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Women's Quest to Occupy Executive Positions in Corporate America

Erica Charles-Lynch
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Erica Charles-Lynch

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Review Committee
Dr. Raj Singh, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Ernesto Escobedo, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Lydia Forsythe, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Keller School of Management, 2007

BS, New York City Technical College, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Women comprise 50.8% of the United States population and 47% of the workforce, and over the past few decades, many women have been promoted to midmanagement positions in Fortune 500 and other major corporations, but few run companies at the executive levels. The research problem addressed the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions in the executive suite. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of women in upper level management in large corporations on rising to the C-suite. A basic qualitative naturalistic inquiry was used employing interviews in collecting and analyzing the data. The targeted population was 15 women in senior positions between the ages of 25 and 60, who have worked for a company with a minimum of 5 years' experience. Introductions by friends and snowballing sampling were used to select 15 participants for the semistructured interviews. The results of the interviews were analyzed through the completion of a content analysis obtained through coding to allow for the identification of emergent themes. Key findings indicated the emergence of the following themes: loss of confidence, mentoring, sponsoring, and diversity. The study was socially significant in that it provided information for policy changes, access to sponsorship and mentorship programs, and promotion of social change in relation to gender equality in the workplace.

Women Occupying Positions in Executive Management in Corporate America

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, (Charles) and my children (Brandon and Darnell) who have been supportive, understanding, loving, biggest supporters and sources of inspiration. The inspirational speeches and pep talks were really helpful and encouraging, especially for such a long journey.

To my mother (Joyce) and my siblings (Pauline, Michelle, Allison, Neasha, and Anthony) thank you all for your support every step of the way. Words cannot express how forever grateful I am to my wonderful family. To my friends, I appreciate all the words of encouragement and support you provided along the way.

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Finally, I would like to say thanks to my friends who stood by me during this educational process and understood why I could not spend time with them because I had to work on my "paper." You cheered me on and pushed me to "get it done." I am grateful to everyone who assisted me in completing my doctoral journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore and describe the perceptions of women in upper management regarding their quest to occupy upper management positions in corporate America. While public policies are in place in attempting to ensure that barriers do not exist, there is a distinct underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions in executive suites, henceforth called the C-suite, partly due to gender stereotyping (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project (2015) indicated that approximately two thirds of women, approximately 65% of those surveyed, were conscious of the discrimination they faced because of their gender, while only 48% of men believed that such discrimination existed.

In this study, I sought to explore the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions from 15 women in corporate upper management despite policies implemented by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). To explore this matter and address the research question, I needed to explore the roles of women in society, define the glass ceiling (Feminist Majority Foundation, 2014; Li, 2014), explore the role of women in the corporate world, identify how gender diverse workplaces are being promoted, review the positions of diversity officers along with their actions and perceptions, and describe the discrimination currently present within the corporate world against women.

Background of the Study

There is ample evidence in the world of research that the vast majority of women are unable to breach the glass ceiling for a host of different reasons (Bruckmuller, 2013; Fain, 2010; Johns, 2013; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Researchers have indicated that women see the primary reason for such an occurrence as the lingering stereotypes of women in the workplace, a belief that is backed by the Glass Ceiling Act, the Glass Ceiling Commission, and the EEOC (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2015). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), for women ages 25 to 34, 73.5% have completed a bachelor's or higher degree, compared with 29.5% of men. However, Murthy (2015) stated that the overall rate of pay is less for women since they are more likely to be found in leadership positions in the areas of human resources (HR) and research departments.

From an overall perspective, a position in HR or in research is not on a normal route that will lead to either advancement or promotion within a company to the executive level. In spite of the lack of female presence at the executive level, researchers have indicated that female representation in top management has the potential to increase the overall social diversity of the top management team, to serve as an influence for enriching the behavior exhibited by managers throughout the firm, to help motivate women in middle-management positions to continue to excel, and to allow for an alternative perspective and increased information collection at the highest levels of the company (Dezso & Ross, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

In today's extremely competitive and dynamic business world, women account for 52.2% of the workforce in the United States but less than 5% of executives (Kooskora & Piigli, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Women have advanced into the managerial ranks and professional ranks of U.S. corporations at almost the same rate as men for more than a quarter of a century. Still, in spite of this advancement, women are unable to move forward beyond this point to obtain executive positions as effectively as their male counterparts (Shin, 2013). Recent reports indicated that women held only 23 chief executive officer positions out of all organizations on the S&P 500 list, roughly 4.6%, with little over one quarter of companies on that list retaining no female executive officers (Catalyst Census, 2015). Although women play a vital role in the growth of the economy, it is not common that they will become executives in major American corporations (Shin, 2013).

Companies such as Kimberly Clark Corporation, McDonald's Corporation, and Hyatt Hotel Corporation are working to rebuild their workforces to become more gender diverse, including the promotion of more women into positions of middle and upper management. Nevertheless, barriers inherent to the system prohibit women from being treated as equals, disallowing their advancement to executive level positions (Rafter, 2015). Such barriers indicate that there are still other issues associated with the regulatory environment, in spite of the steps that have been taken by the EEOC to ensure that such discriminatory practices do not exist.

The dominant paradigm that frames the challenges women face in attaining upward mobility within the corporate world is referred to as the glass ceiling metaphor (Sabharwal, 2015). The glass ceiling refers to the idea that once women have reached a certain level within the company, they are able to perceive that there are certain paths that could be followed to move higher up in the company. Still, they are, for one reason or another, unable to take advantage of those paths, and they find themselves blocked by a metaphorical glass ceiling through which they may look at the higher levels but never attain them. In spite of such issues, within the past few decades, women have made steady progress in this uphill battle, though many female leaders now find themselves placed in precarious positions that set them up for failure and carry them over the edge; a phenomenon now referred to as the glass cliff (Glass & Cook, 2014; Hennessey, MacDonald, & Carroll, 2014; Ridgeway, 2011).

It is believed that the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated domains, like those of executive level positions, are caused by a host of different factors, including the institutional structure of the organization, bias from male leaders, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, penalties for motherhood, performance standards set by organizations, tasks that could be risky for completion by females, and the type of socialization used within high status occupations (Miles, 2012; Shin, 2013). In spite of the knowledge of such concerns and challenges, the examination of women's issues in the field of management remains an intriguing subject area for research, as while such issues have been identified as part of the problem, further research is necessary to determine the best away to approach the matter and to address it (Miles, 2012). Although

many studies have been conducted on women's struggle for equal representation in corporate C-suites (Branson, Chen, & Redenbaugh, 2013; Cook & Glass, 2014a, 2014b; Glass & Cook, 2014; Hill, Upadhyay, & Beekun, 2015; Inder & Vashistha, 2014; Sabharwal, 2015), there is a gap in the literature from the perspectives of women in senior management positions in Fortune 500 companies on the factors that prevent them from this goal.

Research Question

In order to more effectively explore this subject matter, I aimed to answer the following research question: What are the perceptions of female senior level managers of the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of women between the ages of 25 and 60 who have worked for a company for a minimum of 5 years and who are hoping to occupy C-suites positions in corporate America. Moreover, policies have been made that are designed to promote the presence of a gender diverse workforce. While public policy is in place to attempt to ensure that barriers do not exist, there is a distinct underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in executive suites as a result of gender stereotyping (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). Researchers have further indicated that approximately two thirds of women, roughly 65% of those surveyed, were conscious of the discrimination faced because they are female (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015).

Only 48% of men believe that such discrimination exists, according to the same study (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). If this trend continues, it will take years before women are able to gain equal footing with their male counterparts, indicating a clear need for changes to the current gender discrimination policies. If this trend is allowed to continue, it will take more than 100 years for the upper reaches of U.S. corporations to achieve gender parity (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). While the legislations that the EEOC is tasked with upholding are designed to work to ensure that no such discrimination occurs, the presence of discrimination serves to indicate that the policies implemented and enacted are not enough to have a significant effect on the presence of discriminatory actions.

Extrapolating from this situation, it becomes clear that if such administrative actions are not enough to work to address the matter, review of the areas in which discrimination is still present is a necessity, for without the presence of the same, no changes may be made to work to further address the matter. As such, an exploration of the current barriers, the localizations of gender barriers and EEOC current policies allowed for an identification of that which affects the upward mobility of women and an understanding of the manner in which it may be addressed from the perspectives of female senior managers in Fortune 500 companies.

Theoretical Framework

Complexity theory allows for the study of systems that are both complex and chaotic, allowing for the identification of the order, patterns, and structures that arise within the given construct (Marra, 2015). Such a theory is often applied in a wide range

of fields, although it has not often been employed within the realm of gender discrimination. This theory allows processes that have a high number of independent agents to be ordered into a coherent system and an effective analysis of the system to transpire (Marra, 2015). By viewing the organization as a complex system or construct, and the employees as the independent agents within the system, the theory may be applied to the organization (Marra, 2015).

Marra (2015) further stated that while personal perception does play an important role in a qualitative study, the amount of bias may be removed as a result of that preference given. The fact is that this particular theory looks objectively, as opposed to subjectively, at the system being explored, in this case, the corporate organization. Cooperative behaviors for both sides may be identified within the workplace and the broader socioeconomic spectrum, identifying the areas in which those who are working toward equality have made measures of success and areas in which those who are consciously or subconsciously against the presence of women in executive positions.

Complexity theory allowed me to identify the gender inequalities present in large corporations and a determination of the source of the bias present within these corporations regarding promoting women to executive positions. The goal of this basic qualitative study was to present this information as factually and accurately as possible with as little bias as possible, either on my part or on the participants' and data collected. The application of complexity theory aided me in the accomplishment of such a goal.

Operational Definitions

C-suite: Executive positions including chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and chief information officer (CEO, CFO, and CIO), chief marketing and sales officer, chief supply-chain-management officer, general counsel, and chief human resource officer (Groysberg, Kelly, & McDonald, 2011).

Glass cage: A sociological image denoting the structural location of disadvantaged groups at work. It refers to women's and minorities' segregated jobs as a source of informal and persistent barriers (Kalev, 2013).

Glass ceiling: An intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper-level positions (Kalev, 2013).

Glass cliff: When women's promotions to executive positions are carried out because the company is undergoing significant struggles (Glass & Cook, 2014).

The Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC): The lead federal agency that enforces policy for discrimination in the workplace (EEOC, 2016a).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Women occupy few positions at the top both in executive positions and in corporate board rooms (Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015; Hennessey, MacDonald, & Carroll, 2014; Larkin, Bernardi, & Bosco, 2013; Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014; Sabatier, 2015). They constitute 2.2% of the Fortune 500 CEOs, and 15% of those companies have women as board members (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014). This lack of underrepresentation may prove difficult in obtaining access to meet and interview a large group of this population.

- In this study, I focused on the experiences of 15 women who live in the United States and already have senior management positions.

- The interviews were focused on discovering patterns ideas explanation and understanding of why women are not promoted to the C-suites.

- The results of this study may not be generalized because each woman may have different reason and experiences of her perceptions of barriers to her rise to executive suites.

- The emphasis of this study was limited to the personal opinions of the participants, and it excluded the perceptions of their coworkers.

- Each woman had experienced biases that may have influenced her responses.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to gain valuable knowledge and insights regarding the prevalence and/or lack thereof of women retaining top-level executive positions and the reason for the continuation of the gap, in spite of a longstanding economic opportunity policy. This dissertation contributes to the field of social sciences, as I moved beyond the statistics that served to confirm the denial of top-level positions to women and made a true determination for this occurrence. The answer to the research question was foundational for the study of women's issues as they pertain to employment and career advancement. Should the areas be identified by this study, the study could have even greater significance in that the information collected could be used to assist new discriminatory practice policies, working to further reduce the overall presence and

likelihood of such discriminative acts within the workplace, and allowing effective upward mobility for women in the workplace.

Summary of Chapter 1

Although women have made some strides in attaining positions in the executive suites, they still are underrepresented. Despite the growing body of research that has shown the positive effects of a diverse workforce, including higher employee engagement, innovation, and financial returns, most organizations still lack a formal diversity plan (Whitney & Ames, 2014). Due to this practice, women are not getting the opportunity to showcase their talents and leadership skills to advance to top levels in the organizations. In Chapter 2, I explored the barriers impacting women in their quest to obtain positions in executive management in corporate America. In Chapter 3, I described the research process that was executed to collect and analyze the data. Chapter 4 presented the findings, and Chapter 5 concluded the study, also presenting implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Public policies are in place to attempt to ensure that barriers do not exist; however, there is a distinct underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in executive suites due to gender stereotyping (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). Researchers have indicated that approximately two thirds of women, approximately 65% of those surveyed, were conscious of the discrimination they faced because of their gender (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015). Conversely, only 48% of men believed that such discrimination existed, according to the same survey (Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015).

In this study, I sought to find the answers to the research, identifying the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions, the perceptions of diversity offer concerning the lack of women in leadership positions at the executive level, the ways in which women are obstructed or assisted in their rise throughout corporate America, and the methods both for and against that are associated with policies implemented by EEOC. To explore this matter and address the research question, I needed to investigate the roles of women in society, define the glass ceiling, explore the role of women in the corporate world, identify how gender diverse workplaces are being promoted, review the positions of female senior managers, their actions and perceptions, and describe the discrimination currently present within the corporate world against women.

Research Strategy

The literature research involved use of various academic disciplines. I used

sources such as the Walden University Library, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Amazon, and

various other websites to review and collect articles that strengthened and supported the

research question. The research was conducted by using strings such as *barriers to*

women's executive promotion, C-suites, EEOC and gender discrimination, female CEOs,

glass ceiling, and *women in executive positions*.

Literature Review

The Role of Women in American Society

The role of women in American society is varied, as is the history of the

topic itself. Since the United States was first formed, this country has been a

patriarchal, or male dominated, society. Throughout the vast majority of this

country's history, women have had fewer legal rights and fewer career

opportunities than men have had (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International

Center, 2016). The role of women in American society has been one of a domestic

nature wherein women are considered to be primarily responsible for hearth and

home, "wifehood and motherhood, while it was the man's task and responsibility

to serve as the breadwinner, taking care of all external responsibilities" (Women's

International Center, 2016, p. 1).

The Historical Perspective of Women's Role in American Society

American society was originally based around puritanical views and values. This

worldview served as the foundational means of establishing the role of women in

American society, before the United States existed even as an ideal, when this country was still a British colony (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International Center, 2016). The colonists were Christian, and Christian theology was markedly different, and far more severe, when it came to the identification of the role of women than it is today. These perspectives came across the Atlantic Ocean with the colonists who were set forth in medieval times. As St. Jerome, alive during the 4th Century, stated, "Woman is the gate of the devil, the path of wickedness, the sting of the serpent, in a word, a perilous object" (as cited in Klaits, 1985, p. 67; as cited in Women's International Center, 2016, p. 1).

