topics were interesting or unique during the data collection, documenting thoughts about the coding process and discussing rationales behind each theme, were some of the ways in which I attempted to avoid bias by focusing solely on the experiences and narratives

provided by the participants. All of the participants were informed of my employment with a Californian municipality (they were provided with my title and specific employer). While my experience as a non-executive city employee differs greatly from the participants. I have experienced forms of bias in the past and so, used my field notes as a form of journaling. Within 24 hours of the interview, I added observational, methodological and analytical notes consisting of thoughts, impressions, and reminders to my initial notes taken during the interview. These notes were invaluable during the data analysis because they allowed me to remember some of my initial reactions and thoughts, and allowed me to see any shifts in my thought processes that could have been manifesting bias.

Dependability was addressed by following specific data collection and analysis methods identified in Chapter 3. Variances to those methods have been discussed and code/recode procedures were used to reevaluate the results. Finally, credibility was attempted by allowing participants an opportunity to review transcripts and provide additional context or insight, though none chose to do so.

Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify career barriers of women executives in municipal administrations based on their own personal experiences. Understanding their lived experiences was needed to uncover any shared perspectives or experiences that could be used to create a framework of change for organizations to help support the advancement of women into executive leadership. The following thematic

findings are discussed individually: early influences, home life, work life, leadership experiences, and development of others (see Table 8).

Theme 1: Early Influences

One of the first themes to emerge from the data was a shared experience of strong influences in the early lives of the participants. Many told stories and anecdotes about important people in their childhood and the lessons learned from these individuals. While this first theme is not a barrier, it is a strong shared experience that deserved discussion because the participants' experiences as children and adolescents helped shape their attitudes toward work.

Some of the stories revolved around the lack of gender norms or expectations which reinforced, from an early age, the idea that they could do anything and were not limited because they were a girl. Where role congruity theory would suggest that women's careers are shaped by gender stereotypes and even by their own internal biases based on experience (Bell, 2015; Burnier, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Faulkner, 2015; Cook & Glass, 2014), the findings of this study suggest that growing up without those stereotypes removes that barrier. Participants, as leaders, continue to do whatever necessary to get the job done. P2 said:

> I'm the youngest of four children, two boys, two girls. And in my house, boys and girls are treated the same. I had to go mow the lawn and pick up dog poop outside, and my brothers had to learn how to iron…we all did the same chores. And no one ever said, you can't do that because you're a girl…I never was raised that way. And I don't think that way. I just do what I gotta do.

Another commonality was an early awareness of character traits, such as work ethic, exhibited by family members and community leaders. All the participants talked about their parents' hard work and dedication to their families - traits they adopted as the norm. Considering women have to work harder, perform better, and cope with being left out, overlooked and ignored on a regular basis while fighting stereotypical gender assumptions that they are less ambitious or more sensitive than their male counterparts (Bell, 2007; Cikara & Fiske, 2008; Connell, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Williams, 2014), learning to work hard for what you want and seeing things through to completion appeared to have created a foundation of career success for the participants. P9 said:

> Neither of my parents graduated from high school. They were blue collar workers who lived paycheck to paycheck and worked their butts off to provide for us kids. When I got older and wanted money for all the teenage stuff like name brand clothes or concert tickets, I knew I'd have to be the one to earn it. That wasn't a bad thing. I didn't associate work with negative connotations. It was just what you did. You want money? You gotta earn it. So, as soon as I was old enough I got a part-time job in a fast food restaurant. Problem solved.

P1 said:

> Quitting was never an option for us growing up. If we said we wanted to play softball, we were committing to it for the season. Play an instrument at school? It was for the year. We weren't allowed to give up and always had to see it through.

Education was another common thread, with all of the participants discussing expectations or impacts of education on the lives of their families. Four participants

equated an education to career or financial success. The value these participants placed on education is also evidenced by the high percentage with conferred doctoral degrees (44%, see Table 2). This is consistent with research on the impacts of education on lifetime earnings which found that having a graduate degree results in additional earnings of as much as $1.5 million more than someone who only has a high school degree (Tamborini et al., 2015). P6 said:

> [My mom's degree] is what brought me to the United States. I always thought of her degree as our success story and never questioned that I would someday go to college.

