2019

Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership Practices and Enterprise Longevity: A Multiple Case Study

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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by

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MA, University of the Incarnate Word, 2011

BS, University of the Incarnate Word, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Women entrepreneurs are emerging in the national economy as important players, yet gender bias and stereotypes still exist in organizations that prevent firms from taking advantage of women's potential as leaders in entrepreneurial ventures. At the same time, traditional leadership models are lacking in diversity and unanswered questions remain regarding the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership and enterprise sustainability. The purpose of this qualitative study, which used an exploratory, multiple-case research design, was to gain insight into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business's start-up phase. This study is framed by, first, the concept of *the entrepreneurial leader* and, second *the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership*. Semistructured interviews with 9 participants, observational field notes, and archival data provided data regarding the leadership experiences of women entrepreneurs and enterprise longevity of women-led firms. Identifiable themes emerged through thematic analysis of the textual data and cross-case synthesis analysis. A total of 7 conceptual categories that enclose a total of 12 themes were identified. The conceptual categories are (a) gender, (b) entrepreneurial leadership, (c) market, (d) money, (e) management skills, (f) macro environment, and (g) meso environment. Findings from this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo in existing formal work structures and promoting diversity in the workplace, opening new avenues for business growth and building bridges of communication between the business world and society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Women entrepreneurs are emerging in the national economy as important players and yet gender bias and stereotypes that still exist in organizations today prevent those firms from taking advantage of women's potential as leaders in entrepreneurial ventures (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; McGowan, Cooper, Durkin, & O'Kane, 2015). Traditional leadership models are lacking in diversity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Yousafzai, Saeed, & Muffatto, 2015), yet unanswered questions remain in the literature on the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership and enterprise sustainability (Dean & Ford, 2017; Foss, Henry, Ahl, & Mikalsen, 2018). As such, researchers have begun to acknowledge these unanswered questions and call for research to fill these gaps in the scholarly literature (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b; Pejić Bach, Merkač Skok, & Suša, 2016).

In this chapter, insights are provided on the potential impact of gender bias and the challenges confronted by women entrepreneurs serving as barriers to developing successful start-up enterprises. First, the background information is presented and, in the presentation of the problem, a description of the gap in the scholarly literature is given. Next, the researcher presents a logical alignment between problem, purpose, and research questions and the conceptual framework of the study. Finally, the significance, assumptions, and limitations of the study, along with definitions of terms that are used throughout this document, are presented.

Background of the Study

Research by Patterson, Mavin, and Turner (2012) evidenced the stereotypes of both men and women in leadership roles, women being associated with communal

behaviors, such as concern for others, and men with agentic behaviors, such as aggression and competitiveness; as women challenge the stereotype, taking on agentic behaviors, negative impressions emerge. Applying gender recognition in entrepreneurial leadership can help in understanding the complexities women face (Patterson et al., 2012). While the masculine perspective continues to pervade the literature, in their literature review Henry and Foss (2015b) demonstrated that the traditional view of masculine hegemony as entrepreneurs is outdated.

Female entrepreneurs are emerging as important players in the national economy, but they are still underrepresented in leadership positions (Bianchi, Parisi, & Salvatore, 2015). Calling for a more gendered perspective on entrepreneurial leadership, addressing inequities confronted by women in leadership roles, a study by Chasserio, Pailot, and Poroli (2014) explored how women entrepreneurs build their identities through social constructs. The barriers that women face in obtaining leadership positions have been extensively documented as the glass ceiling effect and, more recently, the glass wall and the glass cliff, with several underlying processes being identified (Ryan et al., 2016). The pervasiveness of gender differences in entrepreneurship can be seen in Bianchi et al.'s (2015) empirical study exploring the constraints and motivations of the woman entrepreneur. In their study, they highlighted that while men contend with many of the same limitations as women, men's and women's motivations and expectations for entrepreneurship differ.

In the past, researchers have used the 3M framework (money, market, and management) to examine women's entrepreneurship and leadership practices, while

Brush, de Bruin, and Welter (2009) argued for the need to extend that framework to include *motherhood* and the *meso/macro environment* using institutional theory to provide a more complete view of the challenges endured by the woman entrepreneur. Through an extensive review of the literature, the authors suggested that rather than developing a separate theory, researchers should expand existing theoretical concepts to include explanations for the social context and the embedded nature of gender in women's entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial leadership development depends on human, social, and institutional capital, and in the study by Leitch, McMullan, and Harrison (2013) the researchers found that human capital is developed through the development of the entrepreneur's social capital. Social capital theory, then, will focus on the relationships that are needed for the entrepreneurial leader's success (Leitch et al., 2013).

Leadership has traditionally had a male influence in the literature, and research in gender studies has emphasized the differences in male and female styles; however, those studies are now being challenged as more women assume senior positions (McGowan et al., 2015). The study by McGowan et al. (2015) revealed that there is still a prevalence of the masculine view of leadership and a lack of social networks available for young, women entrepreneurs, and the need exists for policymakers to address plans that will encourage young entrepreneurial women, promoting diversity in organizations and creating opportunity for social change. As women have moved into leadership roles traditionally occupied by men, they have had to overcome obstacles, and the lack of support has forced them to work through these by building a collaborative network (Moore, Moore, & Moore, 2011). These traditional leadership roles, which are lacking in

diversity (Yousafzai et al., 2015), provide the opportunity for a new conceptual model to explain the underlying context of women's entrepreneurial leadership and the environment in which they operate.

Problem Statement

The general problem is that women entrepreneurial leaders who do not conform to traditional gender leadership practices risk negative evaluations and gender bias that may result in firms sacrificing these women's valuable entrepreneurial contribution to enterprise longevity (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Mylonas, Kyrgidou, & Petridou, 2017). Conducting further research into gendered models and practices of entrepreneurial leadership and recognizing the effectiveness of women's entrepreneurial leadership practices in enterprise longevity is important as women entrepreneurs are emerging as important players in the national economy (Chasserio, Poroli, & Redien-Collot, 2016; McGowan et al., 2015). The 5-year benchmark is a critical element of defining entrepreneurial longevity: The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reported that 21% of start-up businesses operate for less than 1 year and 77% have a lifespan of only 3 years. The remaining 23% must overcome multiple challenges for survival, including competition, product and service development, and customer acquisition (Stuetzer, Obschonka, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2012). The fifth year of operation is therefore used as a benchmark for long-term sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs, Fairlie, Morelix, Tareque, Russell, & Reedy, 2016).

Scholars continue to acknowledge unanswered questions in research regarding the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership practices and its effect on enterprise longevity

(see, for example, Foss et al., 2018; Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b; Pejić Bach et al., 2016; Stead, 2017). Yet, a gendered approach to entrepreneurial leadership has not developed due to a dearth of research on the entrepreneurial leadership practices of women to gain a deeper understanding of gender's role in enterprise longevity (Dean & Ford, 2017; Galloway, Kapasi, & Sang, 2015; Henry et al., 2015). The specific problem is the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity remains unknown (Dean, Larson, Ford, & Akram, 2017; Harrison, Leitch, & McAdam, 2015; Markussen & Røed, 2017; Salloum, Azzi, Mercier-Suissa, & Khalil, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. Most gendered entrepreneurship leadership data derives from U.S. studies in which quantitative, survey-based approaches were utilized, thus lacking in exploratory methods needed to offer a deeper understanding of gendered entrepreneurial leadership practices (Henry et al., 2015; Kirkwood, 2016). To address this gap on the implications of women's entrepreneurial leadership practices for enterprise longevity, consistent with the qualitative paradigm, and to provide a strong basis for theory extension, a multiple-case study method (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017) utilizing criterion-based sampling to recruit and interview 5–15 women entrepreneurial leaders was used. The final number of participants in the study was

determined on confirmation of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). With fewer than five cases, it is often difficult to gain an in-depth understanding of the data to extend theory using a multiple-case study design. When to halt data collection in a multiple-case study and to stop iterating between theory and case study data in the analysis is determined by data saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Research Questions

In line with the purpose of this study, the following two research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this study centered on two concepts that focus on the challenges that women entrepreneurs must contend with in developing their careers: McGrath and MacMillan's (2000) concept of the need for a new type of leader, coined by the seminal authors as *entrepreneurial leadership*, and Brush's (1992) concept of the *intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership*. The concept of the entrepreneurial leader was critical to the foundation of this study. Entrepreneurial leadership has predominantly been explored based on leadership traits and behaviors (Leitch et al., 2013). While past research has explored leadership from various leadership

styles, including authentic, transformational, and shared leadership, a new paradigm has emerged, that of entrepreneurial leadership (McGowan et al., 2015). A review of research on this emerging field indicates parallels between entrepreneurship and leadership, yet there is no agreed-upon definition (Galloway et al., 2015; Harrison et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015).

In current leadership theory, the use of a flexible leadership style is encouraged, and most styles fall somewhere on a continuum from transactional to transformational, in which leaders are focused on the environment, tasks, and followers (Galloway et al., 2015). Per Galloway et al. (2015), the entrepreneurial leader functions as a visionary who can engage followers and stakeholders to perform in such a way as to achieve the growth outcomes of the business. While researchers have examined the gender differences that exist between men and women business owners, there is a need for a new perspective, one that integrates the human and social relationships that take place when women start their own businesses (Brush, 1992). Through the concept of intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurship, it is possible to integrate human and social capital to provide a more complete perspective of the complex nature in which society and business operate (Brush, 1992; Cole, 2009). Researchers have studied the importance of social and human capital for the success of the woman business owner, finding that early development of this capital is imperative to the success of their enterprises (Leitch et al., 2013; McGowan et al., 2015). The challenge for future scholars is to answer critics by examining the woman entrepreneur through a feminist lens for a better understanding of the complexity of their leadership and career experiences (Dean et al., 2017; Henry & Foss, 2015b).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative so that the method supported the purpose of the study and provided data to answer the research questions. As the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial leadership practices of women founders of SMEs 5 years after their business' start-up phase, a multiple-case study design was used to meet the study objectives (Yin, 2017). Associated with a constructivist paradigm, the goal of qualitative research is to understand experiences from the perspective of people living and working in a specific context (Cooper & White, 2012). The relationship between social constructivism and qualitative research is demonstrated through *mimesis*, which elicits the interpretation of links between experiences, narratives, and constructs (Flick, 2004; Ricoeur, 1991). This idea of mimesis can also be applied to the most common design in qualitative research: the narration of life experiences in in-depth interviews. The narratives of such interviews can provide a general framework within which experiences are ordered, interpreted, and represented through thematic analysis of the textual data. Through qualitative research within the constructivist paradigm, people have the opportunity to create their reality through their subjective experiences, thus? giving a voice to marginalized groups to support social change (Cooper & White, 2012; Merriam, 2002; Stake, 2006).

The case study method, from a social constructivist approach, is appropriate when existing theories are inadequate to explain the phenomena under study and especially in the extension of entrepreneurship theory (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013) as well as in the development of entrepreneurship theory (Henry & Foss, 2015a). A

multiple-case study is utilized by researchers to investigate the experiences of individuals living within the context of a complex social phenomenon; as such, these individuals are studied as separate units of study (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017). When the data focus is only on individuals in a case study design, the study's central social phenomenon—in this case, female leadership in SMEs—is the context and not the target of study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017). As such, in this study individuals rather than organizations were researched, and the qualitative design best suited with data retrieval to build theory was an exploratory multiple-case design (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This design allowed for comparing and contrasting data results between cases (Yin, 2017). The unit of analysis for this study was women founders of SMEs.

Purposeful sampling strategies were utilized to recruit participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008) using the following inclusion criteria: adults over the age of 30; women; founders of SMEs, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge of and experiences with the study topic (Patton, 2014). Data were collected from a purposeful sample of nine information-rich participants for in-depth study. After eight interviews I determined that data saturation was achieved; I conducted an additional interview to confirm this, bringing my total interviews to nine (Patton, 2014). Qualitative methodologists support that no more than 15 participants may be used to reach thematic saturation for a qualitative study (Mason, 2010; Schram, 2006), and that long interviews with up to 10–15 people tend to be sufficient for a multiple-case study where the unit of analysis is a person, place, or event (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017). Participants were recruited primarily using criterion-based sampling, a typology of purposeful sampling as

recommended by Patton (2015) and using only snowball sampling to augment the sample if needed. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identified snowball sampling as a prominent form of purposeful sampling that is frequently used in qualitative case study research by asking key participants already recruited for the study to refer others who may also meet the inclusion criteria for sample selection (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Aligning with the case study method, multiple sources of evidence were gathered to provide evidence for the two research questions: interviews, reflective journaling, and analysis of archived data, such as government reports and media reports on women's entrepreneurial leadership (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017).

Definitions

Diversity: Diversity is an understanding that individuals have different backgrounds, including but not limited to culture, race, and gender (Tolbert & Castilla, 2017).

Entrepreneurial leadership: Entrepreneurial leadership are those leadership capabilities that achieve success in organizations through innovation and opportunity development (Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore, & Nikolopoulos, 2015; Harrison et al., 2015). Entrepreneurial leaders provide a vision that encourages commitment from their followers to achieve success (Henry & Foss, 2015b).

Entrepreneurship: Entrepreneurship is an instrument for economic growth through innovation and risk-taking, creating opportunity for improvement not only at the organizational level but for society as well (Ahl, 2006).

Enterprise longevity: Enterprise longevity is the measure of a business to remain in business and be successful 5 years after start-up (Fairlie et al., 2016).

Gender bias: Gender bias is discrimination, either openly or indiscreetly, present in organizations based on gender (Henry, Foss, & Ahl, 2016).

Glass ceiling: A metaphor that describes the inability of women and minorities to advance to executive leadership positions, but who rather are held to a lower level due to invisible challenges (Carli & Eagly, 2016).

Leadership practices: Leadership practices are those behaviors that have an impact on the relationships between employer and employee and impact the overall performance within an organization (Kirkwood, 2016).

Assumptions

Data collection and analysis strategies for the study were carried out in accordance with four assumptions. The first assumption was the women entrepreneurs' willingness to volunteer in this research study, and that the data collected from in-depth interviews would provide honest, accurate, reliable, and well-articulated information. This would help to identify specific knowledge gaps among women entrepreneurs' leadership practices and the implications of those practices for enterprise longevity. Exploration and description of the women entrepreneurs' perspectives regarding specific knowledge gaps relied on the presumption that the recruited participants' real-life experiences supported in-depth knowledge on the study's central topic (Erikkson & Kovalainen, 2015).

The second assumption of the study pertained to the integrity of the data collection, processing, and analysis process. It was assumed that the researcher had in-depth knowledge pertaining to the purpose of the study, and that the data would be accurately collected, recorded, and analyzed (Patton, 2014).

The third assumption behind this study was that the insights and perspectives recorded in the in-depth interviews would provide the information needed for triangulation of information from multiple sources (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Patton, 2014). Given that the interviewer in this study is a woman, this shared gender could help establish trust and rapport during the interview process, so participants could be comfortable in sharing their knowledge gaps on entrepreneurial leadership practices. It was assumed that transcription of the interview data would be accurate; the study design included member checking to address this assumption (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The fourth assumption of this study was that using a multiple-case study design would contribute new knowledge to the conceptual framework of the study and its underlying theories. Yin (2017) indicated that the multiple-case study design in qualitative research and use of the cross-case synthesis technique for analyzing qualitative data are preferred methods for strengthening validity and robustness of qualitative research. Additionally, data analysis results using the multiple-case study design are commonly used to build or extend theory (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

Scope and Delimitations

This multiple-case study was limited to women founders of SMEs with the following additional boundaries: women over the age of 30; located within the United

States, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic (Patton, 2014). This criterion-based sampling gathered a heterogeneous group of participants to support maximum variation sampling (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). Maximum variation sampling in qualitative research relies on the researcher's judgment to select participants with diverse characteristics to ensure the presence of maximum variability within the primary data, which in this multiple-case study were the responses to the interview protocol (Palinkas et al., 2015). This age criterion has been used by scholars in similar studies who have concluded that this age criterion allowed sufficient time for the participants to have established a specific direction in their careers as leaders of an enterprise (Bamiatzi, Jones, Mitchelmore, & Nikolopoulos; Juma & Sequeira, 2017; Overbeke, Bilimoria, & Perelli, 2013). These criteria for participant selection limited the scope of this study to exclude women who entered the business as a stop-gap measure or who were in a clerical or supportive position absent of an intention to assume sustained executive responsibilities (Overbeke, Bilimoria, & Perelli, 2013).

In qualitative research, sampling is primarily utilized to delve into cases, events, or actions that can enrich understanding about the phenomenon being investigated, to add to existing research and new knowledge regarding a particular issue of interest (Ishak & Bakar, 2014). All interviews were conducted on Skype. Offering the option of a Skype interview gave participants a degree of control over the research process and promoted a more equal relationship between the researcher and the participant (Hanna, 2012).

The specific scope of 5 years after start-up for the population of women SME founders was chosen due to the need to fill knowledge gaps on the leadership practices of

women founders of SMEs that cannot be explored by using other methodologies, including assessments and surveys. The study excluded those women owners of SMEs who had not yet reached the 5-year benchmark of operation (Fairlie et al., 2016). This study also excluded those women business owners who had founded SMEs that operate outside of the United States.

This research is transferable to women founders of SMEs as they face financial and social barriers similar to business start-ups. Formerly, researchers have focused on gender as a variable in exploring the woman's role in entrepreneurial leadership. However, Henry et al. (2016) indicated the need for using a qualitative methodology that gives in-depth access to the knowledge gap on the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of those practices for enterprise longevity. Not offering statistical generalization limits transferability of data results or the general population from which the small sample of the study originated (Yin, 2017). However, this was not the aim of this study, but was rather used to enhance validity and credibility in the face of personal bias, uniformed cross-comparison, and faulty theory generation (Stake, 1995). This study followed recommendations by Stake (2006) on showing transferability of multiple-case study findings.

Limitations

Limitations, a characteristic of every research study, are those elements of the study that are out of the researcher's control and can impact the trustworthiness of the study results (Golafshani, 2003; Sinkovics, Penz, & Ghauri, 2008). The first limitation was that the researcher, being a woman, could inadvertently contribute to gender bias.

Motivation and influences based on a personal gendered lens can create ethnocentrism and judging research participants and their responses solely by the values and standards of one's own gender (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2011). To minimize female gender bias, a male debriefer skilled in qualitative methods analyzed the same data and the results were compared and contrasted with the researcher's own, discussing discrepancies until a consensus was reached (Anney, 2014).

The second limitation of the study was that the case study method has received scholarly criticism for not offering statistical generalization, which prevents transferability of data results or the general population from which the sample of nine U.S. women entrepreneurs originated (Yin, 2017). The multiple-case study method was not used for this purpose but to augment external validity and cross-case comparison, to safeguard against observer bias (Stake, 2013), and to advance theory extension, which does not target representativeness as a relationship of sample and population (Ridder, 2017). The initial primary data collection process was limited to five participants, not to exceed 15, and based on saturation of the data (Stake, 2013).

Participants' willingness to answer the interview questions in a straightforward and honest manner contributed to the third research limitation, although it was assumed that participant responses to interview questions by the researcher would be truthful and transparent (Sinkovics et al., 2008). Patton (2014) noted that political atmosphere, anxiety, and personal bias could place limitations on the interview process and could result in distortion of participants' responses. The researcher, in consequence, depended

on the commonality of her and the participants' shared gender to put the participants at ease.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

The significance of a study must address the importance of filling a knowledge gap (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The significance of this study lay in the opportunity to address an underresearched area on the career development of diverse populations, namely women entrepreneurs. This research was needed to gain a deeper understanding of the daily work lives and leadership practices of women business owners (Dean & Ford, 2017; Harrison et al., 2015), and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity (Bianchi et al., 2016; Eagly & Heilman, 2016). The career development and management literature has largely consisted of studies constructed from a masculine perspective (Leitch et al., 2013; Patterson et al., 2012). This study is significant in that it enabled the researcher to address inequities in employment that women, an underrepresented population in leadership, must contend with, and to support this population, challenging existing formal work structures through the growth of women entrepreneurs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Heilman, 2016).

Significance to Theory

The lack of exploratory research on women's entrepreneurial leadership practices and their implications for enterprise longevity is a critical knowledge gap resulting in leadership theoretical frameworks lacking diversity, generalizability of findings, and gender inclusivity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Henry et al., 2015; Yousafzai et al., 2015).

Scholars concur on an existing research gap regarding the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership practices and its effect on enterprise longevity (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b; Pejić Bach et al., 2016). Yet, a gendered approach to entrepreneurial leadership has yet to be developed regarding the entrepreneurial leadership practices of women (Dean & Ford, 2017; Galloway et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2015). The findings of this empirical study contributed original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework, and were aimed at advancing knowledge on gender-inclusive leadership practices in SMEs. Two concepts made up the framework defining the challenges facing women founders of SMEs in operation over 5 years in the United States: the *entrepreneurial leader*, a term coined by McGrath and MacMillan (2000), and the concept of the *intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership* (Brush, 1992). The entrepreneurial leader can be a catalyst for change that is needed for women to advance in their careers, providing socioeconomic development among women business owners (Chasserio et al., 2014). Through empirical investigation into women's entrepreneurial leadership to fill the gap in knowledge in the theoretical foundations of the conceptual framework, this study contributes original, qualitative data to social capital theory and intersectionality theory that may prove useful in future related research.

Significance to Social Change

Workplace discrimination must be addressed at the micro level as the impact is felt across communities (Harrison et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015). Gender is one aspect of this discrimination and remains significant in determining inequity in the United

States (Henry et al., 2015). As such, this study bears social change implications in understanding whether the creation of alternate work settings, such as women leading successful SMEs, will impact the culture at large. Further, women entrepreneurs have a voice that is shaped by their distinct experiences with workplace discrimination (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Harrison et al., 2015). Through this study, a sample of women entrepreneurs had the opportunity to voice their experiences regarding both gender and entrepreneurial leadership, an area that remains largely unexplored and undocumented (Bamiatzi et al., 2015; Brush, 1992; Harrison et al., 2015).

Capturing the differences made by women entrepreneurs also contributes to social change by opening new avenues for business growth and building new bridges of communication between the business world and society (Chasserio et al., 2016). With this study's results documenting the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur, this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo in existing formal work structures and promoting more diversity in the workplace.

Summary and Transition

Women represent a pivotal segment of the U.S. national economy and yet continue to have to contend with gender bias and stereotypes in the workplace, giving rise to women exiting organizations and establishing themselves as entrepreneurial leaders. In existing leadership models, a masculine perspective continues to dominate, perpetuating barriers for the woman entrepreneur and for enterprise sustainability. The intersection of the concepts of gender and the entrepreneurial leader should be reflected in policies and strategies, examining how the challenges for the young woman

entrepreneur may affect leadership development and enterprise sustainability. Human and social relationships are an integral component of the success of the woman entrepreneur's enterprise. For the woman entrepreneur to thrive and succeed past the 5-year benchmark, they need skills that will allow social change to take place through the promotion of a more diverse workplace.

