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# Women's Experiences of the Glass Ceiling in U.S. Manufacturing and Service-Based Industries

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Diane Mastroguiseppe

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2018

Abstract

Women's Experiences of the Glass Ceiling in U.S. Manufacturing and Service-Based

Industries

by

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MS, Neumann University, 2008

BA, Neumann University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

Fewer women occupy executive-level positions in U.S. companies compared to the number of men. Antidiscrimination laws have been in place for 30 years to combat the threat to gender equality. The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of executive-level women employed in the manufacturing and service-based industries to explore the persistence of the glass ceiling. Social learning theory provided the framework for the study. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with 12 executive-level women in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Data analysis involved hand coding and software coding to identify six themes: discrimination, opportunities, support and choices, advantages, balances, and roles. Findings indicated that discrimination against women being promoted to executive positions still exists. Most participants stated that lack of enforcement of antidiscrimination laws and quota programs could be a hindrance to women being promoted to executive-level positions. Findings may be used to support the promotion of women to executive-level positions in the manufacturing and service-based industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

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## Dedication

The most important dedication for this dissertation goes to God. He blessed me with the strength to persevere in times of sorrow, depression, and despair. He blessed me with the stamina to work on a page or a paragraph after working and traveling 16 hours. God blessed me with the courage to work toward this goal when everyone encouraged me to quit. God blessed me with intelligence, perseverance, but most of all, a loving, supportive family. I also dedicate this work to my late husband, Carmen, who pushed me to succeed in all my academic and work endeavors. He believed in me and provided me with the confidence I have today. The week before he died, he made me promise him, and myself, that I would finish my PhD. He said that I owed it to myself and to remember that I could do anything. I also dedicate this to my late mother. She never understood why I did not quit after Carmen died, but was so very proud of my perseverance. In their honor, and with the blessings of God, I finished my dissertation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Women have struggled to achieve equality in the workplace for decades, and the struggle continues into the 21st century. Statistics indicated that over half of the world's workforce is composed of women (Punnett, 2016). Even though statistics showed women are more effective than their male counterparts are, less than 10% hold corporate executive positions (Baker, 2014; Matsa & Miller, 2011). One reason for this social gap is the glass ceiling phenomenon identified in 1995 (Vaccaro, Jansen, Van Den Bosch, & Volberda, 2012). The persistence of this phenomenon presents a challenge and a barrier to women in their quest for leadership positions and equality.

The increased number of women in the workforce should have resulted in more women in executive positions; however, this has not been the outcome, and the glass ceiling appears to be the reason why women and minorities experience impediments to progression in their careers (Vanderbroeck, 2010). The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential impediments for women who want to break through the glass ceiling, based on the lived experience of women who have obtained executive-level positions.

The following sections provide a brief description of the glass ceiling, the problem it presents in society, and the purpose of this study. The background of the study provides a historical review of the glass ceiling phenomenon during World War II, the creation of the term *glass ceiling* in the 1990s, and the current situation. The problem statement presents the general and specific issues for women and the rationale of the study, and the research question conveys the focus of the study.

I used a descriptive phenomenological design to answer the research question within a conceptual framework and to gain insight from the participants' lived experiences. This chapter includes definitions of terms used in the study, the assumptions of the study, and its scope, delimitations, and limitations. I also describe the significance of the study for management practices, the theories related to the glass ceiling, and the implications for social change.

### **Background**

Throughout U.S. history, there has been a lack of equality for women in the workforce (Kiser, A. I. 2015). Some of the inequalities have been identified as discrepancies in compensation between men and women in the same positions, the evaluations used when considering people for advancement, and the number of opportunities afforded men versus women for executive-level positions. Prior to World War II, women were viewed as having one purpose in life, and that was to be mothers and run the household (Hill, 2013). Businesses often dismissed female employees once they married (Pleck, 1977). During World War II, married women in the United States went into the fields and factories to keep the country operating while the men went off to war (Honey, 1985). Manufacturing plants established day care facilities in Michigan, as companies needed workers to support the war effort (Clive, 1979; Hill, 2013). Goldin (1991) explained that half of the women employed in the war effort, of which 26% were married, continued to work into the 1950s. The women who continued to work after the return of the men from the war were often relegated to menial and lower paying jobs, which most women expected and accepted (Summerfield, 1998). Their compensation was

not equal to that of their male counterparts, but one fourth of the married women continued to work (Clive, 1979; Goldin, 1991).

The establishment of laws to prohibit these inequalities, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Opportunity Act of 1972, were ineffective in eliminating the problem (McClain, 2015). The Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), established as part of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, investigated the continued inequalities in pay and advancement opportunities for women and minorities in corporate America. The Glass Ceiling Commission determined that disparities existed, and it recommended companies make an effort to change their practices. The Commission's investigation showed discrimination existed; the problem was proving it in a court of law, which was as impossible in 1995 as it is today (Cundiff, & Vescio, 2016). The term *glass ceiling* characterized impediments for minorities and women who wanted to advance in business (Behery, Al-Nasser, & Parak, 2017). The term provided a metaphorical representation of how the attainment of goals of advancement and equality were hindered.

There have been numerous studies on various aspects of the glass ceiling phenomenon, which addressed discriminatory actions that prevent a female's accession to executive or corporate officer positions (Aiken, Salmon, & Hanges, 2013; Catalyst, 2014; Damman, Heyse, & Mills, 2014; Faragalla, 2015; Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015; Michailidis, Morphitou, & Theophylatou, 2012). Statistics indicated a change in the last decade of the 20th century; women began to assume more Fortune 500 corporate officer positions (Catalyst, 2014). The rise of women in corporate level positions as corporate executive officers (CEOs), corporate financial officers, and other senior executive roles nearly

doubled from 8.7% in 1995 to 16.4% in 2005 (Catalyst, 2014). However, the numbers dropped to 15.7% in 2008, with only 14.6% of executive positions being held by women in 2013 (Catalyst, 2014). These statistics indicated the number of women in executive positions declined between 2008 and 2013 even though women were in the majority of those graduating with masters and doctoral degrees in the previous decade (Ginder, Kelly-Reid, & Mann, 2018).. The statistics do not convey whether the decline was due to discriminatory practices or to women's choices.

The current statistics for the Philadelphia metropolitan area showed steady growth in women holding executive positions (Catalyst, 2014). The area has a higher percentage of women in executive positions than the national average, at 21%, except in the nonmedical manufacturing and service industries for organizations earning over \$500,000 annually (ReferenceUSA, 2015). Nationally, the nonmedical manufacturing and service-based organization statistics for female corporate executives are 15% (Catalyst, 2014). There is a lack of literature to clarify the disparity between men and women in executive positions in these specific industries.

There are books written by and about women who have advanced to executive office positions, and these books address issues women encountered in the corporate world (Barsh, Cranston, & Lewis, 2011; Frankel, 2014; Sandberg & Scovell, 2013). However, these books do not inform the reader of individual choices or sacrifices women had to make to advance to their positions. Sampson, Gresham, Applewhite, & Roberts (2015) noted that some of the barriers women encounter are self-imposed through family or personal choices, and others are a lack of role models or mentors. Rayburn, Denmark,



Reuder, and Miteria Austria (2010) countered that having mentors does not guarantee success and, depending on the industry or field, women may require different types of support in various phases of their careers. Few of these books addressed how circumstances from the women's private life or home environment influenced their career progression.

### **Problem Statement**

The progression of women into executive positions did not significantly improve in many industries during the first decade of the 21st century (Russo & Hassink, 2012). The number of women moving into executive-level positions has risen by only 0.2% over the last decade, yet the number of women entering the workforce during this last decade increased over 5% (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2014). A general problem reflected in 2014 U.S. statistics is after 30 years of women working toward gaining equal opportunity, 77% still earn only 82% of what their male counterparts earn, yet the number of women with advanced degrees has tripled between 2003 and 2013 (Catalyst, 2014). The cause of the stagnation has been attributed to the phenomenon of a glass ceiling (Wilson, 2014). The phenomenon is a form of discrimination related to assumptions about women or other minorities. The statistical data has not indicated whether the general problem has resulted from women's individual choices or the glass ceiling.

The reasons for the lack of women's advancement may be best discovered by interviewing women who have obtained executive-level positions. One specific problem addressed in the current study was why women occupy only 13% of the executive

positions in manufacturing and service-based industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area (see Catalyst, 2014). Statistics indicated this percentage is less than half of the national average of 28% for these industries (Catalyst, 2014; ReferenceUSA, 2015; Sage Publications, 2015).

Comparing the statistics from the nonmedical manufacturing and service industries with those from the pharmaceutical, banking, and educational industries is problematic. In the latter industries, women occupy over 50% of senior-level positions nationally and in the Philadelphia metropolitan area (Catalyst, 2014; ReferenceUSA, 2015; Sage Publications, 2015). Without studies addressing the lived experiences of women to identify the possible factors contributing to this disparity, women may be hindered in preparing themselves to breach the barriers to executive-level positions in the nonmedical manufacturing and service-based industries.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women executives in their career progression and to identify experiences they had related to the glass ceiling in the manufacturing and service industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. I used aspects of descriptive phenomenology introduced by Husserl (2008) and supported by Giorgi (2012) to gain an understanding of how women's experiences influenced their career progression.

I planned to interview 15 women executives, but data saturation was achieved at 12 (see Suri, 2011). The results revealed aspects of the glass ceiling that presented obstacles to participants' career progression. The results were used to understand the

phenomenon and answer the research question. One objective of the study was to understand whether the decline in the number of women moving up the corporate ladder was due to a glass ceiling or whether women chose not to pursue the goal of a corporate career, and whether the decline related to personal costs associated with executive positions. The results helped fill a gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of women executives and their understanding of the choices they made to succeed.

### **Research Question**

What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I needed data on the lived experiences of successful women executives to understand whether the success they achieved was influenced by social change and whether any aspects were attributed to the elimination of the glass ceiling. Recorded lived experiences provide an understanding of the relationship between individuals' education, work experiences, and if the way in which their family helps to provide conditions for them to achieve success. Studying participants' lived experiences may also assist in identifying the relevance of the glass ceiling in the advancement of women in the 21st century (Vaccaro et al., 2012).

A conceptual framework can assist in understanding the lived experiences of women, and how their individual experiences may relate to the glass-ceiling phenomenon. One such framework is social learning theory. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory identifies the process of how a person learns and how they may be

influenced by the behavior of others, how the person duplicates that behavior, and how the behavior can be internally motivated. These principles of social learning theory are apparent in the coaching and mentoring programs used in recent years to develop executives (Brauer & Tittle, 2012).

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a descriptive phenomenological design and conducted interviews with female executives in the service and manufacturing industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. A descriptive phenomenological design was appropriate to address the purpose of this study (see Moustakas, 1994a). Descriptive phenomenology refers to how individuals perceive a phenomenon and their feelings related to their experience (Moustakas, 1994a). Descriptive phenomenology favors the internal thoughts and perceptions of the person who lived the phenomenon (Husserl & Hill, 2008). The purpose of this study was transcending the phenomenon, without bias, and gaining knowledge through the lived experiences of those who have encountered the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994b). The qualitative approach facilitated gathering information from women who had attained executive-level positions in industries where there are few women in similar positions. I used a descriptive phenomenological design to study the participants' experiences of the glass ceiling and to observe the behavior of the participants as they related their experiences (see Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The open-ended questions used in a descriptive phenomenological study enable researchers to understand the lived experiences of the participants from their perspective (Husserl & Hill, 2008; Marshal & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2013; Patton,

2002). Studying the lived experiences of women helped me identify the relevance of the glass ceiling in the advancement of women in the 21st century (see Vaccaro et al., 2012). I gathered data related to women's lived experiences to understand whether their success was influenced by social change and the elimination of the glass ceiling. The women's lived experiences provided a better understanding of how their education, work experiences, and family support provided opportunities for them to achieve success.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions were used for important terms in this study:

*Career woman:* A woman who focuses on her career first and either chooses not to have a family or to put her career goals before her family, entrusting her family to the care of others such as a spouse, parents, or nanny (Ganginis Del Pino, O'Brien, Mereish, & Miller, 2013).

*Culture:* The beliefs and behaviors based on age, social, or ethnic groups; in the anthropological aspect, it can include a group's way of living that is passed down from one generation to another (Lynd, 2015).

*Executive:* An individual filling a senior management position or top-level management position in an organization or company (Tracey, 2016). The term is used synonymously with leader, senior leadership, or leadership position in the document

*Gender roles:* Standards denoting the behaviors, activities, and positions considered suitable for each gender in developed Western societies (Perrone-McGovern, Wright, Howell, & Barnum, 2014).

*Glass ceiling*: An invisible barrier hindering women and minorities from progressing to executive-level positions within an organization or industry (De Blas, Corrales-Herrero, & Martín-Román, 2012; Wilson, 2014).

*Leader or leadership*: Summerfield (2014) defines a *leader* as a person who is the primary or principal performer in an organization or company; *leadership* is the act of leading. In this study, *leader* was used synonymously with executive, senior leader, or holder of a leadership position.

*Upper echelon*: Those in the higher executive positions of an organization, including the CEO, chief financial officer, chief information officer, or chief administrative officer (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2015).

*Work-life balance*: The act of stabilizing the requirements of the job with the obligations of the home and requires compromises in both areas (J. Wang, & Verma, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption was that participants would provide an honest account of their experiences. I provided all participants with a written statement of confidentiality to assist in obtaining accurate narratives. The paperwork ensured the participants that their information would be safeguarded and no connection to the individual or the organization would be made or implied in the study. Each participant, before the start of the interviews, reviewed the statement.

The second assumption was a shared experience among the participants based on their positions, gender, and era in which they obtained their positions regardless of the

industry or their particular backgrounds. The final assumption was I would ask the same interview questions for each participant. I created the interview questions, which were open-ended but objective in nature, and conducted the interviews from a neutral and unbiased position.

### **Scope**

The purpose of the study was to understand the situations female executives encountered in their careers. Specifically, those related to their ascension to their current executive positions, in the manufacturing and service-based industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The interviews were 30 to 45 minutes in length to gather data on the issues that the participants faced and the choices they made in their careers based on their lived experiences.

### **Delimitations**

The research was delimited to the lived experiences of the participating female executives and to discovering the elements in their personal and business lives that hindered them or helped them achieve their success. The emphasis was on identifying and reporting whether situations at home or work presented hindrances to career progression. The participants' current and previous positions and their gender and race were also delimiting factors of the study.

### **Limitations**

The study's limitations included the schedules of the participants, their availability for interview, the data collection process, and the candidness of their responses to the questions. There was the additional limitation related to the participants'

career fields, experience, background, age, and attitude toward the subject (see Patton, 2002). The information provided by the participants was limited due to the inability to confirm the data. Each participant's review of the transcribed interview provided validation of the information, yet findings were limited to what participants wanted to reveal (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The limitations in this study were typical in phenomenological research, but the study nonetheless provided information to fill a gap in the literature.

### **Significance**

Female middle managers in manufacturing and service-based organizations need to have a better understanding of what is expected of them if they are going to advance in their career. The findings of this study may provide insight for these women and a possible foundation for the skills, training, or approaches required for them to succeed in these industries. The study included one-on-one interviews in person, on Skype, or on the telephone to identify barriers women face in their career progression. The lived experiences may reveal the obstacles the participants faced due to choices they made or the glass ceiling they encountered.

### **Significance to Practice**

The results of the study may help corporate executives understand how female employees perceive the organization's actions regarding promotions and the criteria used for advancement (see Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). The identification and clarification of the standards and expectations may facilitate standards for internal professional development and assist in the development of training and mentoring



programs. Identifying women as mentors in any discipline, whether business or academia, is a problem for those seeking guidance (Rayburn, Denmark, Reuder, & Miteria Austria, 2010). The findings from the study may inspire female executives to mentor women and provide upward mobility for more women in the fields. Mentoring programs could be developed for the industry, and for the general understanding of the issues that confront women in their drive to attain executive positions.

### **Significance to Theory**

Feminist theory is used in many studies related to the glass ceiling phenomenon, but in situations related to career progression, it is not always relevant to the situation being researched. The glass ceiling phenomenon can be associated with many theories such as social role theory, contingency theory, systems management theory, obligation theory, and others (Wilson, 2014). The results of the study clarify how diverse theories apply to the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

The findings may provide an understanding of the lived experiences of women in breaking the glass ceiling as viewed through the lens of social learning theory. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory addressing how parents, peers, leaders, and society help to inspire and motivate individuals for success may be relevant in understanding the success of the study participants (see Gill, 2014). Related principles of social learning theory, coaching, and mentoring as described by Brauer and Tittle (2012) may be used to understand participants' experiences in striving forward toward their goal.