P9 said:

> We were middle class financially, but in a lot of ways we were working poor. But my parents knew that education was a way out, I mean you could see it all around us. I wanted to be that. The success that I saw all around.

Educators also influenced the career trajectory of some of the participants. Two of the participants admitted that professors had shaped their careers by suggesting academic programs the women might not have pursued on their own. P7 was initially determined to go to law school because she was determined to change the world. P7 said that one of her professors told her, "you want to change the world…law school only helps you manipulate it. He told me I needed a PhD program and he was right."

Theme 2: Home Life

The second theme to emerge was that of a home life. The balance of home and work, expectations of family, and personal relationships – and how these influences

supported the participants' career endeavors. Fifty-six percent (56%) of the participants self-labeled as married and this entire segment of participants not only mentioned disagreements or discord involving child rearing and household responsibilities, but also expressed frustration at having a higher share of child rearing and household responsibilities. These experiences and shared frustrations supported similar findings by Overall and Hammond (2018) who noted that these types of dynamics promote benevolent sexism that can be damaging to a woman's career. P7 felt that her husband was "a great dad, but a shitty parent" leaving all the day to day responsibilities on her. The sentiment was mirrored by P3 who said:

> I wish he'd help out more. He thinks taking out the trash is his fair share of household responsibilities. What about childcare, cooking, cleaning, laundry, paying the bills, scheduling various appointments and checkups, taking care of the dogs, grocery shopping and all the other dozens of things that happen on a weekly, if not daily, basis?

Three of the five married participants equated their career success to a conscious decision to prioritize their careers over their private lives. While they did everything possible to be present in their loved ones' lives, they would choose professional priorities or private ones. Although not a question I asked, only one participant admitted to a deep sense of guilt for making that choice; however, it was assuaged by the knowledge that her salary is what afforded her family a comfortable lifestyle that included luxuries like international vacations and paying for her children's college education without student loans. It was a tradeoff she was happy to make.

Tradeoffs like that can be equated to higher costs of entry many women face in their careers (i.e. they face more career interruptions which leads to lower numbers of working hours) (Pande & Ford, 2011). These costs, especially fewer working hours can have significant adverse impacts on advancement over the span of a career (Offerman et al., 2020). For example, caring for children or other family members may require missed days, increased costs to be at work, and competing priorities for their attention. Choosing to prioritize one's professional life over a personal one might not be an option for all women and could be become a significant barrier. Aguano & Frederickson (2012) found that many women choose to prioritize their spouses' careers, their families, and even their communities ahead of their own careers – a finding also confirmed by Watson and Hassett (2004).

Another commonality between the married participants was a perceived lack of support. All married participants stated that their spouses were outspoken in support of their careers and career goals, but the participants did not feel that the support carried over into active support. For example, P9 explained that her husband would frequently comment on all the things his male colleagues, friends, or family members did not have to do – things like picking up the kids from school or making dinner. She said that he would frequently joke about how boring life would be if he was able to come home from work to see dinner on the table and know the kids' homework was already done. P1 explained that she knew her spouse would never want to relocate and would instead prefer it if she were a housewife. She also felt that there was an unspoken insecurity surrounding her success because he never attended work-related functions. P1 said, "He

always has an excuse. That's fine. I don't need him there, but sometimes I'd really like him to be" (P1). According to Ocampo et al. (2018), these perceptions of low spousal support can be interpreted as forms of work-family conflict. High levels of spousal support have been found to buffer the stress of work, enhance adaptability, and even create advancement opportunities (Ocampo et al., 2018). Furthermore, these findings corroborate Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008) whose study found that married female executives valued career support from their spouses above all else.