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain greater insight into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. To address this gap on the implications of women's entrepreneurial leadership practices for enterprise longevity, consistent with the qualitative paradigm and to provide a strong basis for theory building, a multiple-case study method was used. This study bears social change implications in understanding whether the creation of alternate work settings, such as women leading successful SMEs, will impact the culture at large as it gives voice to women entrepreneurs' experiences with the intersection of gender and entrepreneurial leadership, an area that remains largely unexplored and undocumented

In Chapter 2, a review of the literature is presented on factors affecting the woman entrepreneur's success, such as entrepreneurial leadership, the role of gender, women entrepreneur competencies, and studies that will help the research. Topics that are examined include women in entrepreneurship, challenges confronted by women entrepreneurs, and enterprise longevity and the woman entrepreneur.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Women entrepreneurs are emerging as important players in the U.S. national economy, yet their contributions to enterprise longevity remain largely unrecognized by organizations. With the lack of diversity in current leadership models (Ayman & Korabik, 2010), an understanding of the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership is needed to encourage success of the female entrepreneur past the 5-year benchmark (Fairlie et al., 2016). The recognized management and leadership practices used by successful women entrepreneurs are critical to understanding how to overcome the challenges confronted by organizations to build progressive enterprises.

The purpose of this exploratory, multiple-case study was to gain greater insight into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. The goal was to study the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur from their perspective to understand the challenges they have endured. This understanding will help to promote the growth of women entrepreneurs by challenging existing formal work structures (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Eagly & Heilman, 2016).

In this chapter, the literature search strategy as well as the conceptual framework on which the research was based will be presented. More evidence of gender bias in the workplace and the challenges confronted by the woman entrepreneur will be discussed. Finally, the need for a more gendered lens through which to view entrepreneurial leadership will be examined.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was researched using the following databases: Academic Search Complete, Business Source Complete, Emerald Insight, ProQuest Central, Google Scholar, and Sage Research Methods Online. Journal names retrieved from the reference lists of other experts in the field of women's entrepreneurship for current research were used and verified on and Google search.

The following search terms used: *entrepreneurship, woman entrepreneur, woman leadership practices, gender bias, glass ceiling, intersectionality theory, social role theory, firm performance,* and *entrepreneurial competencies*. Some of these search terms were combined to see if more relevant results could be generated. These combined terms included: *woman entrepreneur and leadership practices, woman entrepreneur and gender, woman entrepreneur and glass ceiling, woman entrepreneur and entrepreneurial competencies, firm performance and woman entrepreneur, woman entrepreneur and social role theory,* and *woman entrepreneur and intersectionality theory*.

The primary objective in the literature search strategy was to provide evidence that the need exists to understand the leadership practices of women entrepreneurs 5 years past the start-up of their businesses. Research based on the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership was used to further justify the fact that the inequities in the workplace are a real social change problem that needs to be addressed through a feminist lens, thereby promoting diversity in the workplace. The secondary objective was to search for literature on the effects of gender on entrepreneurial leadership in order to provide evidence of masculinized leadership frameworks that exist in enterprises. The

last objective was to find literature on the competencies women entrepreneurs use in leading organizations. Most of the articles used in the literature review were published between 2012 and 2017; less than 10% were published between 2006 and 2012.

Conceptual Framework

The framework of this study is centered on two concepts that focus on the challenges women entrepreneurs must contend with in developing their careers: McGrath and MacMillan's (2000) concept of the need for a new type of leader, coined by the seminal authors as *entrepreneurial leadership*, and Brush's (1992) concept on the *intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership*. The concept of entrepreneurial leadership is a critical concept to the foundation of this study. Entrepreneurial leadership has predominately been explored based on leadership traits and behaviors (Leitch et al., 2013). While in the past researchers have explored leadership from various leadership styles, including authentic, transformational, and shared leadership, a new paradigm has emerged, that of entrepreneurial leadership (McGowan et al., 2015). Research on this emerging field indicates parallels between entrepreneurship and leadership, yet there is no agreed-upon definition (Galloway et al., 2015; Harrison et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015). This study may be an important contribution in presenting previously unexamined gendered perspectives between previous leadership styles and the entrepreneurial leader.

In current leadership theory, the use of a flexible leadership style is encouraged, and most styles fall somewhere on a continuum from transactional to transformational, in which leaders are focused on the environment, tasks, and followers (Galloway et al.,

2015). Per Galloway et al. (2015), the entrepreneurial leader functions as a visionary who can engage followers and stakeholders to perform in such a way as to achieve the growth outcomes of the business. Leadership practices are crucial for enterprise longevity and studies have suggested the importance of leaders in SMEs is even more important as there is a blurred line between leaders and managers (Bamiatzi et al., 2015). Understanding the leadership practices needed for success in SMEs becomes even more important when examining the role of gender as much of the entrepreneurial leadership has been described as gender blind, gender neutral, and gender defensive (Harrison et al., 2015; Leitch et al., 2013).

Researchers studying entrepreneurial leadership and gender have focused on the gender-as-variable approach, drawing comparisons between male and female leaders, promoting the masculine characteristics of leadership currently promoted in the leadership literature (Harrison et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2015; Leitch et al., 2013; McGowan et al., 2015). In some studies, this comparison between males and females has been used without theory to explain how gender impacts leadership practices, while in other studies theories such as androgyny theory, social role theory, expectation states theory, and status theory have been used to interpret the results (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

It has been suggested that to understand gender in entrepreneurship, a post-structuralist feminist stance is needed to move away from the masculinization of the entrepreneurial leader (Dean et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2014; Henry et. al., 2015). Current entrepreneurship theory explaining venture creation is generally organized around three

basic constructs: market, money and management. An entrepreneur needs to have access to markets (Kirzner, 1985; Clough, Fang, Vissa, & Wu 2019), money (Aldrich, 1999; Balachandra, Briggs, Eddleston, & Brush, 2019) and management skills (in the form of human, social and organizational capital) (Aldrich, 1989; Gupta, Weiland, & Turban, 2019) to launch a business. These encompass what Bates et al. (2007, p. 10) describe as the three *fundamental building blocks* of business sustainability derived from a mainstream economics and management-driven view of entrepreneurship. Bates et al. (2007) argued that while these three constructs are central to the foundation of any business, for minority (including women-owned) business enterprises there are barriers when attempting to access markets, money and management skills (Welsh, Kaciak, & Shamah, 2018).

Drawing on the insights of Bates et al. (2007) for an initial platform, Brush (1992) and Brush, de Bruin, & Welter (2009) argued that to holistically study women's entrepreneurship, one must also consider norms, values and external expectations (Elam, 2008). Market, money and management skills must be defined to include the uniqueness of women's entrepreneurship, and extend the conceptual framework to include three additional facets: gender, and the meso and macro environment. Gender can also be extended to represent family and household factors influencing one's entrepreneurial practices (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). The macro/meso environment captures considerations beyond the market, including factors such as expectations of social and cultural norms for women entrepreneurs. Macro environment typically includes national policies, strategies, cultural and economic influences; while meso environment reflect

support policies, services and initiatives (Dopfer et al., 2004; Pitelis, 2005). Welter, Brush, and DeBruin (2014) support the five constructs of gendered entrepreneurial behavior and the agency of women entrepreneurs in influencing their spatial-institutional contexts by building on the conclusions of Ahl et al.,(2006) and Welter (2011) that place itself is gendered, reflecting local institutions.

While research has been conducted to examine the gender differences that exist between male and female business owners, there is still much that is unknown regarding the experiences of female entrepreneurial leaders, their career development, and the factors that contribute or hinder their success (Henry et al., 2015). This highlights the need for a new perspective, one that integrates the human and social relationships that take place when women start their own businesses (Brush, 1992). In existing research there is a lack of integration of gender and leadership from the female entrepreneurial perspective. Redressing this failure will allows the integration of human and social capital to provide a more complete perspective of the complex nature in which society and business operate (Brush, 1992; Cole, 2009). Researchers have studied the importance of social and human capital for the success of the female business owner, finding that early development of this capital is imperative to success of their enterprises (Leitch et al., 2013; McGowan et al., 2015).

For a woman who wants a chance to be part of the leadership and decision-making in a company, entrepreneurship becomes an attractive option to have more control over the direction and culture of an enterprise (Tolbert & Castilla, 2017). Women-owned businesses can not only make significant contributions to the economy,

but they provide an alternative route for women to move into leadership positions past the glass ceiling that continues to exist in organizations (Harrison et al., 2015). Utilizing the concepts of entrepreneurial leader and the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership as a lens to view entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon offers a more meaningful impact on the career development of women entrepreneurs (Brush, 1992; Harrison et al., 2015; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). Brush et al. (2009) suggested the use of a constructivist/interpretive stance to study women's entrepreneurship and the contextual embeddedness on which it is built. The challenge for future scholars is to answer critics by examining the female entrepreneur through a feminist lens for a better understanding of the complexity of their leadership and career experiences (Dean et al., 2017; Henry et al., 2015).

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship in the United States: A Brief Overview

There is lack of a clear definition of entrepreneurship, which can create problems for scholars (Leitch et al., 2013; Renko, El Tarabishy, Carsrud, & Brännbach, 2015). While there is agreement among scholars that entrepreneurship involves the creation of a business, this does not give a full picture of the entrepreneurial experience. The entrepreneur not only creates a business, they find and pursue opportunities, innovate, and create value for organizations (Liang & Dunn, 2011; McGowan et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs are risk takers and innovators and they create businesses that can bring value to the community (Renko et al., 2015).

As of 2016, there were approximately 27 million entrepreneurs (Buchanan, 2015). U.S. small businesses (defined by the Small Business Administration (SBA) as under 500 employees for most manufacturing and mining industries and $7.5 million in average annual receipts for many nonmanufacturing industries) employed about 56 million of the nation's private workforce (SBA, 2016b). Self-employment rates are higher for men than women. In 2015, 12.5% of men were among the ranks of the unincorporated self-employed, compared with 7.5% of women (Hipple & Hammond, 2016). In occupations such as construction and management, which have a large number of self-employed workers, typically more men than women are employed. The implication of the definition above is that not all of these could be considered entrepreneurs as they may have not created the business but rather purchased an existing business and/or may have not created innovation.

Characteristics of those who become entrepreneurs in the United States. Researchers of entrepreneurship have identified that entrepreneurs may share particular psychological characteristics (Frese & Gielnik, 2014). In a seminal study comparing entrepreneurs and managers on the five-factor model of personality, Zhao, Seibert, and Hills (2005) reported that entrepreneurs scored higher on Conscientiousness (i.e., degree of organization, persistence, and hard work) and Openness to Experience (i.e., intellectual curiosity and seeking of novel experiences) (). The entrepreneurs in the sample scored lower on Neuroticism (i.e., indicating higher levels of adjustment and emotional stability) and lower on Agreeableness (i.e., interpersonal orientation associated with trust, altruism,

and gullibility), but showed no difference on Extraversion (interpersonal assertiveness, enthusiasm, and energy) ().

In three meta-analysis studies on entrepreneurial intentions researchers concluded that entrepreneurs displayed traits of hard work and persistence, openness to new experiences, stress tolerance, emotional stability, the need for autonomy, less trusting and less agreeable in interpersonal relationships, ready to take greater risk, and with a strong internal locus of control (Brandstätter, 2011; Jin et al., 2017). Additionally, the willingness to start a career that requires skill acquisition in a variety of topics beyond one's defined skills area is a trait for entrepreneurs that is unique to this demographic group in comparison to the general population in the labor market (Halkias, Thurman, Smith, & Nason, 2016).

Family experiences. The decision to become an entrepreneur is influenced by early family life experiences and associated with social skills and entrepreneurial intentions expressed in adolescence. For women, becoming an entrepreneur was predicted by their family socioeconomic status, which researchers theorized was due to structural disadvantages in society that made it more difficult for women to access start-up capital than men and necessitated family financial support (Halkias et al., 2016). For men, becoming an entrepreneur was predicated by a business-owner father (Overbeke et al., 2013). Family support, even when the business will not become a family-style business, is critical in a novice entrepreneur's decision to start a business and increases how prepared entrepreneurs are to launch a business in advance of its start-up phase (Halkias & Denton, 2015; Shen, Osorio, & Settles, 2017). In economically disadvantaged

areas, family support is particularly important and family firms make up a significant proportion of businesses in economically depressed areas (Southern, 2016).

Motivations. Many entrepreneurs start businesses out of the need to generate income in a slack labor market, as studies reported entrepreneurship increasing during the Great Recession that began in 2007 in the United States, when labor markets were harder hit (Fairlie, 2013). Personal motivations such as the need for autonomy, challenges and self-actualization, desire for personal growth or control, and a need for financial gains are some of the reasons for a person to become an entrepreneur (Fayolle, Liñán, & Moriano, 2014). Motivations of the entrepreneur shape the growth of the business, and those who express the desire for financial gains are more likely to have greater growth than those who express independence as the main motivation for starting a business (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2017). The desires to effect change in a particular field or to become an innovator in their field have also been cited by entrepreneurs as motivators. Those who possess a high orientation for innovation may be more motivated to leave the formal work structure and start their own business as they become frustrated with those business structures that do not favor innovation as a business strategy (Attiq, Wahid, Javaid, Kanwal, & Shah, 2017; Lee, Wong, Foo, & Leung, 2011).

There are some unique challenges and rewards that may impact the family life of an entrepreneur, such as increased time, financial benefits, and the emotional investment in the business. There is variation in the amount of involvement in the business by partners, but in a recent study by the SBA (2016) there is evidence of an increasing number of spouses/partners starting businesses together. In a study by Liang and Dunn

(2013), the researchers found that entrepreneurs, male or female, who started a new company (either with or without the spouse's involvement) were better off financially and their marital satisfaction improved or stayed the same. Other scholars have found entrepreneurs reporting marital stress due to the challenges of work–life balance, lack of quality time, and incompatible expectations (Bhatnagar, Bhardwaj, & Mittal, 2017).

Women's Entrepreneurship: A Historical Overview

In 1953, the SBA was formed to recognize the impact on the economy of small businesses in the United States and to promote their growth through policies (SBA, 2015). In the years following, lawmakers enacted several policies to increase the focus on women and minority-owned businesses (The National Women's Business Council [NWBC], 2004). In the 1960s several policies were ushered in aimed at nondiscrimination of women and minorities. The Commission on the Status of Women along with Executive Order 10925 set nondiscrimination standards for federal contracts, followed by the Civil Rights Act and Title VII, barring employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Women and veterans were added to the Equal Employment Opportunity within Affirmative Action (EEOC.gov, 2015a). The Consumer Credit Protection act prohibited lenders from discriminating on the basis of sex or marital status when extending credit and required disclosure of important terms and all costs associated with loans in the Truth in Lending Act (FDIC.gov, 2014).

Title IX required equal treatment of women by educational institutions that received federal funding (EEOC.gov, 2015b). The number of small businesses owned by women (4.6%) provided the opportunity for policymakers to enact the Equal Credit

Opportunity Act, guaranteeing married women the right to credit in their own name, improving women business owners' access to credit. The National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) was created and impacted many of the policies over the next two decades benefiting women-owned enterprises (NWBC, 2004).

The government began tracking the growth of women-owned businesses and revisions were made to the Small Business Act to allow more small businesses, including women-owned, to participate in federal contracting programs (SBA, 2006). Other policies created include: National Women's Business Enterprise Policy, the Interagency Committee on Women's Business Enterprise, and the Office of Women's Business Ownership at the SBA (U.S. Department of Justice, 2000); and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA), amendment to the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, preventing discrimination due to pregnancy or related medical conditions (EEOC, 2016). In 2009, President Obama enacted the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, to restore protection against pay discrimination (NWLC, 2013). Many of the policies supporting women business owners in the 1980s were advocated by the NAWBO (2014), most notably the Women's Business Ownership Act (HR 5050) to bring attention to the importance of women-owned businesses for the economy (Library of Congress, 2015). Through the bill the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974 was amended, expanding the census criteria for a woman-owned business, which improved the data on the number of women-owned businesses by the U.S. Census Bureau, and established the NWBC allowing policy recommendations to the President, Congress, and the U.S. SBA on economic issues related to women business owners (Library of Congress, 2015).

In a study published in 1992 it was revealed that women-owned businesses employed more people than the Fortune 500 companies, helping them gain recognition as being important to the U.S. economy (NWBC, 2004), yet even during that time the number one problem cited by the women was lack of funding (NFWBO, 1996). The Federal Acquisition Streamlining Act paved the way for women small business owners to participate in government contracts (federal, state, and local). Through these programs women gained equal opportunity in fields traditionally dominated by men, which have networks that exclude women (Zwahlen, 2010). Several certifications are available for women that, while time consuming, allow women to become eligible for these types of contracts from government agencies and corporations (Accion, 2014).

Gender bias and oppression impacts women in many areas of life, including formal work structures and entrepreneurship (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Galloway et al., 2015). The historical background presented above provides evidence of the work that has been done, and continues to be done, by changing the perspective of society, narrowing the gap between men and women leaders, and increasing opportunities for women. Individuals adapt to societal expectations and perform their roles based on their perceived gender or sex (Patterson et al., 2012; Stead, 2017). Entrepreneurship is associated with a masculine identity (Hamilton, 2014; Lewis, 2013), and as such women have been encouraged to adopt the masculine traits to be viewed as legitimate business owners (Lewis, 2015). To support women as small business owners, public policies have been enacted (McGowan et al., 2015).

Present state of women-owned businesses in the United States. The number of women-owned businesses has more than doubled in 20 years, according to the annual State of Women-Owned Businesses report (American Express OPEN, 2017). In this report, it is noted that, as of January 2017, the approximately 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States employ approximately 9 million people and inject more than $1.7 million into the economy as revenue. These findings align with studies through which researchers were able to indicate the fast growth of women entrepreneurs and their contributions to the economy (De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014; Salloum et al., 2016). In addition, over the past 20 years the employment rate for women-owned businesses was 27% versus 13% for all businesses (American Express OPEN, 2017).

Three industries were noted in the report to encompass half of all women-owned businesses: other services (2.8 million or 23%); health care and social assistance (1.8 million or 15%); and professional, scientific, and technical services (1.5 million or 12%) (American Express OPEN, 2017). There is also indication in the report that industries having the highest revenue per firm attract fewer entrepreneurs. The findings in this report point to progress for the woman entrepreneur but also the need to promote women-owned businesses as they have the potential to make an even greater contribution to the economy (American Express OPEN, 2017).

Entrepreneurial Leadership Models and Multiple Identities

Ideas surrounding who an entrepreneur is and what characteristics such an individual has are widely explored and discussed in literature relating to entrepreneurship research, small business studies, strategic management, and economic theory (Dean et al.,

2017; Gartner, 2010). It is notable that such literature has a bias in presenting descriptions commonly rooted in traditionally masculine traits and norms, offering constructions of entrepreneurial identity that inherently personify a man (Conroy & Weller, 2016). Recently, this has prompted a small yet steadily advancing critique of gendered concepts of entrepreneur identity, highlighting a need to call on a feminist approach that will challenge long-established notions and introduce new perspectives (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Stead, 2015; 2017). One example is a study by Harrison et al. (2015) in which researchers are encouraged to consider the leadership–entrepreneurship interface through a gendered analytic lens. Their recommendation is the result of building on earlier findings from other studies. In their article, Harrison et al. (2015) drew attention to a wealth of new meanings linked to the concept of entrepreneurial leadership and suggest the fluidity of this concept. Through these numerous, fluid meanings, the authors shed light on how entrepreneurs' sensing of their everyday subjectivities break the boundaries of the dominant entrepreneurial discourse and embrace the many and varied social and perhaps even conflicting identities (Lewis, 2015). Finally, Harrison et al. (2015) brought to the forefront the tension that has arisen because of the unabated privilege afforded to overriding gendered leadership behavior that assigns value to economic growth.

Women have had to deal with conflicts in leadership identity due to the higher-ranking value ascribed to men in leadership as compared to women (Díaz-García & Welter, 2011). Masculine approaches to leadership in current research follow notions related to what constitutes successful entrepreneurial leadership, introducing additional conflict for women entrepreneurs (Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Dean and Ford (2017)

adopted a critical and feminist post-structural lens in their study of 12 participants from the United Kingdom who participated in qualitative research on women entrepreneurs and their working lives as leaders. Dean and Ford (2017) reported that their study has implications for theory as it contributes to a new ontological domain in the literature on entrepreneurial leadership and that their findings and analysis challenge the normative accounts of entrepreneurial practices that continue to privilege a hegemonic masculine discourse while marginalizing both women and men who do not fit within the narrow constraints of that dominant discourse. The primary limitations of this study were that narratives collected through this research were inevitably shaped by the current social, material and ideological context of the United Kingdom and the authors recommended further reflective and qualitative research studies of women entrepreneurs that add further insight and diversity from studies contextualized by location (Dean & Ford, 2017).

The concept of the entrepreneur has traditionally been described by scholars as a male-gendered concept and this has created a standard against which the successful woman entrepreneur is measured (Ahl, 2006). For the most part, the focus of research on leadership has been on traits and behaviors (Leitch et al., 2013), although a new concept of the entrepreneurial leader has emerged (McGowan et al., 2015). Gendered interpretations limit understanding of the concepts of entrepreneurship and leadership, and alternative perspectives need to be examined (Galloway et al., 2015). Critical leadership studies provide approaches to studying leadership using diverse views and challenge the existing perspectives on leadership (Dean & Ford, 2017).

Although entrepreneurship has been viewed as an opportunity for both men and women, the masculinization of the field has created limitations for the woman entrepreneur as they are required to adapt to a male view of leadership (Ahl & Marlow, 2012). Expanding the existing theoretical frameworks for women's entrepreneurship could help to explain the unique capabilities of the woman entrepreneur (Yadav & Unni, 2016). One such framework identified by Galloway et al. (2015) is the use of performativity to understand entrepreneurship.

As both the leadership and entrepreneurship literature have been grounded in a masculine orientation, researchers are calling for a gendered perspective on understanding the woman entrepreneur (Lewis, 2015). While most studies have focused on gender as a variable, the entrepreneurship literature would benefit from the recognition that gender is a complex process and is seen at several different levels (Hamilton, 2014). Scholars have recognized a need for current research on women entrepreneurs to shift their focus from a masculine perspective to understand how gender is experienced for the woman entrepreneur (Patterson et al., 2012). Yet, there are few studies in which the topic of gender and the woman entrepreneur is addressed, leading to a call by scholars for the need to explore research leadership and entrepreneurship through a gendered lens (Harrison et al., 2015). Due to a lack of research using a post-structural feminist approach (Henry et al., 2016), examining the woman entrepreneur through a feminist lens would help capture the diversity of entrepreneurship and extend existing theories for the woman entrepreneur (Foss et al., 2018; Yadav & Unni, 2016).

Continuing to rely on the masculinized understanding of the successful entrepreneur limits the knowledge of the identity of the true entrepreneurial leader (Galloway et al., 2015). The face of leadership is changing, moving away from the masculinized models currently seen in the literature (Harrison et al., 2015), and examining women's entrepreneurship through a gendered lens would help researchers understand more fully the value the woman entrepreneur can bring (Henry & Foss, 2015b). As the findings in the study by Dean and Ford (2017) show, challenging the traditional accounts of entrepreneurial leadership by giving voice to women entrepreneurs offers researchers the chance to extend the knowledge of entrepreneurship. Further, a shift in the perspective of entrepreneurship through a lens of narrative identity and gender would help to lift the constraints of the current masculine models that have been imposed (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Foss et al., 2018; Hamilton, 2014).