### **Significance for Social Change**

The results of the study may positively influence social change by providing young women with the knowledge vital to advancement in the manufacturing and service industries. Understanding of career development obstacles may assist women in planning to make appropriate choices required for success. The study findings may lead to an increase in the percentage of female executives in the manufacturing and service industries equivalent to that of other industries in the region. Changes in the Philadelphia metropolitan region could influence similar changes in industries across the United States.

### **Summary and Overview**

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the problem and the background of the study. In addition, it provided a description of the purpose and significance of the study addressing how executive women's experiences may have been influenced by the glass ceiling and other societal pressures (see Welch, 2012). I presented a conceptual framework to facilitate comprehension of the lived experiences of the participants. I used a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore insights regarding obstacles to the advancement of women.

Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant research on the roles of women in the workplace. The review includes articles on social role identity, diverse management functions and techniques, leadership styles and responses, familial roles and obligations, and women's roles in business decision-making. The chapter also includes literature on the qualitative methodology and conceptual framework used in the study. Some sources

were books written by women who were in or previously held executive positions. The literature reviewed provided support and for the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature to support the study. There has been considerable research on the glass ceiling, but few studies have included a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of women who have progressed past the barriers. Reviewing the previous studies provides a historical perspective that supports the gap addressed in this study. The literature review provides evidence on how different theories can support interests, attitudes, and cultures in the workplace.

Researchers have not addressed specific barriers women in executive positions have faced in their careers and the different requirements and experiences they have confronted. Moreover, few studies have included a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of women who have progressed past the barriers. There were no articles found on inspiring social change in the industries addressed in this study. The current study may provide support for future research on this topic.

The strategies used for retrieving documents related to the study and the conceptual framework for the study is outlined in this chapter. I collected literature to support the conceptual perspectives and to provide support for how feminist and social role theories are a part of the glass-ceiling phenomenon. Chapter 2 contains a description of the history and progress of the glass ceiling, including variations on the glass ceiling, which provide a broad perspective of the complexity of the glass ceiling phenomenon. The information covers the various aspects of the work-family balance and the conflicts that women face when pursuing a career. There is also a review of the specific industries and the geographic location targeted for the study, based on the available literature. The

issue with the minimal amount of available literature is highlighted in the last section of this chapter, which shows the gap in phenomenological studies of the glass ceiling in the 21st century.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I searched databases in the Walden University library, Google Scholar, and research data from other databases including the National Bureau of Economic Research, ReferenceUSA, the SAGE Encyclopedia, the U.S. Department of Labor and Statistics, and Catalyst. Most of the reviewed articles were obtained through the Walden's databases: ProQuest Central, Academic Search Complete, Science Complete, Thoreau Multi-Database Search, and Academic Search Complete. I conducted searches using the subject Business and Management in Walden databases, which consisted of the following: Business Source Complete, SAGE Premier, SAGE Stats, ABI/INFORM Complete, ScienceDirect, and Emerald Management. There was considerable literature available on the topic of the glass ceiling. Using principles outlined by Hinde and Spackman (2015), I followed a systematic approach to find articles and references using the same key words: *board diversity, business diversity, civil rights, equal opportunity, female board members, female entrepreneur, female executives, female executives in business, female leaders, female role, family expectation, feminist theory, gender differences in business, gender discrimination, gender gap, gender leadership, gender roles, glass ceiling, glass ceiling theory, glass cliff, leadership diversity, phenomenological, qualitative, social identity theory, social role theory, women board members, women executives, women in business, women leaders, women's careers, work-*

*family balance*, and *work-family conflict*. The search I conducted through Walden's library included only peer-reviewed articles. I also used the Google Scholar search engine to find peer-reviewed articles that cited the most relevant articles.

Articles that were not relevant to issues related to promotion barriers for women or industries addressed in the study were not chosen for this review. I selected articles based on their relationship to the research question. I reviewed many manuscripts that appeared to have relevance and downloaded many of them to conduct key word searches within the articles.

The types of literature obtained via the search terms and the dates of the collected works are listed in Table 1. The requirement for 85% of literature used in the review to be peer-reviewed is shown in the columns for the count total. The dates in the literature columns show both the totals and the percentages of the documents less than and more than 5 years old. The information in Table 1 demonstrates compliance with the Walden University requirements for currency and validity of documentation used for doctoral dissertations (Garside, 2014).

*Table 1**Results of Search Criteria Used for the Literature Review*

Type of reference	<u>Count total</u>		<u>Dates of literature</u>			
	Quantity	Percentage	< 5 years	Percentage	> 5 years	Percentage
Peer-reviewed journals	120	87%	108	90%	12	10%
Books	14	10%	7	50%	7	50%
Research databases	4	3%	4	100%	0	0%
Other pertinent articles	0	0%	0	0%	0	0
Totals	138	100	119	86%	19	14%

### **Conceptual Framework**

The foundation of the study was based on a conceptual framework. I researched the literature to find articles that had a similar basis and found that many of the theoretical documents did not include the lived experiences of the participants. Understanding how or whether women encountered aspects of the glass ceiling theory or the social learning theory during their career progression could provide valuable information for those wishing to follow in their footsteps (Bandura, 1977; Vaccaro et al., 2012). The literature I gathered and reviewed provided the foundation for the study to understand the lived experiences of female participants.

The problems of gender equality have existed throughout the ages (Sampson, Gresham, Applewhite, & Roberts, 2015). The various theories of leadership and

feminism do not relate to or support the 21st century's success rate of women (Deutsch, 2004; Gilligan, 1993; Horney, 1993). The original theories do not take into account the drive and determination of the modern working woman (Liggins, 2017).

### **Conceptual Perspectives in the Literature**

The literature indicated a general change in the attitudes toward women in the workforce since the new millennium. There are still members of the upper echelon of corporations who hold on to the old perspectives, which can hinder women (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014; Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). Comprehending issues experienced by executive women may provide a better understanding of how education, work experiences, and a personal support system may have helped them to achieve success.

**Personal.** The personal reflections of women, found in the identification of career progression, are related to the glass ceiling and societal expectations through a range of topics. The articles I reviewed touched on various subjects including job and pay satisfaction, gender issues, self-worth, and aspects of gender discrimination. Sandberg and Scovell (2013) stated that the biggest concerns for women were the self-assessment of their abilities and the tendency for self-doubt. The choices females make may relate to the principles of self-esteem for women (Ferris, Lian, Brown, & Morrison, 2015). Exposure to sexism in college or in the workplace and the support mechanisms used to buffer the negativity surrounding that discrimination can determine the residual effects on women's motivation (Spencer-Rodgers, Major, Forster, & Peng, 2016). Women who feel ostracized by their peers can suffer from more than diminished self-esteem, including



poor job performance and a negative self-perception (Ferris et al., 2015). The exposure to negativity can have a significant effect on whether women will apply for executive positions.

The barriers women perceive in obtaining executive positions are numerous. Each woman perceives barriers from her individual point of view, based on her experiences. One woman can regard a situation as a challenge, and another may view it as an obstacle. Orser, Riding, and Stanley (2012) stated that perceptions could be based on the organizational culture, the industry, or the challenges of the position related to work and family responsibilities. Ellemers (2014) recommended that women speak up when they encounter bias by way of less recognition for the same or superior work or gender disparity. Women are not typically confrontational at work, as they fear reprisal; instead, they have a propensity to internalize issues in a negative context, which may be the result of a male-dominated society (Ezzedeen, Budworth, & Baker, 2015; Inder & Vashistha, 2014).

What women accept as their due is based on patriarchal values over the course of centuries (Ezzedeen et al., 2015; Inder & Vashistha, 2014; Sabharwal, 2015). There is a need for programs to help women develop the skills required for executive-level positions from the time they start in their careers, so that they can achieve the success they desire whether that is a leadership role or not (Sandler, 2014). Studies have shown that a woman's attitude and drive will help her achieve success (Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012b). Smith, Crittenden, and Caputi (2012) showed that successful women credited their success to their attitudes toward their careers and to their drive, aspirations, and

resilience in overcoming obstacles. Studies have shown that most women do not have the same level of motivation for executive positions as men do (Schuh et al., 2014). To achieve an executive position, women need to compete with those desiring power and plan accordingly.

Women need to rely primarily on themselves to take care of their careers if they are going to succeed. In addition, women need to find those who can help them lay out a career plan and gain insight into what it may take, whether it involves business associations, mentors, or university-based programs (Schulz & Ensin, 2014). Women must determine how they are going to address the obstacles placed in the way of their success. Herrbach and Mignonac (2012) stated that how a person perceives and addresses discrimination and the challenges of home and society could be both subjective and objective based on the personal importance placed on these issues. Women's perceptions of the different issues rest on their values and on what they identify as an obstacle or a challenge to their ultimate success.

**Social.** The way a society defines feminine characteristics as different from the characteristics of a leader is one of the social aspects related to women obtaining executive positions. Although studies have shown that women possess greater leadership skills than men, they are not considered as strong as men in the area of strategic vision or in the principles that determine a leader's ability to make effective changes for the future of the organization (Appelbaum, Shapiro, Didus, Luongo, & Paz, 2013a; Baker, 2014). Society in general has had a stereotypical view of women as being nurturing, sensitive, and communal in nature (Clevenger & Singh, 2013; Mendez & Busenbark, 2015).

Researchers have attributed these traits to the collaborative nature of women and have associated them with transformational leadership characteristics, making women effective leaders in the organizational environment (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014).

This view may be the result of women's nondirective approach, giving others a sense of participation in the decisions of the organization (Appelbaum et al., 2013a; Baker, 2014; Lawson & Lips, 2014).

Most women use a democratic style of leadership (Walker & Aritz, 2015). This non-dictatorial style provides an advantage as it leads to better communication, cooperation, and consensus when implementing changes to the organization (Atanasov & Naumovska, 2013). Women's employment of a directive style of leadership is not evaluated as socially acceptable, and studies have shown that it is viewed negatively (Lawson & Lips, 2014). The collaborative leadership style, often associated with women, may be perceived as weak or indecisive when used by men (Cuadrado, Navas, Molero, Ferrer, & Morales, 2012). Wajcman (2015) contradicted most studies and indicated that there is no difference in leadership styles, as both genders use a variety of leadership styles. Society's view of the attributes of female executives can be beneficial to the organization, especially when they are members of a board, as it presents an unbiased assembly.

The lack of women on boards is a cause for concern for a corporation's stakeholders due to the diversity that women provide (Kakabadse et al., 2015). Research on board diversity has shown a positive view of organizations, an increase in economic standing based on the variety of skills, and perceptions women bring to the group (Dunn,

2012; Kakabadse et al., 2015; Mensi-Klarbach, 2014). Studies have shown that women executives view problems and crises in a different way than men do, and the divergence is perceived as a positive change to the status quo (Appelbaum, Shapiro, Didus, Luongo, & Paz, 2013b). Ben-Amar, Francoeur, Hafsi, and Labelle (2013) stated that the performance of a firm directly relates to the demographic diversity of the board. Similarly, Boulouta (2013) reported that there is a direct link between how businesses address their corporate social responsibilities and the number of women they have serving on their boards. The benefits of gender diversity have many European governments looking at how minority quotas may have a direct bearing on the country's gross national product (Magnier & Rosenblum, 2014; Stevens, 2013).

In support of both the gross national product of their country and to minimize gender discrimination, many European countries have implemented laws requiring quotas on corporate boards (Magnier & Rosenblum, 2014). Stephens (2013) stated that the purpose is to ensure that board members have a mix of skills, come from diverse backgrounds, and provide different perspectives to grow and improve the company. The concept is justifiable in theory; however, many issues must be addressed, one of which is the implementation of operational changes to help women advance individually, resulting in the elimination of quotas (Hurn, 2012). The concept of quotas is viewed by women in the United Kingdom as demeaning; they want to earn their positions based on their qualifications (Hurn, 2013; Kranc, 2013). Studies showing that a higher percentage of women in management results in higher performance statistics were the basis for quotas. Rather than being arbitrarily placed, female candidates should qualify for the

responsibilities associated with the jobs before being awarded the positions (Górriz, 2014; Walsh, Fleming, & Enz, 2016). Alstott (2014) stated that all the supportive reports reviewed from Europe indicated that the enhancement of corporate programs is needed to develop women for leadership positions. The diversity of boards could lead to a better understanding of the markets since the market itself is diverse (Belghiti-Mahut, Lafont, & Yousfi, 2016). Corporation boards need to understand the benefits of having diversity in their business leadership. An organization can implement changes to improve its operations for its stakeholders.

**Occupational.** Occupations that lead to executive positions require diversity for many reasons. Many positions held by women are in the areas of research and development and human resources, and not in those that tend to generate revenue, such as sales or production (Smith, Smith, & Verner, 2013). Sawicka and Lagoda (2015) stated that women tend to dominate positions in service-based fields, and men do so in industry and farming. Many women are not given the same opportunities to excel or to earn the recognition needed for promotion (Holgerson, 2013). Professional service firms do not assign women to work on high visibility projects, or with high-level customers that could lead to partnerships, due to the number of hours involved with these clients and the potential conflicts with family commitments (Pinnington & Sandberg, 2012). Some assignments are awarded to men automatically, with the assumption that women may not have the required dedication.

The assumption that women have home commitments that prevent them from putting in the time required is a stereotypical assumption when promoting women into

leadership positions, but it is not found when advancing women to middle management. When looking at the tactics used for appointing managers in the science, engineering, and technology professions, Braun and Turner (2014) discovered that women have a positive impact on the motivation of others, on their career development, and on the culture of the work environment, making them better candidates for significant roles in the organization. These positions were frequently satisfactory enough for women, since not all women perceive success to be achieving CEO or executive leadership status.

Women tend to perceive success differently than men do. Many women consider their positions as very satisfying based upon their contributions to the organization and their opportunities to advance (Semykina & Linz, 2013). They are satisfied with their situations and even with the differences in pay, as they also look at entitlements differently than men do and they gain a sense of satisfaction based on their contributions to the organization (Damman, Heyse, & Mills, 2014; Davison, 2014). Individual women have their own perceptions of job satisfaction; some women resign themselves to being satisfied, others continue to fight against discrimination, and others leave the corporate world to strike out on their own and become entrepreneurs.

Many women start their own businesses to take advantage of family time management. Mavin and Grandy (2012) stated that entrepreneurship is viewed through masculine requisites or male leadership characteristics. Society has instilled a distinction between work performed in the home as domestic, so not recognized as true work, and efforts outside the home, recognized as viable work, to such an extent that women entrepreneurs dress differently when in their business role (Bourne & Calás, 2013). In

starting businesses, women encounter more than just bias from competitors; they lack the training to run a business, which is not provided in standard business classes, and they lack access to mentors, networking, and financial resources (Riebe, 2012). Saporito, Elam, and Brush (2013) identified distinct issues in female business owners' obtaining equal treatment, specifically the interest rates they are offered and the reported loan approval rates. Most discrimination comes from the historical foundation of a patriarchal society and is supported by a variety of established theories.

### **Theoretical Influences on the Literature**

Numerous theories related to the glass ceiling were found in the studies. There were references to a glass ceiling theory, but more often the expression referred to a concept that reiterates the term first identified in the *Wall Street Journal* and that refers to the establishment of a federal commission to research and investigate the lack of female career progression (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The original article identified the situation as an invisible phenomenon hindering the advancement of women in business (Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012; Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne 2014). To provide focus, the following is a synopsis of the feminist and social role theories.

**Feminist theory.** Within the feminist theory, there is some diversification, dependent upon the aspect being investigated or studied. Pedwell and Whitehead (2012) included the emotional and political perspectives of feminist theory. Welch (2012) stated that many of the feminist theories dispute characteristics as they relate to traditional obligations and identify the differences in requirements versus responsibilities. Stephens (2010) provided an additional view by combining cultural ecofeminism with critical

systems thinking to support a pluralist view and guide toward research. Many have noted that the original feminist theory has expanded and diversified since its first inception by theorists Deutsch (2004), Gilligan (1993), and Horney (1993). Today, modern feminist theory has expanded to almost every aspect of society.