Sixty percent of the married participants identified struggles in their marriage surrounding income inequities and how to support their spouses in careers that were struggling or less successful. In short, these participants experienced emotional exhaustion trying to show support for their spouses. They were cognizant of the impacts their success had on their spouse. P7 explained that she tried to consider how she would feel if her "spouse was making four times as much as I was making and was the CEO and I was still in this piddly job, still trying to make it, I would feel shitty." P5 said:

> He'll say, will you stop treating me like one of your minions (meaning my employees). I'll remind him that unlike him, they do their job without me having to nag.

The final component of the theme was a lack of an impartial ear or not having someone they could complain to or vent to without feeling guilty or judged. P5 said:

> I really don't have an outlet at home to talk about work stuff. At least, not in a meaningful way. My husband gets tired of hearing it and my friends don't understand. Besides, I really don't want to bring work home and if I'm talking

about it when I'm at home then I feel like I never stop working and I feel guilty. My family doesn't need that either.

Theme 3: Work Life

The third theme to emerge is the participants' work life. That is the attitudes, social norms and professional support they have experienced at work. This includes professional criticisms, professional development, mentorship, barriers to promotion, or gender roles and bias.

Eight out of the nine participants talked about the stereotypes and judgments that women in their position face. P2 explained that a woman she knew personally told her face-to-face that a woman should not be a city manager and P2 said that she thought to herself "yeah, it's a male dominated world and I get that. And I look very young. And people look at me and think I'm something that I'm not." P7 explained that there is still so much bias and judgment when it comes to female executives with many not understanding that standing up for women's equality does make someone a feminist.

P7 experienced an internal conflict when first realizing that bias still existed. Reconciling bias with her own personal identity was one of the factors contributing to a bout of depression. She struggled to accept that she was not solely in charge of her destiny and that the bias of others, and more importantly, the total lack of control she had over that bias had a significant impact on her. P7 said:

I didn't think it was happening to me. There's definitely bias out there but not to me. Like, everything that's happening to me is happening because of my own agency, who I am, what I'm bringing to the table. You know, my personality is

> such that it's very hard to believe that there's an embedded structure that I can't do anything about. But then I started working at [a city] I finally had to square off with the ways that sexism were actually impacting me. And it was very, very hard. And that was some of the depression as well, is I just always believed that I could triumph over it.

She stated that the being true to herself and continuing to give her best efforts to the job were the only ways she could move forward – there was not another option for her.

This sentiment was shared by three other participants who also referred to the importance of values, integrity and a personal moral compass. Recognizing their values or integrity and staying true to them was the most important thing the participants could offer. P9 stated that they had more credibility because they remained true, even when the circumstances were hard. P7 said she knew her commitment to doing the right thing frequently landed her in trouble because she would "fight battles that clearly were losers" because they could not stand by and do nothing. P9 was willing to sacrifice her job in order to maintain integrity and said:

> I am who I am, and I had already shared my values with the council, the mayor, the staff [when I was hired]. So, fire me if you don't like what I'm doing. But I'm always going to do what I think is right.

This tactic of doing what is right often included asserting their power and standing their ground which was also viewed negatively by colleagues and/or elected officials. P2 said, "a forceful man is not an asshole, but an assertive woman is a bitch". This supports Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) who said women leaders in educational and

religious organizations were more likely to tacitly accept barriers to gender balance instead of actively trying to overcome them. This may be because research suggests that crossing the lines of traditional gender roles leads to backlash and hostility, often reinforcing women's feelings that that their gender is, in itself, a barrier to promotion or advancement (Lange & Nelson, 2014).

P2 did not see gender as a competition and stated that she does not participate in discussions about gender because it is a fruitless effort. But P2 appreciated being the token female who got called upon to join boards and committees or work on special projects because there were no other women involved. She appreciated the experience and chose to make the most of opportunity regardless of why she was there.