Women's Entrepreneurial Identity and Other Social Identities

Women entrepreneurs construct their identities in multiple ways (Díaz-García & Welter, 2011; Stead, 2017), and as such there is a need to examine how these identities shape the leadership of the woman entrepreneur. While many empirical studies have shown the woman entrepreneur attempting to conform to the masculine identity of the entrepreneur, Lewis (2013) found that the desire for authenticity was a motivating factor related to identity development for the woman entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is framed by masculine qualities that are socially expected of the entrepreneur, but this perspective fails to acknowledge the social identities constructed by the woman entrepreneur (Chasserio et al., 2014; Stead, 2017).

While scholars have acknowledged that entrepreneurial social identity is framed according to male-dominated social norms, women entrepreneurs are conflicted in that role as they also possess the feminine social identities of wives and mothers (Chasserio et al., 2014). The findings of a study conducted by Lewis, Ho, Harris, and Morrison (2016) offered evidence that women experienced role conflict as they transitioned from motherhood to entrepreneur, creating a shift in their identities and priorities. Allowing the woman entrepreneur's voice to be heard through narrative identity will enhance researchers' understanding of how entrepreneurial identity is socially constructed (Hamilton, 2014). This is further supported in consideration of other studies that have shown that entrepreneurship and womanhood are conflicted identities, yet women construct identities differently, accomplishing business practices through gendered practices (Díaz-García & Welter, 2011; Stead, 2017). In the same vein, the findings of a study by Chasserio et al. (2014) indicate that women entrepreneurs are able to develop strategies that interact with their personal and socially constructed identities, showing their ability to either accept or challenge the conventional expectations in a manner that diverges from the generally accepted masculine approach. Such findings underpin the shortcomings of entrepreneurship research regarding gender.

In entrepreneurship research there is a predominant stereotype that entrepreneurship is a masculine enterprise and the entrepreneur identity is steeped in male traditions (Hamilton, 2014). The concept of narrative identity proposed by Hamilton (2014) challenges the traditional male identity through the examination of gender identities and their practices, while other scholars have examined identity through an

intersectional lens. More nuanced approaches to this line of research indicate the need to consider in more depth the constantly changing and evolving nature of entrepreneurial identity, which intersects with other social identities that, in turn, will also change and evolve (Chasserio et al., 2014).

Gender-Based Leadership Barriers

There is a dearth of research in which considerations extend beyond the organization to examine the broader social context in which women live and work. Yet, barriers that exist or present at the societal and personal levels also have a profound impact on women's ability to advance into executive leadership (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Women work and live in a wide social environment, yet research has failed to acknowledge this broader perspective. Personal and societal barriers continue to exist, impacting women from advancing into executive leadership positions (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Various actions have been taken to assist women in the workforce and leadership positions, ranging from the Equal Pay Act of 1963 to family leave policies and flextime. Yet, there are still not a significant number of women in executive leadership. Blatant forms of gender discrimination are increasingly rare due to laws and organizational awareness of the consequences of keeping women out of leadership positions. However, this does not mean that gender discrimination has been eliminated; instead there is evidence to suggest that its expression or manifestation has simply become more unofficial and obscure (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2003).

Critical human resource development theories seek to draw attention to the hidden nature of sexism in the workplace. The starting point of these theories is the idea that

organizations, built in patriarchal societies, represent and promote patriarchal values (Swan, Stead, & Elliott, 2009). According to this line of thinking, organizations not only reflect patriarchal society, they also actively participate in creating and reproducing gender in conformity with patriarchal images (Acker, 1990). These images conform to stereotyped ideas of masculinity and femininity, which place men in roles of power and women in support roles. The exclusion of women in the upper echelons of organizational life is not out of the ordinary, promoted by the fact that men have historically founded and dominated various organizational domains (i.e., law, religion, politics). And yet, these same institutions claim to be gender neutral. However, this idea of gender neutrality promotes the male stereotype as the norm so that the issue of gender remains hidden (Acker, 1990). Researchers are developing the concept of second-generation forms of gender bias involving barriers "from cultural beliefs about gender as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men" (Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011, p. 475). These barriers are often indirect and unintentional acts of bias and are supported by the gendered norms that are embedded in organizations. These weaknesses are built into the normal functioning of organizations so that they are hidden from both men and women. The perception of women as leaders is clouded not only by others but by women themselves when these barriers accumulate (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

The challenges women have to contend with in their professional careers have garnered attention by scholars. There are recent publications in which scholars have given attention to the challenges of working, parenting, and caretaking (Chasserio et al.,

2014; Gherardi, 2015). The role of gender stereotypes and the effect on women's leadership have drawn considerable attention by other researchers (Carli & Eagly, 2011; Glass & Cook, 2016; Harrison et al., 2015). Further, research on the lack of mentoring and sponsorship for women has been documented extensively in the literature (McGowan et al., 2015). The results of the studies remain incomplete in enriching understanding of women's low participation in organizational leadership. Scholars continue to document a lack of mentoring in organizations for women (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; Hurley & Choudhary, 2016; Renko et al., 2015), challenges in women seeking maternity leave and flex time that will not remove them from the corporate ladder climb (Hurley & Choudhary, 2016), and women struggling to break that ever-present glass ceiling in leadership positions reinforcing women's scarcity in organizational leadership (Choi, 2018).

The limitation of current theoretical approaches is their singular focus in researching one organizational issue after the other while ignoring how gendered structures are produced and reproduced in the personal lives and developmental experiences of professional women (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Gendered behavior, passively acquired from observing societal norms, is normally developed during the early childhood and adolescent years (Sherman & Zurbriggen 2014). Males and females develop the behavioral tendencies associated with the observed gender roles, and evidence of this such as parental roles may determine the role the observer occupies later in life (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). When this division of parental roles includes a

career-minded working mother, children are more likely to develop an attitude of gender equality (Wetlesen, 2013).

Less confidence and self-esteem have been noted in women at work when there has been different treatment of boys and girls in risk-taking play during childhood (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Gender-differentiated capital, then, is produced from these experiences, which have an impact on capital accumulation in later life. Women who apply for promotions at work are influenced by gendered experiences with developing self-confidence. Research has documented the lack of women's self-confidence in women seeking promotion opportunities in the workplace and the issues that surround the lower levels of self-confidence (Sturm, Taylor, Atwater, & Braddy, 2014), whereas men tend to overestimate their ability to fill unfamiliar roles in the workplace (Akinola, Martin, & Phillips, 2018).

Why Women Become Entrepreneurs in the United States: Push and Pull Factors

Scholars have categorized the reasons that women start companies as push and pull factors. The desire to be independent, to innovate, and to seek challenge are examples of pull factors that attract women to start businesses (Bianchi et al., 2016; Buttner & Moore, 1997; Patrick, Stephens, & Weinstein, 2016). Examples of push factors are those issues such as gender discrimination or a lack of promotion opportunities to upper management, driving women to start their own businesses and move from the formal work structure in organizations (Mishra & Mishra, 2016; Moore et al., 2011).

Push factors. Negative factors or push factors, such as the need for additional income, dissatisfaction with current employment, the need for a more flexible work

schedule, or the glass ceiling are an impetus for women to start their own business (Fairlie, 2013; Bianchi et al., 2016). Researchers have shown that women, ethnic minorities, and younger age groups (Carter, Mwaura, Ram, Trehan, & Jones, 2015; Harrison et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015) are affected by these push factors, driving them to start their own businesses as a last resort to find satisfaction in the work environment. Yet, in other studies researchers cite pull factors as being more influential as the deciding factor, but the economy and culture of the area may provide an explanation for the difference (Bianchi et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2016).

Pull factors. Difficult work environments are not the only reason women pursue their own businesses as they are lured by the freedom to conduct business on their terms, autonomy, and personal satisfaction. Pull factors that draw them to entrepreneurship and that are most cited by researchers are independence and the challenge of ownership (Bianchi et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 2016), although they may also be motivated by autonomy or personal growth (McGowan et al., 2015). The opportunity to contribute to society through ethical, customer-focused business practices seemingly motivate women more than men (Brush, 1992; Leitch et al., 2013). Social motivations such as the desire to build a community spirit or the desire to help other women through addressing economic gender inequalities or providing the opportunity for stay-at-home mothers, have been cited by women entrepreneurs (Fayolle et al., 2014; Minarcine & Shaw, 2016).

In an early study that examined white women in the United States, researchers found that their sample of women felt empowered by the mental stimulation and creativity afforded by running their own company, and by the personal determination and

support systems they used to overcome discrimination (Gill & Ganesh, 2007). Other studies have returned similar results, on the basis of which researchers have highlighted that it is possible that individuals who choose entrepreneurship to seek higher satisfaction levels in their employment have a higher growth need, such that they seek personal growth and development through their work environment, expanded opportunities, confidence in their ability to start their own venture, and desire for self-expression and autonomy (Gill, 2013; Ivanović, 2017; Mas-Tur, Soriano, & Roig-Toerno, 2015; Mylonas et al., 2017). Empirical investigations continue to reinforce the positive relationship between empowerment, motivation, and the success of companies with a woman leader (Langevang, Gough, Yankson, Owusu, & Osei, 2015; Pogessi et al., 2016).

While research regarding motivation for the older woman entrepreneur is limited, researchers have found they are motivated by their past inability to start a business when they were younger due to either their responsibilities at home or gender norms (Pitt-Catsouphes, McNamara, James, & Halvorsen, 2017). Other life circumstances, such as divorce or the death of their spouse, allowed them to begin their business and explore their independence. Additionally, push and pull factors, working together, provide women with the motivation to start their own businesses (Cantú Cavada, Bobek, & Maček, 2017; Minarcine & Shaw, 2016; Patrick et al., 2016). While the decision to start a business is for personal challenge, ability to be autonomous, or to avoid gender discrimination and the oppression that goes with it, older women pursuing their own enterprise can provide both psychological empowerment and independence in controlling their own resources and destiny (Biehl, Gurley-Calvez, & Hill, 2014; Ratten, 2018).

Challenges to Women's Leadership in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

A large percentage of businesses are started by women, yet they are typically smaller and less profitable than enterprises owned by men (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b; Salloum et al., 2016), with the vast majority having no more than six employees (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2016). As of 2012, in New York City, 90% of women owned businesses have no paid employees, further supporting the small-sized environment of the businesses (Messina, Gray, Lentz, & Bowles, 2016). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reports that 77% of women-owned start-ups remain open after 6 years, which may be due to barriers and challenges business women face, including those not confronted by men business owners, yet researchers continue to disagree over the root causes of the barriers and disparities in size and profit. According to researchers, women are more likely to start lower-growth companies that require less investments in time and money, allowing them to balance family expectations (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b). Women entrepreneurs are expected to handle the bulk of parenting duties and tend to place more emphasis on family concerns rather than focusing on profit or growth than their male counterparts (Brush et al., 2009). Women's roles in the home have resulted from gendered expectations and this has created a struggle for the woman business owner (Chasserio et al., 2014). Work and family balance, including the time for child care, has been cited by researchers as the primary constraint for women in growing their enterprises and is negatively related to the success of their businesses (Cilliers & Strydom, 2016; Mohamad & Bakar, 2017). When women are the primary financial support, they state the financial growth of their business is as important to them as to men

business owners (Cantú Cavada et al., 2017; Dean et al., 2017; Mohamad & Bakar, 2017; Patrick et al., 2016).

While owning a business would promote a more stable work–life balance, women are encountering a struggle with raising children and owning a business as the small business requires a great deal of attention and the stress level is high due to the responsibilities (Bianchi et al., 2016; Chasserio et al., 2014); therefore, choosing to start the small-growth business without understanding the constraints involved ignores the issues, both systemic and cultural, that are involved. Women entrepreneurs, who are expected to fulfill the role of primary caregiver by society, are likely to face gender discrimination and other barriers while building their businesses. Women entrepreneurs are segregated into fields deemed feminine in nature, with half of them are in the retail or service industries (Cilliers & Strydom, 2016; Yang & Triana, 2017). Only 10–20% of companies in important industries such as information technology, construction, and finance are owned by women (Hechavarria & Ingram, 2016; Pisoni & Bielli, 2015).

The current economic climate requires an understanding of the barriers that exist for women who are seeking venture funding and the angel investors who are seeking to fund these start-ups. Only 9% of venture capital funds go to women-owned businesses in New York City (Leitch, Welter, & Henry, 2018). In 2000, only 9% of management-track venture capitalists were women as the industry is male dominated, which may cause a decrease in the connections between women and venture firms offering funding (Eddleston, Ladge, Mitteness, & Balachandra, 2016). Women venture capitalists are 34%

more likely to invest in companies that have a woman on their executive team and three times more likely with a woman as CEO (Brush, Greene, Balachandra, & Davis, 2017).

Men entrepreneurs may have a broader network than women, which allows them to have greater access to private equity funding (Aaltio & Wang, 2015). Women tend to have a network built with more family and close friends, which can be a disadvantage to not only women but men as well (Eddleston et al., 2016). Customers, lenders, and suppliers may discriminate against women entrepreneurs, causing financial suffering (Shinnar, Giacomin, & Janssen, 2012), and, further, they become less confident and optimistic as they have been socialized to judge their performance more severely than their male counterparts (Liang & Dunn, 2011).

The lack of attention to women's entrepreneurship in both the media and academia has been noted by scholars as a possible limitation to business start-ups by women entrepreneurs (Eikhof, Summers, & Carter, 2013). While women business ownership has risen in recent decades, the interest by the media and academia has decreased. However, there has been an increase in research over the last decade due to repeated calls by scholars for more research on women entrepreneurs (Jennings & Brush, 2013). Creating an alternative work setting by responding to the barriers and discrimination that present in the formal work setting provides the opportunity to serve as a medium for social change (Lortie, Castrogiovanni, & Cox, 2017). Entrepreneurship may act as a catalyst for empowerment and freedom for women who have confronted barriers and discrimination in the formal work place and provides them the opportunity to showcase their talents and capabilities, free from gender bias. Feminist scholars argue

that the male-dominated lens that has been used in entrepreneurial research is inadequate to understand the woman entrepreneur and instead argue for the use of a qualitative inquiry to understand their perspectives, lessening the limitations imposed by the current research (Marlow & McAdam, 2013).

Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership: Implications for Enterprise Longevity

Scholars have shown that women-owned businesses are growing at a fast pace in the United States (Brush & Cooper, 2012; De Vita et al., 2014) and are making important economic contributions (Ettl & Welter, 2012; Salloum et al., 2016). According to a report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), 21% of start-up businesses operate for less than 1 year and 77% have a lifespan of only 3 years. The 5-year benchmark is critical in defining entrepreneurial longevity (Fairlie et al., 2016) as the percentage of small business failures reached 55% by the fifth year, and although women own more than 30% of SMEs, they have also contributed to that failure rate (SBA, 2014).

As women continue to enter the field of entrepreneurship at a fast pace, they are making great contributions to the economy, yet studies have shown their businesses to be less successful than their male counterparts' (Dean et al., 2017; Ettl & Welter, 2012; Marlow & McAdam, 2013). The definition of success differs for women entrepreneurs compared to men. Scholars accept success as a construct that depends on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Weber, 2014). Further, Weber (2014) posited there are significant gender differences in the value of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These extrinsic factors are indicators of business performance and include economic, financial, and operational results (Robb & Watson, 2012; Weber, 2014; Zolin, Stuetzer,

& Watson, 2013). The qualitative aspects are the intrinsic motivators (Weber, 2014), which are related to the entrepreneur's satisfaction (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). While men and women both tend to value profit (external motivator), women also value the internal rewards of owning a business such as developing and maintaining relationships (Kirkwood, 2016).

Dej (2010) suggested the qualitative indicators be measured by the perception of the entrepreneur's personal success and by the perception of the entrepreneur's financial success. The entrepreneur's personal success includes social recognition, loyal relationships with customers, and the fulfillment of personal goals and development (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Lewis, 2013). In a study by Dijkhuizen, Gorgievski, van Veldhoven, and Shalk (2014), the researchers established an association between demand factors (working hours, uncertainty and risk, and responsibility) and resources (autonomy, work variety, feedback, learning opportunities, organization, and independence) and the perception of success.

Entrepreneurial success needs to be examined from several aspects, including economic, individual, and societal perspectives, and studies have shown these perspectives of success differ for women and men entrepreneurs (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Ettl & Welter, 2012; Kirkwood, 2016; Poggesi et al., 2016). For example, women entrepreneurs have closer family connections and benefit from those as they lack the same access to financial capital and social resources as men (Kirkwood, 2016; Powell & Eddleston, 2013). Survival, stability, job creation, recognition, and personal development have been cited as defining success for the woman entrepreneur (Dalborg, 2012).

Therefore, success must be examined from both a quantitative and qualitative dimension (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Weber, 2014; Zolin et al., 2013). Even though women entrepreneurs prepare to compete for success, they may not measure success by profit gains but by their ability to prioritize the balance between their personal and business lives (Ahl & Marlow, 2012; Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). Some researchers have suggested that gender may affect the competitive nature of the small business enterprise and may explain why women are less likely to start a new business (Bönte & Piegeler, 2013). Women-owned businesses are often described as less successful due to the gendered nature of the parameters used to measure success (Kirkwood, 2016; Marlow & McAdam, 2013).

Researchers have attempted to explain how women's entrepreneurship is affected by factors that contribute to the success or failure of the business (Cabrera & Maurcio, 2017). Some of the factors that have emerged from the studies include organizational environment, gender stereotypes, and access to resources (Elam & Terjesen, 2010; Gupta, 2014; Wu, 2012). Other researchers have examined gender-based comparisons of the effects of factors such as motivations (Díaz-García & Brush, 2012), growth strategies (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b), and competencies and family–business relationships (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013a; Powell & Eddleston, 2013).

Cabrera and Mauricio (2017) uncovered, through a literature review, elements related to the success of the woman entrepreneur, such as the learned skills and knowledge from work experience and competencies embedded in the entrepreneur's background. Scholars have acknowledged that the success of the SME relies on the

competencies of the entrepreneur (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013a). In a study by Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013b), the researchers developed a competency model for women entrepreneurs. Those competencies included: personal and relationship-based, business and management, business venturing, and human resource management. Scholars have also noted the positive effect that human and social capital has on the success of the woman entrepreneur (Barnir, 2014; McGowan et al., 2015). Other researchers have noted the positive relationship between human and social capital and access to financing and investment capital (Aterido, Beck, & Iacovone 2013; Tinkler, Whittington, Ku, & Davies, 2015).

Studies on the barriers to entrepreneurial success have revealed high failure rates among the SMEs, yet despite the failures, women entrepreneurs continue to make an impact on the economy (Brush, 1992; Dean et al., 2017; Sarasvathy, Menon, & Kuechle, 2013; Wright, 2015). Access to capital has been examined extensively as it relates to the success of women entrepreneurs. Women typically start their businesses with personal capital in small amounts, reducing the amount of debt or equity capital needed (Coleman, Cotei, & Farhat, 2016; Jennings & Brush, 2013). Risk to the business increases with external capital due to the repayment needed and eliminates the entrepreneur as the sole decision-maker in the business (Abdulsaleh & Worthington, 2013). The findings of several other studies indicate that women entrepreneurs have less access to capital funding based on the perspective of them by the financing organizations (Kariv & Coleman, 2015; Radhakrishnan, 2015).

Enterprise longevity depends on access to capital for start-up, and scholars have not agreed on discrimination in financing entrepreneurial ventures (Cheng, 2015; Henderson, Herring, Horton, & Thomas, 2015; Mijid, 2015). Although overt discrimination no longer exists in the United States since the passage of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act in 1974, covert discrimination practices do exist in the form of higher interest rates, lower lines of credit, and collateral requirements (Agier & Szafarz, 2013; Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). In one study, researchers found that men were treated more fairly when evaluated for credit (Henderson et al., 2015), while Cheng (2015) found no evidence of lender bias for minority entrepreneurs. Jennings and Brush (2013) determined through a systematic literature review that women began and operated their firms with low levels of financing, used less formal debt financing and less angel and venture financing than their male counterparts, and were found to underperform men-owned businesses in sales, profits, asset base, and number of employees. The success of new businesses depends on access to capital (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, & Business Dynamics Statistics, 2014; Manolova, Manev, & Gyoshev, 2014), yet women face more obstacles in obtaining financing (SBA, 2014).

Business growth has been tied to entrepreneurial attitude and self-efficacy. Research has shown men and women share the same high-growth entrepreneurial intention, positively viewing growth, technological change, sufficient capitalization, strategic planning, and growth (Dean et al., 2017; Sweida & Reichard, 2013). Sweida and Reichard (2013) observed that women with high-growth entrepreneurial intention had a positive self-image and viewed barriers as challenges. Orser, Elliott, and Leck (2013)

agreed, citing the need for perseverance as a necessary attribute for overcoming bias. Other researchers found entrepreneurial growth directly related to self-efficacy and attitude, and self-efficacy related not only to the individual but to the environment, which included the stakeholders and their access to capital (Bulanova, Isaksen, & Kolvereid, 2016; Mas-Tur et al., 2015).

Researchers have acknowledged that women's entrepreneurship contributes to the economic growth in developing countries and as such knowing what factors contribute to their success is important (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Terjesen & Amóros, 2010). The success of each stage of the entrepreneurial process is affected by many factors and has the ability to put the business at risk. Recognition of the factors involved in each stage allows those to be confronted by the woman business owner to produce a positive impact on economic growth and success (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017). Further, Cabrera and Mauricio (2017) suggested changes in the national education system that would allow women to overcome the stereotypes to access the resources they need for enterprise longevity.

Educating Women to Grow into Entrepreneurial Leadership

For more women to grow as leaders, there is a need for more emphasis on entrepreneurship education and training programs. McKeever, Jack, and Anderson (2015) found that education ranked high as a reason for entrepreneurial success, and suggested that those involved in entrepreneurship, including academia, use their knowledge and resources collaboratively to help reduce the number of unsuccessful SME owners. In another study, Huarng, Mas-Tur, and Yu (2012) examined skills required for successful

ownership. Their findings revealed that lack of education and management competencies were factors in the challenges of being a successful small business owner. Pérez and Morales (2014) studied the impact of entrepreneurial motivation and managerial desire as an occupation and determined that gender as well as the type of education, public or private, heavily influenced both entrepreneurial motivation and the desire to lead.

Research has shown that through effective entrepreneurial education and training, women may succeed in entrepreneurial businesses as leaders in their communities (Bullough, de Luque, Abdelzaher, & Heim, 2015; Foss et al., 2018). Bullough et al. (2015) proposed a model for entrepreneurship education and training to help women with family support, become autonomous, and be an example to other women who may aspire to become entrepreneurs. In a study by McGowan et al. (2015), the researchers found that education failed to prepare young women for entrepreneurship. Business success depends on skills and competencies developed. The need exists for the leadership and entrepreneurship fields to exchange ideas, learning from each other from a more gendered perspective (Patterson et al., 2012).

Scholars have found a positive relationship between business success and human capital assets related to entrepreneurship competencies, that is, knowledge and skills needed to become successful entrepreneurs (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013; Unger, Rauch, Frese, & Rosenbusch, 2011). Warnecke (2016) suggested that while there are a number of programs supporting women's entrepreneurship, the lack of and understanding of the diversity among women entrepreneurs and the lack of a connection to these programs leads to bias in the programs. These skills and competencies have been shown

to be developed through education and training, and the greater the number of resources young women have to draw upon greatly increases their chance of success (McGowan et al., 2015).