**Social role theory.** Henri Tajfel (1982) began developing social role theory during the early 1970s in Great Britain. It encompassed the trends of stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice, as based on his pursuits related to social categorization and social perceptions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Eagly (1987) stated that the roles associated with each gender could affect the view others have of the roles they fill. Although the perceptions of conventional male or female roles have evolved, there exist prejudiced expectations of socially acceptable behaviors (Boulouta, 2013). The principles of this theory evaluate the aptitudes of each gender, based on social norms, and the stereotypical talents or skills men and women inherently possess.

### **Glass Ceiling History and Progress**

The history of the glass ceiling can be traced back to the middle of the 20th century, specifically to when men came back from World War II and not all of the women went back to being homemakers. Those women who stayed on the job faced discrimination in many ways, even if they were widows and had families to nurture; many had their pay decreased regardless of whether they continued in the same job (Aiken, Salmon, & Hanges, 2013; Clive, 1979; Summerfield, 1998). As the years progressed, women began fighting harder for equal rights to employment, equal pay for the same jobs as men, and the right to ascend into leadership positions. The Civil Rights



Act of 1964 provided equal rights regardless of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Piety, 2016). The Act has been changed and modified to incorporate sexual orientation, rights to housing, and other civil liberties (Hersch & Shinall, 2015). Just as the Act changed the legal rights of women, gender discrimination was being identified and clarified.

The term *glass ceiling* was defined in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* in the mid-1980s (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The term identified a metaphorical barrier for women trying to progress up the corporate ladder; the original expression has since expanded to include both male and female minorities (Goldin & Olivetti, 2013). The concept of the glass ceiling has grown to incorporate other names for various barriers for progression. The hindrance is the assumption that successful leaders are associated only with male traits such as assertiveness, ruthlessness, and a commanding nature (Sabharwal, 2015). One variant of the ceiling is referred to as the *glass cliff*, which means that organizations will promote women when the organization is in a crisis; another is the *glass escalator*, relating to the appearance of white men having access to the resources needed to move up the ladder in predominantly female fields (Vanderbroeck, 2010). There is also the *glass wall*, which means that women are in a middle or higher management position, but the ladder for promotion to the executive level is not available, yet both people are a similar position in a lateral office or department (Weidenfeller, 2012).

Research has expanded to cover other aspects of women's and minorities' progression issues to include the *sticky floor* and the *concrete ceiling*, and some have

used terms such as the *celluloid ceiling* (the movie industry), the *stained glass ceiling* (religious positions), and the *bamboo ceiling* (Asians), as well as more being identified (Russo & Hassink, 2012). Smith, Caputi, and Crittenden (2012a) stated that there are many metaphors with a meaning related to that of glass ceiling (the mommy track, the leaky pipeline, off/on-ramps), which are used to imply that women have chosen not to pursue a career and are often referred to as acquiescence by women who opt out of their careers. With a sustained stereotypical attitude, employers may be guilty of assuming female employees will take more time off for their families, not be available for travel, or be reluctant to put in additional work hours due to family restrictions (Figart & Hartmann, 2004). All of these suppositions relate to various aspects of the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

Research has identified variations since the general dimensions of the glass ceiling have been changing in the 21st century. The concerted effort to implement changes may be due to an increase in the number of women working, as well as to the Millennials and young adults of Generations X and Y who have been reared in dual income homes; this has provided a different perspective of women in the workforce (Holden & Raffo, 2014; Raitano & Vona, 2015). The requirement for and enforcement of quotas in Europe have also changed the world perspective on conducting business (Wang & Kelan, 2013). The changes wrought in global business have a marked influence on similar industries in the world market.

**Glass wall.** The glass wall is an interesting phenomenon, as it relates to the glass ceiling in many similar ways. It is the parallel barrier to career progression for women,

meaning that a similar position in an organization has more potential for men to advance than the one held by a woman has (Michailidis, Morphitou, & Theophylatou, 2012). It is also related to another term, the sticky floor, which means that women in a similar position seem stagnated in their careers and lack opportunities to move into those posts with promotion potential (Douglas & Miller, 2015). It is similar to other barriers but is frequently related to women's inclination to undervalue themselves and not negotiate as tenaciously as men (Carrillo, Gandelman, & Robano, 2014). Women are at a career disadvantage because of their propensity to question their abilities and their reluctance to negotiate positions and wages or to determine the growth potential of their skills.

Women are commonly paid less than men, even in equivalent positions. Research by Joshi, Son, and Roh (2015) and by Janssen, Sartore, and Backes-Gellner (2016) showed that even when women are rated the same as men in performance evaluations, companies still tend to reward them at a lower rate. The pay differences found in organizations go from the lowest positions up through, and including, the executive offices (Ochmichen, Sarry, & Wolff, 2014). Although women have narrowed the pay gap over the past three decades, it still exists (Hill, 2013). With differences continuing to occur in pay, as well as in advancement opportunities, the sticky floor and glass wall are noteworthy aspects of the glass ceiling phenomenon.

**Glass escalator.** Another facet of the glass ceiling is that of the glass escalator. This term refers to the accelerated career ascension white men experience when employed in female-dominated fields, such as teaching, social work, and nursing (Williams, 2013). Many of the men view the pressure to ascend the ladder as

unwarranted; for minority men, the situation is not the same, as they are perceived as less competent (Flores & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2014). Woodhams, Lupton, and Cowling (2015) found that ethnic minority men and men with disabilities were less likely to experience the benefits of the glass escalator than were women. Other studies have indicated that the analysis of the glass escalator applies to white males only. Men classified as an ethnic minority or who have a disability do not appear to have the same advantage and can have fewer opportunities than women do in female-dominated occupations.

Women working in male-dominated professions do not encounter a fast-track career experience; it is harder for women to gain recognition in the male-dominated science, technology, engineering, and manufacturing (STEM) fields. The escalator is commonly associated with the lack of career-based support that women need to help them progress in male-dominated fields, such as mentors, advancement opportunities, and encouragement through counseling and advanced training opportunities (Smith, 2012). This type of support can be critical to career progression, breaking through the barriers, and overcoming assumptions and stereotyping. Research by Macarie and Moldovan (2012) exposed the glass escalator effect at universities and focused on the science-based fields. The escalator influence, identified at many of the medically based schools, had a focus on the counseling and nursing fields, although the percentage was not as pronounced as in smaller training facilities.

**Glass cliff.** The social stereotype of women being collaborative and having the ability to persuade others to work together may be one of the reasons for the creation of the term glass cliff. There are some instances where women have been appointed to

leadership positions when a corporation has been at risk (Ryan et al., 2016). Evidence exists that the appointment of a female CEO frequently raises the stock price of a company; however, if a woman fails, it confirms the assumption that women cannot handle crisis situations (Hennessey, MacDonald, & Carroll, 2014; Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014). The placement of women in leadership positions during uncertain times is another form of discrimination, placing them at a disadvantage from the date of the promotion, but it implies that the change in leadership gender will bring significant modifications to the existing operation and invoke a transformation in the organization (Hunt-Earle, 2012). Discrimination of this type, involving leadership appointments, may be a decision to show willingness to make significant modifications to the existing operation and invoke a transformation in the organization.

The addition of women to leadership positions and their induction onto corporate boards have been beneficial to organizations. The addition of women to an organization's board of directors brings a diverse perspective of issues and enhances the stakeholders' view of the company's openness to change and diversity (Sun, Zhu, & Ye, 2015). Although a small step toward removal of the glass ceiling, there remain issues with compensation, mentors, and negotiation skills.

The pay gap between CEOs and vice presidents is usually less when the CEO is a woman than when the CEO is male. The smaller difference can promote collaboration among the vice presidents, whereas when the gap is much larger, it creates a competitive environment for those vice presidents aspiring toward the higher paying position (Vieito,

2012). The issue of compensation is only one aspect of the glass ceiling for women; placing more women on boards is a progressive move toward change.

**Progress.** The addition of women to leadership positions and their inclusion on corporate boards have been beneficial to organizations. Adding women to an organization's board of directors brings a diverse perspective of issues and enhances the stakeholders' views of the company's openness to change and diversity (Sun et al., 2015). The economic effects of women and minorities being placed into leadership positions are reflected in stock prices and also impact the culture of an organization (Cook & Glass, 2014). Diversification, with the incorporation of women and minorities into leadership and board positions, has had a beneficial global effect.

Members of the European Union (EU) have begun instituting gender and minority quotas for large businesses. Stephens (2013) stated that one benefit of having women on boards is their tendency to be more intuitive and empathetic when contemplating decisions. Many governments have recognized the need to incorporate women into executive management positions, as well as into boards of publically listed companies, and they have instituted quota systems in the last decade (Lansing & Chandra, 2012). The quota implementation has produced a marked increase in the number of women on corporate and executive boards, the impact of which on corporate growth and culture is still being researched (Holst & Kirsch, 2012). According to Wand and Kelan (2013), the implementation in Norway yielded a marked improvement in the organization's effectiveness and tactical control, enhanced the amount of development, and reduced the frequency of board conflicts. Although the implementation of quotas is helping to move

women into executive offices and onto boards, many women would prefer to earn those positions instead of being placed there to fulfill a quota (Terjesen & Sealy, 2016). The history of a women's career progression may help her qualify as a viable candidate and can be influenced by the individual's determination to succeed.

There remains the issue of women's self-perceived leadership abilities and their willingness or skills to negotiate competitive wages (De Blas, Corrales -Herrero, & Martín-Román, 2012). Setting up enhancement programs at universities, companies, or industry-based associations can assist both women and minorities in achieving success from early on in their careers (Rayburn, Denmark, Reuder, & Miteria Austria, 2010). The establishment of internal and external programs and incentives is critical for those graduating in the next few decades (Denmark & Williams, 2012). Studies have shown that there is an inequality in the starting wages of male and female graduates and a higher unemployment rate for women and minorities (Sianou-Kyrgiou, 2012).

**Inconsistencies.** The glass-ceiling phenomenon is viewed differently by different generations. The children of the baby boomer generation, who are commonly referred to as Millennials, were raised by the original feminists and tend to have a higher sense of self-esteem and entitlement (Ng & Gossett, 2013). In contrast to the boomers and Millennials, Generation Y members associated female executives with honesty, imagination, a caring approach, and loyalty (Deaconu & Rasca, 2015). The newest generation to enter the job market has higher expectations of gaining challenging positions and, unlike previous generations, does not willingly settle for starting at the

bottom (Sharabi & Harpaz, 2013). Their reluctance and attitude of greater entitlement could be reasons for the high unemployment rate of young adults.

Among young women who have been working, there is a propensity to hold off on having families until they establish their careers. Women may have a tendency to determine their occupations based on anticipation of the responsibilities of marriage and children (Ganginis Del Pino, O'Brien, Mereish, & Miller, 2013). There are numerous factors involved in a woman's choice or need to work, such as whether she has a life partner or depends on the welfare system, and the social culture in which she lives (Stam, Verbakel, & Graaf, 2014). Women in developed countries are not as likely now as in the previous century to give up their careers readily, and companies have instituted policies to facilitate the needs of dual income families (Sharabi & Harpaz, 2013).

In order to establish their careers, many women are postponing starting a family. The concern for the modern woman is developing her career first and ensuring that she finds a mate who will share in all aspects of life: housework, family responsibilities, and income (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). Women today are less likely to give up their career goals or put their spouse's career first, as women did in previous decades. Women in younger generations have a different perception of what is a priority, especially when it comes to planning their future and dealing with conflicts of home and family.

### **Work-Family Balance and Conflicts**

The principles of stress management and accommodations for single parents, dual income families, and employees with elderly relatives induce many organizations to implement programs to assist with the needs of their employees for a work-life balance.



The implementation of these programs is not across all countries, all industries, or across all organizations within an industry. Studies have shown that when an organization implements a work-life or work-family-based program, such as paid day care or flexible work schedules, their competition will follow similarly or suffer from retention and recruitment issues (Wang & Verma, 2012). The concerns with work-family conflicts impact family care and the traditional roles of men and women may be a crucial factor in the continued existence of the glass ceiling.

**Traditional vs. nontraditional.** What used to be the typical role for women has changed dramatically. Women and men no longer feel a woman should be the only parent to nurture their children. The younger generations are sharing responsibilities for raising children. Although previously referred to as nontraditional roles, women with careers have become the norm. The younger generations have set goals for a higher standard of living or various luxuries that previous generations would have had to work for decades to obtain. Members of Generations X, Y, and Z are not willing to start out small and work their way up, the way their parents did.

Traditional roles of women are changing on a global scale, although doing so much more slowly in some developing countries. There, the social norms view the responsibilities for family care as being exclusively female, particularly as they are unpaid and therefore not valued highly (Minguez, 2012). Research shows that women still bear a significant number of the home and family responsibilities, and as unpaid work, it is not considered as a viable attribute for paid employment.

The view of what used to be considered traditional jobs for women has also changed. Women are no longer relegated to being nurses and teachers. There is a need for more women in STEM fields, all of which require more time at work and occasionally more travel (Bosch & Ramos, 2013). These fields, as well as outside sales, require women to be available for travel away from home for overnight trips, putting a burden on the spouse to take on responsibilities at home.

**Expectations of women.** Some changes are happening in the 21st century; society has modified the 20th-century norms of what was expected of women in the workforce (Holst & Kirsch, 2012; Wang & Verma, 2012). Expectations have become higher, and some hiring managers still assume women will take more time off to deal with family issues than men will (Minguez, 2012; Wang & Verma, 2012). This assumption is not always correct and is discriminatory. It is evident that more single mothers are working, and men have begun to be more involved in parenting than in the past. The Baby Boomer generation expected women to stay at home; problems arose with these individuals being at the higher echelon of business, and these men would sometimes experience a bias against women (Holst & Kirsch, 2012; Minguez, 2012).

The bias of men from the baby boomer generation comes to the forefront when women are not expected to perform on the job in the same capacity as men. Women may be single parents or come from a dual income home, but at the same time, they need to work harder, work longer hours and go beyond what a man is expected to do (Joshi et al., 2015). Exceptions are not expected, and women need to determine their home situation and the requirements of the positions for which they apply. One of many challenges

facing women in the workplace is the prejudgment of their availability for travel and longer hours; this is a hindrance when being considered for higher-level positions, even if their work history substantiates their willingness to meet the needs of the organization.

A problem remains in the perception that women are not willing to put forth the effort required for success. According to Rimashevskaya (2013), businesses lose the high quality intellectual abilities of women when they practice segregation and discrimination. The problem is two-fold for women, as the effect on both their work and family responsibilities can be viewed negatively. If a woman stays at home to raise her children, she is not considered a serious or dedicated employee; if she puts forth the extra effort to pursue her career, she is regarded as a terrible mother (Hyland Tajlili, 2014). With the increase in the number of single mothers and dual income families in the 21st century, the Family Friendly Initiatives (FFIs) and benefits afforded by organizations can create competition in the hiring and retaining of skilled employees.

**21st century changes.** Accommodation for families in the laws and in the attitudes of Generations X and Y has changed the workplace environment. Many countries have instituted extended paid, or partially paid, maternity leave for mothers (from 6 months to a year in some countries), and many countries have subsidized day care (Hymowitz, 2013). These benefits are advantageous for both mothers and fathers (who also get paternity leave, though not as much), but the benefits do not have an impact on the number of women who achieve the level of corporate executive.

The new millennium has brought FFIs to many organizations in the United States, but it is not a universal occurrence, nor is it applicable to any particular industry. Each

company determines what FFI it will implement, if any, from flexible work hours to part-time employment, based on how advantageous it may be to the enterprise (Formánková & Křížková, 2015). Different generations look upon these initiatives differently, as their implementation has come too late for the Baby Boomers and Generation X to take advantage of them, but they implemented many of them in the workplace.

Members of Generation Y (the Millennials) are looking at these programs when seeking employment. They are taking the time to consider their choices for work and partners. The majority of this generation do not want jobs that interfere with raising families. They seek partners who will share home and family responsibilities, and they seek careers with organizations that provide the benefits of FFIs (Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). Both men and women are seeking the benefits of enjoying time with their families and not being overly focused on work.

The implementation of different programs to minimize conflicts between work responsibilities and family needs is a great objective, but senior leaders and executive management must show support for the programs to ensure employees do not fear career penalties for participation (Ko, Hur, & Smith-Walter, 2013). Many organizations are looking at programs to help eliminate the glass ceiling by accommodating the needs of women with families, thus gaining a commitment from their employees and reducing employee turnover (Downes, Hemmasi, & Eshghi, 2014).