P2 indicated they had a strong network of peers to rely on, all of whom were male; all of the participants stressed the importance of networking and professional relationships. P2 said:

> I have had the opportunity to make really great friendships with other city managers [all male]. I'm not afraid to call people and say, what do you do about this? Have you ever had this happen? I don't know how to do this. I think it's really important thing to be able to reach out when I'm having a really tough week. And I get a lot from those relationships. So I don't know if I would say there is specifically one person, but it's sort of my network of people who I have called upon throughout my entire career when I hit a rocky patch. I think having good friendships within your profession is really important.

Theme 4: Leadership Experience

The fourth theme to emerge was that of leadership experience. This is a set of specific experiences had during the participants' tenure as city manager.

Several participants provided examples of being overlooked or feeling marginalized. P2 explained that there were times where she, "had to push her way to the podium to speak or fight for a chair at the boardroom table." She questioned what male CEO would put up with similar scenarios. P5 recalled attending a regional meeting where she was one of four women in attendance:

> I was not given a single opportunity to speak even though they were going around the room to allow people to raise questions or voice concerns. I was conveniently skipped. Sure, I could have made a point to insert myself into the conversation, but it just wasn't worth the effort. Especially when I already knew the outcome.

Another example was one participant's poignant memory of being blatantly left out of a golfing event for city leaders. P8 said:

> I remember being in a meeting with my department heads and hearing two of them talking about the mayor's golf invitation for the upcoming weekend. I later discovered that the mayor (a man) had invited the city's leadership team to play golf with him that Saturday. My assistant city manager, and my department heads – all male – were all invited. I was not. Apparently we were back in the 1950s.

Four of the participants, while recognizing the importance of strong relationships and professional networks, admitted they did not have a strong set of peers to rely on or reach out to for moral support. P4 felt that conversations with other female city managers

always felt fake and forced. She acknowledged that "women, in general, are more interested in looking out for themselves. And to be honest, we kind of have to." Lack of role models and female professional networking was a barrier by not providing examples and mentorship that would help motivate women to seek leadership positions (Fox & Schumann, 2001; Pande & Ford, 2011).

P8 said female peers viewed themselves as competition instead of colleagues and focused on negative outcomes:

> If you have 10 women applying for the same position, they look at each other as the competition and know that nine of you won't get the job. If 10 men were applying for the same position they'd look around and know that any one of them could get the job.

Three participants felt they were underestimated with one saying she felt that her promotion was the safest option because the City Council knew her, as opposed to the male candidates that were unknown. Another participant used the underestimations as motivation to overachieve. These behaviors by hiring authorities leads women to feel that they have more to prove and must work harder than male counterparts (Hamidullah et al., 2015). This may be unintentionally promoted by organizations that encourage women to seek leadership roles without addressing those "policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders" (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 61).

Eight of the nine participants provided examples of contradictory and misogynistic attitudes, still prevalent in city government, that perpetuate gender bias. P1

said “being a woman is a double-edged sword. They invite you to sit at the table, but then criticize you for being assertive. They want you to make the tough decisions, but don’t want you to be tough.”

Nearly half of participants felt that they were playing a role or adopting a persona in order to be successful as a city manager. P6 explained that every city is different. For example, some may be more conservative, have stronger cultural or religious ties, and others may have more financial resources. She felt that all of these factors contribute to the expectations and norms that are prevalent within any local government. P6 said:

> [I learned to] play the role, while still being me. Every city is different, so every role is different. Maybe I have to dress more conservatively, or behave more demurely but it’s all a public show. I’m still smart, strong, fearless. It’s why I never stay in one place more than a couple of years. They get tired of me and I get tired of the role.”

P4 felt similarly and explained that she had to “shut down” a major part of her personality at work in order to succeed. She acknowledged that it was “killing her” but it was the path she chose.

Another common thread was the belief of each participant that they were aggressive or assertive in their management approach. P3 explained that you do not achieve the role of a CEO or its equivalent without learning to be lethal and developing a thick skin. P7 asked, “Is the system so skewed that you have to develop this persona to even get to this level?”

Theme 5: Development of Others

The final theme to emerge was the development of others and how to pay forward the lessons learned. One woman had been given a very flexible work schedule early in her career that allowed her to balance her professional and person life. It's something she tries to pay forward. She tries to allow flexibility for her employees because she not only recognizes the value for staff, but also the value to the organization in terms of loyalty and satisfaction.