Thomas Aquinas continued to perpetuate the role of women in an adverse light stating that women were "created to be man's helpmeet, but her unique role is in conception…since for other purposes men would be better assisted by other men" (as cited in Mijares 2015, p. 59; as cited in Women International Center, 2016, p. 1). It is this base concept that served to create the foundational role of women in society. Women were meant to act as helpmeets to men, indicating that they should be there for their male partners by providing the care and support that their men needed in order to succeed and ensuring that his house was kept appropriately, but the only true support that a male would need would be in the role of broodmare and caregiver for his progeny with all other aspects being placed solely in the realm of men (Women's International Center, 2016).

Such a concept was so ingrained that while an unmarried or widowed woman had certain legal rights and could own property, a married woman's property and all of her possessions became the property of her husband. If a husband had a male heir, he

could bequeath his property to his son and leave the mother of his child dependent upon

the mercy of her son to provide for her and allow her to remain on land that was once

her own (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International Center, 2016). Equities laws

were enacted in the United States in 1839, but in some places, the law did not come

into force until 1854 (Federal Judicial Center, 2016; Ingram & Essman, 2014;

Women's International Center, 2016). Equity laws placed an emphasis on the idea of

equal rights as opposed to simply following traditional stereotypes. Accordingly, equity

laws granted women certain right such as the ability to sue her husband, own property,

and to any question of potential legal dispute (Federal Judicial Center, 2016).

In creating equity jurisdiction, Article III, Section 2, Clause 1 of the

Constitution states that federal judicial power is extended to "all Cases, in Law and

Equity, arising under this Constitution, the Laws of the United States, and Treaties

made, or which shall be made, under their Authority." This power was extended to

circuit court judges under the Judiciary Act of 1789, in Section 11, for all cases that

have dealt with a value of $500 or more (Federal Judicial Center, 2016). The purpose

and the goal behind Equity law was to grant judges a higher level of freedom by

allowing them to make their decisions based on fairness rather than the preexisting,

more rigid, confines of puritanical-based laws (Federal Judicial Center, 2016).

Women were no longer confined to the role of wives and mothers in the United

States because of the provision of the equity law by the founding fathers. As a result of

this newfound freedom, women started expanding their roles within American society.

In the 19th Century, it became more common for women to hold jobs outside of the

home, although such jobs were still typically associated with domestic life, including positions in garment shops, haberdasheries, and textile factories (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International Center, 2016). However, this did not mean that women were treated with the same regard as men, and the laws governing the working class reflected this attitude (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International Center, 2016).

It was not until 1910 that laws were put in place that served to limit the amount of time that women could work. Prior to that, women were expected to work 12-hour days and still be responsible for the domestic chores of the household (Ingram & Essman, 2014; Women's International Center, 2016). Furthermore, many states still had laws in place that prevented women from working overnight or holding supervisory positions, and some states prevented women from engaging in jobs that required carrying more than 15 pounds (Ingram & Essman, 2014; National Women's History Project, 2016; Women's International Center, 2016).

Oregon was the only state that had changed such a ruling, reducing the maximum amount of time that a woman was allowed to work to 10 hours per day. However, even this apparent victory was presented in such a way that it served to further strengthen the perspective that women were the weaker sex, incapable of working a "full" 12-hour day. (National Women's History Project, 2016). The ruling was presented in such a way that it was not close to the equal rights that were granted to women, but indicated that the workday must be reduced since women were unable to work 12-hour days.

In spite of these setback the rights of women continued to change and grow, including being granted the right to vote in 1920 (National Women's History Project, 2016). By 1924, certain women were granted the ability to work at night depending on the position that they held (National Women's History Project, 2016). Although the role of women was slowly changing it was mainly being added onto and increasing the burden placed upon women, while still viewing women as the weaker sex, one necessary of protection, but still little more than property. Small strides were made for women between 1920 and 1960, especially during World War II when women adopted the role of men who went off to war. Following World War II, women demanded to be allowed to continue to engage in the same activities that they participated in during the war, however, it was not until the 1960s that larger strides started to be enjoyed by women. (National Women's History Project, 2016).

In the 1960s, women's rights began shifting from the ability to attain no-fault divorces to the ability to forgo maternity leave if they wished. Physical requirements were also adjusted so that women were perceived to be able to do the same jobs as men. (National Women's History Project, (2016). Women's role in America expanded, allowing them to engage in jobs that were previously only available to men, which helped to ensure that women were granted opportunities to those provided to men. Changes to these dynamics worked to shift the perspective of the role of women but also led to a schism in roles for women that started in the 1970s and continued through the 1980s (Women's History Project, 2016).

Stereotypical Roles for Women

Wootton (1997) stated that these changes allowed for the creation of three different stereotypical roles for women in the United States. The first was the original role, that of the wife, mother, and homemaker. The second was the woman who worked and who was still tasked with taking care of home and hearth. The third role was one that presented the greatest dissonance, the woman in the role of the provider and breadwinner, which excluded responsibility for family and home life. It was perceived that women had to forgo their homes life to have a career. In spite of these three different perceptions and the ability of some women to attain relatively high positions within the workforce; the role of women within the workplace remained virtually unchanged. Women still held fewer jobs than men did, and women still were faced with an inability to move up the corporate ladder and attain higher positions. If a woman did move up within the workplace, it was common to say that "she attained her promotion on her back" meaning this perception served to further the idea that women were still only good for one thing (Wootton, 1997).

Although women continued to make inroads into the male dominated workplace the workforce was far from equal in any way that mattered. Wootton (1997) added that by the 1990s, there was a greater number of women within the workforce than there had been in the past, but those additional numbers merely represented the additional jobs that had been created and did not increase the ratio of male to female workers. Today, women comprise approximately half of the workforce; yet, even though there are more

women who are seeking senior roles, women still remain largely outsiders within the corporate world (Chu & Posner, 2013).

Stereotypes in the Workplace

According to Powell et al. (2002), "stereotypes are 'beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups'" (p. 177). Crampton and Mishra, 1999, p. 91, stated, "In a recent study, 79% of CEOs agreed that 'prejudice and stereotypes are among the most identifiable barriers to women's advancement in U.S. corporations.'" Although Yuki (2002) claimed that women are more skilled at interpersonal relationship and make superior managers they are still underrepresented at senior levels. Stoker, Van der Velde, and Lamers (2011) stated that women are expected to engender characteristics like warmth, modesty, and sensitivity but these expectations cause disadvantages for female managers. They are inconsistent with the stereotype that people have of leaders (Katila & Eriksson, 2013).

Leaders are supposed to be strong, result oriented, willing to take risks and they face prejudicial evaluation of their competence as managers leading to a decreased access to leadership roles and more negative evaluations (Brescoll et al., 2010; Eagly & Wood, 2014). According to Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project (2015), the problem is that women still must do more than men do to prove themselves. E.W. (2015) mentioned that this finding suggests a troubling assumption—that women are not able to do what men can. Even though it is possible that women may be able to, the baseline expectations are that men are more capable, which puts women in the position of having to go above and beyond the standards to which men

are held to demonstrate their competence. A woman in a position of power is rarely, if ever, viewed as having acquired that position through her own merit. Instead, it is believed that she got there under the auspices of a male benefactor. Education, experience, hard work, dedication to the company, and other associated positive characteristics showing that a woman is right for the job are not always taken into consideration.

Eagly and Wood (2014) stated that these stereotypes or gender role beliefs form as people observe male and female behavior and infer that the sexes possess corresponding dispositions. Eagly and Wood further commented that the origins of men's and women's social roles lie primarily in humans' evolved physical sex differences, specifically men's size and strength and women's reproductive activities of gestating and nursing children.

The Glass Ceiling

Merriam Webster (2016) describes the term *glass ceiling* as an intangible barrier within a hierarchy that prevents women or minorities from obtaining upper level positions. In other words, women are able to see the upper level positions and understand the qualifications necessary to attain them but are not hired or promoted because they are not white males. The term was originally created in 1985 by the *Wall Street Journal* to detail the barriers that prevent women from accessing jobs within the highest levels of the corporate hierarchy (The Economist, 2005).

Following the identification of this barrier, the government created the glass ceiling concept in 1995 in an effort to address this matter (The Economist, 2005). This

reporting agency was designed to research and explore the lack of female presence within corporate America. Since the creation of the Glass Ceiling Committee, hundreds of reports have been generated but the statistics remain the same; the number of women in executive positions remains much the same as it was when the issue was first identified several decades ago (The Economist, 2005). In spite of the headlines that attempts to make it seem as though women are increasingly prevalent in the corporate world, these stories are deliberately suggestive and are often the result of inflated numbers that seek to show progress where none exists.

The barrier is described are "so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women from moving up the corporate hierarchy" (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1994, p. 15).

Herein lies the problem; while most are aware of what the glass ceiling is and of its existence; the vast majority of women in the United States have felt the frustration of butting up against this imaginary pane of glass and all efforts to date to address this matter have failed. The glass ceiling is still present and while some are able to break through the shattering perceptions to attain higher levels within corporate organizations; the vast majority of women are left behind staring up and pounding on the glass wondering why they cannot break through.

The Civil Rights Monitor served as the quarterly publication designed to release the reports of the Glass Ceiling Commission to the country; unfortunately, due to the lack of progress being made by the commission, the final report was produced in 1995 (Department of Labor, 1995). The report indicated that the Commission had set out what

it was intended to do, specifically, to identify the areas in which the glass ceiling barrier was present and to make suggestions as to how to address the matter (Department of Labor, 1995). Reports were made over the course of the four years that the Commission was in existence; however, the recommendations did not served to actualize change; rather than admitting that such a method was not the most appropriate means of working to address the issue, in 2006 the Glass Ceiling Commission was disbanded with a statement that the commission had obtained the results desired, proving that the glass ceiling was present and recommending that the suggestions put forth by the Commission continue to be implemented until such a time as there was no longer an issue (Department of Labor, 1995). The committee gave up hope and shut its doors, leaving a problem that still remains in existence to this day. This problem is not one that is improving with time, although workplaces are becoming more diverse with a great many organizations becoming equal or close to equal in their employee demographics (LaFrance, 2014).

The Glass Cage

Despite the continual presence of the glass ceiling, society within the past decade has displayed an increased awareness of the value that women provide to the workplace, showing the myriad ways in which the presence and prevalence of women in the workplace has increased the value of organizations (Warrell, 2013). Still, these improvements actually lend additional consideration to a secondary issue that has started to arise due to the increasing presence of equality within lower level employees. It should be noted that the increased awareness of these issues and the care and

consideration taken to address such matters in earnest is something that is to be applauded. At the same time, however, as with many situations, when one issue goes toward resolution, other underlying issues are brought to light, issues that would not have been fully acknowledged or understood without forward progress (Warrell, 2013).

The glass ceiling and the continued presence of stereotyping within the workplace has worked to create a secondary barrier to the promotion of women, a barrier present within the minds of females of working age – the 'glass cage" (Warrell, 2013). The glass cage is a concept that indicates it is not just the external factors (those outside of the control of the female population, such as the presence and prevalence of stereotypes of women in the workplace, that are the problem) but internal factors as well. The glass cage refers to an invisible barrier created by women around themselves, one that fails to allow them to accept potentials for advancement, even when they do arise out of "misgivings they have about their ability to succeed and handle the demands of leadership without sacrificing other aspirations outside of the workplace" (Warrell, 2013, p. 1). In essence, women are not only failing to attain corporate positions because of others, but also because of themselves. Society has changed in such a manner as to work to promote a more hedonistic lifestyle. The pursuit of entertainment and justification for pleasure that is seen in all advertising campaigns and across all social media platforms is one that is ever present within the American culture (Gilbert, 2006). This mentality stems back to the puritanical where self-- denial became so ingrained within our society, that society itself lacks the ability to remember how to take joy in anything, and that mentality has shaped our culture in such a way as to necessitate

someone else, such as the media or advertisements, telling us that it is all right to take such pleasure, that we have earned a reward (Gilbert, 2006).

According to Mohr (2014), women do not or have not in the past put themselves out there when there is an opportunity that they do not feel they have 100% of what is being asked, whereas the findings from the Hewlett Packard internal report stated that if men have six out of the ten qualifications they would put themselves forward for a role whereas if women have six out of the ten qualifications the research have said they do not put themselves forward. Mohr indicated that women focus on what they do not have versus what they do have.

The Role of Women in the Corporate World

The role of women in the corporate world is a tricky one, particularly considering the promotions of diversity and commitments to ensuring that discrimination is not present within the workforce. In spite of such commitments and promotions, however, a recent study conducted by professors at the University of Colorado in Boulder showed that women are in fact able to move up the corporate ladder, as long as they keep their noses down and do not promote other women or assist other women in their quest for forward movement (Hess, 2014). The study conducted with a sample group of 362 executives which required those executives to rate their perceptions regarding various actions associated with company policies regarding diversity and the application (Hess, 2014).

The results showed that women who assisted other women with the advancement of their careers were seen as exclusionary, cold, and were less likely to

advance in their careers, whereas men who assisted women were more likely to advance quicker; although there was no correlation between advancement and females assisting men with the improvement of their career potentials (Hess, 2014). This serves to indicate that not only is the glass ceiling still present but also the stereotypes concerning female role are still in place. The perceptions in the 1970s concerning a female sisterhood, one that was exclusionary toward men, are still present; instead of feeling left out of bra burnings, however, the exclusion felt from men is manifest in other ways, in this case, in an unwillingness to advance the female career (Hess, 2014).

There remains a dearth of evidence in the world of research indicating that the vast majority of women are unable to breach the glass ceiling, making the role of women in the corporate world a relatively small one (Johns, 2013; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). In spite of the results of the study conducted by the University of Colorado, research indicates that this does not address the totality of the issue (Hess, 2014). Researchers have claimed that it is more than simply a perception of women being exclusionary toward men or filling their mandatory role and thus being overlooked, although this is a part of it; it is believed that the presence, or lack of women in the corporate world is the result of nothing more and nothing less than the lingering stereotypes associated with females in the workplace (The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, 2015).