Offering flexible schedules for all members of the organization can benefit both genders, as it can provide an opportunity for men to become more involved with family responsibilities (Boyar, Huang, & Xu, 2014; Putnam, Meyers, & Gailliard, 2013). The

flex-schedule is one benefit that younger generations are looking for when seeking employment, along with programs like telework, alternate work hours, and subsidized or on-site child-care, among others. One major problem organizations encounter when implementing work-family programs is a change in the corporate culture due to a decrease in working relationships among associates (Whiston, Feldwisch, Evans, Blackman, & Gilman, 2014). The problems encountered with work-family programs occur in all fields of industry, and implementation of any, or many, programs does not result in a comprehensive reduction in turnover, increase in loyalty to the organization, or greater employee satisfaction.

**Issues and barriers.** Existing problems in the new generation of work for women are frequently reflected in the number of women in the STEM realms in both education and industry. The issues may be attributed to the hours and travel required to establish credibility in these areas. One program designed to ameliorate the problem in the education industry found that work-family conflict is a global issue and that many women have implemented personal changes instead of challenging the established policies and procedures (Li & Peguero, 2015). The requirement to travel, work overseas, or move to a different location can have a significant effect on the family, in particular for women, as it is socially acceptable, if not expected, for women to give up their careers to promote that of their spouse (Heikkinen, 2014; Sayers, 2012). The result in some situations is that women refrain from pursuing a career or do not put forth the extra effort to obtain career advancement, depending upon how the individual couple views their particular situation.

The implementation of family-friendly programs does not come without issues. The programs developed and implemented by many organizations occasionally worsen the conflicts between work requirements and family obligations (Bertrand, 2013; Wille, De Fruyt, & Feys, 2012). The practice of working from home (teleworking) can create issues due to the permeable boundaries of being at home versus being at work and the inability to separate the two environments (Higgins, Duxbury, & Julien, 2014).

Success in pursuing career advancement can be augmented by the benefits of programs that help with work-family conflicts (WFCs), which are also related to the changes implemented globally. The stress and exhaustion associated with WFCs are related to perceptions of career success as well as to justifications for changing jobs or leaving an organization (Wille et al., 2012). The types of conflicts that people experience have become a serious issue and the rationale for numerous incentive programs.

Women who have been able to have a successful career and raise a family are not necessarily as happy as one might expect. The problem is that the conflicts between the demands of a family and those of one's career can create various forms of stress related to feelings of guilt and inadequacy (Chang, Chin, & Ye, 2014). Women who seem to have the best of both work and family are typically dealing with much more internal conflict than appears on the surface (Bertrand, 2013). The challenges lie within the individual. How she adapts to them can be related to the industry in which she works.

### **Industry**

The literature research concentrated on two industries where women in leadership positions remain a minority: service-related organizations and manufacturing. The studies

found for service organizations centered on the legal, accounting, and hospitality fields. The manufacturing industries were diverse in their products but excluded the pharmaceutical industries.

**Service industries.** Women have experienced barriers to advancement in numerous service- and profession-related industries. Grow and Deng (2014) provided insight into the practice through various types of gender-based segregation, including vertical (career progression) and lateral (women in specific job categories), resulting in overall discrimination in the advertising industry. The media play a key role for women in leadership, primarily through their reports on female CEOs. Dixon-Fowler, Ellstrand, and Johnson (2013) revealed how male CEOs are referenced in the media as individuals, but female CEOs tend to be considered as a group entity, which can influence an investor or stakeholder's view of any female CEO. The inconsistency can jeopardize how women are viewed in any executive position or for their potential for an executive-level position. The stereotypical roles of men and women are influential in whether women are even considered for senior positions.

There is a significant disparity in the legal profession when it comes to women. Although female lawyers comprise nearly half of the lawyers employed in Britain and the U.S., less than 25% in Britain and less than 20% in the U.S. of legal firm partners are female (Walsh, 2012). The large firms attribute the situation to the unofficial requirement for partners to be available to the more prestigious clients on a 24-hour basis, to wine and dine potential or existing large clients after hours, and to be able to work longer hours (Feenan, Hand, & Hough, 2016; Sommerlad, 2016). According to Dinovitzer and Hagan

(2014), the disparity in pay between men and women has nothing to do with segregation or abilities; it is a method to preserve men's advantageous position. The responsibilities of family and home preclude many women from aspiring to partnerships until their families mature, but the delay can be as detrimental to their careers as taking a break. The legal profession is only one of the service-based industries with fewer women in leadership positions.

The accounting field has very few women in leadership positions, and the reasons used to justify the deficiency in the accounting profession are synonymous with those used in the legal field. A study by Faragalla (2015) on women in accounting found that a significant percentage of women experienced discrimination in job assignments, promotion opportunities, and opportunities for access to professional development. The hierarchy of these male-dominated fields creates an atmosphere that hinders women's success in these environments.

**Manufacturing industries.** A review of the literature on the positions and progress of women in various fields of manufacturing revealed very few reports. The focus of those articles was on the employment of women in the labor-intensive areas of manufacturing in developing countries, without mention of their progress up the ladder, or even to supervisory positions (Kucera & Tejani, 2014). Ahmed, Feeny, and Posso (2016) researched how many of the women employed in manufacturing are not educated and have fewer skills than their male counterparts in countries like Bangladesh, where there has been an influx of companies in the clothing industry in recent decades.



The trend of the garment industry to move where they can have less expensive costs for workers has propagated the development of unions. According to Ghosh, (2015), female manufacturing workers will not participate in a union because of their family responsibilities and because it would add to their responsibilities and require approval from family and peers, due to the culture of their area. Investigative literature and peer-reviewed articles lack explanations concerning how this affects progress to executive or senior level positions in the field of female employment.

### **Geography**

Documentation related to the general population of female executives in the Philadelphia metropolitan area could only be found in statistical analyses and databases. The metropolitan region for the research project included southeastern Pennsylvania, northeastern Delaware, and southwestern New Jersey. The statistics show a very low number of women in executive-level positions in the service and manufacturing companies located in this area. Statistics gathered from the ReferenceUSA (2015) database showed the Philadelphia metropolitan region had a higher than average percentage of women in executive positions. Women held executive positions in this geographic location at an average of 21%, except in the nonmedical manufacturing and service industries, where the percentage was 15% for organizations with over \$500,000 in annual income (ReferenceUSA, 2015). These organizations had many female executives in different divisions, but only 6% of them holding the CEO position. Discovering the personal opinions of the female CEOs could clarify the reasons for the small number of women attaining this level in these fields.

### **Gap in the Literature**

There are hundreds of articles and books about the glass ceiling, women in leadership, and the issues that involve having both a career and a family. An extensive search revealed very few articles or research on these topics directly related to women in the industries of manufacturing and services, and no specific articles found on lived experiences in the specific industries related to this study. There were articles on the discrimination issues women encountered, but none specific to women working in a male-dominated field, such as construction or manufacturing, nor any focused on problems related to a woman's career advancement in these areas.

The focus of my research was on identifying and understanding the issues women have encountered in ascending to executive positions in the manufacturing and services industries and to document their lived experiences for others to gain insight. Statistics showed that these industries were very lean on female executives. The process of obtaining and documenting the participants' lived experiences was intended to identify or explain the obstacles and yield an understanding of the reasons for these low numbers.

Peer-reviewed literature on female executives in the service industries was minimal, with just a few focusing on the reasons why women are not considered for the upper echelon in this type of business. Literature specifically on female executives in the manufacturing industry was nonexistent. There did not appear to have been any research conducted from the female executive perspective on the continued existence of a glass ceiling phenomenon. The literature did not provide specific examples of the problems encountered when women took a break in their career, nor how it may have affected their

promotion potential in the future. The assumption was that women automatically put their careers second to their family, and unlike men, all women planned on having children.

This research project was an attempt to fill the gaps described above by asking women in executive positions about their experiences of discrimination and other issues they encountered in their rise to the executive suite. The research sought their opinions on how their work environment and their work culture had changed and on what changes they anticipated for the next generation of female executives. The report was intended to provide much-needed insight into women's rise to the executive office as well as to fill these known gaps in the literature.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature review provided an overview of published articles related to the study subject. The goal of the research study was to provide an additional contribution to the existing literature, potentially filling the gap in the literature on female executives in the service and manufacturing industries. The need to understand what the specific issues are for women in these businesses was not identified in the existing literature. There were no articles that defined where problems existed for women ascending to executive positions in the service or manufacturing industries, nor any specific examples of what obstacles they faced.

Chapter 2 presented a synopsis of the strategies used in researching the literature on women in executive positions and a table indicating the types and dates of the articles used. A breakdown of the conceptual framework used for this study was provided, as well as an overview of the two theoretical influences on the literature used. The literature

review included a breakdown of the history, progression, and variations of the glass ceiling phenomenon, and the principles related to the work-family conflicts related to the problem. The literature review concluded with the relationship to the problem within the industries, the geographic location targeted, and the gap revealed in the peer-reviewed research on this topic.

Only women in leadership positions can answer questions and provide a better understanding of the specifics related to a successful career in their industries. The descriptive aspects of a descriptive phenomenological approach were proposed to gather the lived experiences of female executives. The use of interviews to gain a better understanding of their experiences was intended to identify specific details of what they required to further their careers. Chapter 3 provides the details of the research method and outlines the systematic process followed to identify the issues experienced by executive women during their careers.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research process for the qualitative phenomenological study. The purpose of the study was to identify and report the lived experiences of women executives in their career progression and to identify any unique skills or assets related to their success in the manufacturing and service industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The descriptive phenomenological design was used to gain a better understanding of the experiences that influenced women's career progression (see Gill, 2014; Husserl, 2012; Husserl & Hill, 2008; Moustakas, 1994).

Descriptive phenomenology addresses how an individual perceives a phenomenon and his or her feelings related to his or her experience (Moustakas, 1994a). Descriptive phenomenology favors the internal thoughts and perceptions of the person who lived the phenomenon (Husserl & Hill, 2008). The approach used in this study was that of transcending the phenomenon, without bias, and gaining knowledge through the lived experiences of those who have experienced the event (Moustakas, 1994a). Individuals' unique experiences, including the environment they grew up in, their personal life experiences as adults, or the experiences they confronted in the workplace, all play a part in the perceptions they have of a phenomenon (Moran, 2012). Descriptive phenomenology is used to examine individuals' perceptions of what they distinguish as objective and subjective, as related to their experiences (Moran, 2012).

The participants were asked to provide their views of their career experiences. The study involved an inquiry into the results of their conscious versus subconscious perceptions of their situations (*noesis* versus *noema*) (Moustakas, 1994b). The goal of

this study was to document similar and dissimilar experiences to understand how women of divergent backgrounds perceived the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

Data collection included semistructured interviews with 12 women executives; after 12 interviews, data saturation was achieved when no additional new themes or perceptions were identified (see Suri, 2011). The findings of this study may assist other women in the manufacturing and service industries in understanding the circumstances these women experienced to obtain executive positions. The results addressed aspects of the glass ceiling that had an impact on the participants' career progression.

This chapter includes the rationale for using the qualitative method, the approach for gathering the data, and the role of the researcher. The chapter also addresses ethical procedures and concerns regarding trustworthiness and confidentiality. It concludes with a summary of the research method used to investigate the glass-ceiling phenomenon.

### **Research Question**

The study explored one research question: What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century? Data were collected from women who had achieved executive-level positions in industries dominated by men. The statistics for the targeted metropolitan area showed that the service and manufacturing sectors remained male-dominated (ReferenceUSA, 2015). The goal of the study was to understand the methods and skills the participants used to ascend to their positions.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This qualitative study addressed the gender inequality of the past and the growing success of women in the new millennium. One-on-one interviews were conducted to explore how executive-level women achieved success and to gain an understanding of the challenges they faced. The interview questions were designed to explore the aspects of the glass ceiling that they had encountered in their careers, the issues they had encountered with work-family conflicts, and the influences or support they had received that facilitated their rise to the top.

The interview process allowed me to gather data on the lived experiences of the participants and on how their success was assisted or hindered by their education, work experiences, and families, and in what ways. The qualitative phenomenological approach allowed me to obtain information from women who had attained executive positions, including their lived experiences and their perception of whether and how the glass ceiling influenced or hindered their rise to an executive position.

The quantitative method would not have provided data needed to answer the research question. The deductive approach in quantitative research would have involved the creation of a questionnaire or survey (Neuman, 2000). Thick, rich details of the women's backgrounds, the culture of the organizations where they worked, and their positive and negative experiences could not have been obtained except through qualitative methodology.

The qualitative approach was the best suited for understanding the experiences of women in their progression toward their executive positions. The inductive nature of

qualitative research enabled me to answer the research question by exploring the experiences of the participants (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). A phenomenological approach was chosen to satisfy the purpose of this study.

Following the principles of phenomenological research, I used semistructured questions to collect the data from the participants. Moustakas (1994a) stated that to conduct phenomenological studies, a researcher must not make any suppositions and must create questions or guides to obtain information that may help to understand the participants' experiences. The descriptive phenomenological approach requires direct interaction with those who have lived through the experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Secondary resources would not have provided the personal experiences or the additional details required to answer the research question (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The information on lived experiences could only be obtained using a phenomenological design.

Evaluation of other qualitative designs indicated that they were not appropriate for the study. The objective of the study was not to develop a new theory but to understand the lived experiences of executive women. The grounded theory design was not appropriate for the study, although the results may be used for additional studies and theory development (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The narrative approach could have been used if the study had not focused on understanding the related experiences of women from diverse backgrounds in similar industries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The ethnographic approach is anthropological in nature; although executive women may be considered a unique group, they are not part of a particular culture and



can come from a variety of backgrounds (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A case study approach was also considered; however, an in-depth study of one or two cases would not have enabled me to answer the research question (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

The phenomenological approach facilitated the gathering of information on the participants' lived experiences. I collected data on the experiences of executive women in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The interviews addressed the participants' lived experiences and their observed behavior related to incidents and encounters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The data were obtained using open-ended questions with the potential for follow-up questions to clarify participants' answers, which helped me to gain a clear understanding of participants' unique experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I fulfilled the roles of observer, interviewer, transcriber, and evaluator. I conducted the interviews and noted any significant actions such as inflections of voice, facial expressions, or physical behaviors of the participant that could lead to additional questions or indicate specific behavioral reactions. The observations of physical or auditory data were noted.

As the researcher and transcriber, I provided each participant with a description of the study and a guarantee of confidentiality in an invitation email (see Appendix E). Before the interview commenced, the participants were provided with a consent form. The form included the guarantee of confidentiality and required a signature before the interview commenced. The study description indicated that the transcript of the interview

would be provided to the participant within 48 hours of the meeting. I provided each participant with a copy of the transcript to verify the accuracy of the narrative, with a request for confirmation within 2 weeks; transcripts not acknowledged within 2 weeks would be assumed correct as written.

I was not employed in the targeted industries and did not have a personal relationship with the participants. I did not sit on any of the boards of these industries, and none of my friends or family had any influence over the participants. The absence of a personal or professional relationship minimized bias in data collection.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The research participants were female executives in the manufacturing and service-related industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The targeted population was based on demographic research for the area (Catalyst, 2014). ReferenceUSA (2015) provided the data that identified the number of women holding executive positions in these industries as lower than in other industries and as lower than the national average.

I chose a target of 15 participants to ensure data saturation. The number of participants needed for a phenomenological study is debated among researchers, with a range from five to 25 (Beitin, 2012; Boyd, 2001; Dworkin, 2012). The determined number of 15 took into consideration that one interview could generate more than 15 pages of transcribed data (Dworkin, 2012). The participants targeted for this study represented specific demographics, and interviewing more than 15 people would have generated an extreme amount of data for review (Seidman, 2013).

The selection of the participants was based on their years in the position and their availability to participate. Participants were identified through the database found in ReferenceUSA (2015) and verified through the organization's website. The quest for qualifying participants included members of female executive associations in the eastern region of the United States, which provided additional participants for the study. The participants' contact information was obtained through the Internet and corporate websites. The invitations included a description of the proposed study, assurance of confidentiality, and an outline of the interview process and the subsequent review of transcribed material (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Maxwell, 2013).

The requests were sent to 25 women in each industry to ensure a minimum number of successful interviews. The number was also intended to ensure various backgrounds and experiences to answer the research question. The interviews were scheduled with female executives from both the manufacturing and service industries.