Three participants acknowledged the lack of women in their profession and expressed a desire to be an example to other women. One spoke of wanting to take advantage of her platform to encourage others. Another expressed a desire to focus on diversity within her profession. While expressing an understanding of the time it takes to implement change, she hoped that eventually the demographics of city managers within California will mirror the demographics of the state's population in all its forms.

In order to change the statistics, only one participant felt that it was time to start having the conversation about gender and bias in local government. She explained that there has to be open, honest conversations about the issues in order to create the programs, policies, and training that could combat barriers. This same participant felt that it was easier for her to advocate for others than for herself, but recognized that telling her story – the good and the bad – is the only way to prepare future female city managers and possibly change the dynamic. P7 said:

> I get we all try to do the pink glasses and the silver lining. Oh, it's hard, but it's so worth it. And it's fine because we don't want to be discouraging. We want young

> women to move into this profession and keep doing it. And so we don't want to scare them. But the reality is it's bullshit most of the time. And if you don't hear that from the people that are doing it, then when it's bullshit to you, you feel like you're doing something wrong or you feel like you're alone. And none of that is true. So I feel like my job on Earth is to tell all women it's bullshit and I don't feel an obligation to put a positive spin on it because there isn't.

Summary

This chapter included data collected through semi-structured interviews of nine female city managers in California. Interview transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo and inductive analysis was used. Five themes emerged involving participants' career progression and barriers they experienced. Chapter 5 includes my interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, and implications of the study, as well as areas for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

There is little research on women executives in municipal governments and none that specifically sought to determine if female executives in city government experienced any barriers to career advancement. This study was designed to specifically focus on perceived barriers in order to understand how they were overcome. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to identify females over the age of 18 who were currently serving as city managers within the state of California. Addressing how women feel about their career progression and providing their personal perspectives might provide insight for municipal leaders seeking to implement positive change within their organizations. In order to do so, this chapter provides context for findings, addresses limitations of the study, and discusses recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of the Findings

Key themes that emerged were not only present for each participant, but also representative of key times or career stages where barriers were experienced.

Themes

Early Influences

Role models have long been known to nurture or encourage certain behaviors or characters in children. Exposure to positive moral behaviors triggers an emotional response whereby children want to emulate what they see (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003; Schnall et al., 2010).

Participants in this study addressed their childhood through early adulthood, which included ways in which adults had influenced them. Some were influenced by

what they saw in family members (hard work, dedication, determination, and accountability). Others were influenced by families who did not apply gender norms. As children they were empowered to do, or be, anything they wanted. And for some, it was educators who were able to understand them and provide guidance or insight, even when unsolicited. Participants attributed these early influences to helping them develop strong character traits that would aid them later as organizational leaders.

Home Life

Results of this research showed that female city managers face challenges balancing a demanding career with home lives. Participants who acknowledged these challenges felt that they held a disproportionate share of household and childrearing responsibilities (such as laundry, cleaning, cooking, pet care, and children's needs) versus what their working partner contributed. Pande and Ford (2011) said career interruptions could raise the cost of entry to women seeking leadership positions.

These women also felt they were less willing to consider other career opportunities that would involve relocating or moving their children to new schools or forcing their partner to relocate and/or look for a new job. Watson and Hassett (2004) said female city managers were more likely to serve longer terms in smaller cities where they are most comfortable or feel they are better able to enjoy a higher quality of life, compared to a traditional career path of moving to larger cities with larger paychecks.

Work Life

All but one participant admitted experiencing varying levels of gender bias ranging from subtle to blatant. The extent of bias that still was difficult for P7 to

reconcile and in one instance contributed to a bout of depression. All participants referenced having to just put up with bias and learn or develop coping mechanisms to deal with it. Participants, based on their feelings and experiences, said fighting bias would make them, in the eyes of men, man-hating feminists. Diehl and Dzubinski (2016) said women were more likely to tacitly accept barriers. Lange and Nelson (2014) said trying to cross traditional gender roles leads to backlash and hostility.