Women in the Workforce

The report on women in the labor force by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) is crucial in understanding recent and relevant research into the situation with

women in the workforce. The report has statistical tables and is accompanied by technical notes. These types of informatics are important to understand how women are doing in occupation industry. The report states over 50% of women are employed in the professional and management fields. Women comprise of 20% and 33% of software developers and lawyers respectively. Female auditors and accountants account for 63%, and 81% respectively, of the women employed as teachers of elementary and middle school. It also states that 49% of Asian women and 43% of white women are more likely to be employed in high paying profession, whereas for black women it's 35% and 26% for Hispanic. White women account for 20% of those employed in lower paying occupations which show that the chance of a woman reaching upper management level positions is also defined by her skin color (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

Women in Banking

In leadership positions, women are dramatically underrepresented. They constitute 2.2% of the Fortune 500 CEOs and 15% of these companies have women as board members (Vachon, 2014). Jane Schreuder, COO at Northern Trust stated that her willingness to take on risky assignments hastened her rise. In the late 1990s as the Internet was taking off, she took a job leading e-commerce strategy which "was huge in terms of skill building, but frightening in terms of doing something outside my comfort zone." (Cummings, 2015).

Beth Mooney, Chairman and CEO of KeyCorp and also one of the 25 most powerful women in banking stated that of the recent college graduates that she hired, 25 % were minorities and 36% were women which is up from 17% and 24%, respectively.

Of the manager's two levels below Mooney, 35% are women and 40% are minorities, and Key's board is now one of the most diverse in the industry with five women among its 14 directors. The company has been named as one of Diversity Inc's "Top 50 Companies for Diversity" for three years running (Kline, 2015).

Promoting a Gender Diverse Workplace

Because the gender divide in the workplace was identified, researchers and companies alike have been working to create initiatives that attempt to increase diversity within the workplace (Catalyst, 2016b; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak, Cherin, & Berkman, 1998; Tyson, 2015; White, 2016; Zevallos, 2013). Such studies have been extensive seeking to explore the relationships that are present in racio-ethnicities, genders, and job level of individuals within contextual organizations in an attempt to determine what aspects that the individual has no control over are serving to influence the likelihood of attaining certain positions (Kossek & Zonia, 1993).

Results showed that gender played the single largest role in the determination of what was affecting position and movement (Kossek & Zonia, 1993). The question is not whether or not such a gender bias is present; research has shown that it continues through to this day. Jaffe (2014), publisher at the magazine Fast Company, stated that research have shown that workplace gender bias not only persists but thrive in ways many people do not even realizes, especially for women in a male dominated profession. Jaffe claimed that stereotypes are so embedded in the cultural brain that people often serve them without being aware.

Efforts to promote a gender diverse workplace have been in effect since the creation of the EEOC in 1965, spurred by the Civil Rights movement and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (EEOC, 2016a). The EEOC was tasked with ensuring that no one is discriminated against in the workplace based on gender identity or sexual orientation (EEOC, 2016b). All reports of potential discrimination against gender within the workplace filed with the EEOC are investigated thoroughly to attempt to unearth and correct any potential wrongdoing found as a result of the presence of any discrimination. Thus, in spite of diversity initiatives within the workplace, inequalities remain, forming what is referred to as "inequality regimes" (Acker, 2006, p. 441). Inequality regimes occur in work organizations and consist of the "interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organizations" (Acker, 2006, p. 441).

Workplace diversity measures become stopgaps and as the basic underlying premise with the inherent presence of bias within the workplace leads to gender discrimination which remains unaddressed (Acker, 2006; Catalyst, 2016b; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKinsey Global Institute, 2014; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Tyson, 2015; White, 2016; Zevallos, 2013). These inequality regimes continue to grow and expand until the entire culture of the workplace are so steeped in the inherent gender bias against women that even the women in those organizations are unlikely to go against the culture of the workplace. After some time, they no longer perceive that such a bias is present because they become too immured to the actual practices which is directly in front of them; such inequality regimes have been created and destroyed as well by those

in the organization. Social media is a great way to get a pulse on real-time information about the issue of gender diversity in the workforce. Gender issues being discussed on the social media platform show the importance of social media tools such as LinkedIn.

The data show how inclusion and diversity are important issues with women in the corporate workplace. The primary occupation that women hold according to this survey is in healthcare and pharmaceuticals. Table 1 shows that 59.8% of employees working in healthcare and pharmaceuticals are women followed by 52.7% in government, education and the nonprofit sector. Toward the bottom of this table are 26.7%, 19.7% and 20.2% for the oil and industry sector, software engineers, and leadership roles, respectively. The next area where women are barely represented is in the automotive, aeronautical, and transportation industry. The survey indicated that women still lag far behind in leadership positions in financial services, retail, and healthcare. This study concludes that women are still underrepresented in roles of leadership in corporations and other non-profit organizations (Murthy, 2015).

Positive Results in Gender Diversity

There are gender diversity programs that have been implemented which show overall positive results. Applying the cultural theory of heterogeneity, it was hypothesized that the relationships present between racial and gender diversity at the management level and in overall firm practice were curvilinear (Richard, Barnett, Dwyer, & Chadwick, 2004). According to Richard et al. (2004), it became possible to study the different relationships present amongst application of diversity practices, firm

performance, and entrepreneurial orientations. Table 1 shows female representation by industry group.

The results indicated that the greater the entrepreneurial orientation the less likely a culture would be present within the organization in which gender bias was present; conversely, the more traditional the organization, the more likely it was that the organization would experience a degree of gender bias. Furthermore, in the majority of instances, the longer the organization had been in business the more likely it was that the organization would not adopt an entrepreneurial approach resulting in increased gender bias and a decreased concern toward addressing that bias (Richard et al., 2004).

Google and Pandora (Gender Diversity)

Google started with the Internet revolution of the 1990s, the company is highly entrepreneurial and places a high premium on diversity within the workplace (Google Diversity, 2016). Google demands that its employees work to recognize that gender bias is an unconscious societally ingrained component, and they request that their employees participate in unconscious bias workshops and training activities that are designed to specifically address and point out bias within the thoughts and actions of its employees. This practice has dramatically reduced bias within Google and worked to increase overall innovativeness and production outcomes (Google Diversity, 2016). In addition, the company has created specific, targeted initiatives designed to ensure that its employees are not discriminated against in any way.

Table 1

Female Representation by Industry Group

Female representation by industry group (current as of June 2016)	All members	Leadership	Software engineers
Healthcare & pharmaceuticals	59.60%	45.20%	32.30%
Government, education, & non-profit	52.70%	46.30%	33.40%
Professional services	47.10%	33.20%	27.10%
Retail & consumer products	47.00%	32.40%	27.50%
Media & entertainment	43.90%	33.10%	21.00%
Financial services & insurance	42.90%	28.70%	25.80%
Technology	30.60%	20.90%	20.50%
Telecommunications	30.30%	22.00%	16.80%
Architecture & engineering	29.20%	20.10%	21.40%
Manufacturing/industrial	28.80%	19.00%	18.80%
Aeronautical, automotive, & Transportation	26.80%	19.00%	17.70%
Oil & Energy	26.70%	20.20%	19.70%

These initiatives included benefits provided through caregiver leave programs that were extended to all individuals, as opposed to just nuclear families, the provision of on-site physicians and nurses and other convenient medical coverage for the families of their workers such as: travel insurance, personal insurance, paid maternity and paternity leave for adoptive parents and biological parents, reimbursement for additional higher education, decreased legal costs, and a host of other amenities (Fitzpatrick & Curran, 2014; Google Diversity, 2016). The company also offers means through which individuals are able to recommend others for promotion after finding out that women were the least likely to recommend themselves for a self-promotion, ensuring that all actions may be recognized and that all contributions are viewed as equal by all staff (Google Diversity, 2016). The premise was that if employees knew that their coworkers can submit recommendations for their promotions regardless of gender, creed, and nationality then employees were more likely to work together to create a unified workplace.

Google created the Diversity Core program that allowed Google employees to work within local communities in order to increase diversity and tolerance starting at the local level in an attempt to remove bias from other aspects of life as well (Google Diversity, 2016). Google's policy is one of inclusion and they are working to spread and promote those policies as far and wide as possible, while providing the support that their employees need in order to be able to sustain happy and well-rounded lives.

Pandora

Pandora is also working to promote positive diversity initiatives. Pandora, the online radio streaming initiative, has a very diverse employee population with 48% female and 52% male as of 2014, and by 2015, the company was 50.8% male and 49.2% female, showing a continued push toward overall diversity (LaFrance, 2014; Mangalindan, 2014; Mikel, 2014). Recent reports indicate that the practices of Pandora are actually working to change the face of technology companies when it comes to diversity (LaFrance, 2014; Mikel, 2014). Promotions are based solely on merit and the company has become one of the largest supporters of Women 2.0 which is a California based initiative designed to allow women to break down the barriers present within technology companies (Mikel, 2014). When it comes to leadership positions, Google is ahead of Pandora, who has 38.8% of its leadership positions filled by women. (LaFrance, 2014; Mangalindan, 2014; Mikel, 2014).

Pandora does not discuss anything about its internal diversity practices stating that the programs the company has in place are not for public consumption. One thing is known is that the programs are working, and Pandora has recently launched additional programs targeting its hiring practices and working to concentrate its hiring on individuals, other than White, and a larger female population (LaFrance, 2014). The company hopes to attain equality across the board in all of its demographics through targeted hiring practices designed to ensure that the best worker for the job is the one who gets the job with further focus on qualifications as opposed to connections (Kosoff, 2014; LaFrance, 2011).

Diversity Officers' Perceptions on Women's Role Within Corporations

Baldwin Wallace University defines diversity as "the ability to think critically while acknowledging and respecting different beliefs, practices, and norms." (Baldwin Wallace University, 2013). The University of Rhode Island (2004) defined it as a wide-ranging term, include racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, value, and any cultural or identity differences. According to Joel Kranc (2013), Director of Kranc Communication in Toronto, many companies have launched initiatives promoting diversity in the workplace, but despite this fact many women still are not promoted. The primary focus, when it comes to the perceptions of diversity officers, appears to be a concern that there is a case for business diversity that may be made for the organization. Hubbard (2004) acknowledged that diversity is advantageous to both the business institute and its staff.

A diverse workforce improves a company's performance and boosts its bottom line. The majority of corporations within America are more concerned with ensuring that a diversity policy is present, and that the general population is aware of the presence of that policy than the company is with actually enforcing those policies (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). While companies are aware that having and enforcing a diversity policy is the right thing to do those who are tasked with ensuring that such practices are created, adhered to, and even upheld are not always able to do so in an effective manner, even if they so desired (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). According to the Calvert Investments (2013) Diversity Report: "Examining the Cracks in the ceiling: A Survey of Corporate Diversity Practices of the S&P 100," a "leaky" "pipeline to management persists; women

are often hired as frequently as men, however, their representation in management roles decreases with each step up the corporate ladder.

Another report from Forbes Insights (2012), titled Diversity & Inclusion; Unlocking Global Diversity Rankings by Country Sector and Occupations, states that out of 1.5 million chief executives in the United States, just one-quarter are women, and only one in 10 represents an ethnic minority. Diversity Officers trust that management will back up their decisions concerning enforcement of such policies and the resolution of cases that may arise, on the other hand, such actions serve to create additional discord within the office, disrupting the culture, decreasing productivity, and reducing trust between individuals (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

Mor Barak et al. (1998) stated that when concentrating solely on just the perceptions of those who are tasked with the enforcement of diversity practices within the workplace. In a study of 2,686 individuals applying social identity theory and intergroup theory the results showed that fairness and inclusion of all individuals were paramount, but that those perceptions of what fairness was and what constituted inclusion varied based on the gender and socio-ethnic group of the individual. The research showed that the problem is not the gender of the individual within the corporate world because all individuals appear to genuinely want to address the issue; the problem is in perception and the application of the same (Catalyst, 2016b; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKinsey Global Institute, 2014; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Tyson, 2015; White, 2016; Zevallos, 2013). The problem is an inherent bias that is present within society against women in the workplace; one ingrained in men and women alike and one that manifests itself through

the glass ceiling and the glass cage (Catalyst, 2016b; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKinsey

Global Institute, 2014; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Tyson, 2015; Waller, 2013; White, 2016;

Zevallos, 2013).

Summary

While studies have shown that women have more advanced degrees than males in

the workplace, their overall rate of pay is less, and women are likely only to be found in

positions of leadership within the areas of HR and research (Murthy, 2015). Based on an

overall review of traditional organizational structure, such positions are not on a normal

route that will lead to a high level of advancement within an organization, much less

allow the individual to rise to an executive level. Research showed that increased female

representation within top management fields has the potential to increase the overall

social diversity of the management team, serves to provide an influence for enriching the

behaviors exhibited by managers throughout all levels of the firm, serves as further

motivation for other women within the workplace, and allows for alternative perspectives

and increased information collection at the highest levels of the organization (Dezso &

Ross, 2012). It is possible to see, in spite of the current state of affairs within the

workforce, that the historical perspective of women has changed, and that the role of

women in society has shifted, allowing for the formulation of three distinct role sets, as

opposed to the initial one only.

The glass ceiling is still present, and in spite of attempts to work to reduce its

presence or mitigate the issues associated with its presence, even governmental attempts

have determined the futility of attempting to tackle the matter from a research based

perspective. The role of women in the corporate world is still limited, drastically, although it has improved from its past position, to feats higher than ever before possible, albeit still quite poor. On top of that, women are starting to self-sabotage themselves due to a phenomenon being referred to as the glass cage, a process wherein women work to actively reduce their likelihood for further advancement. This product of society serves to add further stressors to the situation, stemming from the underlying gender identities that are created in a person's formative years.

In spite of such concerns and difficulties, it is possible to find individual companies, like Pandora and Google, that are actively working to decrease discrimination based on gender and are working to show others the means through which it is possible to first identify and then reduce the unconscious bias that a person holds, arguing that all individuals have such a bias and, while it is not something to apologize for or be ashamed of, it is something that should be acknowledged and steps should be taken toward its resolution. These companies are considering gender discrimination and indeed all other forms of discrimination, acknowledging that such a bias was present within their organizations and working to implement and promote programs designed to tackle the problem head on. Google is even working to tackle the issue of the glass cage through the use of anonymous recommendations for promotion put in by coworkers, thus decreasing the amount of self-sabotage present and increasing the likelihood of female promotion, as research has shown women are less likely to advocate themselves for promotion (Google Diversity, 2016).