In a study by Mitchelmore and Rowley (2013a), the researchers examined four competencies to determine their impact on growth and performance of women-owned businesses. The results indicated that four clusters of competencies—personal and relationship, business and management, entrepreneurial, and human relations—were valued more by women than men entrepreneurs and that personal relationships, human relations, and education contribute to the overall success of women-owned businesses (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b). Scholars have suggested that the lack of management skills and experience are a major constraint for the woman entrepreneur (Bamiatzi et al., 2015). In a study by Bamiatzi et al. (2015), the researchers focused on the role competencies play in developing women leaders. Two important findings emerged: transformational leadership style is linked to the participant's perceived human, personal, and entrepreneurial competencies; and the participants were highly confident in their entrepreneurial competencies but not in their managerial competencies (Bamiatzi et al., 2015).

The lack of education and managerial skills have been shown as major challenges for women entrepreneurs (Huarng et al., 2012; World Bank, 2013). Education systems and support networks have failed to provide support for young women who are seeking entrepreneurship opportunities (McGowan et al., 2015). If women are to develop successful businesses, scholars need to recognize the influence of the role of finance,

management, leadership skills, marketplace, and family as well as institutional and cultural environment (Brush et al., 2009). As women entrepreneurs are influential in their communities and have the capability to affect public policy, entrepreneurship education and training can assist them in their leadership goals (Bullough et al., 2015). Women and men entrepreneurs are more different than similar in their business acumen and personal demographics, and as such training programs must address these differences (GEM, 2016).

Identifying the Gaps in the Literature

While women are emerging as entrepreneurial leaders in the national economy, research continues to provide examples of the lack of women in leadership positions within privately owned firms, and that pervasive gender discrimination in group and organizational contexts exists in organizations today preventing those firms from taking advantage of their potential as leaders in entrepreneurial ventures (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Galloway et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015). More studies on gender in leadership are needed and scholars propose a shift in the view of gender in entrepreneurship, discussing the concepts of narrative identity and gender. This paradigm shift would assist in freeing the constraints that existing male-dominated models impose on entrepreneurship (Mylonas et al., 2017). By examining this epistemological shift, a new platform on theory and methodology in entrepreneurship can emerge, challenging the traditional masculine perspective that currently exists (Hamilton, 2014). In a meta-analysis study, Henry and Foss (2015a) presented literature demonstrating the diversity and complexity of women's entrepreneurial leadership, providing evidence that it is

economically and contextually embedded, and that a more thorough understanding of women's entrepreneurial leadership and the value it would bring to the scholarly community is needed.

Researchers have begun to acknowledge these unanswered questions and call for research to fill these gaps in the scholarly literature (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013a; Pejić Bach et al., 2016). McGowan et al. (2015) examined the constructs of human and social capital and their influence on prospective women entrepreneurs, and by using intersectionality theory examined how the challenges endured by women entrepreneurs affect the development of their businesses and leadership potential. The authors identified a need for new leadership theories to address young women's barriers to encourage women's entrepreneurship (McGowan et al., 2015). A need exists to understand the potential barriers that prevent entrepreneurs in developing successful start-up enterprises (Chasserio et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2015). To respond to this research gap, scholars also indicate the need for an exploration of entrepreneurial leadership from a woman's perspective, suggesting qualitative studies being the choice method to answer the gap currently seen (Markussen & Røed, 2017). A gendered analysis of entrepreneurial leadership will contribute to the emerging field and will encourage further development of women entrepreneurs (Salloum et al., 2016).

Summary and Conclusions

In this literature review, a discussion was provided of the problem of gender bias existing in organizations and resulting in sacrificing the valuable experiences of the woman leader to the detriment of enterprise longevity. This provided the foundation for a

multiple-case study to explore the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur and the implications of these for enterprise longevity. Topic-specific and pertinent search terms and research databases that were used to search for current and relevant journals were presented to support the study. This was followed by a summary of the concepts of entrepreneurial leader and the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership to explore entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon and gain a better understanding of the complexity of women's leadership and career experiences. An overview of entrepreneurship in the United States showed the value entrepreneurship brings to the economy and the various categories of entrepreneurs. Thereafter, the factors that contribute to becoming an entrepreneur were discussed.

The factors contributing to entrepreneurship were discussed as well as the challenges and rewards experienced by the entrepreneur. A historical overview of women's entrepreneurship was presented to explore the policies enacted to protect women in the working environment, followed by a discussion of the present state of women-owned businesses in the United States, showing the impact of women entrepreneurs. Discussing the entrepreneurial leadership models showed how the current view of entrepreneurship is masculinized and has created limitations for the woman entrepreneur, limiting our understanding of the true identity of the woman entrepreneur. Examining the identities of the woman entrepreneur showed how the male identity perspective fails to acknowledge the social identities constructed by the woman entrepreneur. Examination of leadership barriers from a gendered perspective showed the prevalence of barriers confronted by women and how the use of human resource

development theories has drawn attention to hidden sexism in the workplace. By understanding the barriers confronted by women entrepreneurial leaders, as well as the successes that contribute to enterprise longevity, the national economy will benefit. As women become educated and trained in the competencies needed to become successful, they, in turn, become role models for other women seeking to become leaders. Considering the lack of research on the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur, the outcomes of this study may help to challenge the existing male dominance in leadership positions and formal work structures.

In Chapter 3, the research method for qualitative, multiple-case study research will be discussed, followed by the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The data analysis plan and issues of trustworthiness will also be addressed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain greater insight into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. To address this gap on gendered models of entrepreneurial leadership and the role of women's entrepreneurial leadership practices in enterprise longevity, a qualitative, multiple-case study approach was utilized for theory building. (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017). This study's research goal was to use a constructivist lens to gain a deep understanding of the emerging paradigm of gendered entrepreneurial leadership (Galloway et al., 2015; Harrison et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015) through qualitative data from women entrepreneurial leaders on business practices that supported their firms' longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase.

In this chapter, detailed information is provided on the research method and rationale for conducting an exploratory multiple-case study, and the two research questions guiding this empirical study. Also presented in this chapter is a rationale for the participant selection strategy, data collection strategies and data analysis, the role of the researcher, evaluation methods for the trustworthiness of data, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

To obtain the appropriate answers, the right research questions need to be asked (Browne & Keeley, 2007). In line with the purpose of this study, two research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

Understandings of gender and entrepreneurial leadership are outlined to provide a backdrop for the study and ground it within mainstream literature on entrepreneurial leadership. From a gendered perspective, entrepreneurial leadership has remained relatively absent from both the leadership and entrepreneurial literatures (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Henry & Foss, 2015b). There remains a gap in leadership roles between men and women and as researchers examine leadership from a gendered perspective, the opportunity exists for that gap to be narrowed (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). While there has been a paradigm shift in the way researchers define gender, there remains a paucity of research in which gender is a construct rather than a variable (Henry et al., 2016). Patterson et al. (2012) argued the need to converge the concepts of women's entrepreneurship and women in management and leadership, allowing new concepts to emerge from a gendered perspective. Understanding women's entrepreneurship from a new theoretical perspective would provide researchers with a better understanding of the value of the woman entrepreneur to the community (Henry & Foss, 2015b). Using data from the GEM, Sánchez-Escobedo, Fernández-Portillo, Díaz-Casero, and Hernández-Mogollón (2016) found limited qualitative studies and limited research on gender-based

entrepreneurship, positing that while research on gender in the entrepreneurial literature has advanced, there are still many opportunities for development.

The nature of this study was qualitative so that the method supported the purpose of the study and provided data to answer the research questions. As the study's purpose called for a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial leadership practices of women founders of SMEs 5 years after their business' start-up phase, an exploratory multiple-case study was used as the research design for this study given that the study's purpose called for a deeper understanding of gender's role in enterprise longevity (Dean & Ford, 2017; Galloway et al., 2015; Henry et al., 2015). Associated with a constructivist paradigm, the goal of qualitative research is to understand experiences from the perspective of people living and working in a specific context (Cooper & White, 2012). Qualitative research within the constructivist paradigm posits that people create their reality through their subjective experiences and gives a voice to marginalized groups to support social change (Cooper & White, 2012; Merriam, 2002).

In the initial phases of this study, using qualitative designs such as phenomenology and narrative inquiry were considered, yet neither one of the qualitative designs that depend on personal storytelling could be used to adequately answer the study's research questions (Yin, 2011). Case study design aligns with a research goal that can be met by answering phenomena-driven research questions and offers methods to extend a theoretical proposition. Yin (2017) recommended that the case study method is applicable when the research seeks to address an explanatory question, such as how or why something happened, or a descriptive question, such as what happened.

Qualitative case studies are now an integral part of the business and management literature and are used by researchers to better understand the actions and outcomes of actors and organizations in multiple fields (Klenke, 2016). Qualitative case studies generate holistic and contextual in-depth knowledge using multiple sources of data. The case study method is appropriate when existing theories are inadequate to explain the phenomena under study and especially in the development of entrepreneurship theory (Henry & Foss, 2015a). A multiple-case study is utilized by researchers to investigate the experiences of individuals living within the context of a complex social phenomenon; as such these individuals are studied as separate units of study (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was both an interviewer and an observer. I had no relationship with the participants or their firms as I recruited across the United States through the professional online network LinkedIn to gain variability in my sample for comparison between cases, for effective replication (Yin, 2017), and to strengthen transferability of the data to other similar populations (Stake, 2006). All interviews were conducted on Skype. As a researcher, offering the option of a Skype interview gave participants a degree of control over the research process, and promoted a more equal relationship between the study participants and myself (Hanna, 2012). By depriving the interview interaction of contextual information, Skype is deemed useful in upholding a highly unbiased atmosphere and deterring the researcher's personal reflexivity. Skype interviewing is a widely used data collection method that aids the process of replication

and transferability of qualitative data by allowing the researcher to reach participants in distant locations (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014).

Conducting rigorous case study is challenging and must withstand and illuminate in the final written report questions of reliability, credibility, and validity (Yin, 2017). Case study research must be done with a high level of professionalism for the study to be academically acceptable and rigorous in a methodological sense (Stake, 2006). In following the aforementioned recommendations of Yin (2017) and Stake (2006), I only performed interviews with the approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). I did not provide any incentives for participation so that effects of bias, power, and conflict of interest were minimized or eliminated.

It was also my responsibility to make sure I presented the Recruitment Letter (Appendix A) and Consent Form to all participants before the study and then emphasized to them that I must maintain the ethical expectations of Walden University's (IRB) and the Natural Commission of the Protection of Human Subjects. Also, to get in-depth responses from the participants I ensured the creation of an environment that encouraged the participants to be comfortable and confident. Lastly, the participants' responses were recorded and a member check was done to ensure trustworthiness of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Methodology

To thoroughly investigate a social phenomenon by comparing and contrasting differences between cases and considering each participant as an individual case, Yin (2017) suggested using a multiple-case study. The situational complexities related with

particular social settings are imperative to understanding the social and behavioral cooperation of factors inside a bigger framework (Stake, 2006). In a multiple-case study, the case itself may be a person, an event, an entity, or other unit of analysis. When focused on a person, a single case concerns one individual, where a study of more than one person constitutes a multiple-case study (Yin, 2017). Multiple cases may be conducted for several reasons: they extend emergent theory, fill theoretical categories, provide examples of polar types, or replicate previously selected cases to discover new theoretical direction (Bonnet, 2012; Yin, 2017). In such a research design approach based on Yin's (2017) methodology and interpretation of the multiple-case study, the case itself may be a person, and is often used in business and management studies in the scholarly literature, for example, Brown (2017) on airport managers; Hamlett (2014) on manufacturing managers; Komodromos (2014) on university employees; and Neubert (2016) on tech firm owners.

The multiple-case study approach, as used in this study with a sample of women entrepreneurial leaders, is used in attempts to replicate the same findings across multiple cases by exploring the differences and similarities between and within cases, and evidence created in this way is considered robust and reliable (Yin, 2017). Eisenhardt (1989) recommended that multiple-case studies should follow a replication rather than a sampling logic, which is more characteristic to quantitative survey research. Unlike statistical sampling methods, there is no single rule concerning the minimum number of cases that should be selected for a given multiple-case research project. Eisenhardt (1989)

suggested limiting the number of cases to the point where the incremental contribution of extra cases is only marginal (e.g., 4 to 10 cases).

A qualitative multiple-case study allows the in-depth study of holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events and can offer an awareness of the underlying forces that support relationships and answer the questions of how and why those relationships are sustained (Yin, 2017). When the goal of the study is to make an original contribution to a theoretical or conceptual framework and provide a rich, powerful picture of human interaction, a multiple-case study approach is recommended over a single-case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Analysis of the cases is done using replication logic to offer contrasts between each case and extend theoretical constructs (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The qualitative method allows for probing questions using a variety of data sources, contributing to the originality of the study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017).

Important themes and practical applications can be identified through the use of purposive sampling of 5–15 participants as a larger sample size can become an obstacle for an in-depth investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Schram, 2006). The final sample size of nine participants was determined by data saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989). The research and interview questions were designed to gain a deeper understanding of the entrepreneurial leadership practices of women founders of SMEs 5 years after their business' start-up phase. To provide consistency for analysis of the similarities and contrasts, a template for reporting the findings of the multiple-case study was used (Noor, 2008; Yin, 2017). Triangulation, the method of integrating several data sources,

strengthens the credibility of a study by balancing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach (Guion et al., 2011; Jack & Raturi, 2006; Patton, 2014). Multiple data collection methods from multiple sources of evidence were gathered to provide evidence for the study's two research questions: interviews, reflective journaling, and analysis of archived data such as government reports and media reports on women entrepreneurial leadership (Guion et al., 2011).

The qualitative multiple-case study is utilized as it allows the in-depth study of holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2017). When the study is bounded by time and the researcher is asking how and why questions, Yin (2017) suggested utilizing the case study approach. When the goal of the study is to make an original contribution to a theoretical or conceptual framework and provide a rich, powerful picture of human interaction, researchers should utilize the multiple-case study as opposed to a single-case study approach (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). To strengthen external validity, trustworthiness of data, and provide a more vigorous research study, cross-case synthesis is recommended for data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Designing a case study protocol allows researchers to augment the reliability of their study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2017). Reliability of a study can be strengthened by designing a case study protocol (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2017). The multiple-case study is delineated by the method and research design (Tsang, 2013). The research design included two research questions and utilized interview questions to uncover the participant selection logic, participants' experiences, data collection and field procedures, an identified data analysis technique, and a template to follow for reporting the multiple-

case study (Noor, 2008; Stake, 2013). The research design for this study commenced with the participant selection logic.

Participant Selection Logic

Population. In a qualitative study, the population of a study is the totality of persons from which cases may legitimately be sampled for participation in interviews or other data collection protocols (Robinson, 2014). Those persons in the population had to meet the study's inclusion criteria of adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic. The American Express OPEN report, *The State of Women-Owned Businesses, 2016*, indicated that as of January 2017 there were approximately 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States registered at the SBA. Since the scope of the study was limited to women founders of small and medium businesses that survived a minimum of 5 years after start-up, it is important to note that only about half of all new establishments survive 5 years or more and about one third survive 10 years or more. As one would expect, the probability of survival increases with a firm's age and survival rates have changed little over time (SBA, 2015). These women founders compromised the initial population group for this study. To further narrow the scope of this initial population of approximately 11.6 million women-owned businesses in the United States registered at the SBA to one that would be accessible to this researcher (Meriam & Tisdell, 2015), the open access group 'Business Owners Network' was identified after a criterion search on the LinkedIn online professional network platform, and with a membership of approximately 7,000. These 7,000 adults

comprised the final population group for this study. The criteria of gender and 5-year survival rate of the participants' businesses were prescreened via the initial recruitment letter.

Sampling criteria. In discussing sampling of populations in qualitative research, sampling and selection of the specific population addressed is critical to assure integrity of the research (Tracy, 2010). This study utilized purposeful sampling for participant selection to enable the maximization of the usefulness of information because it allows the researcher to specifically identify a group of people with the most reliable information desired for the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2014). Data was collected from a purposeful sample of nine information-rich participants for in-depth study, at which point data saturation was achieved (Patton, 2014). To test for data saturation in this multiple-case study, themes were developed from five initial responses to interview questions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Three subsequent interviews were conducted and themes were generated. Data saturation was attained when no further themes emerged from the responses of nine participants to the interview questions (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Qualitative methodologists support that no more than 15 participants may be used to reach thematic saturation for a qualitative study (Mason, 2010; Schram, 2006), and that long interviews with up to 10–15 people tend to be sufficient for a multiple-case study, in which the case itself may be a person, an event, an entity, or other unit of analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017). Participants were recruited primarily using criterion-based sampling, a typology of purposeful sampling recommended by Patton (2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) identified snowball sampling as a prominent form of purposeful sampling, and it

is frequently used in qualitative case study research by asking key participants already recruited for the study to refer others who may also meet the inclusion criteria for sample selection (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Aligning with the case study method, multiple sources of evidence were gathered to provide evidence for the two research questions: interviews, reflective journaling, and analysis of archived data such as government reports and media reports on women entrepreneurial leadership (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017).

In this study, women entrepreneurs who had been in business more than 5 years were considered to have the best information on leadership experiences needed to lead a successful SME (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013b; Pejić Bach et al., 2016). The participants selected in this study, individually or collectively, had the ability to share perspectives gained from their experiences as women business owners who had been successful past the 5-year mark, as 5 years is the benchmark used for long-term sustainability (Fairlie et al., 2016). The participants' experiences supported and enriched the data and substantiated the clear evidence of its occurrence (Robinson, 2014).

Participants for this case study were recruited using criterion and snowball sampling strategies and screened with the following inclusion criteria: adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic (Patton, 2014). The participant selection logic ensured that participants fulfilled the minimum requirements. Snowball sampling is a frequently used purposeful sampling in qualitative case study research and is utilized by asking key participants already recruited for the study to refer

others who may also meet the inclusion criteria for sample selection (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Sampling selection. The sample comprised women founders of SMEs who had been in business 5 years since start-up. The considered minimum unit of analysis ranged from 5–15 women founders of SMEs, a criterion size that most likely assured data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, nine in-depth interviews with women founders of SMEs were conducted, which was the point at which data saturation was reached. Methodologists have also stated that qualitative investigation aims for depth and breadth; there are no hard and fast rules when determining sample size as long as the sample meets some predetermined criterion of importance (Flick, 2014; Mason, 2010). The commonly proposed criterion for determining when sufficient sample size has been reached in qualitative research is saturation (Charmaz, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mason, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Schram (2006) argued that a range of 5–10 participants for a qualitative investigation can be recommended as sufficient. Some researchers have argued that an analysis of large numbers of in-depth interviews may thwart a deeper investigation of the phenomenon being studied. Yin (2017) suggested that 6–10 cases can be recommended as a good sample size when involving a multiple-case study. In this study, the unit of analysis was women founders of SMEs. Researchers need to scrutinize the information desired, the purpose, reliability of resources, time, and cost when considering the sample size (Patton, 2014; Mason, 2010). As recommended by Yin (2017), each unit of analysis, in this case the woman founder of an SME, represented a single study and the data from

in-depth interviewing provided insight that could be used to perceive causal inferences based on theoretical propositions or to predict similar or contrasting results.

According to Yin (2017), a quantitative research method would not have offered this study a meaningful output because its focus typically depends on larger sample sizes and its primary goal is to generalize findings and inferences of the statistical sample of the study population. Quantitative researchers rely heavily on deductive reasoning, focusing on certain premises or abstract ideas such as hypotheses or theories in order to draw logical conclusions. Qualitative research approaches deal with elucidation and comprehension, unlike quantitative approaches that focus on details, testing theories, and analyzing statistics (Flick, 2014). To understand the subject matter holistically and its significance to the study's population and sample, qualitative research acknowledges the sensitivities that come into play during the collection and analysis of data contingent upon social and cultural contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

In contrast to quantitative research, Yin (2017) noted that case studies are focused on the use of small samples in order to enable in-depth analysis of the population and also consideration of variability and reliability due to the replication logic and cross-case analysis. Qualitative methods permit the researcher to add more participants until a saturation point is reached to ensure the phenomenon is adequately investigated. In this study, a qualitative research method was suitable for discovering the issues, opinions, and insights embedded in the experiences of women founders of SMEs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The exploration of women founders of SMEs, their interactions, individual and

collective issues, opinions, and insights provided variability and ensured the process of replication was effective (Yin, 2017).

Sampling strategy. The scope of this study was limited to the population of women founders of SMEs in the United States, 5 years after start-up. The data for this study was gathered through a purposeful sampling technique based on individual in-depth, semistructured interviews. Purposeful sampling allowed the discovery of varieties of meanings and experiences from the sample of nine women founders of SMEs (Patton, 2014), at which point data saturation was reached. In-depth interviews allow greater flexibility when questioning a participant and the strategy allows questions to be addressed until saturation point is reached through interviewing of participants, which in this case was a group of women founders of SMEs, which helped me to understand their leadership experiences in greater detail (Eriksson & Kovaleinan, 2015).

The strength of in-depth interviews provides an opportunity for interviews to be conducted in private. Detailed explorations of a participant's experiences, opinions, and attitudes can be investigated until the saturation point is reached. An in-depth interview provides more information because it allows the interpretation of data to be based on the completely articulated individual viewpoints of the participants, and that allows a researcher to capture lived realities and experiences of the phenomenon (Rowley, 2012).

Intentional sampling requires that participants fulfill the minimum requirements and are willing/able to provide detailed information on the topic (Patton, 2014). For this study, the woman entrepreneurial leaders were over the age of 30. This age criterion is used by scholars in other similar studies who concluded that this age criterion allowed

sufficient time for the participants to have established a specific direction in their careers. These criteria for participant selection distinguish women who entered the business as a "stop-gap" measure or in a clerical or supportive position absent of an intention to assume sustained executive responsibilities (Overbeke et al., 2013). I was actively engaged in selecting the most potentially data-rich participants and began establishing rapport once the participants were identified in order to fully understand the phenomenon and enhance the probability that the participants would provide in-depth data (Rowley, 2012). The focus of the sampling strategy was to select participants who would offer a deep understanding of the central study topic and not generalize (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Instrumentation

The goal of instrumentation in a case study, according to Yin (2017), is to gather data from several sources through data collection instruments and processes that are valid and reliable to answer the research questions posed in the study. Thus, gathering appropriate instrumentation that aligned with the purpose of the study, provided answers to qualitative research questions, and contributed original data to the conceptual framework was an important process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Themes emerged through the suitable choice of instrumentation that fulfilled the purpose of this study, which was to explore the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. The data collection strategy included multiple data collection methods for each source of data. Yin (2017) identified six sources of evidence as units of analysis. Three sources of data were used in this study: an open-ended interview protocol (see

Appendix B) whose items were designed and standardized by previous researchers; archival data in the form of government labor reports and media reports on women entrepreneurial leadership (Yin, 2017); and journaling/reflective field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) I kept throughout the data collection process. Multiple data collection methods from multiple sources of evidence were utilized for methodological triangulation.

Semistructured interview protocol. The results of studies are primarily influenced by rigorous data collection procedures. A common data collection method in qualitative studies, the semistructured interview offers the researcher a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena from the participant's perspective. Trustworthiness of data produced in a qualitative study is enhanced through the careful selection of a qualitative open-ended, unstructured interview guide (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this multiple-case study, the validated interview protocol addressed the purpose of the study and answered the study's two research questions: (a) How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices? (b) How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

This study's interview guide (see Appendix B) consisted of 12 open-ended questions and prompts grounded in the conceptual framework and literature to address issues of gender bias and entrepreneurial leadership practices. Four interview questions in this study's protocol were designed and field tested by Dean and Ford (2017). Drawing

from interviews with women business owners, Dean and Ford (2017) questioned the dominant masculine entrepreneurial leadership model to add fluidity and gender inclusiveness to the entrepreneurial leadership construct. I used prompts during the interview conversations to solicit additional information for clarification purposes; these were added to the protocol. Probing questions such as "Can you tell me more about that …?" and "What you mean by that ...?" were also used to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2014; Yin, 2017).