P2 spoke of having to push her way to the podium at a press conference and frequently having to fight for a seat at bargaining tables, something she felt no male CEO would ever have to do. Participants shared the mentality that they must work harder and be stronger than their male counterparts. Only one participant, P7, felt that it was time to start having the conversation about gender and bias in local government.

Leadership Experiences

Participants discussed lack of a strong network of peers, specifically female peers. With so few female city managers in California, the pool was already limited. While all participants mentioned having male counterparts they could reach out to or rely on, only two regularly communicated with other female city managers, at least outside of routine meetings or committees that arise. This creates a barrier due to lack of support and mentorship that helps motivate women to seek leadership positions (Fox & Schumann, 2001; Pande & Ford, 2011) while reinforcing the status quo (Ibarra et al., 2013) and promoting bias (Fine et al., 2020).

Many participants said female city managers must be assertive or aggressive and must look out for themselves first. This was not said as a criticism, but rather a fact. This

reflected coping mechanisms that many adopted in order to succeed at their job. P7 questioned if the "system is skewed so that you have to develop this persona to even get to this level" and wondered what it might have been like to have a nice relaxed group of women to network with.

All participants mentioned, in one way or another, the need to play a part in order to deal with bias. For some, this involved playing the stereotypical female in public by being nice, soft spoken, and proper; for others it was creating a persona that took on characteristics they felt were expected. Some felt that if they wanted the job, they had to change themselves to become what was expected. These ideas or perceptions may be unintentionally promoted by organizations that encourage women to seek leadership roles without addressing those "policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders" (Ibarra et al., 2013, p. 61).

Development of Others

Several participants discussed the impact a mentor or strong leader had on their careers. For some, leaders understood work-life balance struggles by allowing participants flexibility in their schedules. For other participants, mentors demonstrated skills and professionalism they wanted to emulate.

When it came to expressing how they should pay it forward, another set of challenges arose. 22% of participants said lack of transparency, when talking about city manager roles for women, created false impressions that made real conversations and/or discussion of expectations with potential applicants difficult. However, only one third

had any desire to change statistics by bringing more diversity to city management through hiring practices, and only one participant was ready to start having conversations about gender and bias in local government. Open dialogue with female city managers willing to share their experiences would have a positive effect on mentoring and overcoming gendered career barriers (Dashper, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

This study was delimited by both the small number of participants as well as the limited demographic area (the state of California) which might not be transferrable to other states. The findings were based on the personal experiences of participants that might not be shared by others. Honesty, openness and the willingness to respond were at the discretion of the participants, while the findings were based on my interpretation. The COVID-19 pandemic also contributed to the limitations of the study. While the initial research design included face-to-face interviews, social distancing requirements resulted in virtual interviews being conducted via Microsoft Teams. While there were no observable technological challenges due to the online nature of the virtual interviews, I felt a definite shift when conducting online interviews versus those that had been conducted face to face. The virtual format did not feel as personal and I found it more difficult to develop a rapport with participants. Whereas participants in the face to face format were able to get comfortable by pulling their feet up on the couch while enjoying the snacks provided, all of the virtual participants sat upright at their desks in a manner reminiscent of a job interview. There were also a few potential participants who chose to opt out due to the many unknowns presented by COVID-19 at the time.

Recommendations

This study provided a new perspective into female city managers' career paths. The study did not seek to make comparisons, but rather gave voice to a minority group of municipal leaders to better understand barriers they faced in their careers. As a result, several key factors to the participant's success (i.e. overcoming barriers) emerged; lending themselves to recommendations that might aid future female city managers and/or municipalities. They are organized here, by theme.

Early Influences

The participants' experiences during childhood were filled with positive role models, learning determination, work ethic and the importance of not quitting. This supports earlier studies showing that role models nurture or encourage certain behaviors or characters in children (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003; Schnall et al., 2010). Continuing to promote these behaviors is paramount.