The participants were provided with an opportunity to ask any questions about the study before commencement of the interview. I concluded each interview with a description of the procedure that would be followed. The process consisted of transcription within 48 hours and sending the transcript to the participant for review. In addition, I also reiterated participant confidentiality (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

In addition, I provided participants with information on receipt of an email containing the transcript and the need to expedite any changes as part of the validation of the contents. Participants were informed that failure to return the document within 14

days would result in the assumption that the transcript was correct. I then thanked the participant and asked whether she had any further questions. I followed an interview protocol to ensure that all aspects of the interview process were consistent.

I conducted nine successful interviews to obtain saturation. To have the session be considered successful, the participants had to answer all the questions. Saturation was determined when there were no new themes, information, or experiences related by the participants. The process entailed interviewing the nine participants, hand coding, using the NVivo 12 Plus software program to identify recurring themes, and evaluating the data to determine saturation. After that point, an additional three interviews were conducted and the coding and evaluation processes repeated. The process was repeated until saturation was attained.

Saturation was reached after 12 successful interviews. The researcher evaluated the questions and obtained expert guidance to determine whether modification of the questions was warranted. Modification was not necessary, and the original questions were utilized for all participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary instrument for this study was the researcher. I used a list of open-ended interview questions designed to answer the main research question, as well as notes taken during the interview process in a one-on-one, semistructured interview with each of the participants (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011).

The audio recorder function on my laptop (Microsoft's Media Program) was utilized for recording the interviews, and a mobile smartphone was used to provide a backup of the audio recording. The recorded interviews were saved to the hard drive and downloaded to a digital device (thumb drive or CD/DVD) and were secured in a fireproof safe after transcription and confirmation of accuracy by the participant. The audio files were encrypted, secured, and stored for the duration of the required time in accordance with Walden University guidelines. A semistructured interview approach permitted asking follow-on questions to gain additional or detailed information as it related to the original interview question.

The consent form (see Appendix F) was formulated using a variety of established records, in order to have one specific for the collection of the data in the study. The consent form was based on previously utilized forms and incorporated standards set forth by Walden University. The form outlined what would transpire during the interview, what would be done with the information afterwards, and when to expect the transcript for verification; it also included an assurance of confidentiality (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The use of any document previously created would have required the permission of the original creator; no such form was utilized for this dissertation.

### **Researcher-Developed Instruments**

The bases for question development were an analysis of the literature reviewed for the study and personal experience. The personal experience was gained over the last three decades of working in various business environments and experiencing some

aspects of the glass ceiling. Research on the theories of the glass ceiling and the work-family conflict provided the basis for the main research question.

Addressing the main research question required obtaining the personal experiences of women who had achieved success in executive-level positions. Through a list of questions (see Appendix A), I inquired about the poignant incidences in their careers that had made a difference and their background of family support, career assistance, and education as these related to their success. These interview questions were field-tested by experts at Walden University.

### **Field Test**

The researcher drafted the interview questions found in Appendix A and invited 10 university-approved research experts to participate in a field test. Two positive responses were received from the initially invited qualitative phenomenological research experts. The second set of requests was sent out the following week. There was one response requesting additional information, which I provided. The expert evaluation of my interview questions was returned, as well as another response from the second set of requests, making four responses in total.

The requests were sent individually to each expert and included an overview of the proposed research, along with the interview questions for evaluation of the value, content, and wording of the questions as they related to gathering data to answer the main research question. The field test, which some referred to as an expert panel review, was designed to clarify the interview questions and to assure that they were formulated to gain

relevant data, promote gathering additional information, and generate data to answer the main research question.

The appendices include the original interview questions (see Appendix A), the email request for participation (see Appendix B), and a table for the evaluation of the questions (see Appendix C). The field test section (see Appendix C) includes comments and suggestions based on the question design, clarity, alignment, and appropriateness for the inclusion of data that would answer the main question of the study. The comments are identified in Appendix C by letter in the last column. The finalized interview question set utilized for the final study was developed based on the feedback provided from the field test experts (see Appendix D).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The recruitment process was conducted using the ReferenceUSA database and through the utilization of three different female executive organizations. These organizations were the Forum of Executive Women (FOEW), the Network of Executive Women (NEW), and Executive Women International (EWI), which have chapters based in the targeted metropolitan area. Each organization was contacted directly, requesting their cooperation in posting a request on their official website for participant volunteers. A draft request letter including the reason for the research was incorporated into a follow-up email to each organization. To obtain a list of volunteers, I provided an outline that included the estimated length of the interview and the goal for the collection of the data. The participants were also provided with the assurance that the researcher would conduct and transcribe all interviews and that there would be only one contact for the study.

The recruitment plan was designed to obtain the names and contact information for 50 participants from the region, in order to obtain the required number of participants for saturation. A follow-up plan of action was created to recruit additional participants, if required, from those areas just beyond the metropolitan boundaries. The researcher explored other means for assistance in recruitment through the alumni associations of five local universities.

The data collection included no more than five interviews per week, depending on the participants. The schedule did not exceed five per week to allow for proper transcription and return of the transcription to each participant within the predetermined 48-hour period. The first week of study consisted of only one interview, which allowed the time required for transcription and for the updates needed. The schedule was adjusted based on the availability of the participants, their schedules, and the amount of time determined during the first few interviews.

The researcher/interviewer closed each interview with an outline of the procedure going forward. The process consisted of transcription within 48 hours and forwarding of the transcript to the participant for review. The closing remarks included the reiteration of confidentiality (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Data were recorded using a mobile phone and transferred to a laptop computer. The information was stored in three locations: on the computer's hard drive, on a thumb drive, and on a personal Drop Box Cloud storage program. The multiple locations ensured that all information gathered was backed up and secure. The recordings were maintained until after transcription. Transcription records are available until completion



of oral defense and award of the doctorate. One final copy of all transcribed materials will be recorded on a single digital device and stored in a secure fireproof container for a minimum of 5 years, as required by the University.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The analysis plan directly addressed the need to answer the primary research question: What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century?

During transcription, notes were taken to help evaluate the data (i.e., observation notes and transcripts) and to assist with the identification of patterns or themes. To analyze the data, I personally performed the evaluation of the gathered data. I then analyzed the information with a qualitative software program (NVivo12 Plus), then compared the two sets of identified themes, and finally wrote the report.

The analysis of data required refraining from making judgments based on my personal values, beliefs, and perceptions, otherwise referred to as epoché (Moustakas, 1994b). The elimination of personal bias is critical to phenomenological research. According to Patton (2002), “The process of epoche epitomizes the data-based, evidential, and empirical (vs. empiricist) research orientation of phenomenology” (p. 485).

The first step in the analysis of the data was to listen to the recorded interviews before transcription and take notes. The subsequent transcripts were read, and again notes were made. The transcripts were sent back to the participants for confirmation or correction within 48 hours of the interview. The transcripts were reviewed upon return

after an established response period to refresh the memory, and additional notes were taken to assist with the identification of patterns (Maxwell, 2013). The additional reviews were done to ensure consistency in the evaluation of the gathered data.

The evaluation of the data utilized a dual approach. The assessment started with hand coding, a process of noticing similarities in words and phrases used during the interviews and while performing the transcription. The second phase used a qualitative software program (Rodham, Fox, & Doran, 2015), the NVivo 12 Plus. The program software was created for qualitative data analysis. The software design uses algorithms to identify themes through text analysis. A comparison of the two methods of identifying topics and experiences contributed to the accuracy of the data gathered and helped to establish credibility.

The strategy for qualitative research categorization requires coding and sorting the related data (Maxwell, 2013). The process of coding was used for the identification of similar phrases, experiences, or other relevant data. The codes were further broken down into subcategories for more specific themes (Patton, 2002). The additional coding or subcategory coding was conducted for clarity and evaluation and was built on the narrative descriptions provided by the participants (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The interpretation of codes and subcategories was based on the comparative experiences of the participants and the literature reviewed as part of the study background. The various categories, codes, and themes were created through both the computer program and the researcher's interpretation, and they were examined in parallel. A hierarchical approach

was used to identify each interpretation method and the relationship to the research question.

The transcribed interviews and the research notes were loaded into the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo 12 Plus. The themes, or codes, identified by the software program were compared to those developed by the researcher. Concordance reinforced the trustworthiness of the evaluation and of the subsequent report. There were no significant discrepancies between the two evaluations, which eliminated the need to recruit another researcher to conduct an assessment and code the data or to use another qualitative research software program in order to ensure the reliability of the data coding.

The reasons for a dual coding approach were to clarify and identify the similarity of experiences of a phenomenon. The potential discrepancies between the participants helped to identify specific causes (i.e., personal background, industry, or demographics) and the positive or negative relationship to the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. The purpose of the study was to determine if the phenomenon continued to exist in the new century and if lived experiences of the participants could fill the gap in the literature.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

A researcher must apply quality controls to research in order to gain acceptance of a study's value in the body of literature. The issues related to the trustworthiness of the project include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014; Barki, Robert, & Dulipovici, 2015; Cope, 2014). The field study validated the research questions and determined whether they would adequately address the primary question of the study and relate to different industries in order to enhance the

trustworthiness of the results (Sousa, 2014). The use of both the researcher's evaluation of the collected data and the NVivo 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software heightened the trustworthiness of the results gathered.

### **Credibility**

The study confirmed credibility by using NVivo 12 Plus software, the interview notes, and the researcher's personal coding of the information obtained. The multifaceted method of evaluating the data also included the expected confirmation of the participants of the accuracy of the data collected, before the analysis was conducted (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Starr, 2014). The questions used in the face-to-face interviews were field-tested to ensure that the phraseology addressed the main research question (Patton, 2002). The confirmation of the transcribed data ensured that the transcribed materials were accurate and correct, and it assisted with determining the point of saturation. The multiple methods used also validated the data as true and factual.

### **Transferability**

The information was collected from different businesses in two separate industries: manufacturing and services. Obtaining saturation provides the basis for identifying issues that can transfer across trades (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the issues facing women across two industries in a region that had lower than average rates of executive women. Obtaining participants from various organizations helped to substantiate the transferability of the data to other fields of commerce and added to the literature on understanding the glass-ceiling phenomenon (Sousa, 2014).

**Dependability**

Trustworthiness requires that a study's results are dependable. Ensuring the dependability of the gathered information was accomplished through the field test to ensure that the interviews produced data related to the main research question (Anney, 2014; Sousa, 2014). The coding of the collected materials was done by both the researcher and NVivo 12 Plus in order to confirm that the data similarities and identified themes were dependable results. The validation of the information by the participants also verified the reliability of the data and provided an audit trail for authentication (Patton, 2002; Sousa, 2014). The triangulation of the transcribed interviews, the researcher's notes taken during the meetings, and the computer program's (NVivo 12 Plus) evaluation of the transcriptions ensured that the materials used for assessment were both dependable and accurate.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the objectivity of the researcher. The researcher confirmed the accuracy of the data and of its analysis through openness, through the availability of the gathered data, and through the notes used for interpretation (Cope, 2014; Patton, 2002). The reflexivity of the notations is available to ensure minimal bias by the researcher (Anney, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). The minimization of bias in all interpretations of data was evidence of the objectivity of the researcher and was vital for both the confirmability and the trustworthiness of the data.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The procedures and materials met the ethical standards of Walden University. The researcher did not have any personal involvement in the industries covered or in the specific businesses involved, thus eliminating any ethical bias. The data were gathered only for use in the research study. The research data did not include any names of people or organizations, and any affiliation between the participants and their organization was kept and will be kept at the highest level of confidentiality until authorized for destruction (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002). The participants were obtained on a volunteer basis and were not held liable for any of the data collected or for withdrawal from the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 described the qualitative descriptive phenomenological method followed to investigate the primary research question. The experimental design was for the researcher to interview individual women who hold executive-level positions in the manufacturing and serviced based industries. The chapter describes the reasoning for selection and the questions, equipment, material, and procedures used in the interviews and for subsequent data analysis. The main role was that of the interviewer and collector of data. The strategy for recruiting participants focused on women holding executive-level positions in the manufacturing and serviced-based industries. The interview questions were field-tested by experts at Walden University to clarify them and ensure that they would most likely result in answers to the primary research question. The

section on trustworthiness outlined the processes to ensure the data met the criteria for credibility and transferability.

The information provided in this chapter is a detailed outline of the processes used in the qualitative research study. They were designed to provide the steps and guidelines for another researcher to conduct the same research, or for another individual to perform the study. The chapter may also be used as an outline or guide, should someone desire to duplicate the study or to utilize the principles for a study in a different metropolitan region.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the interviews conducted following the method described above. It identifies themes that relate to the women's personal insights into whether a glass ceiling still exists in the 21st century. The themes were determined based on the recorded interviews, utilizing a dual evaluation process.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women executives in their career progression and to identify any experiences related to the glass ceiling. This chapter provides results of analysis of the data collected during interviews with 12 executive women in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The eight interview questions were designed to explore aspects of the glass ceiling that these women may have encountered in their careers, issues they experienced, and influences or support that assisted their rise to executive positions. The data were analyzed to answer this research question: What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century?

Chapter 4 contains seven sections to provide an understanding of the data collection methods and results. A field test was conducted to determine recommended changes to the interview questions by Walden University faculty who were considered topic and methodology experts. I also describe the interview setting and the demographics of the participants. The data collection section presents the methods used to obtain data from participants. The section on data analysis contains the method used to identify six themes and to determine data saturation. The trustworthiness section includes validation of the standards outlined in Chapter 3. The section on the study's interview results provides a review of the identified themes.

The original plan was to interview 15 participants to ensure data saturation. I sent 25 requests to women in both targeted industries and received 10 replies showing interest



in participating. Another 30 invitations were sent out, which resulted in one more person agreeing to participate. I then contacted three female executive organizations to request their assistance with recruiting participants. This approach was helpful. One organization sent an invitation to join its LinkedIn group and followed with an introduction to its members. That provided further access to potential participants, but scheduling interviews proved challenging due to their schedules. Many prospective participants indicated a willingness to participate but did not follow up with a day or time, even when I provided the option to conduct the interviews after work hours. The data collection process took 15 months.

### **Field Test**

I conducted a field test before requesting institutional review board approval for research. There were eight draft interview questions (see Appendix A). Ten Walden University faculty members who teach qualitative research and are subject matter experts in women's studies were asked to participate in a field test. Two positive responses were received from the initially invited qualitative phenomenological research experts. A second set of requests was sent out the following week. There was one response requesting additional information, which I provided. The expert evaluation of the interview questions was returned, as well as another response from the second set of requests, for a total of four responses.

The field test, or expert panel review, was intended to clarify the interview questions. This was done to ensure the questions were designed to elicit relevant data and promote follow-up questions to clarify initial responses, if necessary. The goal of the

field test was to have experts evaluate and provide insight as to whether the interview questions would yield data that could be used to answer the research question.

Appendices include the original interview questions (see Appendix A), the email request for participation (see Appendix B), and a table for evaluating the questions (see Appendix C). The field test section (see Appendix C) includes comments and suggestions related to the question design, clarity, alignment, and appropriateness for the collection of data to answer the research question. The experts provided several recommendations. First, Interview Question 1 was determined to be ambiguous. Two of the experts recommended that an introduction be provided to clarify the meaning of *glass ceiling*. The clarification was intended to provide the specific definition for the term needed to answer the question. The experts also identified questions that included quantitative terminology instead of qualitative. Additionally, some questions were not open-ended enough and others were leading in nature. Further recommendations were made, and the questions were revised accordingly. The updated interview questions used for the study are presented in Appendix D.

The interviews were semistructured to allow for elaboration of the response so I could obtain a definitive understanding of the situation described by the interviewee. The longest interview lasted 50 minutes, and the shortest lasted 22 minutes. The average time was 31 minutes.

Upon completion of the interview process, the participant was informed that the recording would be transcribed and returned via email for confirmation or clarification within 48 hours. I transcribed all of the interviews. The transcripts were submitted for

review by the participants within the time promised. The participants were asked whether it was reasonable for them to respond to the request for review and respond within five business days, and they concurred. Two participants decided they did not want their responses published in the report after reviewing the transcript. They understood that the manuscript would not include their names or the names of the organizations they had named. All 12 participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcript within the requested time.

### **Research Setting**

The principles of a phenomenological study were implemented by way of one-on-one interviews. Due to location differences, phone and Skype interviews were conducted and recorded for transcription. Most of the interviews were conducted after business hours so participants could focus on the questions and their responses without interruption.

The research was conducted in the metropolitan area of Philadelphia. This area included a significant portion of southeastern Pennsylvania, which comprises four counties surrounding Philadelphia County. The metro area also consists of the northern section of Delaware (New Castle County) and five counties in southwestern New Jersey. A variety of manufacturing and service-based industries were targeted, and responses indicated that the industries ranged from pharmaceutical manufacturing and refineries to education and health care.