Current perceptions of diversity officers have served to create an additional layer of complexity to the situation, as while the majority of individuals feel as though discrimination is something that should be removed, with a focus instead placed on merit and earning of a given position, diversity officers find themselves in a difficult place. They create the programs, but to actively enforce the programs would work to create discord in the office, causing the creation of a negative workplace and reducing workplace productivity. The result is that the programs are created and are nominally enforced, but not actively enforced, which causes even larger problems when the situation blows up as a result of a true discrimination case, leaving upper management wondering what occurred, given that they and all others perceived that the programs were working effectively.

Through the application of complexity theory, a necessity for the study of something so complex and yet so chaotic, it becomes possible to understand where the underlying causation of the ultimate issue of gender bias and gender discrimination originates, why there are not more women in the corporate world, and how the organizations will be able to take steps to work to address the matter. Chapter 3, the methodology section presented the methodology used in the completion of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore and describe the perceptions of women on executive leadership positions in C-suites of corporate America. In this chapter, I presented the study's methodology: the approach, the design, how the participants were selected, and how the data were collected and analyzed. There were variations in the perspectives of men and women as to whether or not a gendered bias was present within the workplace. These variations served to indicate that a bias was still present, as did the statistics associated with the gendered variances in those positions (Catalyst, 2012; Cramer, 2012; Egan, 2015; Pew Research Center of Social & Demographic Trends Project, 2015).

Research Design

The basic qualitative research design was used to reference the overall strategy employed within this research study, allowing for the description of the components used in the study and the manner of integration, ensuring that the research problem was addressed effectively (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015; University of Southern California, 2016). To ensure that the research questions were addressed fully, the research design served to ensure that there were no inconsistencies present within the sample population, collected data, or methodology employed in the completion of the study (University of Southern California, 2016). A basic qualitative study was completed to determine the answers to the identified research questions. Qualitative research of all kinds (e.g., phenomenology, case study, basic, and ethnography) was conducted to explore the

construction of meaning in people's lives, mostly to discover and interpret such meaning (Merriam & Tisdale, 2015).

Examples of basic qualitative studies can be found in Rebholz and Baumgartner's (2015) study on the important role of preceptors in retention of new nurses. The researchers interviewed 19 nurses for 1 to 2 hours, also using the constant comparative approach. Silveira and Santini (2015), in a gender study on accounting using a basic qualitative approach, found gender stereotypes prevailed in a mostly female accounting firm because of the idea that women were more suited for the field due to gendered perceptions of gentleness and attention to detail.

A naturalistic qualitative approach was the most appropriate choice for implementation of this study. In this qualitative method, the researcher can explore the experiences of a group of people to develop an understanding of the commonalities of what they share (Glaser, 2004; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is here that the ideal design was found, allowing for an exploration of a societal injustice that must be further explored before it can be addressed, something that I achieved through analyzing the themes that arose from the individual and collective experiences of women who are upper level managers striving to get to the executive level in a large corporation.

Research Question

In order to more effectively explore this subject matter, I identified the following research question: What were the perceptions of female senior level managers of the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions?

Population and Sample

When conducting a basic qualitative study, the determination of the most ideal sample size in the completion of such a task varies widely, with suggestions varying from a sample size of 10 to 20. However, when completing a basic qualitative study that uses participant interviews instead of the collection of data through questionnaire or survey, the goal is to gain information to the point of data saturation (Guetterman, 2015; Gulati, Paterson, Medves, & Luce-Kapler, 2011; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2000; Nastasi, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013. The sample size selected for the completion of this research study was 15.

The population interviewed in the completion of this study consisted of women in upper management in the corporate world, of all races, who were over the age of 25. The women interviewed for the purpose of this study have been a part of the workforce for a minimum of 5 years working at the same job at the time of the interview. This ensured that the women had an awareness of the presence or absence of such biases within their workplace environment and in light of the workplace culture.

Instrumentation

To collect primary data from the sample population, an interview guide was employed (Appendix A). In-depth interviews are commonly used in qualitative research, allowing for the identification of the perspectives of a set group of participants, ensuring that the researcher can attain detailed information regarding a person's thoughts and behaviors associated with a specific subject (Boyce & Neale, 2006). An interview guide must be tailored specifically to the study being conducted; it is necessary to ensure that

factual, open-ended questions are the primary focus of the study, although certain demographic questions may also be included for participant modeling (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In keeping with interview guide design strategies, the participant was asked five demographic and categorical questions and 10 main questions. There were five additional probes that were asked or inserted at times following the participant's response to a main question to allow the participant to elaborate (Boyce & Neale, 2006).

Data Collection

Data collection were collected through semistructured interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. To gain access to the participants, I used the snowballing sampling by asking friends and colleagues to recommend women they knew who fit the criteria and who were willing to be interviewed. Aurini, Heath, and Howells (2016) stated that the snowball sampling is a common strategy for obtaining a sample in qualitative methods. The process involves asking people whom the researcher knows for the names of others who fit the selection criteria.

These participants received an email that included information about the study and what I was seeking to explore (Appendix B). Those who contacted me were scheduled an interview at their convenience. The interviews were held at locations and times that best suited the interviewees. All the responses were kept confidential, and the participants were required to fill out an informed consent form. The interviews were audio-recorded, and I took notes during the interview process. I transcribed the interviews upon completion.

Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was completed to extract all relevant information

from the collected data (Glaser & Luadel, 2013). The coding process ensured that I was

able to extract all relevant data necessary for the purposes of addressing the identified

research questions, and by codifying the data, data extraction and processing occurred

(Glaser & Luadel, 2013). Once the codebook was complete, I identified whether any

correlations were present in the responses received. I determined the emerging themes

and compared the information collected through the completed data analysis to the

secondary data explored in the completion of the literature review. This determined

whether similarities to the collected data existed, or if the situation had changed since the

majority of the data collected within the literature review was published. This, in turn,

allowed for an identification of the answers to the specified research questions.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

Since human participants were used in the completion of the study, it was

necessary to obtain IRB approval (Approval No 04-14-17-0328564) and the informed

consent of the participants in the completion of the research (Driscoll & Brizee, 2012).

All participants were aware of the purpose of the research, and no attempts at coercion

were present within the study; all data were represented honestly and faithfully and all

efforts to reduce and remove possible bias were undertaken (Driscoll & Brizee, 2012).

Participants were informed that their consent must be given to participate in the study and

that their participation were 100% voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time

(Driscoll & Brizee, 2012).

Participants were informed that their information would remain confidential and that no identifying information would be collected from them (Driscoll & Brizee, 2012). In addition, all tape recordings of the interviews taken and all notes I made during the completion of the interviews were stored in a locked drawer accessible only by me and would be destroyed 60 days following the completion of the research study. All transcribed data were stored on my computer, in a password-protected file on a password-protected profile. The computer was locked when not in use and turned on, meaning that the password, known only to me, must be entered to access any data on the machine, adding an additional layer of security.

Summary

Chapter 3 has provided a review of the research design employed in the completion of this study, offered an explanation as to the appropriateness of the design, and explored once more the research questions to be addressed within the study. The population and sample were clearly defined and the instrumentation, (a research guide) were discussed. The processes of data collection and analysis were explored in depth, and care was taken to ensure that all human participants were provided with full ethical considerations. In addition, information was provided on the interview guide and the cover letter for the email. Chapter 4 served as a presentation of the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of women in their quest to occupy executive positions in Corporate America. To accomplish this task, 15 women between the ages of 25 and 60 were interviewed. These were women who worked for a company for a minimum of 5 years and were hoping to occupy C-suites positions in Corporate America. To explore this subject matter more effectively, I aimed to answer the following research question: What were the perceptions of female senior level managers of the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions? The answer to this question was foundational for the study of women's issues as they pertain to employment and career advancement. This study could have greater significance in that the information collected could be used to assist new discriminatory practice policies, working to further reduce the overall presence and likelihood of such discriminative acts within the workplace and allowing effective upward mobility for women in the workplace.

In this chapter, I discussed the setting of the interviews, the demographics of the participants, how the data were collected and analyzed, evidence of trustworthiness and credibility and the results of the data collection and analysis. Table 2 provided information about the demographics of the participants.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participants	Education level	Present position	Age group	Years in workforce
P1	Bachelor	Bank officer	25-40	8
P2	JD	CEO	25-40	12
P3	Masters	Director	25-40	5
P4	Masters	Global head of communication	40-60	20
P5	PhD	Professor	60-90	50
P6	Law degree	Vice president	24-40	10
P7	Masters	Executive director	40-60	30
P8	Bachelor	Chief diversity officer	60-90	21
P9	Bachelor	Director	41-60	30
P10	Bachelor	Program manager	25-40	10
P11	Bachelor	Manager	41-60	24
P12	Bachelor	Vice president	41-60	35
P13	Bachelor	Vice president	41-60	35
P14	Associate	Engagement Ambassador	41-60	40
P15	High school diploma	Manager	41-60	29

Methodology

This study was a hypothesis-generating investigation utilizing the methods of naturalistic inquiry to capture respondents' judgments and perceptions concerning the phenomenon under study. Researchers using a naturalist design look objectively, as opposed to subjectively, at the system being explored, in this case, the corporate organization (Ratner, 2002).

Miles (2012) and Shin (2013) stated that while personal perception does play an important role in a qualitative study, a degree of bias must be removed. It is believed that the underrepresentation of women in male-dominated domains, like those of executive level positions, are caused by a host of different factors including the institutional structure of the organization, bias from male leaders, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, penalties for motherhood, performance standards set by organizations, tasks that could be risky for completion by females and the type of socialization used within high status occupations (Shin, 2013).

The participants agreed to participate in the semistructured interview process as discussed in the previous chapter. The research study was conducted doing face-to-face and phone interviews. The participants were from different corporations in the United States, and they were asked to give their perceptions to a series of 10 questions. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, and each interview was between 45 to 60 minutes. Some participants were asked follow-up questions depending on the answers received during the interview process. The participants were chosen through introductions by friends and from LinkedIn. The demographic profiles of the

participants interviewed were all women between the ages of 25 and 60. Eight of the

participants had undergraduate degrees, three had master's degrees, two had law degrees,

one had a PhD and one had a high school diploma. One of the interviews was conducted

in a café called Financier, one was conducted in the participant's office and the others

were conducted by phone with the participants in their offices.

The participants were asked to give their perceptions of factors they believed were

prohibiting them from advancing to the C-suites. They were assured that their names

would not be used in the interviews. Still, most of them did not seem concerned whether

their names or companies were used. I protected the participants by not using their names

and the names of their companies but assigning them a number (e.g., P1). The results of

the interviews were analyzed through the completion of a content analysis obtained

through coding to allow for the identification of emergent themes. The results were

presented in the order in which they were obtained from the participants, allowing me to

explore the underlying themes in the manner in which they were identified. The interview

questions are in Appendix A.

Research Setting

When conducting a basic qualitative study, the determination of the most ideal

sample size in the completion of such a task varies widely. According to Guest, Bunce,

and Johnson (2006), there is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation. This is

because study designs are not universal. However, researchers do agree on some general

principles and concepts: no new data emerges, and there is an ability to replicate the

study. Such explorations indicate that when completing a basic qualitative study that uses

participant interviews instead of the collection of data through questionnaires or surveys, there is no exact or right answer for a sample of this nature, given that the idea is to gain information to the point of data saturation (Guetterman, 2015; Gulati et al., 2011; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2000; Nastasi, 2015; O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). I conducted 15 interviews and the emerging themes are shown in Figure 1.
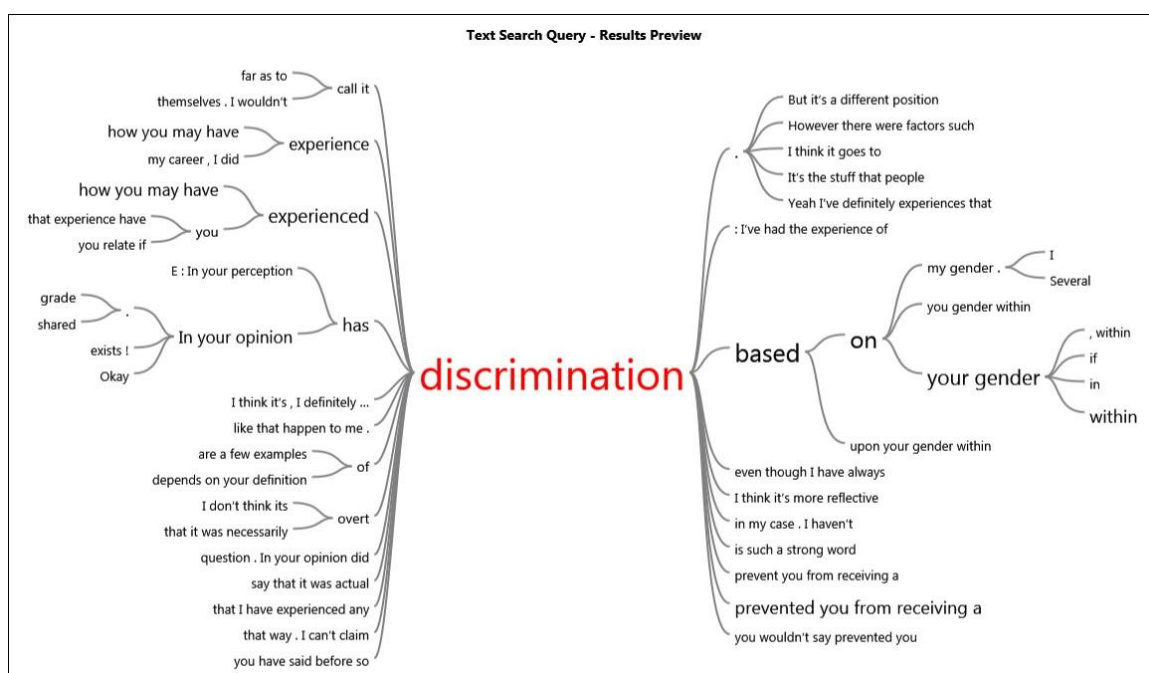
Figure 1. Text search query: Results preview

Demographics

The sample size selected for the completion of this research study was 15. The population interviewed consisted of women in upper management in the corporate world who were over the age of 25. The women who agreed to be interviewed for the purposes of this study were a part of the workforce for a minimum of 5 years working at the same job at the time of the interview. This ensured that the women had an awareness of the

presence or absence of such biases within their workplace environment and the workplace culture.

Data Collection

The data were collected from interviews of women in senior positions after receiving approval from the Walden Institution Review Board (IRB, Approval No 04-14-17-0328564). As mentioned, I approached friends and colleagues for recommendations of women in their networks who met the criteria. I also contacted women who met the criteria on LinkedIn. My friends provided the phone numbers of the potential participants whom I contacted and asked if they (potential participants) would be willing to participate in the study. The participants who agreed to be interviewed were sent an email with a cover letter.