Home Life

The participants' honesty and openness regarding their home life provided valuable insights into the struggles many face on a daily basis. Education aimed at valuing and promoting participation in all familial roles (by both sexes) should start young. Organizations would benefit from providing education and/or resources for handling personal or work-life conflicts.

Work Life

Municipalities should consider encouraging employees to use their paid time off. Allow staff to create flexible schedules that allow them to attend children's sporting

events or plays, or work around child care and school schedules. Women, even city managers, are primarily the child care provider – or at the very least coordinate schedules and pickups. Not providing flexible schedules or the autonomy to work when and where needed, automatically prevents some women from considering the job.

Leadership Experience

Change starts at the top. Implement training programs aimed at creating equity. Programs to consider include teaching all levels of management how to give appropriate, effective, constructive criticism and feedback; how to identify your own personal bias; and how to develop future leaders. Kulik and Metz (as cited in Fine et al., 2020) said the appointment of women to leadership roles "may serve a signaling function to internal and external stakeholders" (p. 53). Byron and Post (2016) said gender diversity on corporate boards had a high correlation to corporate social responsibility. Glass and Cook (2018) found that a gender diverse leadership team has more of a positive impact on promoting or advancing equity policies than simply promoting a token female.

Development of Others

Municipalities should focus on creating mentoring opportunities to allow future leaders to learn firsthand what it takes to succeed. Career planning workshops would also be a good way to help employees learn about the skills and experiences they need to advance. Workshops should also include discussions about barriers, discussions on organizational cultural (and what the municipality hopes the culture can become), and the costs of entry, while providing resources and support.

Implications

Providing a better understanding of the career barriers faced by female city managers can lead to a more applied approach to organizational training, mentoring, and even recruitment in municipalities. These findings might help organizations create training opportunities that can help promote equal opportunities for their female employees (at all stages of their career), as well as evaluate or develop mentorship programs aimed at developing emerging leaders. These findings could also be used by incumbent city managers (male and female) wishing to begin conversations about positive social change within their own communities. Having a government that looks like and represents its citizens is better able to serve the communities' needs. Allowing women to have a voice in policy development and in how to spend money within their community could also help demonstrate to women in the community that the system is not "unfair, illegitimate, or biased against them" (Holman, 2017, p. 293).

But, the barriers faced by participants in this study also included family conflict of varying degrees (e.g. household responsibilities, childcare responsibilities, emotional support from a spouse, etc.). These barriers are similar to work-family conflicts uncovered by Yu (2019) while exploring ways to reduce turnover among women in federal law enforcement. This phenomenon needs to be explored further. Future researchers should explore ways in which organizations might better support the work life balance, and whether or not there might be programs or resources for women and their families that are more beneficial than others. For example, there are a number of professional organizations dedicated to the support and advancement of government

employees, some are specifically for city or county managers, and some even have chapters specifically for women – but none that focus specifically on supporting female executives. While one participant felt a lack of camaraderie amongst other female city managers, something she attributed to the competitive nature of the job and basic survival instincts, it is possible that a professional organization or network dedicated to the positive support of female executives (professionally and personally) could make a difference.

It would also be interesting to see research focus on so-called corporate husbands – the men who support these executive women by consciously allowing their own careers to take a back seat to the careers of their wives. Are there commonalities amongst those most supportive? It would be interesting to learn about any coping mechanisms or tactics used by spouses who find themselves in this supportive roll.