The seminal researchers used a qualitative methodology to interview the participants twice. In the first interview they asked one open-ended question of the participants that was to tell their story, reflecting on their whole life and how they ended up being an entrepreneur (Dean & Ford, 2017). In the second interview, the participants were asked about the history of their business and why they saw themselves as entrepreneurs. Finally, Dean and Ford (2017) asked the women entrepreneurial leaders whether they saw themselves as successful or not and why. The original study's purposeful sampling was carried out within the United Kingdom, in the small business, entrepreneurial sector, and women entrepreneurs were accessed via a substantial database that informs the SME Knowledge Network (SMEKN) located within a university business school (Dean & Ford, 2017). This present replication/extension study taking place in the United States and purposeful sampling were carried out through the LinkedIn online professional network. Replication/extension studies not only provide replication evidence but also extend the results of prior studies in new and theoretically important directions (Bonett, 2012).

The open-ended interview protocol can be reviewed in Appendix B and permission to use Dean and Ford's (2017) questions can be seen in Appendix C, where Professor Hannah Dean, from the highly ranked Durham University Business School, stated she approved of using several of her interview protocol items to meet this study's purpose and to "… extend my research and carry out a comparative study with U.S. women business owners and may be later we can publish a joint paper." There were 13 questions in the interview protocol. The interview protocol questions 1, 2, 3, and 12 were field-tested by Dean and Ford (2017), and therefore no field test was required for these interview protocol items. A preliminary field test was conducted on the remaining researcher-developed interview questions (4 to 11) as a measure to analyze and determine whether the study's interview questions would produce results that could answer the study's research questions, and they underwent a quality audit (Patton, 2015) by two subject matter experts to determine the credibility, dependability, and applicability of the interview protocol's questions and the interview procedures (Golfashani, 2003). The two auditors/subject matter experts—Professor Stake of University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA and Dr. Mason of Oxford Brookes University, UK—are both seminal qualitative methodologists and Professor Stake is today considered the world's foremost expert on case study design from a social constructivist perspective (Mason, 2010; Stake, 1995; 2006; 2013). Both subject matter experts confirmed the interview questions were appropriate to meet the research purpose and aligned with a multiple-case study design. Professor Stake confirmed that the length of the interview protocol was adequate to support a multiple-case study and data analysis (Stake, 2013). This field testing

establishes trustworthiness and credibility in the study's qualitative findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability, which is similar to external validity, adds strength to this study's instrumentation through utilizing a collection protocol that could be useful to extending theory (Stake, 2013). Transferability of qualitative data is deemed to be validated when one study's findings can be proven to have use in other settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Many qualitative studies are challenged by this process as their findings are often limited to specific settings and individuals (Shenton, 2004). The multiple-case study approach of this study replicated the same findings across multiple cases by exploring the differences and similarities between and within cases, creating "robust and reliable" evidence (Yin, 2017), and this multiple-case study's replication logic supports the transferability of findings from study past the participant sample (Stake, 2013).

Archival data: Government and private-sector labor reports. To authenticate qualitative data during fieldwork such as the interviews in the study along with evidence of two or more different sources and in addition to data analysis later, triangulation was used as an analytic technique and central aspect of case study research (Yin, 2017). Triangulation plays a pivotal role during the qualitative research process and may be viewed as a frame of mind rather than a methodological technique in the case of corroborating or conflicting ideas and data (Guion et al., 2011). In this case study I captured and recorded the actual data directly and triangulated the results of the qualitative interviews by triangulating this evidence with archival documents in the form of private-sector government reports on women business ownership in the United States.

Media reports were also presented documenting issues that were identified in the raw data of interviews. These reports were not substantive for the literature review but were a source to complement the open-ended interviews. The flexibility of analyzing archived data enabled deep, thick, rich information for methodological triangulation to answer the two research questions (Patton, 2014).

Journaling/reflective field notes. The research questions and the paradigm underlying the study dictated how I used observation. Unstructured observation in the form of reflective field notes also served as a source of data collection as the study was grounded in the interpretivist paradigms (Katz, 2014). The third instrument used for data collection from the participants of this study was reflective field notes obtained from online data sources, in this case the semistructured interviews carried out via Skype (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). By depriving the interview interaction of contextual information, Skype was useful in upholding a highly unbiased atmosphere and deterring any personal reflexivity on my part as the researcher. Skype aids the process of replication by allowing the researcher to reach participants in distant locations (Janghorban et al., 2014). Journaling is a common technique in qualitative research, and in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Stake, 2013). The concept of reflexivity has been part of qualitative research methods in organizational research for several decades (Haynes, 2012) and is a critical portion of data analysis within the constructivist paradigm (Stake, 2013). Trustworthiness of the data was protected from reflexivity-generated bias by relying on other sources of evidence to corroborate any insights of the participants, and to search for contrary evidence as diligently as possible (Alvesson &

Sköldberg, 2017). To minimize female gender bias, a male debriefer skilled in qualitative methods analyzed the same data and the results were compared and contrasted with my own, discussing discrepancies until a consensus was reached (Anney, 2014).

Netnography is an online data collection method that may include interactions, interviews, and introspection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), and as most interactions in online data collection are recorded and saved as they take place, reflecting field notes take precedence over observational field notes. Reflective field notes allow researchers to record their own observations in relation to their online experiences (Katz, 2014), interpret the reasons behind the cultural actions observed, and offer insights into the transpiring and functioning of online social interactions (Kozinets, 2017). The process of reflective field notes is inductive and emergent so that it may be useful to take notes on many varieties of interesting online social experiences such as social groups, events, or sites that may arise out of the qualitative data collection (Yin, 2017).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data saturation occurs when further information from new participants becomes repetitive (Mason, 2010). Data saturation ensures content validity and replicability of a study (Bowen, 2008; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). When qualitative data collection ceases to yield new information or themes, a study has reached saturation (Mason, 2010; Yin, 2017). For multiple-case study, two issues are important in reaching closure: when to stop adding cases; and when to stop iterating between theory and data. In the first, ideally, researchers should stop adding cases when data saturation in interviews or theoretical saturation in data analysis is reached (Eisenhardt, 1989). Theoretical

saturation is the point at which incremental learning is minimal because the researcher notes the observed phenomena is repeating itself. Finally, while there is no ideal number of cases in a multiple-case study, a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well to reach data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). With fewer than five cases it is often difficult to gain an in-depth understanding of the data to generate theory using a multiple-case study design. In the second closure issue, when to stop iterating between theory and case study data in the analysis, again, saturation is the key idea (Eisenhardt, 1989).

To test for data saturation in this multiple-case study, themes were developed from five initial responses to interview questions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Three subsequent interviews were conducted, and themes generated until reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). After a total of eight interviews and reaching data saturation, I conducted an additional interview to further confirm data saturation, bringing my total interviews to nine.

For this case study, I used LinkedIn to connect with women founders of SMEs in the United States who met the inclusion criteria of the study. A Recruitment Letter (Appendix A) was sent to those who responded positively to invite them to participate in the study. For effective communication purposes, the participants who accepted the invitation were asked to provide their email addresses and Skype ID. Once approval was obtained from Walden University's IRB, each potential participant received a recruitment letter via email from me inviting them to take part in the study. Along with the recruitment letter, I emailed them an Informed Consent Form, which included the following: an explanation of what the study entails; option to withdraw; the procedure;

possible risk or discomfort associated with participation; time limit; statement of voluntary participation and no consequences for refusal; and, their confidentiality rights.

To gain in-depth understanding of the knowledge and experiences of the study's participants was the main purpose of using a qualitative method. My focus was to engage in the data relevant to the interviewees' experiences regarding the issue under investigation. The study's participants—women founders of SMEs—were identified and selected from all women founders of SMEs in the United States who were currently listed on the LinkedIn online professional network. Participants selected for this qualitative multiple-case study were: adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic (Patton, 2014). If recruitment resulted in too few participants, I was prepared to seek out more women founders of SMEs through LinkedIn until I had a group of at least 10 willing potential participants.

Data collection methods used in this study were: a review and content analysis of the current literature; demographic questionnaire; semistructured interview; and reflective field notes and journaling. The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to explore the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase (Yin, 2017). To align with the issue under investigation, the interview guide included open-ended questions and was presented to capture the study participants' backgrounds and ideas, thoughts, opinions, values, and behaviors regarding the purpose area (Patton, 2014;

Yin, 2017). During their respective interviews, each participant's responses were recorded and thereafter transcribed.

Prior to beginning data collection, which I carried out via Skype, approval was obtained from the Walden University IRB (Approval: 09-13-18-0510170). Data collection took place each day until nine in-depth interviews had been conducted, with the duration of each event lasting between approximately 30 and 45 minutes. Data was recorded on a digital audio recorder with responses and reflective handwritten notes recorded on an observer note sheet (Katz, 2014). To transcribe interviewees' responses, I used Microsoft Word software. I then used Microsoft Excel software to electronically record, document, analyze, and categorize the data collected from each interview, as Microsoft Excel is appropriate for documenting interview schedules, storing collected data, recording research themes, and classifying information through numbering.

I thanked the interviewees at the end of each interview and informed them that should a clarification of responses be needed they may be contacted again to initiate the process of member checking. The participants received their respective transcripts via email for review and verification. The back and forth exchange between the participants and I ensured accuracy and helped to clarify any thoughts the participants believed were not adequately or accurately expressed. Member checking improves credibility and reduces concern over the accuracy of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I assured each interviewee that their personal information and any other materials produced in relation to the data collected during their interview for this research will remain confidential. A pass code to access the research data from the computer is required to ensure the data is

protected and each participant received an email from me with a transcription of their responses.

Data Analysis Plan

As an empirical inquiry, the case study was supported by theoretical propositions that aligned with the identified areas of research questions of how and why the phenomena exist and evolved in the manner supported by the seminal literature and guided by these propositions (Yin, 2017). After determining the study's focus, I selected an appropriate sample size to ensure there would be adequate data from the detailed qualitative study to authenticate themes and trends that emerged from the interviewees' responses (Zainal, 2007). Nine women founders of SMEs, 5 years after start-up, adults over the age of 30, and who possessed in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic made up the participants for this study. Using this approach helped me to make a link with theoretical propositions to effectively guide how or why questions in the case study analysis (Yin, 2017). To facilitate conversation, I used appropriate prompts regarding interview questions. The collected data was categorized with further information beyond the semistructured questions and responses. Pattern recognition based on interview discussions provided a thematic analysis. During content analysis, patterns and themes were distinguished; evidence noted to be nonrecurring was attributed to individual case composition (Vaismoradi et al, 2015). By marking common relationships across multiple cases during coding analysis of the interviews, I could justify the cataloging of various themes (Saldana, 2015).

The contents of the interviews and documented data in this study were processed and analyzed by me using cross-case synthesis (Merriam, 2014; Yin, 2017). To analyze data in a multiple-case study, cross-case synthesis is recommended to enhance external validity and trustworthiness of the data, establishing the research as more vigorous (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Developing a case study database required that the themes be identified and the important words, views, and/or analyses in the documented data be reliable, referred to, and attributable (Yin, 2017). To develop themes and models based on the data collected, organization and analysis of documented interviews through content analysis and cross-case synthesis was used (Vaismoradi, Joines, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016; Yin, 2017). I conducted a specific evaluation of each case, and data was synthesized across the many cases. Through a series of proofs, the strength, validity, and reliability of this study was enhanced. Further, thematic analysis helped to gauge the breadth or exclusion of emphasis of an analytical segment or alignment with theoretical suppositions. Triangulation of proof from multiple sources was enhanced, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the study (Yin, 2017).

To answer the study's research questions, I examined the research results and identified recurring themes emerging from the interviews, to assess similarities and differences among cases. After coding the data by interview question, I linked the themes that emerged to other coded classifications to assess connections between reviewed cases (Patton, 2014). Triangulation of the multiple data sources was performed: the in-depth, face-to face interviews, interview transcription review, reflective notes and journaling an archival data review allowed me to consolidate and enhance comprehension of the

findings of the research and improve the quality of the study (Patton, 2014). Triangulation assists in corroboration of the evidence and enhances the strength and reliability of the study (Yin, 2017). I kept handwritten notes during the interview process to note, for example, attitudes, beliefs, or views of the interviewees that may have been omitted from the interview transcripts (Patton, 2014). The member checking process allowed the interviewees to receive their respective transcripts and respond to the accuracy and efficacy of the transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Member checking procedures were completed according to the Walden University IRB approved process listed in the Informed Consent Form ().

In the development of a case study database, identified words of significance, viewpoints, documented work, themes, and their analysis were referred to, reliable, and attributable (Yin, 2017). I used content analysis to organize and analyze the interviews, which assisted in developing the models and themes in the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Yin, 2017). The utilization of memos, methods of categorizing such as coding and thematic analysis, and connecting strategies such as narrative analysis constitute three groups of data analysis strategies in qualitative research. Although no one best way exists for conducting data analysis (Maxwell, 2013), the analysis option I selected fits the available data collected in order to answer the study's two research questions. In the analysis of qualitative data, Maxwell (2013) noted that the essence of coding lies not in counting items but rather breaking up the data through a rearrangement of the texts so that items within the same category can be compared. Codes help to capture words and phrases with similar meaning, and then these are connected by categories (Maxwell.

2013). The basic analytical technique I chose for this study was the descriptive coding method, which is used to symbolically assign meanings to pieces of data and thereby develop an inventory of words or phrases that can be used for indexing and categorizing the data (Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) recommended this coding method for qualitative researchers who are still in the early stages of learning how to code data for qualitative study.

For multiple-case study research, Yin (2017) supported that the most appropriate data analysis technique is cross-case synthesis. The author has noted it is more efficient than content analysis for the purposes of a PhD study where individual cases are not just to be analyzed but also compared and contrasted. In cross-case synthesis each case is treated as a separate study and findings are aggregated across a series of single cases. As such, this technique does not differ materially from research syntheses that also involve aggregating and comparing findings across a range of individual studies. Scholars have found that compared to a design that uses only within-case analysis, designs using both within-case and cross-case synthesis provide a better platform for generating theoretical propositions and constructs (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). For the analysis of case study data in this research, I chose to follow the "ground up" strategy, recommended by Yin (2017), which allows key concepts to emerge through close examination of the data. This was deemed the most appropriate strategy for analyzing the multiple-case study data that was gathered in this study because it allowed me to align the concepts that emerged with the study's two research questions (Yin, 2017). Furthermore, this strategy is consistent

with the descriptive coding method I used as the study's analytical technique (Saldana, 2016).

Data analysis in this study took place in two stages, with the first involving within-case analysis of each individual case. The second stage comprised cross-case analysis of data to uncover similarities as well as differences across the categories and themes that emerged (Yin, 2017). For the within-case analysis, I arranged the data collected from each of the transcribed interviews and field notes in segments, indexed them with line numbers, and arranged them according to the interview questions so codes could be easily identified (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). Following, I recorded the identified codes in matrix form using a Microsoft Word table with columns. In this way, I could capture the data segments, assigned codes, and reflective notes that helped identify emerging patterns (Saldana, 2016). I classified codes that shared common meanings into categories and themes (Saldana, 2016).

For the cross-case synthesis, the second stage of data analysis, I used a Microsoft Word table to aggregate the themes from each individual case across common patterns and categories, allowing me to make comparisons. Emerging similarities and differences across the cases were then examined, with similarities subjected to *pattern matching* (Yin, 2017) and utilized to create literal replications (Yin, 2017) in line with the literature. Differences that emerged across the cases were used for theoretical replications (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) that helped indicate new directions for future research. Since programs cannot generate codes, I was responsible for identifying codes and aggregating them into categories and themes for analytical reflection (Saldana, 2016).

I manually performed first- and second-cycle coding (Saldana, 2016) to make sure the identified codes were streamlined before starting the process of aggregating them into categories and themes.

Qualitative analysis transforms a study's data into findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Once I had coded the data from the interview questions, I linked the themes to classifications grounded in the conceptual framework and the scholarly review of literature presented in Chapter 2. The codes helped to identify common themes that emerged from participants' responses as well as notes I had kept. Thematic analysis of the data gathered supported each of the important interpretations (Stake, 2008).

Using cross-case synthesis allows the researcher to determine whether the case studies are comparable (Yin, 2017). A cross-case synthesis was conducted on nine in-depth, face-to-face interviews; each of the cases provided strong evidence and a base to explore the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. While each case in the cross-case synthesis was evaluated as a separate case, robustness of the study's results was strengthened by synthesis of the data. Cross-case synthesis of the face-to-face interviews conducted via Skype provided substantial evidence of the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. To systematically assess the logic linking the data to the propositions, the cross-case analysis technique for multiple-case studies is useful (Yin, 2017). Cross-case analysis can provide richer data for the study's research questions when multiple representative cases are

identified. Consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the data to establish a rational argument based on evidence enhances the trustworthiness of the data (Cooper & White, 2012; Yin, 2017).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

When confidence is placed in the findings of the qualitative research, credibility is established (Anney, 2014). To determine credibility, the researcher must show that the findings represent believable and trustful information of the correct interpretations of the participants' views drawn from the original data (Anney, 2014). By adopting credibility strategies based on extended and varied field experience, spending time on sampling, reflexing, triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview techniques, and establishing authority of research and structural coherence, the qualitative researcher establishes rigor of the study (Anney, 2014).

Understanding the phenomenon experienced from participants' views, in this context the women founders of SMEs, is the purpose of qualitative research, as they alone can give a legitimate judge of credibility to the findings. For this study, I interviewed participants individually by Skype for approximately 35–40 minutes and explained to the participants that they could end the interview at any time. Each participant's answers were written down and recorded electronically; then, each participant was sent their transcribed responses once the interview was completed. The use of triangulation and member check procedures was used to ensure the participants

had an opportunity to review the data collected and the interpretation I made about the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

To assist in uncovering taken-for-granted biases or assumptions to prevent a form of reflexivity, triangulation and the member check process is used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). When the ability to obtain additional new information during the in-depth interviews has been reached and further coding is no longer feasible, data saturation has been reached (Guest et al., 2006). Data saturation can impact the quality of the research and hamper content validity, so precision is vital and is determined by the study itself (Fusch & Ness, 2015). When enough information is obtained during the study's interviews to replicate the study and ensure the research questions can be answered, data saturation is reached (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

Transferability

The degree to which qualitative research results can be generalized to other situations and applications in other settings or groups is referred to as transferability (Anney, 2014). Transferability judgement can be enhanced by the researcher by doing a thorough job of describing the research context through thick, rich, and deep descriptions of the results and purposeful sampling, where the focus is on assumptions that are central to the research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). A detailed description of the inquiry should be provided by the researcher for readers to easily determine if the results of the study can be transferred to their individual context.

A rich and thick description of the study should be provided by the researcher. For the reader to determine that the conclusions made by the researcher are transferable

to other settings, situations, or groups, the researcher must give an extensive detail and explicit descriptions of field notes, observations, sample characteristics, data collections, and interpretation (Houghton et al., 2013).

Dependability

The stability of findings over time is referred to as dependability (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Through the use of an audit trail, an examination of the inquiry process and product to validate the data, based on the research decisions made by the researcher showing how data was collected, recorded, and analyzed, the researcher establishes dependability. When two or more researchers analyze the same data separately, compare the results, and come to the same conclusion, dependability is achieved (Patton, 2014). When inconsistencies arise from two or more separate analyses, dependability will be shaken and the inconsistencies need to be addressed to improve the dependability of the inquiry (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010).

Confirmability

The degree to which the results of an inquiry can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers is confirmability (Anney, 2014). When the results are neutral and accurate, free from researcher bias or reflexivity, and can be corroborated by other researchers, confirmability is established (Mason, 2010). Using audit trail, a reflexive journal, and triangulations can assist the researcher in attaining confirmability (Guion et al., 2011).

In a rigorous qualitative study, confirmability is crucial as the results reflect the truthfulness of the participants' perspectives, in this case women founders of SMEs. If

the researcher uses coding during data collection and analysis, the researcher should ensure consistency in both the use and definition of the codes to enhance validity and reliability (Mason, 2010). Reflexivity offsets preconceived notions about the research by the researcher, while audit trails support the participants' perspectives (Billups, 2014). In a qualitative study, a valid technique to establish trustworthiness is to use participants to validate the responses (Kornbluh, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

All students doing research on human subjects are required to obtain approval from the Walden University IRB. The approval of the IRB application is normally referenced by a number and the approval is then used to gain access to participants. Aspects of ethical research such as informed consent, undue burden on participants, minimizing harm, and privacy and confidentiality risks are minimized by the IRB (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). While the researcher and participants are personally interacting in different stages of the study, their involvement can be ethically challenging in all stages of the study. Ethical challenges such as anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent could potentially impact researchers and participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Approaches that place undue burden on participants, overburdening the participants with long interview or group discussions, desire to do a thorough work on topics that might be compounded by pressure to participants, potentially addressing emotive and distressing topics, and embarking on a research that is potentially unduly intrusive are a concern that has been raised by qualitative research (Ciuk & Latusek,

2018). Institutional permissions, including the approval from Walden University's IRB, are required for research on human subjects.

All research materials and processes have been carefully stored, avoiding any issues of privacy and confidentiality of participants. Data collection did not take place until approval was received from the University's IRB. A reminder was given to each participant that if they desired to withdraw from the study they were free to do so at any stage of the research study and that there was no penalty or risk for withdrawing. Participants were assured that their responses would and will be confidential and privacy issues would and will be protected. Data is anonymous and the responses have been stored in a private and secure place. I am the only person who has access to the data, which will be kept for 7 years and then it will be destroyed.

Summary and Transition

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain greater insight into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. The interview protocol allowed participants to provide their understanding of the leadership practices of women founders of SMEs, 5 years past start-up. Data collection took place through Skype interviews with the participants. To have access to participants, ethical standards for conducting research on humans were complied with.

The identified themes were used to describe the specific leadership practices of women founders of SMEs in the United States. The study explored the leadership

experiences of women founders of SMEs, 5 years after start-up, from a feminist lens for a better understanding of the complexity of their leadership and career experiences. To ensure reliability and validity of data and to reduce bias, member checks and triangulation were involved. The truthfulness of the research and the issue of trustworthiness was explored by considering credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. In this theory-generating case study research, two research questions were developed to provide answers within the context of the empirical setting (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014). By answering these research questions and analyzing the experiences of women entrepreneurs who have been in business 5 years past start-up, I was able to explore and offer insight into how women entrepreneurs describe their leadership practices and how those practices affect enterprise longevity. The two research questions guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

The two research questions were designed after an exhaustive review of the extant literature to identify gaps in the lack of women in leadership positions within privately owned firms (Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Galloway et al., 2015; McGowan et al., 2015). More studies on gender in leadership are needed and scholars propose a shift in the view of gender in entrepreneurship, discussing the concepts of narrative identity and gender. This paradigm shift would assist in freeing the constraints that existing male-dominated

models impose on entrepreneurship (Mylonas et al., 2017). By examining this epistemological shift, a new platform on theory and methodology in entrepreneurship can emerge, challenging the traditional masculine perspective that currently exists (Hamilton, 2014). McGowan et al. (2015) examined the constructs of human and social capital and their influence on prospective women entrepreneurs, and by using intersectionality theory examined how the challenges confronted by women entrepreneurs affect the development of their businesses and leadership potential (McGowan et al., 2015). A need exists to understand the potential barriers that prevent entrepreneurs in developing successful start-up enterprises (Chasserio et al., 2016; Harrison et al., 2015). To respond to this research gap, scholars also indicate the need for an exploration of entrepreneurial leadership experiences from a woman's perspective, suggesting qualitative studies as the method to address this gap (Markussen & Røed, 2017). A gendered analysis of entrepreneurial leadership will contribute to the emerging field and will encourage further development of women entrepreneurs (Salloum et al., 2016).