I also sent out emails with cover letters to the women found on LinkedIn, explaining the dissertation and asking them to be part of the study. Thirty requests were sent via LinkedIn and five potential participants responded with interest to participate. I had face-to-face interviews with two of the women and the others were completed using telephone interviews. To ensure that the data were valid and reliable, I only collected data from participants who met the criteria and had signed the consent form before participating. I recorded the interviews and it was transcribed and returned to the participants for verification to either delete or add, however, there were no changes. All the data collected were stored in a password-protected file that is only accessible by me.

Data Analysis

To collect primary data from the sample population, an interview guide was employed (Appendix A). In-depth interviews are commonly utilized in qualitative research, allowing for the identification of the perspectives of a set group of participants, ensuring that I was able to attain detailed information regarding a person's thoughts and behaviors associated with a specific subject (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Because interview guides must be tailored specifically to the study being conducted, it was necessary to ensure that factual, open-ended questions were the primary focus of the study, although certain demographic questions may also be included for participant modeling (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Data were collected through semistructured interviews between 45 to 60 minutes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure data credibility, reliability and validity, I reached out to the participants to verify the findings and accuracy of the data collected. I informed the participants that as soon as the recordings were transcribed, they would receive an email with a copy of the transcript to ensure that everything was accurate. The participants were asked to read the transcript and change anything they thought were incorrect and add anything they deemed valuable. I asked the participants to respond within 48 hours of receiving the transcript. Eight of the participants responded with an email acknowledging that they read the transcripts and verified that the data was accurate from their perspective. After one week, I called the participants who did not respond, and they responded verbally that all the information was correct. After coding and analyzing the data collected, I started

writing a comprehensive description of the data, using direct quotes from the participants. According to Hunt (2011), the use of direct quotes is important to ensure data reliability and validity.

<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Discrimination in the Workplace

The first question asked of participants was to explain how they may have experienced discrimination in the workplace and the second if such discrimination prevented them from receiving a promotion or failing to receive a high-status project. The answers to the first two questions from four of the women interviewed stated that they had not personally experienced discrimination in the workplace; however, two of the women stated that they knew that discrimination against women occurred. As Participant 2 stated,

> I wouldn't call it discrimination in my case. I haven't had anything that's extreme. But I do think there are circumstances that I see that relate to women and their willingness to take responsibility at times or other times or the desire to want to take responsibility or be given responsibility in certain circumstances as well.

Participant 5 expressed a degree of uncertainty: "It could have been some of my experiences in my earlier years. It could have been my age when I entered the work force. Those could have been two factors." Participant 7, who worked in a small department with "few opportunities for promotion or advancement" where promotions come "every 5 to 7 years" stated that it was "more based on salary levels than performance."

Participant 8 likened becoming a partner to a "dog and pony show" and did not "want to be a part of something that didn't really want [her] to be a part of" all the time she was "one of the few women of color to reach certain levels, especially in this particular industry." Participant 9 did not feel she had experienced discrimination, but Participant 10 thought the biggest factors were "age and being a woman" and not making comparable salaries to those of men. Not only that, but she complained about constantly having to "prove her worth and speak up to obtain promotions." Interestingly, Participant 11 was tricked into not accepting an outside job, so they could keep her only to find out that she was not being given more money to stay after the job offer was rescinded. Participant 12 continued,

> I've had the experience of saying something relevant and attention-worthy in a meeting and being totally ignored…only to have a male peer praised for repeating the same thing minutes later. I've been accused of being emotional when my male peers were praised for passion. I've been paid less than my male counterparts because of assumptions made about my financial needs as a single woman versus theirs. I've been excluded from the meetings "before the meetings" and from meetings "after the meetings" where decisions have been made. And I've not been included in golf course discussions where critical information has been shared.

Participant 13 gave a general example of discrimination where as a person of color, she often found it hard to discern if the discrimination was due to race or gender or a combination of the two: "But I've had circumstances where people would discount

what I had to say or not pay attention to it and then have a man say the exact same thing and then suddenly there was meaning to what I said." She continued, "Or the same things, have someone light say exactly what I had just said exactly the same way or perhaps a slightly different way and so now everybody thinks that it's a brilliant comment." She also believed discrimination often came in the form of salary differentials between women and men and the way society is: "I think that part of it is based on a patriarchal society, and part that men can be misogynistic and a lot of them control those things. And so, men are the ones doing the hiring and firing."

Participant 14 discussed a few personal characteristics that take people aback: her small stature and her booming voice about which she gets professionally inappropriate remarks: "One, my stature is really small, and people are actually surprised when they meet me if they've just spoken to me over the phone." She continued, "And then they meet me, and they think, oh my God, you have such a presence about you. I expected you to be taller. So that is just it; it's just a physical hurdle to get over." One way she met male colleagues on equal ground was to learn to play golf well, which "became a neutralizer of gender for sexism." Participant 15 since 2008 and especially in the last few years was denied specific jobs in the Sacramento area "even though [she] held a higher-level position" and was "denied that opportunity to actually get those jobs" and it just seems to be in [her] opinion a concern about why "she's not able to have that opportunity."

Of the eleven participants, eight participants indicated that they had personally experienced gender discrimination, and two indicated that they felt as though they had

experienced ageism as well as Participant 10 mentioned regarding having to prove her

worth constantly and speak up despite her greater experience and higher education.

With eleven of the participants experiencing discrimination based on their gender, and

another two of the participants indicating that they were aware of gender discrimination

within a workplace setting, this leaves the majority (13 out of 15) of participants in

agreement that such an occurrence is still prevalent within the workplace setting.

Participants were next asked to explore the topic further, discussing their opinions on

how discrimination may have personally prevented the receipt of a promotion or a failure

to receive a high-status project. The responses here were somewhat more varied. Some

participants indicated that they had not personally experienced this issue, while others

explained that the situation was more complicated than that, or that the organization at

which they worked did not grant promotions or projects in a manner that would be

affected by gender. The responses served to indicate the true complexity of the situation,

even in instances wherein the answer was not one that provided a direct response to the

question.

     As the data showed, most women cannot answer specifically whether an instance

of gender-based discrimination has directly resulted in the lack of a promotion or the lack

of being assigned to a large or high-profile project. The reason for such a response varied

among participants, with some participants indicating that age or other areas of

discrimination could have played a role, while still others indicated that gender

discrimination did not necessarily equate to a lack of promotion or project acquisition,

but could be present without promotion within the company being affected or the

decision to assign a project to a given individual being influenced. Two participants focused solely on addressing the question as it was asked, without providing additional elaboration, noting that their promotion or project acquisition had not been influenced because of gender.

Participants 3 and 4 indicated that they felt as though the discrimination that occurred was less based on ageism or gender or race and was instead more focused on the perspectives of the individual engaging in discriminatory practices, commentary that could lead into further exploration of the topic, providing insight into the difficulties faced by the female population regarding their personal advancement. Indeed, such commentary serves to provide further credence to the study outcomes, as current literature on the topic explores the subtleties of discrimination, investigating the idea that multiple types of discrimination can be present, that one may not be more predominant than the other, and that the effects of those discriminatory acts may be indirect or elusive, ever present yet not overtly affecting larger opportunities within the workplace setting (Deitch et al., 2003; Mishra, Smith, & Battle, 2013; Offermann et al., 2014; Sipe, Larson, McKay, & Moss, 2014).

Women in Executive Positions

Participants were next asked to identify their perceptions regarding the reasons that more women do not hold more positions in the executive suite in corporate America. The following question asked of participants was a request that they identify the factors that they felt might derail women professionals from reaching the executive suite, a slightly different question from the first. The first question sought to explore female

perspectives relating to the general reasons that more women do not hold more executive positions, while the second question in this thematic area asked participants to explore the specific factors that might cause a woman's career to derail. Once more this question resulted in a certain amount of complexity in the responses. For some participants, the response was simple: "For most women, the path to the C-suite (corporate suite) is the same as for a man," but there are differences based on breaks in female employment. Many indicated that the decision to start a family and to become pregnant, coupled with the time off work following the birth of a child led to gaps in the work history of the individual, which in turn worked to push back the career of the female. To bypass such a concern, participants indicated that women needed to be aware of this potential setback and be able to plan accordingly.

In Participant 1's lengthy answer addressing the path to the C-suite, she indicated that there were gaps due to family obligations. Still, she believed that "companies are looking for ways to eliminate some of the barriers, but this could limit women's ability to move beyond specific types of jobs that lead to the CEO position." She stated that women might become chief communications officers, for example, "the C-suite without the profit and loss responsibilities." She continued, "Women have fewer sponsors and more mentors" and that sponsors are those who advocate for women in times of key promotion decisions. Because women tend to feel that they must meet *all* job qualifications, it may lead to lack of confidence, which "can be misinterpreted as lack of talent." Executives particularly "don't want to hold the hand" of their important employees but rather, they expect them to "create value to the bottom line." Participant 1 added that women need to

learn how to speak up and not feel uncomfortable doing so, and it should be considered that family responsibilities often lead to not wanting to take on too many work responsibilities.

Participant 2 stated that corporate jobs "don't really seem desirable to women" because of the social structure of the organization. In a side comment, she stated that to the younger generation, such a structure was not welcome to either gender. In other words, the environment at the corporate level is unwelcoming to females; therefore, females do not have an interest in placing themselves in that situation. The workplace dynamics are such that the employees can see what the different interactions are like in each level of the organization, and then make a conscious decision to participate or not to participate within such an environment (Pauksztat & Salin, 2017). Participant 2 emphasized that many jobs simply do not "really seem desirable to women" because they are "so demanding" and really hard to see the "impact on a personal level and then the personal demands on top of it has made it a less attractive position." She noted that she "personally for example never wanted to be a partner at a law firm." She didn't think it was because she did not "want to work hard or that [she was] not ambitious; it's just that it makes no sense to be a partner at a law firm." She added that she did not "even understand why the men do it."

Participant 3 brought the conversation back to the need to understand the perspectives of others within the situational context, in this case, the promotion of women to the executive suite. As she stated,

I don't know if it's just human nature if you've got two identical people to consider for that promotion or that next level or that fresh opportunity or whatever. You're going to go with the one that you're the most comfortable with and the one that you're the most comfortable with is likely the one who you think is most like you. I think if you're [female] and if it's mostly men making those decisions, then it's mostly men that are going to be picking other men.

In expressing this sentiment, Participant 3 was indicating that there was no discrimination against women, but instead there was simply a preference toward a man for the position for which the candidates were being considered. Participant 3 was not the only participant to explore this topic, but was the only participant to state the idea so succinctly. This sentiment was present in several other sociological concepts, oftentimes to a lesser degree (Baker & Beagan, 2014; Bruckmuller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslamn, 2014; Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2013). On the other hand, Participant 3 emphasized the women "have to take responsibility for [their] careers [themselves]." That they "need to stop that racket. That's a racket, that's a way of thinking and it's not accurate. It's not factual if we say it enough times and we believe that it is." She referred to the 2016 Democratic presidential candidate: "But again, you go back to Hillary Clinton; she could easily say that 'oh, I didn't win because I was a woman.' But no, the country was ready for a female president; just not *that* female president."

Some women had strong family support that enabled them to pursue top career paths. Participant 4 noted that she used to believe that women had to leave the workforce "because men don't help." However, her "husband proved [her] wrong; he's a stay-at-

home dad for [her] kids." Participant 5 thought that a path to the C-suite could depend on the "progressiveness" of the company and what type of industry it is, "but mostly it depends on who is making those decisions." Participant 6 believed that "raising a family can derail women – they often need to wait until their family is raised before being able to fully focus on their careers." Participant 7 tried to dispel the *lack of confidence* myth (as women having to blame themselves) referring to a report on what is holding women back: "I think that's absolute nonsense. I think the reason that women lack confidence is because they're treated as less valuable often by men. That's what happens, for people are social beings." She offered a few reasons that it might not be women's fault: "So, if you're interrupted more and you're talked over more, if you get criticism for the same work as your male colleagues but you get more criticism that's going to affect your confidence."

Participant 8 stressed the importance of making advancement is not only about passively waiting feedback but also reaching out for it: "If you can't get it directly, then indirectly, which is not very comfortable… it's certainly not comfortable for me, and I ended up having to figure out how to do that to get the information that I needed." Participant 9 thought that derailment was more "a choice by the woman professional." She added, "If there was any derailment going on outside of her control, it would probably be the views from others. If she misses work for sick children, or school events, that might factor into any promotions."

Participant 10 noted that "flexibility is key," pushing back from the societal idea of a close-minded work culture "whereas women [we] tend to see work as *only one piece*

of the pie. This mindset could hinder women because other priorities can take precedent."

Participant 11 emphasized the importance of the family factor: "I had to juggle my role as

a mother, and a wife, and my career. Sometimes it was detrimental because if my child

got sick or there was a parent teacher conference I had to make the conflict work." She

believed that although such family obligations can be detrimental to a career path, "it also

depends on how the culture of the organization you work with." Participant 11 added that

she wanted to be a role model and show her children "that hard work pays off … yes, you

can work be a parent and be successful at what you do. So, to [her] something that might

hold [her] back is the same thing that propels me to push forward."

Participant 12 had strong opinions on why women were kept from the C-suite and

what could derail them or imbue them with success: "Women may tend not to push their

way in for fear of being labeled as too aggressive. They may get discouraged along the

way and give up." She continued, "They may try too hard to be like the successful men

they see at the executive level instead of playing to their own unique strengths."

Participant 12's strongest point involved confidence: "Absolutely *nothing* can take the

place of confidence. It is the single biggest factor that distinguishes women who make it

to the executive level from those who just want to get there. Second is sponsorship. Not

mentorship, but sponsorship."

Participant 13 give an example of not being sure if race or gender or a

combination of the two were factors in not reaching the C-suite: "But I've had

circumstances where people would discount what I had to say or not pay attention to it

and then have a man say the exact same thing and then suddenly there was meaning to

what I said." She added, "or the same things, have someone light say exactly what I had just said. Exactly the same way or perhaps a slightly different way and so now everybody thinks that it's a brilliant comment." She did not think that discrimination had to do too much with promotions but talked about "a salary differential, I think, or when I asked for a raise and been denied."