### Demographics

All of the participants were female executives. The positions held by the participants included senior director, executive director, vice president, and higher positions within their respective organizations. Among the study participants, four participants (33%) worked in the manufacturing industry, and eight participants (67%) were employed in the service-based sector. Seven (58%) of the participants had an executive status for 10 years or more, 2 participants (17%) held their position from 5 to 10 years, and 3 participants (25%) were in their current jobs for less than 5 years.

Of the 12 participants, one participant (8%) had a bachelor's degree, and one participant (8%) had a PhD. The remaining 10 participants (84%) had a master's degree. The average age of executive-level personnel is over 50, regardless of their sex, race, or industry (see Table 2). The ages of the participants in this study ranged from 48 to 66, resulting in an average of 56 years. Table 2 presents participants' years of experience in a senior-level position and their education level.

*Table 2*

*Demographics of Participants*

<u>Years in position</u>			<u>Education level</u>		
<b>&gt; 10</b>	5–10	< 5	PhD	MS/MBA	BS/BA
7	0	0	1	0	0
0	2	0	0	10	0
0	0	3	0	0	1

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected over a 15-month period. The extended period was determined based on the schedules of the participants and the importance of the topic to the individuals invited to participate. Using the ReferenceUSA database, I called 25 female executives from both industries. Although responses from 12 women were received, only five women initially set up interviews. Of the five, only three scheduled and participated. Subsequent invitations were made through a Philadelphia female executive organization to obtain additional participants.

Most of the interviews were conducted from my home in Brussels, Belgium. Five interviews were held in person at the University of Maryland library while I was living in the area. In December of 2016, my employment location was changed to Brussels, Belgium, where I conducted interviews via Skype. Three interviews were set up for my return to the Philadelphia area in the fall of 2017 for personal business. An appointment to meet with a representative of another female executive association was held to recruit additional participants. The rest of the interviews were conducted from Belgium using Skype and a speaker telephone.

A mobile phone was used to record the interviews. The recordings were saved and transcribed to a private computer. Consent forms and releases were obtained electronically and put into a file on my personal computer. All original recordings and references to the participants were removed from the phone and personal computer, and these materials were transferred to an external drive stored in a fireproof safe in my home.

## Data Analysis

Eight interview questions were used to gather data to answer the research question: What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century? I coded the data after the first three interviews and added additional codes as more data were collected. After gathering and transcribing nine interviews, I conducted preliminary coding. I then processed the data using NVivo 12 Plus to confirm the coding and ensure the credibility of the codes identified in the initial analysis.

The following six themes were identified from the hand coding and verified with the use of NVivo 12 Plus software:

1. **Discrimination:** The lived experiences and perpetual existence of discrimination against women.
2. **Opportunities:** Volunteering for projects and putting forth an effort to take chances.
3. **Support and choices:** Identifying what support systems were in place to obtain career progression and have a personal life, and the choices women make to succeed.
4. **Advantages:** The advantages women had in their careers.
5. **Balances:** Having both a career and a family or a relationship, and the issues related to coping.
6. **Roles:** Women's roles as seen by social stigmas and opportunities to bring about changes based on experiences.

Table 3 shows the data for the number of times themes were identified from the transcribed interviews. The data collected reflected the participants' insights regarding their various experiences. Although all 12 participants answered every interview question, nine (75%) elaborated on their answers.

*Table 3*

*Identified Themes in Data*

Theme	Number of references	Percentage
Discrimination	11	92%
Opportunities	9	75%
Support and choices	9	75%
Advantages	9	75%
Balances	8	67%
Roles	8	67%

**Theme 1: Discrimination**

Participants expressed the belief that the creation of laws against discrimination made it stop is a fallacy. Throughout the years, equal pay was denied to these women, as well as opportunities for positions of higher responsibility. Many of the participants provided their personal experiences of discrimination:

- Participant 3: “When I first started, front offices were all male. Except for the support staff.”

- Participant 5: “I was told by my boss that he could pay me less because I was a woman. Unfortunately, pay disparity is still a major issue.” She indicated that the most frustrating aspect of discrimination was, “being passed over for a less qualified man for promotion.” She described the demeaning aspect of discrimination she experienced as “being required to train the man who would become my supervisor.” She also imparted that, “A less productive man, of equal position to mine, was promoted to be my boss.”
- Participant 6: “In the past—prior to 2000—there was no justification needed.” “There were a few times that a man was provided the opportunity for projects over me, even though I actually had more experience.”
- Participant 12: “Back in the beginning of my career it [discrimination] was obvious and in the open. All executives were men, heck, all supervisors were men. I was told that women were too emotional to hold down jobs that required long hours or hard decisions. I remember one manager said women could never be supervisors as they would never have the guts to fire someone.”

The majority of these experiences were reflections on the past. In the new millennium, with years of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs, initiatives, and laws, one would expect the situation to have changed. There have been changes, to some extent, but there is still evidence of continued discrimination, as imparted by the participants.



- Participant 1: “I would say it [discrimination] has drastically changed since 2000. I can’t say exactly when it happened, but I do think it has changed. I would like to think anyway that younger women coming out of universities today are not in the same position that I was in. I don’t think they are. I hope not...To be frank, it [the glass ceiling] was still there even a decade ago. It probably still exists a little bit today, but I don’t think it’s as bad.”
- Participant 7: “The outward boys club has now gone underground. I think it is still there, but not so much ‘in the face.’”
- Participant 9: “I’ve often been the only woman in the room. Statistically, you would think by today—with all the talk of advancing women and minorities, the percentages would be much higher. Sadly, I would say it is largely similar [to the past]. Not much has changed.”
- Participant 11: “When I first started out in business, women who had risen to the top before me were a bit overly aggressive or tended to exhibit male tendencies in inelegant ways in an attempt to fit in. They also struggled with helping the women coming up behind them as they were very territorial about the success they had achieved. That is changing, perhaps not enough, but it definitely feels like we are on the right track. What needs to happen is that the cascade of women speaking out today is not a blip or fad, but rather a steady current that continues to stream us into the future.”
- Participant 12: “Let’s just say that the “good ol’ boys” network that was in play years ago still exists; it is just not as prevalent, or should we say, as

obvious. Also, some of the narrow-minded thinkers of the past are retiring, which I think makes a difference. There is still an underlying reluctance to give women a chance, in a number of industries. I am not sure if it is because they [women] don't believe they are competent, or if they are afraid of losing their jobs because they know the women on the rise are more competent."

## **Theme 2: Opportunities**

The opportunities afforded to the participants translate into examples of efforts put forth to succeed. The examples participants provided are examples of the chances these women took to further their careers. These examples also impart the confidence they possessed to take advantage of the assistance offered and of the opportunities to advance.

- Participant 1: "I chose to volunteer to go to Kuwait after the first cohort: the emergency restoration and emergency reconstruction. I was selected to go in at the last minute. I never understood why until I got there and then I got the whole story. It was because the Kuwaiti princess asked why we didn't have any women coming. Then they [the coordinators] had to look through the scrolls of the women engineers who volunteered. I ended up with nine different ministries I was working with. Then I was given more opportunities."
- Participant 5: "I had been with the company for ten years, but left and went to another that illustrated they were willing to promote women to senior positions."

- Participant 6: “A woman who was passed over [for promotion] ended up being offered a position with a rival company and took it. That company benefited from her experiences and ended up beating our company out of several contracts in later years.”
- Participant 7: “I realized then that it wasn’t worth the ‘fight’. I quit the company.”
- Participant 8: “The situation actually showed me that I needed to get my MBA so that I could be put in the role that I deserved. I believe that everything that happens moves you in the direction you need to go, whether it is a positive or a negative experience.”
- Participant 10: “For me—I get frustrated at work and frequently move jobs. Moving has provided advanced positions and more diverse experience.”
- Participant 11: “It was frustrating, but after I did get the promotion, I could tell that those higher up the chain were not going to promote me any higher, so I looked for a position outside the company and was offered a higher management position with a competitor.”

### **Theme 3: Support and Choices**

The advances women made appear to have been dependent on the support they were provided outside of work. It is unknown how important these choices and support mechanisms truly were for their careers and if they had not been there, whether the women would still have achieved their success. What is known is that these choices and

mechanisms played an important part. The mechanisms included support at home and taking the opportunities when they arose.

- Participant 1: “I had my children quite late. I had to force the support, to be frank, with my husband. It’s nothing particularly easy under an ideal situation. I have a lot of sympathy for single mothers. They probably have to sacrifice their career in order to be a single mom.”
- Participant 2: “It’s really varied at times in my life. There are times where you are able to find a balance and create the balance you need to make those choices yourself. I think like most people, you work within what you need to do, what the law allows you to do, and you try to find a balance. Having a support network of people who I could talk to and sort of just gauge because when you’re starting out, in particular, you don’t know what’s appropriate and what’s inappropriate.”
- Participant 6: “My husband rarely traveled in his job, and if we both had to be on the road at the same time, my mom, or my sister would come stay at the house and take care of the kids. This was the main reason I was able to climb that ladder.”
- Participant 7: “I do not have children and have a husband who has no ego about family roles. My husband was a long-time school teacher and unlike the men I’ve encountered in business did not seem to mind when roles were shared.”

- Participant 12: “Summer was always a busy time in the construction industry, and the kids had off school. My husband is a teacher, and although he would always work summer school sessions, the biggest obstacle was coordinating time off with family.”

#### **Theme 4: Advantages**

The advantages the participants experienced were fairly common. The women's responses indicated that they all had an advantage to which they attributed their success. The value of the help was evident in their achievement of their goal to succeed. Several indicated that the power they had was the drive to succeed and to take advantage of opportunities. Some stated that they also had support and encouragement from home.

- Participant 1: “I would have to say what helped my career the most was volunteering to go to Kuwait. That launched my career, my taking the initiative to do that—to volunteer to go—made a big difference.”
- Participant 2: “Being older.....I was 36 when I came on board. By that point, you can put up with stuff, but you’re also old enough to know better by developing skills, being good at what I did, and developing a good reputation. [Also] being helpful, being useful, and doing what I said I was going to do. I would say all of those things helped build a set of relationships that were important and built up to other relationships.”
- Participant 3: “The biggest advantage was an amazing education I think. I had some incredible professors, teachers, and I went to a really fantastic school. I went to a great college, where I had the opportunity to really explore lots of

different fields of work and lots of interests and people who really taught me how to write and to think critically, and I think that was probably as important.”

- Participant 4: “Supervisors who value hard work, loyalty, dedication, expertise, and diversity (those who appreciate others' points of view) and appreciate being professionally challenged on positions/policies.”
- Participant 5: “I had a number of male mentors in my career, from when I was very young and even now. They have always been my biggest supporters and challenged me when I needed it.”
- Participant 6: “Having a stable and supportive family that allowed me to put in the extra time, and encouraged me to get more education and training so I could succeed. I guess the other thing is that I had a great mentor early in my career.”
- Participant 7: “I did have strong supporters moving me from senior manager to director levels in the organization and at a very fast pace. I also had strong support from executive men when I made my move into a VP role.”
- Participant 8: “The biggest advantage that helped my career was determination and strong will. I never give up.”
- Participant 9: “Confidence and curiosity—reinforced by my parents. And tenacity—seeing whatever I’m doing through to a positive conclusion—not just for me but for the organization I am working with or my client or my colleagues. I never really thought about not being able to—or being allowed to

do something. That and early strong supporters, mentors, and a strong network that I rely on to this day.”

- Participant 10: “A willingness to be the only woman in the room and live with the challenges and still contribute above average. I think the ability to move into other roles where I learned and could contribute in unexpected ways. I think networking is critical and constantly learning.”
- Participant 11: “The biggest advantage that helped me in my career was relentless ambition and a zero tolerance for fear. As difficult as it has been to do, I have also always tried to embrace change as an activity of innovation, as opposed to a dreaded event that happens over the course of time whether we want it to or not. I was also very fortunate to have a few terrific female mentors in my early life.”
- Participant 12: “Having the support of my spouse is probably the biggest advantage. He pushed me to get my MBA, and I would bounce things off of him, and he would give me his honest answer. I also was lucky with my family, being encouraged when I was young by my mom, and having great role models. I also had some bosses that were real leaders. They encouraged me to believe in myself, and would tell me to go for it when challenges arose.”

### **Theme 5: Balances**

One of the themes inferred was the need to be able to balance one’s time.

Working to establish and succeed in a career, as well as to have a personal life, can be

very challenging. The majority (67%) believed that one aspect of life would have to suffer in order to have success in the other. Among the respondents, two participants (17%) did not have children, and two participants (17%) had children after they became established in their careers.

- Participant 1: “I find it very, very difficult to balance it [time] because I have to work a lot of hours. The only way I am able to balance it [home and career] is to give it to my husband to do.”
- Participant 2: “It’s really varied at times in my life. There are times where you are able to find a balance and create the balance you need to make those choices yourself. I think like most people, you work within what you need to do, what the law allows you to do, and you try to find a balance.”
- Participant 3: “It’s a very demanding career and so to suggest there was a balance would not be correct. I think that like most people, I work through things at home.”
- Participant 4: “It is hard to have two careers, more so when one’s spouse is military. The sacrifices are your health (lack of time to exercise) and minimal vacations (lack of time to relax).”
- Participant 5: “I was in an economic position to hire the additional help I needed, which allowed for a better balance. I know not everyone is in that position.”



- Participant 6: “Sometimes it was extremely difficult—more so emotionally—but it ended up providing my kids with a great example for working toward a goal and the sacrifices one needs to make in order to achieve it.”
- Participant 8: “I was very fortunate to have been able to stay home with my daughters for the first years of their lives, and then they were in daycare, which was wonderful. My daughters loved the social interaction they got at daycare and thrived while I was working. I was able to balance work and family life very easily, and I would not have done it any differently.”
- Participant 10: “I believe this is life balance. I have always believed we need to contribute and be present in both [work and home].”
- Participant 11: “I think women with children must have an extraordinarily difficult time balancing it all.”

The women with children, although challenged at times, had a family support system in place to handle issues. The support system allowed them to work the long hours, travel, and put in the time required. None of the participants indicated it was an easy task, but they all worked through the issues.

### **Theme 6: Roles**

The social stigmas of the past and new millennium roles of women have changed. Not all women are stay-at-home mothers and homemakers. Some of the changes are based on how society changed prior to 2000 and the increase of women in high visibility roles in business and politics. The role changes for women can be viewed from a number of different aspects: their corporate role, their role in the home, and their role as a parent.

- Participant 1: “A woman was assumed to be not competent and capable until she proved herself such. It was exactly the opposite for men, they had potential. I saw that, particularly very early in my career, but there are still tons of that [mindset] today, I think.”
- Participant 2: “I’ve been fortunate on the places I’ve worked but still, there is a sensitization [in society] to individual rights, to respect, [and] harassment issues. I think generally there is, in terms of promotion opportunities. I think it’s good to force people to have to think, and I think most people prefer not to.”
- Participant 6: “I am trying to ‘pay it forward’ as they say, and encourage young women in my organization to join those outside groups [career field organizations] and try to find a mentor. The challenge women face is the one we have all faced, and that is our society’s view of what a mother should be doing as opposed to the father doing the tasks, like staying home because a child is sick. Our society is not going to change in just a few decades. I look at what my mom dealt with in her twenties and thirties and realize that although our society has progressed in a number of aspects of women working, the attitude as to the primary duty of women—to rear children—has not changed. That is sad, but it is a fact.”
- Participant 7: “Most of the men at the executive levels that I’ve worked with had wives who stayed home and managed the home. I don’t think they could understand how I was able to operate, and [they were] probably really

confused by my husband's equal role in the house. Many still believe the traditional biases are involved in upward mobility of women. I was listening to a political show [based] in North Carolina on our public TV station and this fellow in his 60s, [a] long time educator and politician, actually said that he believed more women Republicans were running for office now because they did not have the worry of leaving behind successful businesses and careers like men do.”

- Participant 8: “I believe that women have to work twice as hard as men to get advancement and three times as hard as men to stay there. You never know when a relationship you make with someone will help you out when you need it. It is important to really get to know others, and have a kind, compassionate heart. It doesn't matter that they may or may not ever be able to reciprocate. You just have to pay it forward. When someone helps you, you help someone else, and that person helps someone else, and so on.”
- Participant 9: “I started an investment fund to funnel private equity investments to women-owned and led companies—precisely because the funding for innovation is disproportionately (like 90/10) going to men over women.”
- Participant 11: “I would encourage women to keep these thoughts in mind and do whatever they can to pay success forward to the generation behind them. It's something I'm very serious about and something I have remained committed to throughout my entire career.”