The research design and approach of this study were grounded in the study's conceptual framework, built on two concepts that focus on the challenges that women entrepreneurs must contend with in developing their careers: McGrath and MacMillan's (2000) concept of the need for a new type of leader, coined by the seminal authors as an *entrepreneurial leader*, and Brush's (1992) concept, the *intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership*. The concept of the entrepreneurial leader was critical to the foundation of this study. Researchers have studied the importance of social and human capital for the success of the woman business owner, finding that early development of

this capital is imperative to success of their enterprises (Leitch et al., 2013; McGowan et al., 2015). The findings of this empirical study are aimed at advancing knowledge on gender-inclusive leadership practices in SMEs, and at contributing original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

In this chapter I provide an analysis of the results of the multiple-case study, which is divided into two main sections. The first is a thematic analysis of the data collected based on the study's multiple sources, as recommended by Yin (2017); it contains: an open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix B) whose items have been designed and standardized by previous researchers; archival data in the form of government labor reports and media reports on women entrepreneurial leadership (Yin, 2017); and journaling/reflective field notes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) I kept throughout the data collection process. The second is a cross-case analysis in which I synthesize the findings of the initial thematic analysis of data to answer the two research questions. Boyatzis (1998) stated one could take a variety of approaches to using thematic analysis and essentially get the same rigor. Boyatzis (1998) contrasted theory-driven codes, derived from the researcher's or other existing theories, inductive codes, derived bottom-up from the researcher's reading of the data, and prior research-driven codes. While all approaches have something to offer qualitative data analysis, "thematic analysis is flexible and what researchers do with the themes once they uncover them differs based on the intentions of the research and the process of analysis" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63).

In a multiple-case study, the case itself may be a person, an event, an entity, or other unit of analysis. When focused on a person, a single case concerns one individual,

while a study of more than one person constitutes a multiple-case study (Yin, 2017). This approach is used in attempts to replicate the same findings across multiple cases by exploring the differences and similarities between and within cases. The evidence created in this way is considered "robust and reliable" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). Multiple cases may be sampled for several reasons: they extend emergent theory, fill theoretical categories, provide examples of polar types, or replicate previously selected cases. Eisenhardt (1989) advised that multiple cases should follow a replication rather than a sampling logic, which is characteristic to survey research. Unlike statistical sampling methods, there is no single rule concerning the minimum number of cases that should be selected for a given multiple-case research project. The number of cases was influenced by the study aims and the research questions. Each case within a multiple-case design can incrementally increase the ability of the researcher to generalize their findings. However, Eisenhardt (1989) suggested limiting the number of cases to the point where the incremental contribution of extra cases is only marginal (e.g., 4 to 10 cases).

Each of the nine cases in this study is defined by the unit of analysis. A multiple-case study investigating a social phenomenon can involve individuals living within the setting of that social context as a separate unit of study (Yin, 2017). The unit of analysis in this study was women founders of SMEs. When the data focus is only on individuals in a multiple-case study design, each unit of analysis becomes a case study in and of itself (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017). The multiple-case study design can deliver reliable results to answer the research questions by utilizing data collection methods that support the phenomenon being studied (Shenton, 2004), a method proven to add rigor

and contribute credible results that can be replicated (Yin, 2017). The main uncovered patterns and recurrent themes are described in detail throughout this chapter, accompanied by their respective participant voices. Tables summarizing demographics of the study's sample population, coding categories and themes, and a cross-case synthesis of themes across cases as recommended by Yin (2017) are also presented.

Research Setting

Data for this multiple-case study was collected by conducting semistructured interviews with nine female founders of SMEs in the United States, 5 years after start-up on the Skype telecommunication platform. The participants were recruited using the LinkedIn networking platform and once the potential participant was identified, contact was made via email. After acknowledging consent, an interview time was set via email. Several interviews were rescheduled based on participant request, but the overall scheduling process was not problematic. The criteria for selection required participants be adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic (Patton, 2014). The one on one interviews were conducted in private settings of the participants' choice via Skype and with few interruptions. This, along with the semistructured format allowed each participant to be fully engaged during the interview. The participants were also fully aware of the confidentiality agreement and appeared to express themselves openly and without incident.

Participants' Description and Demographics

I selected nine participants based on the eligibility criteria that was set out in the design for the study. The eligibility criteria included: adults over the age of 30; women; and founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up. All participants were located within the United States.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a 35-year-old female co-founder of an SME specializing in an online human resource management system for small and medium organizations. The enterprise commenced business in 2013. P1 commenced functioning as the owner-manager in the same year.

Participant 2

Participant two (P2) is a 37-year-old female founder of an SME specializing in human capital consulting with a focus on executive recruiting. The business has been in operation for 5 years and the owner has been in the start-up environment in the recruiting space for approximately 15 years.

Participant 3

Participant three (P3) is a 39-year-old female founder of an SME specializing in women's fashion, specifically women's crocheted swimwear. The enterprise began operations in 2007 and P3 commenced functioning as sole owner-manufacturer the same year. Before assuming the position of owner, P3 worked in several positions in various large corporations.

Participant 4

Participant four (P4) is a 59-year-old female founder of an SME specializing in food processing and manufacturing. The enterprise has been in operation since 2011. P4 commenced functioning as owner-manager the same year.

Participant 5

Participant five (P5) is a 52-year-old female founder of a professional recruiting services SME, specializing in IT, engineering, and manufacturing. The enterprise was founded in 1995 and P5 commenced functioning as the owner-manager the same year. Before assuming this position, the founder was employed by a national recruiting firm.

Participant 6

Participant six (P6) is a 49-year-old female founder of an SME specializing in marketing. The enterprise commenced business in 2010 and P6 commenced functioning as the sole owner-manager in 2012 after buying out a co-founder. Prior to assuming this position, P6 was employed in a large marketing firm primarily focused on the non-profit sector.

Participant 7

Participant seven (P7) is a 47-year-old female founder of an SME communications firm that integrates public relations, marketing, branding, and video production. The enterprise commenced operations in 2013 and P7 began functioning in the capacity of owner-manager the same year. Before assuming position as owner-manager of the enterprise, P7 held a position in news reporting for a local television station.

Participant 8

Participant eight (P8) is a 35-year-old female founder of an SME involved in software development. The business commenced operations in 2011. P8 assumed the position of owner-manager the same year. Prior to founding the enterprise, P8 was employed in a medium-sized enterprise working in web design.

Participant 9

Participant nine (P9) is a 47-year-old female founder of an SME specializing in contracting work for school psychologists. The enterprise commenced operations in 2001. P9 assumed the position of owner-manager the same year. Prior to assuming the role of owner-manager, P9 worked in education functioning as a school psychologist. Table 1 shows a summary of the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Participants' demographics and characteristics

	Business Sector	Year commenced business	Gender	Age	Years in position	Marital status during first 5 years of business	No. of children during first 5 years of business
P1	Technology	2013	Female	35	5	M	Not disclosed
P2	Human capital consulting	2013	Female	37	5	M	0
P3	Retail fashion	2007	Female	39	11	S	1
P4	Manufacturing	2011	Female	59	7	M	2
P5	Recruiting	1995	Female	52	23	M	2
P6	Marketing	2010	Female	49	6	S	1
P7	Communications	2013	Female	47	5	D	4
P8	Technology	2011	Female	35	7	M	2
P9	Education	2001	Female	47	17	M	2

Data Collection

The data collection process began on October 1, 2018, following IRB approval from Walden University (IRB Approval: 09-13-18-0510170). The data collection phase concluded on November 29, 2018 when data analysis of interviews and reflective field notes revealed no new themes, indicating to the researcher that data saturation had been reached. Evidence of data saturation in themes emerged during the seventh semistructured interview with P7; her responses were similar to those of P5 and P6. In the

eighth interview with P8, I did not discover any new data or themes in the semistructured interview compared to the responses from P5, P6, P7, and P9.

Evidence of data saturation within the set of raw data manifested itself in themes that included gendered leadership style and gender-based leadership challenges, providing data for answering RQ1 and RQ2. Seminal literature also revealed evidence of data saturation in these areas based on statistical data and testimonial accounts of marginalization based on gender (Dean & Ford, 2017; Stead, 2017). Triangulation of multiple resources revealed the commonality of assertion among the participants, combined with the interviewer's familiarity of the cultural dynamic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In the Study Results section discussion is provided on the data saturation process and what was revealed.

Over a period of 60 days I coordinated five tasks: (a) participant recruitment, (b) scheduling and conducting interviews, (c) recording reflective field notes, (d) reviewing the seminal literature, and (e) member checking by the participants of the study. A data collection process with a built-in audit trail to establish rigor was implemented. Additionally, the study relied on previously successful study questions meeting the established criterion thus establishing content validity.

Data collection consisted of nine in-depth, face-to-face interviews by the researcher using the Skype telecommunication platform. Two of the participants refused video Skype so only voice Skype was used. The interviews were conducted over a period of 8 weeks with an average of two interviews conducted each week starting October 1, 2018 and concluding November 29, 2018. Once consent was obtained the interviews

were scheduled based on the participants' scheduling preferences. The interviews were conducted in private settings, including the participants' homes or offices while the interviewer was in a home office setting.

Reflective field notes were recorded and maintained by the researcher beginning after IRB approval by Walden University on September 13, 2018 to record my thoughts, emotions, and reflections during data collection. I recorded experiences and reactions to formal aspects of the data collection process, including participant recruitment comments and their consent forms as they were returned to me. I recorded informal aspects of the data collection process such as the appreciation and respect I gained for the participants as they interacted with me throughout the interview process. As a researcher, I found the interview process rewarding. I gained perspective by observing experiences, some of which were supported by literature and concepts that were not aligned with previous research but saturated in this study.

There were some initial challenges to participant recruitment on LinkedIn; however, that may have been due to infrequent log in periods by those invited to participate. Interview scheduling went mostly as expected, with typical scheduling conflicts and delays in responses confirming participation. Occasionally the audio portion of the interviews was briefly inaudible most likely due to connectivity issues, but the digital recorder captured the participants' responses without any issues.

In each interview, the participants described their experiences as a woman founder of a small to medium enterprise and the effect of their leadership practices on enterprise longevity. During the interview, the participants were given the benchmark

used by economists for enterprise sustainability to ensure they all had a similar interpretation of the concept of sustainability. The questions addressed general experiences of these women based on the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership and how these experiences helped shape their leadership philosophy.

Initial Contact

I initiated contact on September 17, 2018, recruiting participants utilizing a criterion search via the LinkedIn Business Owner's networking website. The specific criteria were: adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic. Several profiles located as a result of the search indicated the business was a female start-up while others were informed of the criteria that they must be the business' founder and have been in business past the 5-year start-up phase. Formal consent from the final participant was obtained November 27, 2018, and outreach for participants concluded after the last interview was conducted November 29, 2018. As outlined in Chapter 3, I successfully followed the data collection plan that was established. Messages were sent to several hundred women founders of small to medium enterprises as listed on their profiles on LinkedIn.

Initial responses to my invitation were slow. As responses came in they provided their email addresses for me to send the consent form for participation, which they promptly returned. Several provided verbal agreement but were slow to return the consent form and send me their availability. One contact expressed interest, returned her consent, but was never able to find a time in her schedule to do the interview. Several

others also expressed interest but never returned the consent forms. I received positive feedback on the study subject from those who did not meet the study criteria. Participants who formally agreed to participate in the study were encouraged to contact others who they believed fit the criterion. During purposeful snowball sampling, as described in Chapter 3, of those who were mentioned, one formally consented and one contact disqualified herself as a participant as her business had not yet reached the 5-year criteria.

Interviews

After a period of 2 weeks, three participants responded and returned their consent forms the same day and the interviews were scheduled. After the initial delay in getting responses, participants responded within 24 hours and returned their consents the same day or within 48 hours of their informal consent. Most interviews were scheduled within 2 days of receiving the formal consents. One interview was scheduled 1 week out to accommodate the busy schedule of the woman business owner. One had to be rescheduled at the last minute due to a business emergency.

Once the interviews were scheduled most participants were easily located on the Skype network. One participant could not remember her Skype user name as she had not used her account for over a year and had to sign up under a new name and phone number. As mentioned earlier, two participants refused to use the video portion of Skype but were willing to use the Skype phone feature. I provided my username to each participant so they knew from whom the connection request was coming.

Each participant agreed to be recorded via Skype, however two agreed only to the audio recording. A second hand-held recorder was used as backup, which proved useful

as the Skype recording was briefly inaudible at times. The brief interruptions in connectivity were quickly overcome without making any adjustments and the interviews were conducted successfully as outlined in Appendix A. Participants were located in each time zone spanning the continental United States, representing several states from the east coast to the west coast. Participants were located in the states of New York, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Minnesota, and California. Skype made interviewing these participants across the United States feasible, which aided in replication (Yin, 2017).

Reflective Field Notes and Journaling

I began recording reflective field notes on September 13, 2018 upon Walden IRB approval. I recorded not only my excitement about the data collection process but my anxiety regarding the interview process as well. I recorded the frustration of the participant search process and the highs and lows of recruiting participants and obtaining the informed consents. I also recorded my frustration with scheduling the interviews. I recorded my process for selecting the data collection tools to ensure accurate data collection as well as my own reflections to minimize personal bias and any expectations I may have had during the process. As the interviewer, my concern with each participant was to listen to their experiences as they shared them and desired they be conveyed. I analyzed the tone and attitude of the interviewees as well as their nonverbal communication. The reviews of the transcript and field notes allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on their responses in a private setting (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003).

While I wrote a few observations during the interviews, I primarily reflected afterward and followed up watching the video recording if necessary for inference (Patton, 2014). As the interview process progressed, this aided in establishing patterns and themes. Participants often convey beliefs and attitudes through intonations and cadence and may be expressed nonverbally by looking off in reflection, long pauses, exhales, and rocking back and forth in their chair. As each interviewee shared their recollections, emotional experiences, and reflections, the handwritten notes provided valuable information.

A systematic process of hand coding the data from interviews and the description of the social reality of the participants revealed themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In addition to word coding, triangulation of data allowed for a broader recognition of patterns and increased dependability by highlighting common relationships across multiple cases (Patton, 2014; Yin, 2017).

I observed how some participants approached the interview as a more formal presentation, bold and direct in their responses, while others approached it as more of a casual conversation, jovial at times. All participants had a full understanding of the experiences they have had as women entrepreneurial leaders of successful SMEs. I noted and reflected that most all of the participants were very forthright in sharing their experiences with gender discrimination as it related to the start-up phase of their businesses. An interesting point in my notes that was common among all the women was the determination and strength they portrayed in building a business while also nurturing a family, which is supported to some degree by seminal research.

Member Checking

Member checking improves credibility and reduces concern over the accuracy of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After each interview was transcribed, the participant was sent the transcript via email for review and verification. The process of a back and forth exchange between the participant and researcher ensured accuracy and allowed the participant to clarify any thoughts or add any additional thoughts they felt might have been inadequately expressed. Overall, there were few changes made to the original transcripts with a few word additions that were inaudible and one participant who added some additional thoughts to one question.

Response to my request for participants to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy and to make needed changes was slower than anticipated. Only two participants responded within 48 hours while the rest took longer. One took a full week to respond and only after an e-mail reminder. This may be attributable to the participants' schedules and their confidence in the technology used to record the interviews accurately. After a reminder, participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcriptions and the data was used for coding. Two of the transcripts received minor edits from the participants. One was a correction in wording and the other was additional comments from the participant that came to mind after the interview ended. Hand coding took place with the edited transcripts, and the participants' approved files were stored in accordance with the data collection design set forth in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

I adopted the descriptive coding strategy (Saldana, 2016) for the analysis of raw data collected in this study and to assign meanings to segments of raw data (Saldana, 2016). Through this coding process, I used emerging words and phrases for categorization and thematic analysis. The raw data (transcripts) collected from the interviews contained the insights of the study's nine participants in response to the study's two research questions. The data I collected from the interview questions provided detailed information for an in-depth contextual understanding of how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase.

In qualitative, exploratory studies, coding drives organization of the collected data for analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To achieve this goal, I used a consistent procedure for the collection and analysis of data across all cases to provide a common platform for cross-case comparisons and thematic analysis perspectives for ongoing studies. In conducting a multiple-case study it is important to follow the same procedure for the collection of data across cases, each represented in this study by an individual (Yin, 2017). I adopted a consistent process for manual coding, categorization, and identification of emergent themes across the nine cases. I analyzed the data in two stages: within-case content analysis (Yin, 2017) of data collected from each participant, followed by a cross-case synthesis of data and comparison of emergent themes (Yin, 2017) across the nine cases. Multiple-case studies are based in common settings with the

purpose of understanding the process of an under-examined area; therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon can, in such a way, be explored as soon as data collection comes into existence and continues through the data analysis process (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 2013). This type of method helped me explore differences and compare and contrast results within and between cases (Yin, 2017). The multiple-case study design is significant for replication and supports the exploration of complex social phenomena as I compared results between and among the nine cases analyzed for this study (Yin, 2017).

Thematic analysis is guided by the standardized process of coding raw data, usually from interviews, examining the meaning and provision of a description of the social reality of participants through the creation of a theme (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As a qualitative descriptive design, thematic analysis is dependent upon sets of techniques used to analyze textual data to frame and develop themes that the data analysis process can be used to reflect upon their full meaning in answering the central research question of a qualitative study. By recording and categorizing thoughts that were similar using key words, views, and deeply rooted attitudes, the database for this study was developed (Yin, 2017).

The thematic analysis for this study was done by hand coding the data through a systemic process mapped out in the descriptive coding method (Saldana, 2016). I used the descriptive coding method to assign meanings to segments of data providing an inventory of words or phrases for indexing and categorization of data (Saldana, 2016) from the interviews and the description of the daily experiences of the participants that

revealed a theme (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Once transcript review checking was finalized, the interview notes were hand-coded by utilizing an Excel spreadsheet to enter the participants' transcribed responses to the questions. Attention to common relationships across multiple cases was accomplished through triangulation of data along with word coding, which also allowed a larger recognition of patterns and increased dependability (Yin, 2017).

After entering the data, I highlighted key phrases that were appropriate to answering each interview question. I used pattern recognition based on interview discussions to conduct thematic analysis. During content analysis, themes and patterns were set apart; nonrecurring evidence was associated to individual case compositions. To identify codes from raw data, I used the "ground up" data analysis strategy (Yin, 2017). From the transcribed interview data for each participant, I extracted relevant phrases or sentences. The extracted segments of data were evaluated and codes were assigned to them; then the codes were recorded according to each interview question. Further coding analysis of the interviews accrued in categorizing various themes by distinguishing common relationships across multiple cases (Yin, 2017). To illustrate how the coding took place for each of the categories, the following is a description of the finalized categories and themes of this multiple-case study.

A total of seven categories that enclose a total of 12 themes were identified for this study: gender; entrepreneurial leadership; market; money; management skills; macro environment; and meso environment. For each coding category, themes emerged to provide data for answering RQ1 and RQ2.

The seven coding categories are grounded in the conceptual framework. To understand gender in entrepreneurship, a post-structuralist feminist stance is needed away from the masculinization of the entrepreneurial leader (Dean et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2014; Henry et al., 2015). Utilizing the concepts of entrepreneurial leader and the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership as a lens to view entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon offers a more meaningful impact on the career development of women entrepreneurs (Brush, 1992; Harrison et al., 2015; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). Current entrepreneurship theory explaining business creation is generally organized around three basic constructs: *market*, *money*, and *management skills*. For a successful business launch, a novice entrepreneur needs to have access to markets (Kirzner, 1985; Clough et al., 2019), money (Aldrich, 1999; Balachandra et al., 2019), and management skills (human, social, and organizational capital) (Aldrich, 1989; Gupta et al., 2019). These three basic constructs of venture start-ups are described by Bates et al. (2007, p. 10) as the three *fundamental building blocks* of business sustainability. Bates et al. (2007) argued that while these constructs are pivotal to a successful business start-up, minority (women) novice entrepreneurs face barriers when attempting to access markets, money, and management skills (Welsh et al., 2018).

Drawing on the insights of Bates et al. (2007) for an initial platform, Brush (1992) and Brush et al. (2009) argued that to holistically study women's entrepreneurship, one must also consider norms, values, and external expectations (Elam, 2008). Market, money, and management skills must be defined to include the uniqueness of women's entrepreneurship, and extend the conceptual framework to include three additional facets:

gender, and the meso and macro environments. Gender can be extended to represent family and household factors influencing one's entrepreneurial practices (Jennings & McDougald, 2007). The macro/meso environment captures considerations beyond the market, including factors such as expectations of social and cultural norms for women entrepreneurs. Macro environment typically includes national policies, strategies, and cultural and economic influences, while meso environment reflects support policies, services, and initiatives (Dopfer et al., 2004; Pitelis, 2005). Welter et al. (2014) supported the five constructs of gendered entrepreneurial behavior and the agency of women *entrepreneurial leaders* in influencing their spatial-institutional contexts by building on the conclusions of Ahl et al. (2006) and Welter (2011) that place itself is gendered, reflecting local institutions.

By using the manual descriptive coding in this study, I was fully immersed in the data (Cronin, 2014) so I could gain a deeper understanding of the collected data (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). As a novice researcher, I chose Saldana's (2016) descriptive manual coding method rather than the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) programs for the analysis of data from this study. During the data analysis I considered all data obtained from the study's semistructured interviews, archival data in the form of government labor and media reports, and my reflective field notes and journaling. The archival data and the journal notes I kept throughout the investigation helped keep my interpretations aligned with the problem and purpose of the study and the two research questions. This back and forth check and recheck between data collected

from multiple sources and emerging patterns and themes helped me further to reflect on participants' responses during the within-case and cross-case data analyses.

Using the seven coding categories based on the conceptual framework, I identified 12 themes across the two research questions, six from each one from the thematic analysis of the interview-collected data. The following are the 12 themes that produced coding category responses to each RQ and a brief description of each by research question.

RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

Key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation. This theme describes the sum of life experiences and events from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood that motivated participants to enter an entrepreneurial/business owner career path.

Managing the macro environment. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of national policies, laws, and their cultural environment.

Managing the meso environment. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of regional support, policies, services, occupational networks, and business associations.

Gendered leadership style. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership style within the context of gender to include family and household factors.

Managing human resources. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of human and social capital.

Managing financial capital. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of financing and investment capital.

RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices on enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

Targeting evolving market opportunities. This theme describes how participants targeted market opportunities within the context of growth strategies.