Participant 14 found out that learning "to play golf was a neutralizer of gender for sexism." She had described her small stature and her "booming voice," as not being a factor for not reaching the top levels as much as "cronyism." In her case it was more about nationalism than gender, for the postal agency for which she worked had men of Hispanic backgrounds in charge: "[They] stuck together and they promoted one another whether or not they in my perspective were qualified or not, so I would term that *cronyism*." She added that men tend to be more aggressive and many women "don't have the inclination to be as powerful as a man," though she admitted her evidence was anecdotal. Participant 14 also believed that one factor in derailing an executive goal was a "sense of defeat… regardless of gender" that women who just acquiesce and "cast aside ambitions" should probably not keep going. On the other hand, she said, "The way I see things, if I absolutely need to get something done, I'm going to figure out how to get there, period, just as long as it's ethical and legal."

Participant 15 answered the question regarding reasons women do not hold more positions in the executive suite as, "I don't see a lot of females pursuing higher level roles. One, I think that it's because they don't feel supported or they're not being coached and mentored the same as the male gender." Participant 15 often saw derailment of an

executive career brought on by other women. She noted that when women do reach the

C-suite, rather than helping other women, they seek out "male senior managers or middle

level managers that they're considering for promotion or detail or developmental

opportunities before they approach female senior managers."

Given that this shift in perspective from one of persecution to the idea that certain

genders are preferred within different settings and in different capacities, such an idea is

worth strong consideration when exploring matters of discrimination. That is not to state

that discrimination does not occur. Yet, in all situations in which it is perceived, the

assertion that the presence of discrimination is present may not be wholly accurate, or a

total representation of the entirety of the situation. As a lesser emergent theme, three of

the women noted that the presence of a mentor, the right mentor in light of the company

culture, the type of position being offered, and even the temperament of the individual

offering mentoring services could serve as a boon or a detriment toward the upward

mobility of the female employee.

Two themes emerged as a result of this question. The first was that family serves

as a primary derailing factor for women professionals, preventing them from reaching the

executive suite. The second factor was confidence and motivation. Most participants

indicated that women do not desire CEO positions, which in turn works to derail the

careers of those women, as there is no further forward momentum. Still further, the idea

of a lack of confidence translating to a lack of motivation was prefaced with the idea that

it is not so much a lack of confidence as a loss of confidence. As noted, Participant 6

discussed being interrupted, talked over, and criticized, and Participant 10 talked about

the work life balance in which women often view their careers as only a piece of the pie. The latter added that the mindset will likely change in younger generations and that "flexibility is key." Thus, the need for a work-life balance, and a shift in priorities among the female population toward a more holistic approach to life, combined with the manner of treatment and perceptions of others are seen as the primary reasons for career derailment amongst women on career track paths.

Because the focus is not solely on the factors that may prevent a woman from attaining the heights of the corporate ladder, the next question asked of participants was if they could identify their perceptions of the factors that can aid in propelling a female professional upward into an executive suite. Sponsorship was defined as a key factor in the advancement of the female executive, as was the need to shift from the perspective that society owes something to females, with women who have made the transition to corporate life working to ensure that more doors are opened for those women who are lower on the corporate ladder and who have a defined interest in career advancement.

A lesser discussed idea was that the industry in which the woman chooses to advance plays a role in that advancement, with some fields or industries being more open to the advancement of a female executive than others. Each of the different aspects addressed by the participants can be summed up into a single emergent theme or idea, that the workplace environment must be conducive to the advancement of a woman through the ranks, allowing for a strong work-life balance while at the same time ensuring that women are able to maintain the priorities that are desirable for a healthy life while still receiving the same advancement opportunities that are already in place for

their male counterparts. As Participant 7 stated, "One key factor is having the right workplace environment – an organization that truly appreciates women (and everyone!) and understands work life balance."

Societal Attention

The sixth question asked of participants was whether they felt as though the issue was one that warranted societal attention, and requested that the participants elaborate on their responses. All participants indicated in the affirmative that the shift toward females in executive positions should be an issue focused on by society. Justification for this perspective varied only slightly, with some indicating that the socio-political climate meant that it was more important than ever to address the issue, others citing increasing globalization as the need behind increasing women in executive roles. Still others indicated that there were enough organizations that were working to ensure that the number of women in executive positions were being increased.

Several participants cautioned that although women have made advancements in society, there appears to be a laxer approach to advancement, and with the current political climate in the United States, there was a need now to be more vigilant than ever, or those advancements that have been made may start to decrease. Another participant elaborated to state that "Women represent 50% of the potential workforce and creating more access [for them] to get to the C-suite will provide more growth for the economy." While it is unclear whether such a perspective would indeed hold true, in terms of actualization of economic growth through increased advancement within the corporate world, all women were clear in their responses. They felt that more should be done to

improve the number of women present within the corporate world, and each could offer clear justification because such an event should occur.

The seventh question explored if the participant thought that women not being able to advance to the C-suites warrants society's attention. In essence, looking beyond just the perspective of whether such an action should occur, the question was to identify why the participants felt as though corporate America and society could benefit from more women present within the executive suite. The differences in the participants' perspective brought up varied yet pertinent results. The responses were primarily concentrated around the need for increased diversity at the corporate level. Although the participants' responses were a bit complex while exploring the different nuances of diversity, they all felt the diversity of female corporate executives would benefit the organization.

Most of the participants provided insight regarding the benefits to be obtained from the presence of more women in executive roles. Participant 2 thought that more "diversity of thought that you have in any kind of organization is helpful… having the representation from females as part of any kind of process is an important part of that diversity of thought picture." Participant 3 agreed that "diversity and inclusion of all kinds would benefit the executive suite." She added, "You've got to have an emotional head to heart connection with that customer base… when you have people of different backgrounds coming together, you have people with different ideas and perspectives, which leads to innovation of all sorts." Participant 4 echoed the sentiment: "Diversity only makes companies stronger; the ability to look at things with different perspectives

only makes companies stronger. The more diverse your company the better you're going to be."

Participant 5 noted that "men and women make decisions differently; however, the education and experience that women have lends themselves to good decisions." She continued, "But I think for companies that are looking to be more progressive they certainly need to have that side of the decision-making process. It needs to be much more integrated." Participant 6 stated, "Basically, we would have better decision making and probably a little bit more stable environment," and Participant 7 felt that diversity "of all kinds is critical in the executive suite—different talents and perspectives make everything better, and more successful." She claimed, "I personally feel that most women are much more organized and efficient and bring unique skills and understanding to the table."

Participant 8 said, "I think it's the same benefit that they get from having diverse individuals in the executive suites with a different perspective; a different way of thinking, a different way of doing things because there's no one size fits all." She emphasized that "the more diverse people that they have in these seats the more successful these companies will be." Participant 9 agreed: "I do. It is not a man's world any longer." Participant 10 believed that "women bring a new fresh perspective and can think long term big picture. They can drive change and make tough decisions. Many women are master multitaskers and highly collaborative but are not afraid to speak their minds." She continued, "They believe in trial and error learning from their mistakes. They earn other people's trust and can influence others. They stay true to themselves and their values."

In speaking about women in executive positions, Participant 11 noted, "I think we bring something to the table that's very lacking. I call it a more humanistic approach because sometimes it's a cultural thing." She clarified her thoughts: "It could be men are supposed to be strong hearted, no nonsense type of people. Sometimes I like to think of myself as firm but fair in the way that I lead and take into consideration the big picture." Participant 12 thought of "women are nurturers, so they often excel at developing others which is a much-needed skill as succession planning becomes more critical." She added, "Also, because gender bias makes ascension to the executive suite more challenging for women, they tend to work much harder to get there…and that work ethic stays with them." She claimed that women take "fewer risks so they tend to be better 'rule followers' thereby setting the best examples for their team members in the work force."

Participant 13 thought there are some companies "very much committed to equal opportunities based on any kind of difference—race, gender ethnicity, those kinds of things." Some companies are "enlightened." Participant 14 thought that "what women would bring to the table is perhaps different than what a man would bring to the table." She tried to express herself more clearly: "Again, women have different sensibilities than men do… I don't want to say it's softness to the table, but it would be… I want to say it's something intrinsic, maybe it's empathy." She admitted that what she said might be "an overgeneralization, but most women are more empathetic than men are, which would come into play in the workforce where we aren't treating employees as cogs in a wheel and just an asset as opposed to a human resource." Participant 15 was more adamant about the differences between women and men: "Absolutely, personally, I think females

are more task orientated, more organized, able to do multiple things and not stress over it,

so I think that *yes* corporate America would definitely benefit from more female leaders."

On question eight, each interviewee provided a response to this question

indicating that diversity was the emergent theme in this case; they thought that women

brought something additional to the table that was either lacking from the current

corporate world or which was not wholly present. Such a finding necessitates a further

exploration and implementation of the integration between the genders at the leadership

or corporate levels. For some, this meant an increased ability to drive change, while for

others this meant that women brought differing perspectives to the table. The creation of

alternative ideas could be used to boost the company within the industry, allowing for

improvements that would not otherwise be present within the organizational structure or

marketplace in which the organization operated.

The Utility of Women in the Corporate Field

The participants indicated that there was a high utility associated with the

presence of women in the corporate field. Still, the types of programs, methods, or

actions that were being taken, either in a general or specific sense, in working toward the

improved integration of females at the corporate level were not easily identifiable.

Participants were next asked to identify any methods that were currently being used to

assist women in making the transition to executive suites. Myriad responses were present

as to current endeavors within the corporate world designed to assist in the transitioning

process.

Participant 1 offered a concise list of "many things" she had "seen in the field":

(a) temporary role swap to accommodate family needs, (b) elimination of gender specific benefits. Instead of maternity versus paternity leave just have family leave, (c) senior women are required to mentor a junior high potential talent, (d) executive coaches to help the women make the transition to the C-suite (including wardrobe and communication style), (e) focused efforts to promote the female leadership outside of the organization, and (f) gender diversity goal is driven from the CEO down through the organization.

Participant 2 was not sure: "You know I don't actually, no I don't. I feel like you read about mentorship circles and you hear about things in the paper … in terms of initiatives and efforts." She admitted, "I personally don't see anything in my life that is an opportunity that I'm taking advantage of or could take advantage of."

Participant 3 thought that "companies are consciously working at it, consciously working to develop it." She stated, "I think of the company that I work at for myself like if you were to look on our website. Our senior management team is on it and there's not a woman among them and it's the most un-diverse group of individuals that you could imagine." She elaborated on what she meant at length:

> However, why would somebody like me work here and be excited about working here because when you interview and walk the halls you see a totally different picture of [what] the company is. So that next level right under them is extremely diverse in terms of nationalities, geographies, religions insomuch as people they visibly display in the workplace wearing yarmulkes or hajibs or whatever. It's ethnically diverse, and it's diverse from a gender specific perspective. There are people from almost every country on the map working here and it's really

exciting to be in an environment like that, but you don't see that at that C-level of the company.

Participant 3 conceded that the company may be changing, however, she stated what's exciting about it is that you see a pipeline being developed and you see the rising stars of the company and you're hopeful that there's a pipeline of talent that's coming through. It's just a matter of time before that picture on the website becomes a little bit more colorful and diverse in ways that you might expect.

She then painted a more hopeful picture for the future:

So, I think there's a lot of that happening and percolating in corporate America. Some companies have done it and gotten there and continue to do it. But I think more and more companies are seeing the benefits and the value of it and I think they've got talent development, recruitment, retention, development programs, training programs and they're investing in the development of talent and they're encouraging the diversity of thought to grow inside their organization in really neat and exciting ways. So, I think there is a lot happening in corporate America. I've seen it in you know the last twenty some odd years that I've been working in it. The annual reports of companies that I've either worked for or with or just kind of benchmarked. It's changing; this space of these companies is literally changing so I think it's just a matter of time before the C-suite starts to update to reflect that.

Finally, Participant 3 cautioned, "But it won't happen if whatever the group in question might be or we as women comes to it with a victimization type of mentality."

She concluded, "It will only come through it if we think it's possible and that we think that we might just be the person to help do that." Participant 4 thought advancement opportunities were hard won and often not sufficient in smaller companies: "If you stay with the company they make sure you have mentors and send you to leadership classes yet want you to work ten million hours. At least they really try to get you ready for that next level." She continued to discuss the disparities in opportunities between large and small companies: "So, they're only mentoring people from the big companies because they want to be able to say when you go to their staff like our members come from multi-million, billion-dollar companies." She added,

> Just the financial statements of my company were like five times too small for me to qualify and we have 200 employees. I mean we're not a tiny company. We're not a mom and pop shop. We got two hundred employees and we're in four other countries today and we're opening, launching in another country later this year. So, we'll be in five different international locations by the end of the year. We serve companies that are in seventy-nine different countries and our customers are multi-billion-dollar companies. Yet we're too small for me to qualify for membership in the organizations that would be most helpful to me. So, I feel like I'm floundering but it's okay.

Participant 5 mulled over the question of training: "But training isn't enough unless you have a stronger way of putting women into those positions." Participant 6 acknowledged the company's efforts for initiatives to advance women yet how others [initiatives] were neglected: "I see all of these networks and confidence trainings being

set up; speak with confidence and such. … but in the end, the blind spot in all of these corporate initiatives is the men; the fact that they need to adjust as well." Participant 7 did not "think that progressive companies have mentoring/sponsoring programs that can help women in this area" but added an encouraging note: "There are also non-profits to help diversify Boards and assist women in their careers, so there is hope."

Participant 8 discussed programs "currently being used to assist women to make the transition to executive suite." She thought "a lot of companies, this one included, do a good job of providing women's networking and opportunities within those groups. Outside of that I'm sure there are." She did concede that she was only focused on what is available within her company: "I've not really had to go outside to kind of get that level of support. But I'm sure they exist, right? There are many women-related things in my industry that I don't necessarily participate in but they're certainly there."

Participant 9 could not recall one such initiative. Participant 10 mentioned succession planning. She said, "It is one tool I see being used, companies want leaders who have had experience working within the company running it." She acknowledged, "Sometimes it is all about who you know and the networks you have built, it is always good to have someone in your corner to pull you up." She added, "Women also need to be convinced that they are good enough and should be able to strive for anything they dream of. It is important that women don't lose their motivation."

Participant 11 highlighted mentoring programs: "Well there are more mentoring programs that are being out there and at one of the institutions where I got one of my master's they have a mentoring program for women who want to go into executive

leadership roles." She often gets invitations from the college in which she works to see if she's "willing to speak to someone or mentor someone or provide some advice in the field of higher education." Thus, she acknowledged its presence and said that it was "always really good news" and added, "I think that will enable the women that are coming up through the ranks to get a little further than the ones that came up through the ranks 20 years ago." Participant 12 did not provide any other answer than "no."