- Participant 12: “Well, it is the consistent belief that women ‘shouldn’t’ work when they have a family. That may go away as the Boomer generation retires. We also have to include those Generation X’ers who grew up in a homemaker mom environment—well let’s clarify that and say the men who grew up in the environment.”

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

A researcher must address controls on quality research to gain acceptance of a study’s value in the body of literature. The field study validated the research questions and whether they would adequately address the primary question of the study, and the different industries included, in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the results (Sousa, 2014). The use of both the researcher’s evaluation of the collected data and the NVivo 12 Plus qualitative data analysis software heightened the trustworthiness of the results gathered.

### **Credibility**

The study confirmed credibility by using NVivo 12 Plus software, the interview notes, and the researcher’s personal coding of the information obtained. This multifaceted method of evaluating the data also included the expected confirmation by the participant of the accuracy of the data collected, before the analysis (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Starr, 2014). The questions used in the face-to-face interviews were field-tested to ensure that the phraseology addressed the main research question (Patton, 2002). The confirmation of the study data, during collection, ensured that the assessed materials were accurate and that the transcribed data were correct, and it assisted with

determining the point of saturation. The multiple methods used also validated the data as true and factual.

### **Transferability**

The information was collected from different businesses in two separate industries: manufacturing and services. Obtaining saturation provides the basis for identifying issues that can transfer across trades (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the issues facing women across the two targeted industries. Obtaining participants from various organizations helped substantiate the transferability of the data to other fields of commerce and added to the literature on understanding the glass-ceiling phenomenon (Sousa, 2014).

### **Dependability**

Trustworthiness requires a study's results to be dependable. Ensuring the dependability of the gathered information was accomplished through the field test to ensure that the interviews produced data related to the main research question (Anney, 2014; Sousa, 2014). The coding of the collected materials was done by both the researcher and NVivo 12 Plus in order to confirm that the data similarities and identified themes were dependable results. The validation of the information by the participants also verified the reliability of the data and provided an audit trail for authentication (Patton, 2002; Sousa, 2014). The triangulation of the transcribed interviews, the researcher's notes taken during the meetings, and the computer program's (NVivo 12 Plus) evaluation of the transcriptions ensured that the materials used for assessment were both dependable and accurate.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the objectivity of the researcher. The researcher confirmed the accuracy of the data and was solely responsible for the analysis. The minimization of bias in all interpretations of data was evidence of the objectivity of the researcher and was vital for both the confirmability and the trustworthiness of the data.

**Ethical Procedures**

The ethical standards of Walden University were met. The researcher did not have any personal involvement in the industries covered or in the specific businesses involved, thus eliminating any ethical bias. The data gathered were for use in the research study only. The research data did not include any names of people or organizations, and any affiliation between the participants and their organization was kept at the highest level of confidentiality until authorized for destruction (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002). The participants were obtained on a volunteer basis and were not held liable for any of the data collected or for withdrawal from the study.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 provides the results of the research. The review of the field test was presented to support the interview questions used for the study. The research setting covered the targeted location, the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The area covers Philadelphia and surrounding counties, as well as southern New Jersey and northern Delaware. All the participants were employed in the region and worked in either the service-based or the manufacturing industries. The participants were from a distinct

group of women who each held an executive-level position in the organization. The demographics provided some of the unique features such as ages, education, and years in an executive-level position.

The data analysis identified six themes from the data collected in the study. The researcher identified the themes and confirmed them by utilizing the auto-coding feature in the NVivo 12 Plus software. The themes were then elucidated by utilizing quotes by the participants. The last section was the evidence of trustworthiness, used to validate the credibility of the data gathered and the transferability for other fields of industry. The evidence of trustworthiness also covered the dependability of the questions used in the study and the methods used to identify the themes. The researcher was the only individual to interview, transcribe, and verify the data to ensure confirmability. Additionally, to eliminate issue bias, there was no personal connection to the industries or individual participants and all the information gathered remains confidential.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the data analysis. It assesses the themes in detail in order to offer a fuller answer to the primary research question. The experiences of the participants were used to identify the steps or processes needed to get to the executive level in today's business environment. Chapter 5 also provides recommendations and considerations for future research in the hope of providing better insight and references that would help with narrowing the gap in the literature on the glass ceiling.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The problem of understanding the continued existence of the glass ceiling was addressed by the research question: What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21st century? The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of women executives in their career progression and to identify their experiences related to the glass ceiling in the manufacturing and service industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach introduced by Husserl (2008) and supported by Giorgi (2012) to study participants' lived experiences, I obtained results to provide a better understanding of the experiences that influence women's career progression.

The study findings showed that the glass ceiling still exists in the 21st century. It is not as prevalent as it was 20 years ago, however, and society is slowly changing its view of the role of women. The results not only indicated obstacles related to the glass ceiling, but also addressed assets essential to the participants' career progression.

Six themes were the result of the recurring ideas expressed in the interviews. The transcribed interviews were loaded into NVivo 12 software and analyzed to validate the themes identified by hand coding. The themes were determined to be the same, and the findings were reviewed and verified as a response to the research question.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

One finding was of particular interest. It was the answer to the question on the laws and guidelines on gender discrimination or affirmative action in career progression



(Interview Question 4). The question was asked because it was in the news due to political emphasis from Barack Obama in both presidential campaigns. The original equal opportunity laws were enacted in the 1960s and resurfaced in the 1980s, and it was a surprise to find that there were no discernable differences, only a bit of clarification as to who was considered a minority person. Equal opportunity laws appeared to exist only on paper. Every participant (100%) said she saw no evidence of the laws being put into practice. Five individuals (42%) expressed the opinion that the laws actually hurt women. Their view was that hiring based on quotas could cause organizations to hire people who were not qualified for the position, thereby hurting the individual's career progression. Participant 4 stated that the laws "had negative effects, where men are scared of women in the workplace." Participant 6 said that if people are hired based on a quota or discrimination, "they are basically shunned by their co-workers, and not given an opportunity to progress." However, the argument could also be used to imply that women or minorities need a quota system because they cannot qualify for the jobs. Participant 12 made a very opinionated statement: "I really think they [equal opportunity laws and quotas] are a waste of paper. I think they [quotas] were put in place in order to try and shut us up."

The laws enacted over the years did not appear, to the participants, to have made any impact other than to make employers aware that going against these laws could open their organizations and themselves to lawsuits. The laws seem to be there, but as Participant 9 stated, "I wish they were more effective," or as Participant 6 stated, "it seems to make those discriminating become more creative in their justification." These

opinions indicate that discrimination against women, or the glass ceiling phenomenon, is still in place. The laws may stimulate employers to think objectively, or, as stated by Participant 2, “I think it’s good to force people to have to think, and I believe most people prefer not to, but the laws are there to make them [comply].”

There were six themes found in reviewing the data. As indicated in the previous chapter, the following themes were identified: discrimination, opportunities, support and choices, determinations, balances, and roles. The following sections include my interpretation of those themes as they relate to the literature and the research question.

### **Discrimination**

The data revealed that the participating executive women had experienced discrimination in various forms throughout their career. Participants indicated that prior to the beginning of the millennium it was not only a common practice, but also an accepted practice, and a women had to learn to work despite the discrimination. The executive, management, and supervisory positions were all held by males. Participant 3 stated that the higher-level positions were “all male when I first entered the work force. Although there were a few women in positions of high responsibility, their ideas tended to become their bosses’ [ideas], as did the credit for any achievements.” The most credit a woman could gain was acknowledgement as a member of the team.

Older individuals who saw women as less capable are retiring. Participants 7 and 12 both said that the boys club or network has gone underground, but still exists to some extent. Those following the older generation are learning to adapt to the change, and discrimination is becoming almost a thing of the past. The glass ceiling still exists in

smaller organizations, but women are receiving higher education at a faster rate than men are and can make a compelling argument that they are just as capable as men (Catalyst, 2014; Fogarty, Allen, Allen, & Walters, 2016; Sandberg & Scovell, 2013). The perception remains in many sectors of services and manufacturing that women are hired for positions based on their experience, while men are hired based on their potential. Society must understand that women have potential and that a man's experience may contribute to or diminish his ability to succeed. Discrimination still exists on pay equality. Participant 5 was told that her boss could pay her less simply because of her sex, and there were no witnesses. Participant 8 stated, "I feel that is the reason there is such confidentiality required where pay is concerned." The reasons are unclear, but as more women obtain higher positions, the disparity is being challenged.

### **Opportunities**

The experiences of the women interviewed indicated that they made themselves open to opportunity. Participant 1 stated, "I signed up to go overseas, but wasn't selected until the customer questioned why there were no women." This executive had set herself up to be available, and when the opportunity suddenly (at the last minute) arose, she was able to take it. This executive indicated that this was what changed her career and set her up to be where she is today. Participant 5 indicated that the organization she was with did not show a propensity for promoting women, so she applied and took a position where they did. Participant 5 suggested that she was somewhat apprehensive about the change, but she also knew it was the only way to move up.

The participants indicated that their success was based on the willingness to take those opportunities when presented, and to find them if they were not. Being willing to change positions or change organizations can be gratifying as a person can obtain additional skills and experience and become more marketable. Change is hard, but the executives interviewed indicated that it was mandatory in achieving career success. The executive women indicated that opportunities for advancement existed. They had to keep their eyes open, obtain the skills needed to advance, recognize opportunities, and be willing to justify being chosen.

The data supported the argument that the new millennium provides more opportunity for women to advance their careers (Catalyst, 2014). With the growth in the number of executive women in other fields of business, there is a trend to minimize the number of companies where only men hold positions of leadership. Women executives have prepared to advance their careers through education, by recognizing opportunities, and by acting on them.

### **Support and Choices**

Only 1 participant (8%) did not have any children and had never been married, and 1 participant (8%) was married but did not have children. A total of 11 participants (92%) had support at home for their careers. Participant 1 indicated that she had to force the support from her spouse, but they worked on balancing family and work. These female executives reported that there would not have been career progression if it had not been for the support at home. There were 3 participants (27%) out of the 11 who started their families at a young age. By the time they were in their early to middle 30s, their

families were not as demanding. Just 2 participants (17%) out of the 11 did not have their children until after they had secured their positions within their respective organizations. They still had to weigh their choices about family issues, but their support mechanism was well established prior to them having a family.

The choices these women made were not easy, but they also stated that without the understanding and support furnished by their families (spouse, siblings, and parents), they would not be where they are today. There are indications that society may still have a judgmental view on mothers working, but it is changing. Participant 7 said, "I got the impression from coworkers that they were somewhat confused that my husband had an equal role in the home, sharing duties." The choices these women make were not made lightly. The main issue was to seek success and obtain the support needed, or give up on the dream.

There was another type of support these executive women had in their career progression. They had people who mentored them. They had someone to guide them along in their careers. Primarily, the mentors gave them guidance in their work-related decisions, acted as a sounding board, provided advice or recommendations, or offered support. Many of these support people did not work in the same organization. These mentors were part of an association outside of work. Among the respondents, 5 participants (42%) recommended joining an organization related to the line of work and making friends. These participants indicated that a person might find a mentor there and might find individuals experiencing similar situations. Most importantly, the participants encouraged everyone to be a mentor.

In the quest for equality, women must understand that there are ways to break through the glass ceiling. Having people to provide support at home is only part of this process. It is an important part, but women must look for other support as well. They must seek out colleagues, join organizations, look for a mentor, and be a mentor. The only way to succeed is through support. By seeking and obtaining the support required, women can break through the glass ceiling.

### **Determination**

The most important advantage the participants had in common was the perseverance to succeed. They all understood that there would be obstacles, but they looked to find a way around them. They had supportive people in their chain of leadership at some phase of their careers. These women also had the support and encouragement of their families. All of them had the drive and determination to succeed. They never let disappointment or ridicule keep them back. They were able to persevere. They had set goals and had the confidence in themselves to work toward those goals. Their lived experiences showed these characteristics were crucial to their success.

### **Balances**

All of the participants agreed that there was no real balance. Participant 2 said, "I used to put in 12 to 14 hours a day, 6 to 7 days a week, and rarely took vacations. I reexamined my life at age 45 and realized that the only life I had was work. At that point I began to adjust my schedule, take the weekends off, take vacations, and leave work after 8 or 9 hours." She said she was learning to cope with the guilt of leaving early, but also stated that she had no problem staying later if required. Others indicated that

working as though they were obsessed was fine for some, but a balance of sort was required or one's health might suffer.

Participant 6 said she was an example for her children that, "If you work hard to achieve a goal, sacrifices are required to obtain success." There was a consensus that there really was not anything that could be considered in balance, as an executive. Participants reported that there were choices that had to be made, and that the others in their lives, as well as themselves, had to accept the consequences of those choices.

### **Roles**

The roles of women in society are in transition. There are still some who frown on a woman working in a job that would be considered a man's role, like in construction or in a manufacturing plant (Baker, 2014; Pedulla, & Thébaud, 2015; Sayers, 2012; Sommerlad, 2016). There are people who frown on a mother working prior to her children being in high school (Boyar, Huang, & Xu, 2014; Budig, Misra, & Boeckmann, 2012). The number of these individuals is dwindling in U.S. society (Hill, 2013; Stam, Verbakel, & Graaf, 2014). Participant 6 reflected on how her mother's generation had struggled and remarked that the stereotypical attitude of a woman's role had changed only slightly in the past two decades (Lawson & Lips, 2014). Participant 7 indicated that her male counterparts in executive positions had a hard time understanding that a husband and father could effectively manage a home.

The view of women in leadership may have changed slightly, but it will probably continue to be a slow process. In some areas of the United States, there are a higher percentage of women executives than in others, but the manufacturing and service-based

industries still fall behind those in education, health care, and retail (Catalyst, 2014). The view of women in leadership is in transition. The change may lie within the women themselves. They need to believe in themselves, prove it to themselves and others, and strive to show the younger generations that it can be done. Participants 6, 8, and 11 indicated that women need to help each other succeed. Among the executives in the study, 7 participants (59%) agreed that women need to be open to opportunities and take the steps to prepare for those opportunities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The anticipated limitations were confirmed during the research process. The primary limitation was the availability of female senior-level executives to participate in interviews. The unavailability of the targeted participants extended the data collection period by several months. The identification of additional participants and their recruitment did not limit the interpretation of the data. The criteria established for participants were met, and the data were analyzed in the same manner.

There was a limitation due to the lack of confirmability of the data. The individuals' lived experiences were confidential, but one had to take their word on their experiences. Any attempt to verify the data they provided would have violated the confidentiality agreement. However, the participants all reviewed the transcribed data to verify the accuracy of their answers. The limitation on interpretation due to the variety in backgrounds, careers, education, age, and other individual differences is inherent in any phenomenological study (Patton, 2002). The difference in backgrounds, however, increases the transferability of the findings.



The quantity of participants and the purposive sampling used to identify who qualified for the study was an additional limitation. I limited the study to only female executives at the higher echelon of businesses in the metropolitan area of Philadelphia. The other restriction was that the executives were all employed in either manufacturing or service-based industries. The constraints on the selection process limited the study, but deliberately targeted industries where statistics indicated a lower than the national average number of women in executive positions (ReferenceUSA, 2015). One indication for this lower average is the lower number of women in the STEM fields. These were not fields that women of the 1980's to 2000's were encouraged to enter.

### **Recommendations**

The study consisted of a small demographic group in one major metropolitan area of the country. It also targeted two industries in that region that employed a lower number of female executives than the national average. These results may be used as the foundation for future research on the stagnation of women in executive positions or on the perpetuation of the glass ceiling. The lived experience of these few executives provides a step toward understanding the need for social change and where that change may be required. All of the participants agreed that society will change, but the change will occur slowly. It will take time for society as a whole to consider women and men as equally capable.

The results of the research project should provide a better understanding for both corporate leaders and women interested in becoming executives. The data showed there was an issue with self-confidence for women, as well as a battle to get corporate leaders

to consider women for the same positions as they do for men. Many women were given the opportunity to prove themselves due to a chance occurrence. Other women furthered their growth by leaving one employer for another that was willing to provide opportunities for women.