Entrepreneurial management skills. This theme describes participants' entrepreneurial management skills within the context of the competencies needed for success.

Building social capital. This theme describes the need for participants to build relationships for their business' to succeed.

Gendered leadership style. This theme describes how the participants' gender impacted their leadership role in leading a successful business.

Work–life balance. This theme describes how participants managed their role in the family while running a successful business.

Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders. This theme describes the barriers the participants endured as entrepreneurial leaders within the context of the patriarchal societies in which organizations are built.

The tables in Appendices E and F are a presentation of the finalized categories and themes of this multiple-case study, along with respective examples of participant

quotations to illustrate how the coding took place for each of the categories and themes and by research question.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

By adopting credibility strategies based on my data collection experience and spending time on sampling, reflexing, triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview techniques, and establishing authority of research and structural coherence, I strengthened the trustworthiness of my data results (Anney, 2014). For this study, I interviewed participants individually by Skype for approximately 35–40 minutes and explained to the participants that they could end the interview at any time. Each participant's answers were written down and recorded electronically; then, each participant was sent their transcribed responses once the interview was completed. Triangulation and member check procedures were used to ensure the participants had an opportunity to review the transcript and my consolidation of the interview data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Adopting this verification procedure prevented my perspective from influencing participants' responses. When more than half of the participants responded to the questions and similar responses were noted, I was then obligated to suspend the study.

Transferability

I addressed transferability without altering transferability strategies outlined in Chapter 3, with the use of a purposeful sample of nine information-rich participants for in-depth study, and I interviewed participants until data saturation was achieved. I was careful to ascertain that all nine participants fit the study's inclusion criteria for

participation in the interviews: adults over the age of 30; women; founders of small and medium businesses, 5 years after start-up; and possessing in-depth knowledge and experiences with the study topic. I provided a rich and thick description of the study so the reader may determine that the results of my study conclusions are transferable to other settings, situations, or groups. I narrated in detail within this chapter my experience in data collection with detailed field notes, observations, data collection observations, and interpretation (Houghton et al., 2013).

Dependability

The stability of findings over time is referred to as dependability (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure dependability where typical strategies could not be employed as I have outlined in Chapter 3, the application of thematic stability was employed to address dependability weaknesses. Dependability is knowing if the results have reliable and constant themes, and if a similar research process and data collection procedures are applied (Yin, 2017). Dependability is grounded on a trail of audits of determinations made by the researcher through the study that explain the researcher's methodological justification, contextual data, and revealed decisions (Houghton et al., 2013). In this manner, if another researcher undertakes a related case study with the same participants in a short time frame, the second researcher will ultimately get comparable results. By using an audit trail, an examination of the inquiry process to validate the data collection and analysis process establishes dependability.

Confirmability

The degree to which the results of an inquiry can be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers is confirmability (Anney, 2014). I limited researcher bias and reflexivity by creating an audit trail, keeping a reflexive journal, and conducting triangulations that can assist the researcher in attaining confirmability (Guion et al., 2011). Reflexivity offsets preconceived notions about the research by the researcher, while audit trails support the participants' perspectives (Billups, 2014). Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the responses of each participant and sent the transcript to each of them to certify and confirm their responses; this is a participant check procedure. In qualitative research the validation of responses by participants is useful to establish trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015). The use of the participant check procedure helped confirm that the participants' answers were acceptable and correct as they were spoken and transcribed.

The quality, best practices, and trustworthiness of the research were my responsibility in this study. There are seven capabilities of a researcher according to Stake (2013): listening, focusing on behaviors, asking relevant questions, understanding the research topic, paying good attention to the data, respecting participants, and using multitasking and ethical procedures. I did not have any relationship with the participants in this study, therefore I was able to avoid bias, awkwardness, or the uneasiness that can be created towards the participants' responses because there is proof of trustworthiness on the basis of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Study Results

In this theory-generating, multiple-case research the specific research questions were developed to provide answers within the context of the empirical setting (Ketokivi & Choi, 2014; Stake, 2014). By recording the insights of women entrepreneurial leaders, insight was provided based on their leadership experiences and the implications of those leadership practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. The two research questions guiding this study were as follows: (a) How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices? (b) How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase?

Behaviors, activities, and characteristics noted from the data analysis of this multiple-case study related to themes and patterns that emerged from the raw data I gathered from the interviews. The identifiable traits of themes and patterns took place in two phases: thematic analysis of the textual data; and cross-case synthesis analysis. The data analysis reflects all data collected, comprised of interviews, field notes, member-checked transcriptions, and findings presented in the seminal literature (Yin, 2017). I categorized emerging themes and cross-referenced findings grounded to the foundation for cross-case analysis, which strengthens a researcher's ability to generalize the findings of a multiple-case study (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017).

An analysis that examines the similarities, differences, and themes across multiple cases is referred to as a cross-case synthesis analysis. The cross-case analysis is utilized when the unit of analysis is a case, which is a bounded unit such as an individual, artifact,

place, or event or group (Yin, 2017; Stake, 2006). I used the constant comparative approach for the analysis of data throughout the study process so that a new group of data emerging from one case was compared to the existing data throughout the entire study to contrast and compare the thematic patterns across cases (Yin, 2017). My goal in utilizing this analysis technique was to create rich, thick commentaries from every participant, which would reveal their personal insights and leadership experiences (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I was careful to note if there were any inconsistent or divergent data emerging from the analysis.

The data analysis takes into regard the overall data that includes interviews, field notes, member-verified transcriptions, and the findings of seminal research articles (Patton & McMahon, 2014). The analysis continued with procedure of cross-case synthesis for familiarity, unfamiliarity, and redundancy as well as crystallization of the data compiled (Stake, 2013). The themes that emerged were classified, and the findings thereof were cross-referenced for graphic representation. This established the groundwork for cross-case analysis, one of the defending features of the multiple-case study design where each case is managed separately yet analyzed collectively with other cases in the study, to strengthen the trustworthiness and the possibility of generalizing the findings throughout a given population group (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017).

I was meticulous in using a consistent procedure for the collection and analysis of data across all cases to provide a common platform for thematic analysis cross-case comparisons and as recommended by Yin (2017), and I followed the same procedure for the collection of data for all nine participants. I adopted a consistent process for manual

coding, categorization, and identification of emergent themes across the nine cases. The analysis of data was done in two stages: within-case content analysis of data collected from each participant (Mustapha & Ebomoyi, 2019), followed by a cross-case synthesis of data and comparison of emergent themes (Yin, 2017) across the nine cases.

First Phase: Thematic Analysis of the Textual Data

There are few consistent suggestions or step-by-step processes in the literature on how to conduct a rigorous and relevant thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The write-up of a thematic analysis should provide "a concise, coherent, logical, nonrepetitive, and interesting account of the data within and across themes" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). I developed this thematic analysis section to clearly present a logical process, so that the implications made in relation to the data set are evaluated as dependable and credible. I followed the thematic analysis recommendation of Castleberry and Nolen (2018) in using direct participant quotes "to allow the reader to verify thematic coding and ensure that conclusions were then drawn from the interpretations of themes" (p. 914). I used shorter quotes in the thematic analysis of the textual data to gain clarity on specific points of interpretation and prevalence of the themes, and longer narration from the participants' passages to offer a clearer view of the original texts. I embedded this raw data within the thematic analysis narrative to illustrate the 'complex story of the data', moving from a simple narrative of the data and to a convincing analysis to further support trustworthiness of the data (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019). In the remainder of this section, the 12 themes that emerged from the thematic analysis are

analyzed and offered in relation to the two research questions, along with representative direct quotes from the participants that defined the complex views grounding each theme.

The following themes refer to RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

Key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation. This theme describes the sum of life experiences and events from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood that motivated participants to enter an entrepreneurial/business owner career path. Most of the participants agreed that their tendency to be a leader and to work independently as an entrepreneur were shaped from developmental experiences in childhood with family and mentors. P1 combined both of these events:

> I was sitting in a lobby of a hotel waiting for my ride to go to a conference and I spoke to a lady, who told me that I had more spark for what I was doing than any man she has ever met and we need more people like me, to bring the balance back to a very male-oriented world of entrepreneurship. I could easily say, that my mother had always built up confidence and fearlessness as a single trait that has helped me all the way from dreaming, to conceptualizing to materializing a Global company within a short span of six years.

P9 brought up an interesting issue that was also seen in data collected from P3 and P5, which is the transition from one profession to entrepreneurship:

> It's really, honestly, an idea I had in graduate school. It really started then as I learned about, you know, the job of being a school psychologist and sort of went through the training and-and had some experience in the schools. Even from the

> very beginning, like I said, as a student I felt like there was probably a different way to do what we do- With less sort of bureaucracy and um, less sort of restrictions.

P3 was also an employee in an ineffective organization when she decided to follow her desire to launch her own business. P3 stated:

> (at) my last employer we had three different CEOs in a function of four years, a disengaged board of directors and a commission structure that changed every single year. By the end of my fourth year, I just, I knew that there was a better way of running a successful, sustainable business and I knew it wasn't going to happen there. And so I began Talent Growth Partners.

P7 talked about entrepreneurship being a part of family members' legacy as professionals—a legacy that took her away from a lucrative career as in television news:

> I never intended to be an entrepreneur, but as I reflect on my life though I grew up surrounded by solutions-driven, risk-taking problem-solving entrepreneurs. My dad started a non-profit in Los Angeles, my grandfather was a movie producer, my grandfather on my dad's side, was a banker who helped new businesses get off the ground. And throughout my career in televisions news, um, I was attracted very entrepreneurial in the kinds of stories. But, the news industry itself is not supportive at all of women, especially women who have families. My family was my incentive to begin looking elsewhere. I left TV news and I went into the business world.

Managing the macro environment. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of national policies, laws, and their cultural environment. Several participants discussed how the cultural environment in which they operate had an impact on their role as an entrepreneur. P3 talked about how government policy impacted her decision to start a business:

> I would, I would say that the thing that really catapulted me into entrepreneurship was after incorporating the crochet business, not being able to find a job with ease. Which had been my experience prior to setting up a formal business. Um, I became extremely depressed with the process of looking for jobs- I maxed out on unemployment three times, completely- by the time I was 30 and I, I just got to a point where it was either you're going to do this thing that you started or you're going to be unhappy for the rest of your life.

P4 stated:

> I had the-need in the community to figure out why we are not incorporating on the spectrum. But not just on the spectrum, but I live in San Diego where we have lot of, of military and a lot individuals with PTSD. Our health, uh mental health system which is outside of you look at people on the spectrum, people with mental health issues PTSD, we have what I would call the cognitive spectrum, And I thought, 'You know what, there's a need here to figure out how to get them trained or retrained and into the workplace'.

P9 discussed how the industry in which she worked influenced her leadership practices:

> In my industry it's not unusual. I don't know that gender has played a huge role. Because mental health and education are predominantly female um, dominant-it probably is perceived as fairly logical and expected that a female might be the person who delivers this service and who's, you know-had this idea or whatever.

P5 talked about the cultural environment that influenced her leadership practices:

> I was raised in an environment where, um, I never felt really slighted, um, as far as opportunity by boys or men. Um, I was a kind of a tomboy and I hung out with a bunch of boys when I was a young adolescent. I would play tackle and did pranks and kick the can and hung out with my boy cousins. Um, I always felt really safe and protected and equal to them. I learned also how to-you know, how to stand up for myself.

Managing the meso environment. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of regional support, policies, services, occupational networks, and business associations. Most of the participants agreed that their leadership tendencies and abilities were supported by a network of business associations. P4 brought up an interesting idea about male associations, which was also shared by P5:

> I've noticed that the men in my circle or the men that I come across their idea is to grow it sell it, and my idea is grow it, maintain it, expand it to include in, in, and include other community members, build a better community.

P5 stated: “I reached out to men all the time and asked them to share the knowledge with me, their advice with me. And when I asked, they gave it to me.”

P9 shared how connections with other women from her past supported her leadership ideas:

> So, I met up with um, a couple of women that I had known many, many years prior, probably been ten years since we had seen each other. Um, back, actually back from graduate school, so it had been about ten years, this is 2011. Um, and we ran into each other at a conference and started talking you know, reconnecting and, ‘What are you doing?’, ‘What are you doing?’. And they were both doing some contract work as well and kind of having the same thoughts and feelings about doing it well, you know, and that working independently felt... didn’t feel as good as it used to because you didn’t feel like you were able to complete assessments as-as, with the quality that, you know, that you wanted to. So, we talked about, ‘Well, maybe we could help each other out,’ you know? Maybe we could, you know, ‘Let me talk to the school where I do contracting and see if they’ll, they’re open to, you know, having you come participate in some evaluations when needed,’ and that kind of a thing. Uh, I knew a speech therapist who was also doing some contracting-contracting as well and so, you know, brought her into that equation too, knowing that we needed a couple different disciplines to participate. Um, and it kind of grew from there into, ‘Well, you know, maybe we should all go into business together and-and market ourselves as

> a team versus an independent contractor.' Um, and so we started that and-and the business just literally flew, you know.

Gendered leadership style. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership style within the context of gender to include family and household factors. Most of the participants agreed that their leadership style was influenced by their gender and their family and household factors. P2, P7, and P8 shared how they believed their leadership style was directly influenced by their gender. P2 stated:

> I think there's a relatability. Granted, I think if I wasn't an expert in my domain expertise- It wouldn't matter as much. But because I'm an expert and I'm a woman I think there is a, a strong comfort, um, and I can give you, I guess, one example of this. So just this week, uh, I was asked to, um, come in and meet with a woman entrepreneur. She runs a comm- a very successful communications firm. I've known her for quite some time. And you know, I'm really the first consultant she's bringing in to truly sort of share everything with full transparency, you know? 'Here's our financials, here's my vision for growth,' you know? 'That could mean, you know, acquisition or selling this business after five years. Um, how do I align my workforce planning, goal planning, um, with that?' So I, I do think there is this stronger comfort and willingness to be transparent versus some guy from, you know, the private bank up stated.

P7 shared that her leadership style was influenced by good listening skills, which she attributed to being a woman:

> I think being a woman I'm a naturally good listener. I very naturally care about the clients that work with us. So I don't just see my client as revenue. I see them as people through our services that we're taking really good care of. So I think being a woman, um, uh, and having the natural traits of caring and good listening-has enabled me, um, to be more successful. I think is also, it also enables me to build a really great environment for my employees, again, as a mom who had a hard time finding balance in my life and having a hard time finding an employer who would respect that I say to my team, you know, work from wherever you feel you need to work from.

P8 stated:

> I would say that that my ability to take all sorts of information and analyze what move, you know, how the move didn't just affect getting what you wanted to get done affected the bigger picture, too. I would say that that is a strength of mine and I think that that is actually, with generalities, a female strength-of being able to think of, you know, not just like, okay, I want to get X done and I'm going to achieve it through doing this, but what else does that impact and how does that move me? Okay, that gets my micro goal done but does it contribute to the, you know, the ultimate goal? Is this moving us in the direction that we want to go in?

P5 shared an interesting thought on how being a mother influenced her leadership style:

> My company is built on ... built with maybe, employees and contractors that that need flexible schedules. So we have one full-time person. The rest all work up to 40 hours, and they have a completely flexible schedule. And that is from being a mom. That's from being a person who had a baby and it changed my life, and that's the reason I got into this business, and that ... I kind of use that as my model. I hire people who have, it could be an elderly parent at home. It could be a child who's disabled. I have I think four people that raised their kids working with us ... working from their homes, 30 hours a week. And they balanced parenting and they had a really great professional role. So I have to say that, you know, really specifically being a woman entrepreneur, that impacted the way I hire people and what I allowed as far as schedules and flexibility.

Managing human resources. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of human and social capital. Three participants shared how human and social capital impacted their leadership style. P2 shared her perspective on the importance of finding and retaining talent, which was also seen in data collected from P5:

> I am very focused, regular, I mean, to a point where it's a weekly discussion with the team. Um, around, you know, clients in pipeline, I do client segmentation, um, again, all around this alignment. I look at the numbers, profitability, the revenue,

> the run rates, um, so those things, to me, um, oh and overlaying that, like no services business is successful without retaining your best in class talent, right?

P5 stated:

> My employees stay. You know, we have very little turnover. Um, and I think it's because of the leadership strategies we put in place to have very clear culture and values. And our culture is defined as teamwork, resilient, flexible, smart, and resourceful, and respectful, ethical.

P4 shared an interesting idea that was not shared by any other participant:

> But you know I'm really having trouble putting myself out there and just wanting to kind of be behind the scenes and make things go. And um, you know so I think that might have been a limitation for me, but I don't know that that's gender. It may be gender specific because women tend to be- the, the operatives behind the scenes. Um, but reaching my market that has been my, and, and you think given my company is actually a training ground for high what, high functioning individuals on the cognitive spectrum. So hiring individuals with, with, with um that are on the cognitive spectrum that I would call it, so you think that's where my challenges would be- but not at all. My challenges were always getting sales.

Managing financial capital. This theme describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of financing and investment capital. Several participants agreed that their ability to lead a business was dependent on their ability to manage the financial capital. P2 stated:

> So I think part of it is just what I'm looking at and how frequently I'm looking at it. And then how do I, how do I translate that in the form of communication to my team? So if, just from like, my financials perspective, um, I look at that and review those in depth- Monthly, if not sooner, or you know, more regularly. Um, I, I mean, I even look at like, okay, well what, with every large new client I look at like, what new tools or technology or investments in the business might make sense. I actually discuss those with my team and let them share opinion and weigh in.

P4 discussed the need for creativity in managing the finances, which was also seen in data collected from P5:

> Very creative in how you get things paid, and, and um, and paying really close attention to you know, the costs and uh because for my business everything's been you know with the exception of a couple small business loans everything's been home grown. I mean everything been out of my pocket so, in the business, so it's been really challenging.

P5 stated: "You know, money's coming in and going out, and as you grow you have to figure out where you want to spend the money on the people."

The following themes refer to RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices on enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

Targeting evolving market opportunities. This theme describes how participants targeted market opportunities within the context of growth strategies. Two

participants discussed how leveraging market opportunities allowed for growth in their companies. P3 stated:

> When I started out the very first swimsuits I made were with this yarn that I would never use now it's so laughable. But I sold them for $25. By the time that I had gotten to six years my swimsuits were $250. And I think that what allowed me to continue pushing through to the point of success, not necessarily things financial but just having the ability to have stuck with something that I didn't see working out for me right away, would be attributed to the fact that I have a serious passion for it. And to, to reach a level of success which, for me my definition of success for June Alexander has been brand recognition. I have created a way to connect or link myself in a person's psyche with crocheting or knitting even. So, and so, what I mean by that is...people send me inbox messages, text messages, email, 'I saw this piece and I immediately thought of June Alexander.', and to have the association in people's psyche that, no matter where they at, where they're at, or what they see, they instantly think of June Alexander.

P4 shared her perspective on how gaining market share is directly impacted by having financial capital: "To find for market it takes money. And then reaching your market because you have to reach a certain economy of scale before you can really make any progress."

Entrepreneurial management skills. This theme describes participants' entrepreneurial management skills within the context of the competencies needed for

success. Several participants agreed that entrepreneurial competencies and skills are needed for enterprise sustainability. P1 discussed empowerment as a management skill, which was also seen in the data collected from P2 and P7:

> We need to have incremental value methodology, a mechanism that supports and uplifts people to do their jobs better, share with them your concerns about the growth patterns and your vision. It is very important that there is a fair share of responsibilities that you transfer to those empowered individuals in the organization that act as the key people who uplift your motto and promote your ideology.

P2 stated:

> So I think part of it is just what I'm looking at and how frequently I'm looking at it. And then how do I, how do I translate that in the form of communication to my team? So if, just from like, my financials perspective, um, I look at that and review those in depth- Monthly, if not sooner, or you know, more regularly. Um, I, I mean, I even look at like, okay, well what, with every large new client I look at like, what new tools or technology or investments in the business might make sense. I actually discuss those with my team and let them share opinion and weigh in. If they feel strongly about something and, you know, walk through-Pros and cons sort of; it's very collaborative in that regard.

P7 shared:

> It's how I empower everybody on the team, um, to own their own roles, um, not just in what they provide for our clients on a day to day basis, but in how they're

> managing their time. And their budget. So we created a tiered, um, system of responsibility for profit and loss, um, and for budgets where our directors, uh, ultimately own profit and loss as part of their team. But everybody on their team has very clearly defined responsibility- We also talk as a team. I'm very transparent with financials. Back to I think delegation and team ownership-being a big part of it- I think to transparency with the team, uh, that is just one important step that I take, uh, with the team, uh, again to empowering my directors, um, and ensuring that their direct reports are also empowered in their role, um, that there is an open line of communication, and, and I think those are some of the stuff that I take. We also invest in professional development of our employees. working to lead through people, um, our success becomes their success not just mine.

P4 stated: "Working really hard and uh, and without the tenacity, with the personal quest there's no way." P5 shared the need for process development as a competency:

> Developing processes for everything we do and documenting them. And so it's a repeatable process so that you have consistent quality. You have very clear expectations of what someone's supposed to be doing in their role and exactly how they should be delivering it ... so every single customer encounters the same experience. It also allows me as a management person, you know, management responsibilities, to take those things off my desk ... and know that somebody has a very clear roadmap as to how they're gonna do their job. Or, you know, whatever it may be. Whether it be we have all the recruiting mapped out, we have sales.

> You know, whatever it may be, documentation of the process has been really, you know, the core I think to that.

Building social capital. This theme describes the need for participants to build relationships for their business' to succeed. Most of the participants shared the importance of relationships and networks in building a successful business. P1 shared the importance of communication and listening for building social capital, which was shared by P2 in the data collection as well:

> A sustainable business requires working outside of your comfort zone at times and I am more than happy to do that. Always trust your instinct but also always be talking to your team all the time, make sure you have their confidence in matters that mean the most to your company.

P2 stated:

> Yeah I think probably the number one is being, you know, pretty astute on what my team needs. So I have, you know, I have one of my partners has, you know, four children and his wife's um, you know, does homeschooling with their kids. I have, you know, another um, coworker that has um, a child with special needs. So part of it is just seriously understanding what each of my team needs from a work life integration.

P3 and P7 shared the importance of personal development and learning from others in building social capital. P3 stated:

> Placing myself in environments and situations where I was the person who didn't know a lot. And, and I, and learning from other people and watching them and

> facilitating, uh, conversations and rapports and ... it's a lot of personal development.

P7 shared a similar sentiment:

> I took a job with a start-up company, um, uh, focused on executive search. So, I had the chance to work with CEOs, senior level business leaders who worked or they had problems that they were hiring my team to solve. So, I had the chance to get very involved with the strategic thinking and the problem-solving, solutions, creation, um, of our start-up company with those, uh, entrepreneurs and those CEOs. Um, I was hired away from, from uh, my recruiting tradition by one of those CEOs.

P5 shared her ideas on social capital and sustainability as a more customer-focused solution: "So, you know, we're focused on sustainability, and we really control it through delivering very high-quality service, making sure we're delivering results. And that drives repeat business, which is really the core foundation of our- our business."

Gendered leadership style. This theme describes how the participants' gender impacted their leadership role in leading a successful business. Most participants agreed that women have a different leadership style than men and those characteristics have contributed to the success of their businesses. P1 described these characteristics as being innate in women, which was also seen in the data collected from P9:

> Where being a woman can be challenging in this field, it also offers many benefits that many women overlook, women are born with the traits of management, whether we realize it or not. We are naturally comfortable with multi-tasking and

taking charge when given due respect and confidence. Our jobs revolve around HR and making it better, so we know, no matter how nice your product is, if you don't take care of the people in your company, nothing is going to work out according to your plan. There should always be a "human" element, when dealing with your employees I just believe, that sustainability is not just numbers, figures and ratios of success, it is also about how good a leader you are.