Participant 13 shared, "You probably take on woman as mentees because they believe they have things to offer; they have skills." She stated that "there are people out there who really are themselves good leaders and therefore they mentor the people coming behind them which then will offer those people the opportunity to succeed."

Participant 14 replied to the question at length:

I would say that is would be continuing education, attending conferences, building relationships with the people that are in that particular industry, building relationships that in those relationships could be stepping stones to breaking that ceiling to get those executive positions. I think that if I look back on my own career that it really is in the workforce all about relationships whether it's wellbeing or performance or productivity or promotions. There's a lot to be said for relationships in the workplace. So, I think that would be one way to maneuver in a career for a woman to navigate through her career for an executive position. A mentor who would go back and align with relationships, someone who can help show the pathways to the higher levels of success, someone to model after

whether it's business acumen or whatever—someone to model after. I think that is

an excellent strategy.

Participant 15 did not see it as a matter of performance: "No. I think that it is

really performance based. If you can perform and be consistently a high performer,

you're going to get noticed regardless of gender. The problem is how many females get

the opportunity for that exposure?

Discussion of Themes

The primary theme that emerged was the use of leadership or mentoring programs

as a means of allowing females to advance through the ranks. However, it should be

noted that there were several women who indicated that they were not aware of any

programs at all, and one participant who provided insight as to why those women may be

unaware of advancement programs. Participant 4 explained in detail how she had

transitioned from a position at a larger company to a position at a smaller company.

Within the larger organization, she would have had access to leadership training

programs and other similar offerings. However, the smaller organization did not have the

resources to offer any programs of that nature, and when she attempted to explore

opportunities for similar types of training on her own, without the resources of the

organization; she found that she was unqualified to participate in those programs due to

the size of the organization. In essence, she was denied access to services that would have

assisted her in improving her knowledge base and her skillset because the company that

she worked was considered to be too small by the organizations that provide training and

assistance opportunities for women entering into corporate positions. In addition, the

organization where she worked did not have the resources to be able to provide those programs for her, although she was second only to the CEO within that organization.

Summary

Results indicated that the presence of gender discrimination in the workplace was well known within the sample population. Participants could not provide specific answers regarding whether an instance of gender-based discrimination had directly resulted in the lack of a promotion or the lack of being assigned to a large or high-profile project. The reason for such a response varied among participants. Some participants indicated that age or other areas of discrimination could have played a role, while still others indicated that gender discrimination did not necessarily equate to a lack of promotion or project acquisition. Still, discrimination could be present without promotion within the company being affected or the decision to assign a project to a given individual being influenced.

The primary emergent theme as to why women did not hold more executive level positions within the current executive suites of corporate America was due to the different perspectives of women. They had different perspectives on a work life balance and different prioritizations. This difference in work life balance perspectives, with a primary focus on family, was seen as the reason that many executive women's careers were derailed or slowed, with a secondary emergent theme of decreased confidence and or motivation, stemming from the environment in which the women worked.

The emergent theme regarding the reason that women are able to be propelled upward through company ranks was the right corporate setting and or the right mentor or sponsor within the organization would serve as the boost needed to move up within an

organization. Participants further indicated that they felt as though this need for support was a societal issue that warranted attention, and that there was a definitive need, perhaps now more so than ever, to continue to target this particular area of concern. While the reasons behind the sentiment were somewhat varied, the ultimate response that the issue should be addressed remained the same.

The primary theme as to why the female participants believed that corporate America would benefit from the increased presence of females was due to the need for increased diversity, different perspectives, and different approaches to the same situation. Such changes would allow for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the different matters deemed necessary of corporate attention. Also, when exploring whether there were current programs present that were designed to assist in the transitionary process of a female to a corporate position, the results showed that there were programs. There were both training programs and sponsorship or mentorship programs that worked to assist women in acquiring the skills that were necessary to be effective in executive positions. Yet, such programs were often only available to those who were accepting a corporate position within larger organizations due to a lack of available resources in a smaller organization and a lack of requirements being met for programs that are provided in the same topic outside of the purview of the organization.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to explore the perspectives of women in their quest to occupy executive positions in corporate America. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted given that this particular type of research methodology and design afforded me the availability of offering a comprehensive summarization of the phenomena, events, and experiences held by a specific group of individuals (Creswell, 2012). Analysis of the study results indicated that the presence of gender discrimination within the workplace was well known in the sample population, although participants could not provide specific answers as to whether an instance of gender-based discrimination directly resulted in the lack of a promotion or the lack of assignation to a high-profile project or a large project. Participants had highly specific views as to the reasons for such occurrences, holding strong feelings on the matter and believing that the presence of females in executive positions was necessary. Chapter 5 served as the conclusion to the study. I interpreted these findings, explored the limitations of the study, offered recommendations, discussed the implications and concluded the study as a whole.

Interpretation of Findings

Following the analysis of collected data, specific themes emerged, presented as the findings, or results, of the study in the preceding chapter. It was not enough, however, to simply document the findings of a study. For those findings to have relevancy, their place within the context of the extant body of literature must be explored. More specifically, the findings were explored within the context of the literature synthesized in

Chapter 2 of the study, allowing for an understanding of where the collected knowledge fitted in the overall understanding of the topic, identifying areas of similarity and differences and areas in which the knowledge base on the subject was extended centered on those findings.

Analysis of the study results showed that the presence of gender discrimination in the workplace was well known within the sample population. Such a finding supported the exhaustive literature on the subject, documenting the presence of the glass ceiling, glass cage, and gender bias within the workplace (Acker, 2006; Jaffe, 2014; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Morrison et al., 1994; Tyson, 2015; Warrell, 2013; White, 2016; Zevallos, 2013). The literature review spans more than 24 years; from a societal standpoint, the completion of this study confirms that the problem still exists, in spite of literature indicating the value of women within the workplace setting (Warrell, 2013).

The majority of participants did not state that gender-based discrimination or gender bias had resulted in a lack of a promotion, or that their gender had prevented them from being assigned either a large project or a high-profile project, the results indicated that such bias is one of the most predominant aspects of gender discrimination within the workplace setting (La France, 2014; Merriam Webster, 2016; Morrison et al., 1994; The Economist, 2005). The primary reason given for the inability to state whether their gender had cost them a promotion or prevented them from being assigned to lead a high profile or large-scale project was that the females could not state what the motivations

were for those who were tasked with giving out promotions or what the motivations of the individuals were who were tasked with assigning project leaders.

The participants did not provide an answer in the project issue given that they did not have insight into the minds of those who were in charge. This doubt suggested an additional area for future research, to be discussed in greater depth in the subsequent recommendations section. However, it is important to note that this particular perspective, those of the individuals in charge, may not be answered conclusively. While it is true that participants promise to provide honest responses when participating in a research study, there is no guarantee that the answers received are indeed honest, so to discriminate against someone based on gender is against the law. Even in an anonymous or confidential study, the participant would take a legal risk answering in the affirmative regarding discrimination against an individual based on gender (EEOC, 2017).

This situation implies that if such discrimination is a driving force in the decision not to promote an individual or to make that individual a project leader, the likelihood of that being admitted is markedly low when looking at the matter from a self-preservation aspect. It should be noted that despite not being able to confirm whether or not gender played a role in the failure to receive a promotion or be assigned to lead a project, participants indicated that gender discrimination is not something that necessarily equates to either of these things and can indeed be present without a promotion or leadership role being affected. This type of gender bias or gender discrimination is likewise discussed within the literature, recognized by the Department of Labor in its last study in 1995,

although the committee who was tasked with the exploration of this consideration has since been decommissioned in spite of the persistence of the issue (La France, 2014).

According to Women's History Project (2016) and Wootton (1997), participants stated that they believed that the primary reason that there were not more women holding executive positions in the United States at the current time was due to the different perspectives of females. Compared to their opinion of the male perspective, women regarded work life balance with a different set of prioritizations. Researchers have shown that such a perspective is a result of the changes to societal dynamics within the United States that have shifted the female outlook. Historically, women were presented with opportunities that differed from those given to males; the woman's role was in the home (Women's History Project, 2016; Wootton, 1997). As societal conventions changed and the presence of females in the workplace increased, it was the female perspective that shifted, transitioning from needing to care for the home to needing to attend to work matters and needing to tend to the traditionally female duties on the home front (Women's History Project, 2016; Wootton, 1997).

As inflation, a rising cost of living, and a push toward equality all occurred in the United States, the female perspective took root that the woman was supposed to be able to hold her own in the office, while still maintaining hearth and home. The new perspective resulted in a need to focus on a work life balance that would allow the female individual to both participate wholly in the workforce and be engaged and active within the home. This stereotype is one of the reasons that while women comprise approximately half of the workforce, the majority of those women are not in executive

positions and certainly not in a comparative ratio to that of their male counterparts (Chu & Posner, 2013). This difference in work life balances and perspectives, with the female focus predominantly on that of the family, was seen as the reason that many women's careers were either derailed or slowed, which was likewise confirmed within the current body of literature. There, gender was shown to play one of the largest roles in forward movement in the corporate world (Chu & Posner, 2013; Kossek & Zonia, 1993).

The study results indicated that the participants believed that a woman's career could be boosted or propelled through the corporate world with the right mentorship or sponsorship. This particular idea was not explored within the body of literature synthesized in the literature review, which serves to indicate another area of research that could be explored. Further exploration of the topic would allow for the potential identification of changes to current programs that could be made to better understand how to make changes in this regard.

Participants further indicated that they felt the lack of women within executive positions in the United States was a societal concern, one that warranted attention. Participants also indicated a belief that there was a definitive need, perhaps now more so than ever, to target this area of concern. While the reasons behind the sentiment were varied, the ultimate responses on why the issue should be addressed were markedly similar. The primary reason for the female study participants' beliefs that corporate America would benefit from the increased presence of females in its midst was due to a need for increased diversity. Such diversity would include different perspectives and different approaches to the same situation, thus allowing for a more comprehensive

means of addressing the different matters deemed worthy of corporate level attention. The EEOC (2017) and the Department of Labor (1995), in addition to multiple researchers and research teams, likewise confirmed the need for an increasingly gender diverse workforce to improve the overall quality and equality present within the workplace itself (Acker, 2006; Catalyst, 2016b; Kossek & Zonia, 1993; McKinsey Global Institute, 2014; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Tyson, 2015; White, 2016; Zevallos, 2013).

Participants indicated that there were programs currently available that were designed to assist women during the transitory process of becoming an executive or accepting a corporate position. However, in spite of the presence of such programs, many participants indicated that these programs were made available to organizations, not to individuals, and that if the organization to which the female belonged did not have an agreement with one of the training programs, she would not be allowed entry into the program. The most common reason given for failure to be accepted into one of these programs was due to working at an organization of a smaller size, one too small to be able to have a contract with one of these training programs.

As a result, a small organization would not meet the requirements of the program itself. The literature indicates that such programs do indeed exist and that these programs do serve as a boon to women who are attempting to enter the corporate world (Richard et al., 2004). The synthesized literature did not, however, indicate the degree to which such programs benefitted the women who participated in them. While participants suggested that these programs were of immeasurable assistance to them, many expressed frustration

at not being able to access those programs, which suggests a further area of exploration and the potential for policy changes in this regard.

The theoretical framework employed for the completion of this study was complexity theory, which is often applied in a wide range of fields, though it is not traditionally employed in the realm of gender discrimination. However, by viewing the organization as a complex system or construct, and the employees as independent agents within the system, I believed that this theory might be applied within an organization as a means of exploring the problem at hand (Marra, 2015). The theory, however, is only meant to explore one system, in this instance, one organization. Since not all participants worked in the same organization, effectiveness of the application of this theory as the framework for the study was decreased.

If the business world, in general, is viewed as the system, however, a loose application of the theory was possible. Analyzing the data through the framework created by complexity theory served to indicate that there were certain emergent patterns. I identified the patterns through the completion of the content analysis of the responses provided by participants. As this section has comprised each of those primary findings, it becomes possible to see that the matter is truly complex and chaotic, requiring the interaction of myriad parts and individuals to function, which can serve as a starting point from which different threads of investigation can be teased. Still, it does not allow for deeper analysis of the identified behaviors, the ultimate purpose for applying this particular theory.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations of the study were discussed. At the completion of a study, it was necessary to review those limitations, identifying whether or not the anticipated limitations came to pass and determining what other limitations were present within the study. I identified those limitations that have occurred as a result of identified issues in data trustworthiness. First, looking back to Chapter 1, the limitations previously identified included participant bias based on participant life experience both within the general job market and within the corporate world. There was also a potential lack of available participants given underrepresentation of females within the corporate population, resulting in a potential difficulty of identifying and setting up interviews with the desired number of participants.

Following the completion of the study, I found that the second limitation was unfounded; there were indeed enough women who were willing to participate in the completion of the study. The first limitation mentioned was that the participants would be biased based on experiences and as such would present information that would be concentrated around those perceptions, and that bias might influence all responses given. This particular limitation was not mitigated, and it was present within the context of the study.

Individual perceptions were formed based on the biases currently held by an individual, their thought processes and their life experiences. As a result, to obtain the information necessary for the resolution of the research question, biases on the part of participants was an acknowledged risk, one that would limit the generalizability of the

study results. However, because qualitative studies are not concerned with

generalizability, instead qualitative studies serve as the foundation on which information

is gathered to further future quantitative studies, which are themselves generalizable, this

concern does not affect the trustworthiness of the data. For these women, the data are

trustworthy because the women's perceptions are their own truth. Thus, although biases

may have been present in their responses, the data itself are not invalidated as a result;

indeed, the data could not be effectively collected without the presence of those biases.

A further limitation identified throughout the completion of the study was the use

of complexity theory (Marra, 2015) as the theoretical framework for the study. As

previously indicated, complexity theory is best applied when looking at a single

organization or system specifically, as opposed to being applied to a broader or more

generalized system (Marra, 2015). Since individuals comprising the participant pool all

worked at different organizations and held different positions within each organization,

although the theory could still be employed in the analysis of data, it did not serve as the

most effective theoretical framework based on the study composition. As such, this issue

served to limit the strength of the findings in terms of their applicability. It suggests a

need for future studies to be conducted either using different theoretical frameworks or

using additional theories in conjunction with complexity theory to create a

comprehensive conceptual framework.