One question that was not asked of participants and did not come up in conversation is that of therapy or counseling. So many of the participants spoke of not having someone that they could really talk to about work and/or family stressors. How many of them have gone to therapy to help them cope with the demands of their lives? Do they have other outlets that help them to unwind? It would be interesting to see more research on challenges and outcomes of counseling executives. Thomas (2019) presented an interesting dissertation on counseling executive couples and discussed not only the unique challenges faced by female executives (which are not always clearly understood by their partners), but also the stigmas associated with seeking counseling. While she posited that a new intake tool, in the form of a semi-structured interview, might aid

clinicians in this area, research in this area could be beneficial. Finally, while this study was focused on incumbent city managers across the state of California, future research may want to focus on specific demographics such as the size or demographic profile of a city. It would also be important to study any programs or initiatives that might develop, not just from this study, but due to a growing interest in the topic. Finally, it might be interesting to research the specific themes, individually, that were developed here with the goal of developing ways to overcome the barriers within each area.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify career barriers of women executives in municipal administrations based on their own personal experiences. Approached using the SLT and RCT, the narrative research design, with thematic analysis, comprised of one-on-one interviews with female city managers currently working in Californian municipal administrations. The emerging five themes (early influences, home life, work life, leadership experiences and development of others) were not only present within each of the participants' experiences, but also represented influential times in their lives and careers. Barriers identified include gender bias, limited peer networks, having to play a part to meet other's expectations, lack of transparency amongst female city managers regarding the demands of the job, and the additional stress placed on personal relationships and family life. This study corroborates previous gender research in a number of key areas such as discrimination, bias, stereotypes, and roles and supports the importance of understanding their lived experiences in order to help support the advancement of women into executive leadership roles in local governments.

Recommendations focused on education, mentorship, training and resources to help women (in particular emerging leaders) deal with barriers they may face throughout their career. The implications of these recommendations could lead to more equitable and diverse municipal work forces that would be better equipped to affect positive social change by having a government that looks like and represents the citizens it serves.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

NOTE: The Demographic Questionnaire was provided to potential participants as a single page, fillable PDF file, to make completing and returning it as easy as possible.

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete and return to Jessica.Gordon2@waldenu.edu

1. Age?

- ☐ Under 30
- ☐ 30-39
- ☐ 40-49
- ☐ 50-59
- ☐ 60+

2. Education Level?

- ☐ High School Diploma/GED
- ☐ Some College
- ☐ Associates Degree
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's Degree
- ☐ Doctorate
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. Area(s) of Study for Your Degree(s)?

4. Ethnicity?

- ☐ African American
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Caucasian
- ☐ Hispanic
- ☐ Native American
- ☐ Pacific Islander
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

5. Relationship Status?

- ☐ Single (never married)
- ☐ In a Domestic Partnership
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed

6. Years in Public Service?

- ☐ Less than 5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20+

7. Your First Paid Position in Public Service (please list title and department)?

8. Years of Experience as a City Manager (cumulative)?

- ☐ Less than 5
- ☐ 5-10
- ☐ 10-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20+

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

The following interview protocol was adhered to in each interview:

1. Researcher to set up and test recording equipment 30 minutes prior to each interview.
2. Researcher to ensure her location is quiet and without distractions (where possible).
3. Once participant arrives, the researcher introduces herself and verifies receipt of the Informed Consent Form as well as summarizes its contents.
4. Researcher provides a brief background and purpose of the study and makes sure the participant is aware of the researcher's position and responsibilities with another local municipality to help assuage any concerns with bias while remaining fully transparent and open with participants.
5. Researcher clearly articulates when the recording will begin and, once started, states the date and time of the interview.
6. Participant is reminded that this is a conversational interview and they are encouraged to digress and tell stories that reflect their own experiences.
7. To kickstart the conversation, the researcher stated the following, "I'm really excited to have this time with you today and would love to know how you got your start in municipal government."

NOTE: While there were two primary questions being researched, the data needed to emerge naturally. So, semi-structured interviews helped to create an atmosphere of sharing and conversation without the formality of a script. To help guide the conversation, a set of open-ended interview questions were developed to encourage storytelling if or when the conversation lulled (though many were answered in the course of the conversation without prodding):

- What are some of the key influences in the development of your leadership skills?
- How has your (insert specific) education and experience shaped your views on leadership?
- What drew you to public service?
- Was city manager always an aspiration?
- How did your leadership journey begin?
- What challenges did you encounter along the way?
- How did you overcome those challenges?