Due to the regional restrictions of this study, it might be beneficial to research other regions of the country with a lower than average number of female executives, both in other industries and in similar industries. The additional research could provide better understanding of the glass ceiling, as different parts of the United States have a variety of cultures and views on women's roles in business. The participants agreed there is a recognizable, slow progression in women earning executive-level positions. It could prove prudent and beneficial to investigate other regions in a similar study. That data could then be compared with the findings in this study and more information compiled, expanding the body of knowledge through supplementary phenomenological studies. Through gathering additional data through studies, information would be obtained to better identify the issues that slow career progression.

### **Implications**

The data from this research adds to the body of knowledge about what was lived, as opposed to what is assumed. The data gathered from lived experiences vary from what has been assumed to happen with hiring. The data collected showed women are still being passed over for promotions, and any questions they raise in that regard can be detrimental to their career. Participant 8 stated, "I worked very hard to attain a position as a director, but from that point on, I felt as if I had a target on my back." She also said, "I

got the impression that I would never get any higher position.” She worked at that organization for a little more than a year and then took a position with a competitor. Participant 7 stated she moved on because “it wasn’t worth the fight.” A majority (67%) of the women indicated that there was really still no recourse to being passed over for the promotion of a man less qualified.

Although the antidiscrimination laws first went into effect in the 1960s and have been modified twice since then, they seem to have had little effect on what transpires in organizations. All 12 participants indicated that they did not believe the equal opportunity or antidiscrimination laws had any genuine effect on hiring practices. Participant 6 stated this: “I believe that the affirmative action initiatives have actually hurt minorities and women, especially with the implementation of quotas.” Participant 12 stated that “unqualified minority personnel were hired to fulfill supervisory positions, but their bad example hurt others, as others were judged by the example they set.”

The executives made a few recommendations for those who desire to reach a similar level in their careers. The common recommendation was that women require, or develop, the same kind of self-esteem or self-confidence as men. According to Participants 1, 2, and 3, women should also be more aggressive in their careers and stop undervaluing their knowledge and experience. It is important to understand that women tend to put down other women, or are reluctant to assist other woman. Participant 1 stated, “no one should ever put down a colleague, as it puts one in a bad light.”

There was a consensus that in order to effect social change, women need to help each other. Social change needs to start with women mentoring others so they do not

repeat the same mistakes, and they should encourage others to join and participate in organizations or associations related to their field. The people on the outside of one's immediate work network can have a very profound impact on one's self-esteem, and they can provide different perspectives on similar issues.

The participants in this study indicated that social change is a slow process. The only way to speed up the process is for those people affected by the stagnation in career progression to be proactive. Those who have achieved success need to help with social change by supporting other women. They should mentor their subordinates and young women in the career-based organizations. The women who have broken through the glass ceiling need to participate in workshops and seminars. The participants in this study indicated that all women need to 'pay it forward' in order to inspire the generations that follow and generate social change.

### **Conclusion**

The study expanded the knowledge on, and provided a deeper understanding of, the glass ceiling. It provided additional data on what was already known, as it offered the lived experiences of women. Chapter 1 contained the overview of the planned project, presented the primary research question, and kept the study on track. Chapter 2 reviewed the culmination of previous research. Chapter 3 presented the overall plan of action to be taken to answer the primary research question. The interview and data analysis results in Chapter 4 yielded the answer to the research question.

The data gathered provided the lived experiences of female executives and, with those, answered the research question. The glass ceiling continues to exist in the 21st

century. The interviewed women explained that the ceiling has become thinner since before 2000, but discrimination continues. They also emphasized that the various acts, or laws, established to prevent the practice of discrimination are not enforced. The experiences of these women indicated antidiscrimination laws or acts did not encourage the perpetrators; however, to keep the glass ceiling in place, they had to become more creative in justifying their actions. The participants had all broken through the glass ceiling, and they provided their personal references for success. These successful women recommended that women must believe in themselves, have confidence in their abilities, and persevere in fulfilling their dreams if they intend to reach their goals.

The research was conducted in one metropolitan area. Future studies may consider utilizing similar guidelines in different areas of the country. Research could be done to investigate other areas of the country that have less than the national average of women executives in other industries. If one were so inclined, there could be a study conducted on executive-level women from minority groups, in order to find out what primary industries they are in, where they are located, and what their personal experiences are in breaking through the glass ceiling. It would be interesting if one could develop a questionnaire with similar topics to this study and obtain greater participation in a quantitative study. A quantitative research project could provide a more substantial response and a broader demographic survey. In addition, a quantitative study could target a specific industry, covering a larger area of the country, i.e. the West Coast, the Midwest, the South, etc. A repeat of a similar study in another decade might yield different outcomes.

One must understand that social change is a slow process. When society stops thinking the traditional roles of women are the only ones acceptable, social change will happen. In the 21st century, more women are working than ever before. The generations that follow will not see women as only homemakers, but also as breadwinners and executives. When these people become members of the workforce, it is unlikely that the glass ceiling will remain in place.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

- 1) What, if any, aspects of the glass ceiling phenomenon have you experienced during your career?
- 2) Did you witness any specific aspects related to the glass ceiling where gender priority was evident, and how did they affect your career or another woman's progression?
- 3) Can you provide any evidence of the phenomenon existing in the last few decades, and if so/not, what particular aspects?
- 4) Do you believe it was harder to prove gender discrimination in the workplace in the past or in the present, and how do you feel this affects women's attitudes toward career progression?
- 5) Do you see any specific evidence of the continued existence of the glass ceiling or are women now choosing to not pursue advancement as in the past?
- 6) In your career progression, can you provide your experiences of conflict between your home or work environments, where one presented problems with the other, and how were they resolved?
- 7) In what way do you see a change in society relating to women's opportunities for career advancement, or do you believe the glass ceiling still exists, and can you provide any examples?
- 8) What recommendation or advice would you give to help women advance to the senior leadership positions, in your industry or generally across all fields of business?
- 9) What would you say was the biggest advantage you had that helped your career?

## Appendix B: Field Test Request

### **Email Request for expert evaluation**

Dear Dr. XXXXXXX,

I am a Walden Ph.D. student working toward attaining my degree in Management with a concentration in Leadership and Organizational Change. My research project is a qualitative phenomenological study. I am presently finalizing Chapter 3, and my dissertation Chair (Dr. Richard Schuttler) indicated I did not require a pilot study. I do need a field test, or expert panel review, to finalize my proposal before submission to the University.

I seek your expert skills in qualitative research to confirm the interview questions will result in data required to address my primary research question. I would sincerely appreciate your assessment of the questions and provide feedback on the configuration of the questions, and any recommendations on their appropriateness or the phrasing, to obtain the data needed.

The purpose of my qualitative phenomenological research study is to report the lived experiences of women executives in their career progression and identify any uniqueness related to women in the manufacturing and service industries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. Utilizing the aspects of descriptive phenomenology, the design will aid in gaining an understanding of the experiences that may have influenced their career progression. The proposed study will have me interview twenty female executives, or until data saturation is achieved. The finding of the study may provide information to assist other women in the manufacturing and service industries, in

comprehending the requirements to achieve leadership positions. The resulting study will provide a information regarding aspects of the glass ceiling, and if it continues to have an impact on the women's career progression. I have attached a template that includes my research question, my interview questions, and a column for your feedback

Please consider helping me achieve my goal by participating in the expert panel review/field test. Your participation will be most appreciated. If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me in this regard.

Sincerely,

Diane Mastroguiseppe

Walden University PhD Student of Management,

Leadership and Organizational Change

[diane.mastroguiseppe@waldenu.edu](mailto:diane.mastroguiseppe@waldenu.edu)

## Appendix C: Panel Review Sheet

Attachment to Request with Comments from Panel Participants

## Expert Panel Review / Field Test

I value your feedback on my interview questions.

Please provide your comments in the area titled Feedback.

- If they are phrased to provide data to address the research question.
- If they are open-ended enough, or too much, to lead to additional questions.
- Any suggestions on the phrasing of the questions.
- If there are suggestions on topics for additional or different direction.
- Any changes or additions you feel will enhance the results.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Questions</b>	<b>Feedback</b>
What are the lived experiences of executive women in the manufacturing and service industries regarding their encounter with the glass ceiling in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century	1) What, if any, aspects of the glass ceiling phenomenon have you experienced during your career?	a. Clarify the definition of a “glass ceiling” in the introduction to your study so the participants understand b. Will these women understand the term “glass ceiling phenomenon”? Rather than asking specifically about a “glass ceiling” you may consider asking about the aspects that constitute a glass ceiling.

		<p>c. A good question that is open and allows reflection</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	<p>2) Did you witness any specific aspects related to the glass ceiling where gender priority was evident, and how did they affect your career or another woman's progression?</p>	<p>a. Quantitative in nature, rephrase with "how" or "what" have you observed...</p> <p>b. This question is confusing. Questions should be as simple and straightforward as possible. For example: Have you witnessed a time when a male was chosen for promotion over a woman? How did that affect your, or the other woman's, career?</p> <p>c. I am fine with this too.</p> <p>d. Consider using a different word than "aspects"</p>
	<p>3) a. Can you provide any evidence of the phenomenon existing in the last few decades, and if so/not, what particular aspects?</p>	<p>a. Quantitative in nature, try using "What particular evidence..." Also, move this to be second question.</p> <p>b. This is not a clear sentence for a layperson. The dissertation is academic speak, the interview questions should not be. How is this question different than question two?</p>

		<p>c. I am okay with this</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	<p>4) 4) Do you believe it was harder to prove gender discrimination in the workplace in the past or in the present, and how do you feel this affects women's attitudes toward career progression?</p>	<p>a. Quantitative. Suggest you use "how has the difficulty in proving gender bias....."</p> <p>b. Ask only one question at a time. Why are you asking the first question? Is second question needed? Unless you have literature/theory supporting this question, I would see if it emerges from the data. If you have a case to ask it, I would recommend revising. EX: How do gender discrimination laws affect your attitude toward career progression?</p> <p>c. Good question</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	<p>5) Do you see any specific evidence of the continued existence of the glass ceiling or are women now choosing to not pursue advancement as in the past?</p>	<p>a. Again, qualitative with the word "do," and break it into two separate questions. Rephrase with "what." Also, when breaking it down and rephrasing it may be duplicating another question,</p> <p>b. How is the first question different than questions 2 and</p>

		<p>3? I would recommend asking the broader question you are leading them to:          What are the reasons you do not think there are more women in management?</p> <p>c. Good question but you may want to make this a bit limiting since it is broad</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	<p>6) In your career progression, can you provide your experiences of conflict between your home or work environments, where one presented problems with the other, and how were they resolved?</p>	<p>a. Quantitative. Again, use “What conflicts, if any,…”</p> <p>b. Too many questions imbedded here. Participants will only partially respond. I am not clear what you are asking here or how it relates to your study. Unless you are trying to understand how home impacts their ability to take leadership positions. Again, I recommend going broader: How do you balance work and home life?</p> <p>c. Good</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	<p>7) In what way do you see a change in society relating to women’s</p>	<p>a. Start the question with “what” or “how” and consider breaking it into</p>



	opportunities for career advancement, or do you believe the glass ceiling still exists, and can you provide any examples?	<p>more than one question and reorganize set so there is a better flow.</p> <p>b. Confusing. Ask the question you are leading them to: “What are current barriers or challenges for career advancement for you?”</p> <p>c. Good</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>
	8) What recommendation or advice would you give to help women advance to the senior leadership positions, in your industry or generally across all fields of business?	<p>a. Great, no changes recommended.</p> <p>b. I like this question.</p> <p>c. Good</p> <p>d. Take out the comma for clarity in the question.</p>
	9) What would you say was the biggest advantage you had that helped your career?	<p>a. Effective question.</p> <p>b. Fine.</p> <p>c. Good</p> <p>d. No comment made.</p>

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- a. Overall direction is well suited to the research question. The biggest problem is that the questions are not open ended enough. It really is o.k. in some instances to assume that the phenomenon you are asking questions about does exist.

- b. I would recommend using something like: “Describe your experience as a female in management in the manufacturing or service industry” as your first question. From there, ask questions to round out what their response did not cover. Be very careful about leading questions. Ask broad questions ask their experience and allow the answers to emerge from the responses.
- c. This is a wonderful topic and once you are done I would love to write an article or two with you.
- d. Your interview questions will yield information related to the research question. Consider some other questions that are not as focused on the glass ceiling: What contributed to your career success? What are the contributing factors that may disenfranchise women in the manufacturing and service industries? What barriers or obstacles have you encountered in your career progression? Describe the role of social networking, both formal and informal, in relation to your personal career advancement? What skills and experiences are necessary for women to advance to the executive ranks of manufacturing and service industries? Rephrase all so you are asking about their experiences instead of their opinion. Also, what demographic information are you going to gather?

## Appendix D: Final Interview Questions

### Introduction and Overview

All information will be kept completely confidential, and other than myself, there will be no connection made to you and your answers in my study. After the interview, your answers will be transcribed and sent back to you for clarification and confirmation within 48 hours. If you do not respond within two weeks, unless there are unforeseen circumstances, the transcripts will be assumed accurate.

The questions for the research project revolve around the experiences encountered during career progression and the phenomenon referred to as the “Glass Ceiling.” The definition is identified in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2003) as “an unfair system or set of attitudes that prevents some people (such as women or people of a certain race) from getting the most powerful jobs” (p. 531). Do you understand the term “glass ceiling” as it relates to this study?

I will be recording the interview for the purpose of transcription. Please provide me acknowledgement of the consent form, verbally and by returning the form via email, and we can proceed with the interview process. I will send you a transcript of the interview, for your approval, within two days. Please understand you are not under any obligation to complete the interview, and can stop it at any time. If you do not have any questions, or need clarification, we can get started.

### Revised Interview Questions

1. What, if any, aspects of the glass ceiling phenomenon have you experienced aspects during your career?
2. What evidence of the phenomenon existed in the last few decades that are no longer evident or as predominant?
3.
  - a. What specific experiences have you had, or witnessed, where a male was chosen for a promotion or project over a woman?
  - b. How did the situation(s) affect your, or another woman's career?
4. How do gender discrimination laws affect your attitude toward career progression?
5. What conflicts between home and work environments, have you experienced in your career progression, and how do you balance the two?
6. What are the current barriers, or challenges, you see in society relating to women's opportunities for career advancement?
7. What recommendation or advice would you give to help women advance to the senior leadership positions, in your industry or generally across all fields of business?
8. What would you say was the biggest advantage you had that helped your career?

## Appendix E: Email Request for Participation in Study

Invitation Email

(Recipient Name)

(Recipient Title)

(Company Name)

(Address)

(City, State Zip Code)

Dear Ms. (Recipient)

My name is Diane Mastroguiseppe; I am a PhD candidate at Walden University. I am presently working on my dissertation for a doctorate in the philosophy of management, with a concentration in leadership and organizational change. The title for my phenomenological study is the perpetual existence of the glass ceiling in the twenty-first century.

The Cause for the stagnation of women into leadership positions continues to be attributed to the phenomenon referred to as the glass ceiling. There does not appear to be much academic research or books written, on whether the stagnation is due to the choices made by women in this millennium or if the phenomenon still exists. The purpose of the research is to understand the lived experiences of women executives, and identify any distinctive factors synonymous to women in these positions. Based on your success in achieving the position you hold at (company name), I am inviting you to participate in this study.

Should you be agreeable, your participation would require 30-45 minutes of your time for a one-on-one interview. Following the interview, the verbatim transcription will be provided to give you the opportunity to make any corrections to clarify your meaning. All interviews will be kept strictly confidential.

The participation of women who have broken through the glass ceiling can provide important insight and assist with educating the population and providing support for effecting social change. The results of the study could have the potential to influence regional social change by providing knowledge to young women, starting in the workforce, as well as those in middle management, of what skills and concessions may be vital to the advancement of their respective vocations. The results could increase the percentage of female executives, as well as provide insight for male leadership, by identifying issues encountered by women in this millennium.

I would greatly appreciate your participation, and your valuable time, to share your experience in this endeavor. Your unique encounters may be the key to promote social change in the area, and possibly in the industry. Please contact me, by return email or on my personal cell phone (610.633.9933), to let me know if you are willing to participate. At that time, we can review our schedules and set up a mutual meeting time and method.

I sincerely appreciate your time. Should you require any additional information, about the study, my background, or Walden University, I will be happy to address your concerns. I have taken the liberty of attaching the consent form which will provide more details on the process. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Diane Mastroguiseppe

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University

[diane.mastroguiseppe@waldenu.edu](mailto:diane.mastroguiseppe@waldenu.edu)

610-633-9933