A further limitation of the study was the perspectives of female senior level

managers were collected. While this was a delimitation of the study, more information

may be collected from the perspectives of middle management female employees

looking at how the issues may affect them as they proceed up the job ladder. These issues indicate a potential future area of study. The collection of perspectives of male senior level managers why there are not many women in the executive suites may also be beneficial in exploring the topic. Gender discrimination is present from both men and women within the business world although it is directed at the female population almost exclusively (Brescoll et al., 2010). Such a phenomenon suggests that the collection of all perspectives, both male and female, is necessary to obtain a total understanding of the issues.

Recommendations

There are two different types of recommendations that must be considered: recommendations for areas of future study and recommendations for practice. Recommendations for areas of future study could be qualitative or quantitative. A qualitative study could be used to gain additional perspectives from women and even from men regarding the potential effects of gender on promotion. Understanding these effects from all possible perspectives can increase understanding of the subject. A quantitative study could be conducted at specific organizations to determine the true extent of the problem from a statistical perspective. Still, it is likely that to obtain true statistical data on the effects of gender on promotion, such measurements would need to be conducted in an organization that has already taken steps toward resolution. This strategy would allow for a review of past cases within the organization that could have resulted in gendered influences on promotion.

Gender inequity practices are discriminatory and illegal at the federal level. They can result in litigation and other adverse considerations. An organization that has already addressed these issues would most likely be more willing to provide past data compared to one that is still experiencing the problems. By using both qualitative and quantitative methods to explore gender inequities in promotion, it is possible to gain a more holistic understanding. Researchers could take the data and apply them effectively toward successful problem resolution. Still, the need for additional information does not mean that recommendations for current implementation cannot be made. Recommendations for practice refer to recommendations based solely on the findings of the study, suggesting ways that the identified problem, in this case, a decreased number of women holding positions in corporate America, could be better mitigated.

Recommendations for Future Study

Previously discussed was ideation that the majority of the female participants could not state with certainty whether their gender had ever cost them a promotion or prevented them from being assigned as a project leader to a large or high-profile project. Therefore, I recommend that further study be conducted to ascertain if discrimination is present when individuals who are tasked with giving promotions or who are tasked with assigning project leaders. Since discrimination is illegal and it is unlikely that this information would be honestly given as a result, given the gap in the literature on the matter, it still must be recommended as an area of future study. If a study is conducted in this area, I recommend that individuals working in human resources be included in the

participant pool because they are required to know the legalities associated with employment in the United States.

Within the context of this study, I did not consider the specific industry in which each of the women worked. Instead, I looked at the overall occurrence of potential gendered discrimination in promotions, as opposed to exploring the potential instances of such discrimination within a certain industry. A study should be done looking at the perceptions of women across industry types to see how they are promoted to senior management. There is a wide variation from industry to industry in terms of how promotions are offered and whether promotions are available without additional education and wide variations also exist in the culture of specific industries. A future study could identify potential areas in which this disparity is a concern.

An additional recommendation for an area of future study is the effects of sponsorship and mentorship programs on assisting women to the executive suites. Further research should be conducted to determine whether there is a gap in the current body of literature on this topic, and additional investigation should occur to determine what the perceptions of those who go through the programs. Research should also be conducted on the perceptions of the benefits of the programs as identified by those who have not yet participated in a sponsorship or mentorship program. This information could serve to provide potential areas of change that could be made to increase the number of females in executive positions in corporate America.

Recommendations for Practice

In addition to the identified areas of future study, there are additional recommendations for practice that can be made as well, based only on the information collected during the course of this study. Of these, perhaps the largest area of recommendation for practice that could be identified falls in the area of policy changes for organizations offering sponsorship or mentorship programs. It is clear, based on both the review of the literature and on the responses given by the participants, that gender discrimination exists. While there is a need for additional research regarding the effectiveness of sponsorship and mentorship programs (Richard et al., 2004), participants who worked at smaller organizations or organizations who did not otherwise meet the requirements that would allow their employees to participate in such programs, expressed frustration at this inability.

Unwillingness to allow these individuals to participate on the program based on the organization where they work serve as another form of discrimination, potentially preventing women from gaining access to the services that they need to be able to succeed in the corporate world. While the lack of research means that it cannot be conclusively stated that, in general, such programs assist women in succeeding in corporate positions, the belief of these participants who access such programs would benefit them does serve to indicate that there is a need and a desire to access these programs.

Changing the program requirements to allow women whose organizations do not have the resources to fulfill the requirements to access these programs, also allowing

women access to the programs under their own recognizance, would be one less step in a

world of gender discrimination that would address these women needs. Since access to

these programs does not come free, it is recommended that policies be changed to allow

women to access those programs on their own recognizance and through their own funds,

with the potential for repayment as part of the program to the employee by the

organization, ensuring that the women can have a greater availability than they might

currently have.

I further recommend that to ensure that there is the possibility for such change to

occur, women start to petition for access to these programs based on their gender instead

of the organization of which they are a part. While it is hoped that the aforementioned

recommendation would occur, unless women take the initiative and start to petition these

programs for access, change is unlikely to occur. I recommend that this petitioning

process be done through the completion of formal letter writing. Changes can occur on a

case by case basis, such actions are still a start in the change process, allowing for the

potential for growth within the corporate world in the female employee population.

Another recommendation for practice based solely on the results of this study is

if women recognize the need for a more gender diverse workplace and if there is a need

for mentorship as a means of moving women through the corporate ranks in areas or

organizations none exists; I recommend that those who see the need for such a program

and who do not have access to such a program work with their bosses or the human

resource departments within the organization to create those programs. Simply because

an organization cannot afford to send its employees to a mentorship or sponsorship

training program, or because the organization does not meet the qualifications required to be able to send an employee to those programs, does not mean that the idea of such a program has to be negated wholly.

Even in small towns, many leadership seminars are offered for free, and the use of such programs, in conjunction with an assigned mentor to the individual in the organization, could serve to provide the female employee with a comparable skillset, one that could assist her in advancing through the company. In organizations where there are fewer than 100 employees and there are no opportunities for further advancement within the organization itself, such programs should still be implemented. The programs would provide the company with skilled employees who can in turn use those skillsets to further the needs of the organization allowing for the potential to increased organizational growth.

Implications

It was necessary to explore the implications of the study results, following the collection and analysis of data and an exploration of how that data relate to the current knowledge on the subject matter being explored. Specifically, it was also necessary to explore the implications for positive social change and to explore the potential methodological, theoretical and or empirical implications as well. Each of these areas of implication, while pertinent to the primary topic being explored, is presented as its own segment, ensuring a clear presentation of results.

Implications for Positive Social Change

In light of the recommendations made for areas of future practice, there is a high implication for positive social change. If the recommended policy changes are implemented, then access to sponsorship and mentorship programs should increase. Such programs would provide women who desire corporate careers with access to the skills needed to be able to attain those positions and to succeed in their set career paths. If these numbers increase, there is a potential for a shift in the male to female ratio in corporate positions, allowing for increased workplace diversity and thus allowing for societal improvement.

Furthermore, as previously indicated, the issue of gender bias or gender discrimination is still present within the workplace setting, at the corporate level and on the ladder leading to a path into the corporate world. While laws have been enacted to outlaw such discrimination (EEOC, 2017), and while the U.S. Department of Labor (1995) in its last exploration of the topic before the committee was disbanded, indicated that gender bias and gender discrimination still occurred within the workplace and no further efforts have been truly made to take targeted steps to address the matter.

As such, targeted steps can be taken to address the problem encompassing everything from the need to conduct additional studies to gathering more information. That information can assist in identifying other areas of future practice for implementation and specific practice recommendations themselves. Then, it would be possible to work to address the matter by tackling it sideways, starting with each little issue identified and gradually working toward addressing the problem as a whole. By

breaking the issue of gender discrimination down to its individual situations or parts and by addressing each of those issues one at a time, there is a great potential for positive social change.

Methodological Implications

As previously indicated, a qualitative descriptive study was conducted to gather the information presented herein (Creswell, 2012). This research design and methodology served the research question, and subsequently the study as a whole. It allowed for the identification of the resolution to the research question and provided a starting place for the completion of future studies, in addition to collecting enough information to make specific recommendations regarding practice and policy change. However, the qualitative descriptive research design is not used as frequently in current years as it has been in decades past because this type of study is quite general in its exploration. The implication is that there may be additional information that could be learned through the completion of another study using a different methodology, one that is more homed in its application and which provides information in a more concise manner. To this end, it appears as though a qualitative case study would serve as the next logical stage for the completion of an additional study in this particular area of research.

The use of a qualitative case study would allow the researcher to collect three different data sets, such as individual, one on one, interviews from individuals in two different participant groups and focus groups conducted with each of those two participant groups as a whole, providing three data sets and three means of collecting information, allowing for a clearer identification of total perceptions (Creswell, 2012).

The completion of the descriptive study could serve as the base information with the minimum amount of information necessary to start to progress in this area. The completion of a case study would then serve as the next logical step in the process, implying that while the descriptive study was sufficient to the research question asked there are more complex questions that likewise warrant exploration. If the issue of gender bias, or gender discrimination, at the corporate level or otherwise, is to be resolved in our society, additional information is necessary to be able to identify the specific areas to be targeted for improvement.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework loosely employed within the completion of this study was that of complexity theory (Marra, 2015). Complexity theory allows for the study of systems that are both complex and chaotic, resulting in the identification of the order, patterns, and structures that arise within the given construct (Marra, 2015). While it can be argued that complexity theory serves to loosely inform the results of the study through the identification of the emergent themes within the context of the participant given responses, the implication is that the theory itself was perhaps not the best selected theoretical framework. Marra (2015) stated that while personal perception plays an important role in a qualitative study, the amount of bias may be removed as a result of the preference given. In this case, when exploring matters of bias and discrimination as perceived through the group being targeted by that bias and discrimination the participant's bias is entwined with participant perception, perhaps more so in a participant population wherein the direct effects of that bias and discrimination are felt.

The implication that this particular theory was not the best suited to use within the context of this particular study suggests that should further studies be conducted in regard to this particular area of study, that a better suited theory should be used as the theoretical framework of the study. Since discrimination serves as a form of behavior, it is suggested that a behavioral theory be used as the theoretical framework for the study, with the selection of that theory based on the research questions to which the researcher wishes to obtain answers. Many different behavioral theories exist and if as the results of this study imply, the application of a sociological theory is less effective in the analysis and exploration of data, then, as the study explores the presence or absence of a given behavior, the application of a behavioral theory would be more appropriate within this context.

Empirical Implications

In addition to the implications for positive social change, the methodological implications and the theoretical implications, there are certain empirical implications to consider as well. Since this particular study was a qualitative descriptive study no quantitative or empirical data were collected. While for some, this lack of empirical data may be questioned, as to how there can be empirical implications stemming from the study results. The response is that the qualitative data collected herein serves as the foundation on which empirical studies can be conducted. Qualitative studies are typically conducted before quantitative studies to determine what is known in a given area, allowing for the framing of a more specific quantitative question and the designing of a study around that research question (Creswell, 2012).

That being said, a host of general information on female executive perspectives was collected through the completion of the study. The perspectives provided by the participants serves as prime material that can be used to formulate additional quantitative questions that can in turn be employed toward the collection of empirical data, thus working to further the extant body of literature while at the same time providing the data necessary to better improve conditions. If conditions are improved and gender discrimination or gender bias is decreased, there is a potential for further positive social change allowing for a shift in societal perspectives through the completion of a host of additional research.

Conclusions

The research question that this study sought to answer was the following: "What are the perceptions of female senior level managers of the factors that hinder women from attaining executive level positions?" Myriad perspectives were collected, and I determined that senior level managers believed that gender discrimination and or gender bias was one of the primary factors that hindered women from attaining executive level positions. The secondary reason given was the awareness that women have different perspectives and a greater concern for a work life balance with a focus on family.

While the women indicated that there were certain mentorship programs and sponsorship programs or opportunities that could assist women in attaining those executive level positions, these were often difficult to find, to identify, or to access, creating an additional issue for those women who wished to advance their careers. Awareness of these associated factors is the first step in the research collection process

that may ultimately lead to or contribute to a resolution or reduction of instances of gender bias or gender discrimination within the workplace setting, allowing for a more balanced division of genders in the corporate world. Although additional research is needed, the completion of this study serves as a stepping stone toward the ultimate resolution or reduction of this societal problem.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

I. Demographics and categorical information

1. To confirm on record, you do identify as female, is that correct?

2. How many years have you been with this company?

3. How many years have you been in the corporate workforce?

4. What position do you currently hold?

5. What is your age group, (20-40) (41–60) (60-90)

II. Main Questions

1. Give a brief summary of your career.

2. Can you relate how you may have experience discrimination based on your gender within the workplace?

3. In your opinion has discrimination prevented you from receiving a promotion or failing to receive a high-status project?

4. What do you see as the reasons that more women do not hold more positions in the executive suite in corporate America?

5. In your perception what factors do you think derails women professionals from reaching the executive suites?

6. In your perceptions what factors do you think propels women professionals upwards to the executive suites?

7. What are your perceptions regarding this issue, do you think this warrants society's attention why or why not?

8. Why do you think corporate America would benefit from more women in the executive suite?

9. Do you see any ways currently being used to assist women to make the transition to the executive suites?

10. Is there any other information you would like to add?

III. Probes

1. Would you mind providing an example?

2. Would you elaborate on that idea please?

3. Would you mind explaining that further?

4. I'm not sure I understand what you're saying; could you clarify for me please?

5. Is there anything else that you can think of to add?

Appendix B: Cover Letter

Dear _____:

My name is Erica Charles Lynch, and I am currently a doctoral candidate at Walden University working on my final research and dissertation. The topic of my dissertation is: The Quest of Women to Occupy Positions in Executive Management in Corporate America". I am seeking to identify the attributes that would enhance women's chances of entering the executives' suite.

As I continue to gather my research data, I would like to solicit your assistance with this topic. I respect that your time is valuable. Your personal views on this topic, and answers to my questions, would be very important to my research. Your answers to my questions will be kept strictly confidential and your name and the name of your company will not be used to report specific information. This interview is designed to get your perceptions of women in upper management regarding their quest to occupy positions in the executive suites in corporate America.

I kindly ask your cooperation in letting me interview you. If you agree to participate, we will meet one time at a location and time convenient to you. The interview will last about 45 minutes and is solely voluntary. All information gathered during the interview session will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to let me know your interest and availability in participating in this study. We can then schedule a date and time for the interview. My telephone number is XXX. You can also email me at XXX@waldenu.edu. I hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your assistance.

Erica Charles

Doctoral candidate

Walden University