P9 shared a similar perspective:

You know, I think to be an entrepreneur you have to be very self-motivated, very organized, and very self-sufficient. And, it's a little stereotypical, but I do think that women in general are better at those kinds of skills. And so that quality, I think, as a woman probably has been very helpful in terms of sustaining success, you know. Just keeping on track of the day-to-day because ultimately, you know, when you've had a business for as long as I have, you are so far removed from the day-to-day actual working with kids, kind of you know, on campuses role. So to sustain it, I've had to move into a much more managerial role and I think you know, those skills that sort of are... like I said, I know it's relatively stereotypical. I think because I'm a woman who hires a lot of women I was able to empathize and relate to the people we hired. You know, we hire a lot of moms- New moms who are struggling with the same things I struggled with, and relate the-the business is built on- The back, the structure of a young mom who wanted to have flexibility, who loved what she did and wanted to keep doing it, but wanted flexibility and wanted to be a mom, too, and wanted to find that, you know,

> work–life balance that so many of us strive for. So, when I interview and hire women that's very frequently their story as well. And I'm able to say, 'I can relate to that, and I experienced that'.

P5 and P6 described their female leadership style as one that is employee focused. P5 stated: "So I have to say that, you know, really specifically being a woman entrepreneur that impacted the way I hire people and what I allowed as far as schedules and flexibility. We also have compassion for people." P6 shared a similar idea: "As a woman I think I was more invested in my employees- Which created more family environment and it created loyalty."

P7 talked about how being a good listener has supported her in building a successful enterprise:

> I think being a woman I'm a naturally good listener And I'm, I very naturally care about the clients that work with us. And so as, uh, a good listener, an active listener, I'm able to, um, uncover business problems that they may not be aware of, um, and provide very, uh, customized, uh, solutions for them. Um, because when I'm a good listener too I really care about their success. So I think being a woman, um, uh, and having the natural traits of caring and good listening- has enabled me, um, to be more successful.

Work–life balance. This theme describes how participants manage their role in the family while running a successful business. Three participants shared how managing their family impacted the success of their businesses. P1 gave a specific example of the role of being a mother:

> Take motherhood for example, nurturing and raising responsible citizens, that are capable of functioning fully in a society is no less than building a huge company, my being a mother had never hindered my process of evolving business wise. It only helped me more, as I matured and took over different roles in my company, like all start-ups, I had to wear many hats in the beginning and had to tie up a lot of loose ends and being a mother only helped me fit into all those roles at once.

P5 discussed balancing work and family, which was also seen in data collected from P6:

> When I was- when I was younger the biggest challenge was always balancing family with my business. So those years were really, really difficult. And, um, but that's why I started the business too was so that I could balance it out. And the kids always came first. So if I had to keep my client base down, or, you know, maybe we didn't take on another client because I didn't want to be too busy when the kids were in school or something, or in the summer. It was usually in the summer. You know, we just did that. That's how we how we rolled.

P6 stated:

> Time resources over how much time do you invest in the business over, you know, family-personal. There were sacrifices, you know and a lot of it was your personal sacrifices you know. There was no sleep. There was just, you know, family and work.

Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders. This theme describes the barriers the participants confronted as entrepreneurial leaders within the

context of the patriarchal societies in which organizations are built. Most participants agreed that they face challenges due to their gender that have an impact on how they manage a successful business as an entrepreneur. P2 described how intimidation affects the way she conducts business:

> I didn't think of it immediately, but I do observe some clients/peers being intimidated by me and one other female partner at the firm. Example, a billion dollar manufacturing client who is the VP of HR demonstrated this. Both my colleague and I felt that he was protective about giving us exposure to the executive team, in part because he was most concerned about protecting his image/ego rather than advancing the business. Our approach is always to make our stakeholders become innovative and solution-focused leaders, but in his case, he was scared that he'd look less knowledgeable, less capable than us women. We successfully completed a small consulting project and decided not to work directly with them (at this level) of the company, despite him requesting more help without offering exposure to other stakeholders in the business. We have also experienced this "protective-thinking and approach" with a female business leader within HR in a private equity setting.

P3 felt that people were not willing to invest in female leaders:

> I think that people are less likely to help women ... When we decide that we want to create in industries or businesses that may not have anything to do with, uh, a standard of beauty or something superficial I don't feel that I have always been taken seriously, um, due to my gender and I think that as a Black woman,

specifically, and being a single mother because that creates a financial ... hardship. Um, people are less likely to want to invest in you being a, a, single mother, Black, woman, business woman, entrepreneur.

P4 shared a unique view on gender-based challenges:

And from, and I think maybe one of the downsides for me as a women is not wanting to be out front, and maybe that's more of a personality thing But you know I'm really having trouble putting myself out there and just wanting to kind of be behind the scenes and make things go. And you know so I think that might have been a limitation for me, but I don't know that that's gender. It may be gender specific because women tend to be- the operatives behind the scenes I'm not as ruthless, I'm more… like I've had individuals tell me, men 'Well don't do all those great things you are doing, and then put that money towards profit.' And I won't do that, and I'm and I'm just hellbent on proving that you can do the right thing and still make money.

P5 discussed how sexism impacted her business, and this idea was also noted in the data collected from P6 and P8:

What I don't know is how many people didn't take my call or didn't say yes to me because I was a woman and maybe they had somebody in their good old boy network. I hang out with a lot of business owners. I've experienced a few things, every single year, and I know all women can talk about this, but where, you know, somebody's more sexist or they have a gesture or they do something inappropriate at a Christmas party or something. Dealing with all these men, is,

you know, when you have to build relationships. I mean I'm selling business to business, and I'm talking to business owners and IT VPs and ... you know, HR VPs. And I mean these are the decision makers, and you know, you encounter things like that. You know, you have to figure that out, how you're gonna handle it. And I think over time I've really just drawn lines in the sand, you know. And now, you know, something happens I say, 'That's not appropriate.' You know, and I don't care if I lose their account, because it doesn't fall under our values, our culture.

P6 stated:

Men hitting on you. You know, I-I still get clients that I know that I cannot meet one on one in my office- Uh, you know, I have clients that wanna ... That when they hug you they hug you inappropriately. I have clients that say inappropriate things to you and you just have to shrug it off, you know? I have women clients who you know are doing things because they-they're just- because you're a woman and they're just- If you were a man they would not be acting this way. It-it's because they're ... It-It's ridiculous. We- I have this one client now and-and my head developer, she just has- She says, 'You know she's acting this way "cause we're women".' Women having to demand respect. You'll always have it. And sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes it's just straight in your face, but you're always having to do it. I'm not on all of the stages as a man. And I don't think I ever will be because, um, I could have a no-name come up and-and say something and, you know, and because he's a man he'll have- he'll get the face before I will.

> P8 agreed that she found a lack of respect, which she attributed to her gender: Just being recognized. If I was more of the, you know, the charismatic, self-promoting type I think that that would be not a challenge for me. I'd say that if I were a man maybe more people would know what I'm doing.

Second Phase: Cross-Case Synthesis and Analysis

Cross-case analysis and synthesis was used as the data analysis technique to incorporate critical findings and identify frequency of themes across the individual cases within this multiple-case study (Yin, 2017). Because of the analogously low number of cases affiliated with a qualitative study, word tables offered an alternative method to seek for patterns across cases instead of the meta-analysis associated with large numbers of case studies (Yin, 2017). Because real-life experiences are complex and patterns may not be readily observable, the cross-case synthesis data analysis method strengthened trustworthiness of data and allowed generalization to the analysis process (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017). With the cross-case synthesis technique, I was able to systemically identify the convergent and divergent data across cases and remove any minor data unrelated to the purpose of the study (Yin, 2017). I enhanced the trustworthiness of data by consolidating and interpreting the data to establish a coherent argument based on evidence and explained within the study's conceptual framework (Cooper & White, 2012; Yin, 2017).

The cumulative theme frequencies of occurrence by participant in answering RQ1 are illustrated in Figure 1, in which I combined the thematic analysis results from each

case to graphically provide the reader with an idea of how many themes converged across cases based on the findings of this multiple-case study.

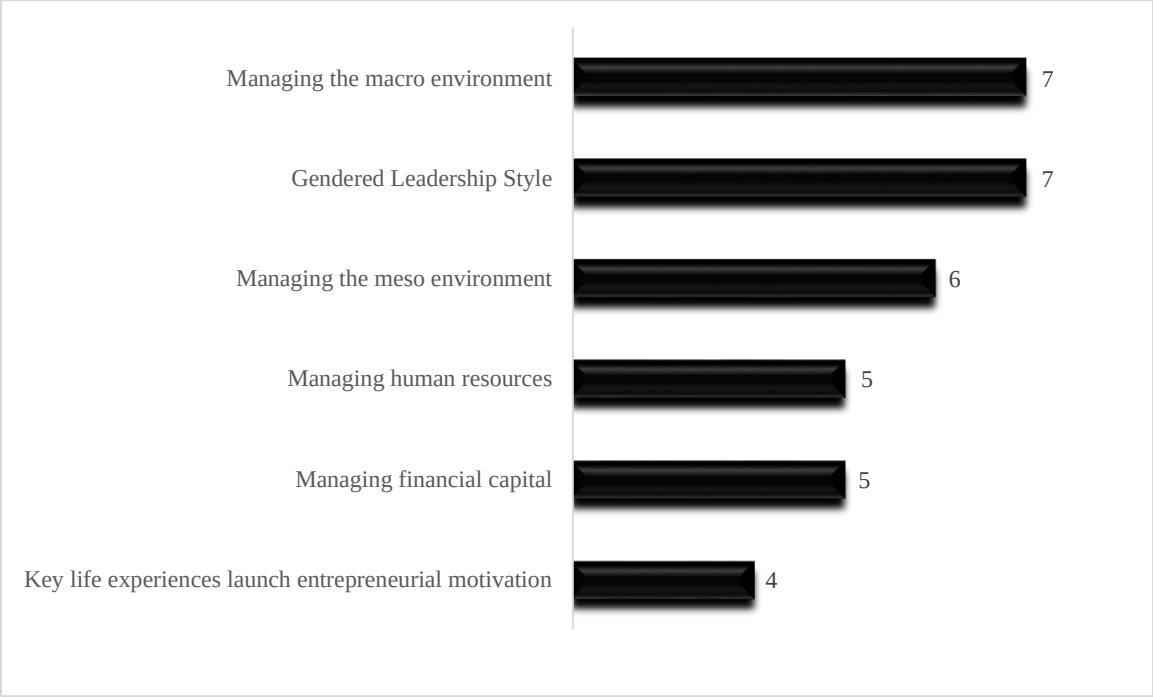

Figure 1. Multiple-case analysis for RQ1 (theme frequency of occurrence by participant).

The cross-case analysis was an iterative process and I first analyzed each of the nine cases separately and by research question. For RQ1, recurrent themes were identified across the data to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices. The cumulative frequencies of occurrence for each theme are illustrated in Figure 1, in which I combined the data analysis from each case while analyzing the convergent and divergent data across the nine cases to provide answers for RQ1. In Figure 1, I present a multiple-case study cross-

case synthesis graph as a visual representation of women entrepreneurial leaders' descriptions of their leadership practices

The two categories that figured most prominently across the data collected from the nine cases to answer RQ1 were gendered leadership style and managing the macro environment. The theme of managing the macro environment describes how seven out of the nine participants managed their leadership practices within the context of national policies, laws, and their cultural environment. Several participants discussed how the cultural environment helped launch their career as an entrepreneur. Most participants had difficulty finding a job within their associated labor market that met both their professional aspirations and financial needs. Poor unemployment benefits and a weak job market hastened some of the participants' decisions to seek ways and means to establish a business start-up. The salaried jobs available to women within their job market were lower paying than their male peers', with little hope for upward mobility within the organizations. Because of the culturally conservative environment of their cities and regions, most participants noticed few women in leadership positions and little support for women with families. By exploring entry into entrepreneurship, most of the participants believed in their cognitive and professional abilities to overcome these gendered issues going against their professional aspirations in the salaried job market.

The theme of gendered leadership style for RQ1 describes how seven out of nine participants managed their leadership style within the context of gender to include family and household factors and figured prominently in seven out of nine participants' interview responses. Several participants discussed how their gender influenced their

leadership style. Most participants viewed their leadership style as nurturing, placing value on the employee not just the bottom line. The value they placed on motherhood and raising a family influenced not only their decision to become an entrepreneur but also how they lead their businesses. Several participants noted that motherhood created unique challenges for working women who are trying to climb the corporate ladder, so they built their businesses with flexibility to address the challenges of the working mother and continued to use that flexibility in their leadership style. Through the use of the natural leadership traits exhibited by women, most participants believed they have created an environment in which employees are productive and turnover is low.

The theme of managing the meso environment describes how six out of the nine participants managed their leadership practices within the context of regional support, policies, services, occupational networks, and business associations. The participants described how advice from associates and various networks helped launch their own businesses and develop their unique leadership practices. While the advice from male business associates was viewed as supportive by most participants, they used that advice to develop their own voice in leading their businesses. Other participants discussed the network of female business associates and the impact it had not only on their decision to pursue entrepreneurship but on how they lead their businesses today. Most participants agreed that having business associations and networks provide the support needed for women entrepreneurs to lead a successful business.

The theme of managing human resources explores how five out of the nine participants managed their leadership practices within the context of human and social

capital. Most participants discussed how they utilized their leadership skills to find and retain talent in their businesses. Several participants agreed that building a culture that values teamwork was essential to the success of their business. Understanding the value that human and social capital brings to the woman entrepreneur, most participants agreed that the success of their business depends on recruitment practices and talent development.

The theme of managing financial capital describes how five out of the nine participants managed their leadership practices within the context of financing and investment capital. Most participants agreed that leading a successful business was dependent on their ability to obtain and manage investment and financial capital. Several participants shared the need for creativity in managing their financial capital while others agreed that transparency with finances was a value they espoused to create trust within their business. As women entrepreneurs, most of the participants agreed that managing their financial capital was paramount to their success in their respective markets.

The theme of how key life experiences launched entrepreneurial motivation was the least prominent theme raised by the women participants. However, since four out of nine participants emphasized this theme, its relevance to these participants and their entrepreneurial leadership practices is worth noting. Most of the participants agreed that their interest in entrepreneurship came from childhood experiences and mentors who themselves were entrepreneurs. Several participants discussed their dissatisfaction with their profession as a key life experience that influenced their decision to become entrepreneurs. On dissatisfaction within the corporate environment coupled with the

desire for independence in building a sustainable business, most of the participants agreed that entrepreneurship was the answer for them.

The cumulative theme frequencies of occurrence by participant in answering RQ2: are illustrated in Figure 2, in which I combined the thematic analysis results from each case to graphically provide the reader with an idea of how themes converged across cases based on the findings for RQ2 within this multiple-case study.

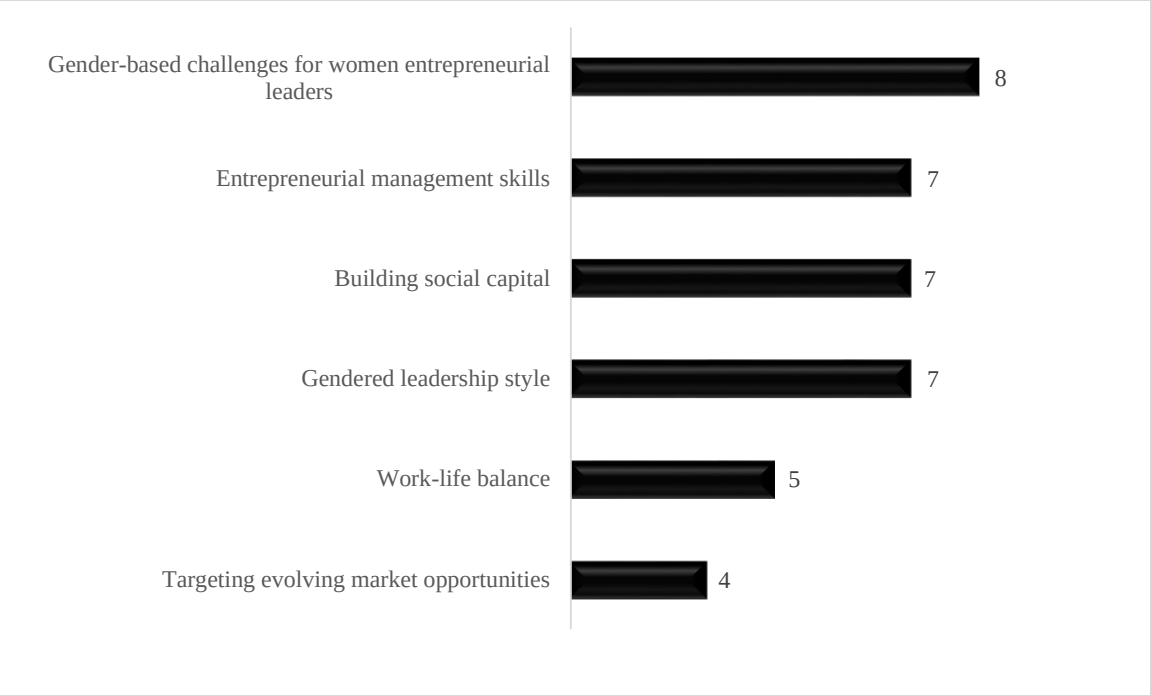

Figure 2. Multiple-case analysis for RQ2 (theme frequency of occurrence by participant).

As previously mentioned, the cross-case analysis was an iterative process and I first analyzed each of the nine cases separately and by research question. For RQ2, recurrent themes were identified across the data to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders described the implications of their leadership practices for

enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. The cumulative frequencies of occurrence for each theme are illustrated in Figure 2, in which I combined the data analysis from each case while analyzing the convergent and divergent data across the nine cases to provide answers for RQ2.

The theme of gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders describes the barriers the participants confronted as entrepreneurial leaders within the context of the patriarchal societies in which organizations are built. Eight out of the nine participants agreed that they endured challenges due to their gender that profoundly shaped how they managed to achieve enterprise longevity 5 years after start-up. Several participants discussed how being a woman impacted how clients interacted with them and how they have overcome those challenges to retain those clients and build their business. One participant shared her perspective on how her values as a woman impacted the way she conducts her business successfully. Most participants agreed that sexism and the lack of respect by men in the workplace have created challenges that they have had to overcome to build a successful enterprise.

The theme of participants' entrepreneurial management skills within the context of the competencies needed for successful enterprise longevity figured prominently in seven out of the nine cases. Several participants agreed that there are skills and competencies needed by women to create a successful business. Having tenacity and the ability to create processes that create a successful business were shared by several participants. Most participants agreed that the value they placed on their employees and

how they empowered them was a management skill that helped them remain sustainable past the 5-year mark.

The theme of building social capital describes the need for participants to build social capital in the form of relationships for their successful enterprise longevity. This theme figured prominently in seven out of the nine participants' experiences. Several participants agreed that building relationships required good communication, active and passive listening skills, and the need to value those relationships to build a successful business. Personal development was shared by several participants as being necessary for building social capital. Most participants agreed that forming solid relationships both inside and outside their enterprises helped lead their business to sustainability beyond the 5-year mark.

This theme of gendered leadership style for RQ2 explores how the participants' gender impacted their leadership role in leading a successful business 5 years after start-up and figured prominently in seven out of the nine cases. Most of the participants agreed that women have a unique style of leadership and it is that style that has helped to lead a successful business. Several participants shared that women have a natural tendency for management that is seen in how they not only manage the many tasks of the business but in their family life as well. Self-motivation, self-sufficiency, and being an active listener were leadership traits that were shared by several participants. Most participants agreed that their leadership style placed emphasis on the employee and, as such, created loyalty among their workers, which contributed to the success of their business.

The theme of work–life balance describes how participants managed their family roles over the years while running a successful business and figured prominently in five out of the nine cases. Several participants shared how motherhood prepared them for building a sustainable business. Most of the participants agreed that balancing work and family was a challenge that most men entrepreneurs do not share and finding that balance was paramount to the success of their business.

The theme of targeted market opportunities was the least prominent of all themes in the cross-case synthesis attached to RQ2, appearing as a theme in four out of the nine cases. Four out of the nine participants stated they used their entrepreneurial skills to target opportunities to expand to different markets. Within the context of growth strategies for their business longevity, these four participants invested money to capture an opportunity in a new market and worked towards reaching an economy of scale to expand and contribute to their businesses' longevity past the 5-year mark. These four participants did find they needed to manage the meso and macro environment in which their business was established in order to maximize the business longevity past the 5-year mark.

Triangulation

The codes spanned themes across many methodologies, including interviews, field notes, and historical literature, while additionally binding data sources (Saldana, 2015). A more comprehensive consideration of the data while enhancing the overall quality of the study was accomplished through methodological triangulation (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2017). This type of triangulation method provides enough in-depth

information for the study to be replicated by future researchers (Jack & Raturi, 2006). I analyzed and interpreted the multiple-case study results through the lens of the conceptual framework and presented how study findings add to the body of knowledge related to women entrepreneurial leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase, and within the specific context of the United States. The use of handwritten notes was a valuable element of the data collection. Through the use of nonverbal communication such as subconscious movements or facial expressions, or auditory cues such as deep exhales, silence, or intonation, the participant's mental state is often communicated (Stake, 2013). Contextual reports of the participants' nonverbal behaviors such as intensity, uncertainty, and fears were supplied through the use of the handwritten notes, thus allowing for a more complete recollection and literal translation of the auditory data in the recorded interviews (Saldana, 2015). My positionality and reflexivity as the researcher was aided through the use of the interview transcripts (Berger, 2015). A copy of the digital transcript of the interview was given to each participant asking them to read and confirm their responses and the meanings associated with them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In order to standardize the process of data collection, an interview protocol was utilized for the semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). Methodological triangulation and an audit trail were used to enhance the dependability of the results of the study (Guion et al., 2011). Evidence concerning the study plan's development can be found in the research record's audit trail detailed in this document (Stake, 2013). The audit trail is comprised of uploaded articles, reflective field notes, and archival data that indicate the

documentations, changes, and additions that occurred in the course of the study (Yin, 2017). The auditable examination of my study is provided by the coding structure, synthesis of reports for transcript review, and memos regarding progress made on the research. I analyzed the archival data such as databases and government reports on women's entrepreneurship and business ownership in the United States and statistics on women-owned enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. I referred to my reflective journal notes during the data analysis phase in order to ensure the process of methods triangulation.

I located over 250 articles including popular media (magazine, newspaper), white papers, and company media, business, and government reports pertinent to my study. Despite the fact that these reports were used as sources to complement the semistructured interviews, they were not substantial enough for use in the literature review. In addition, I read and subsequently annotated approximately 300 peer-reviewed scholarly papers from scientific journals. I analyzed over 70 physical artifacts, such as government, media, and company reports, directly connected to my themes following the semistructured interviews, in order to proceed with the process of method triangulation with the aim of finding an answer to the research questions (Yin, 2017). I used this archival data set to develop deep, thick, rich information within the following themes to answer the study's two research questions: key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation; managing the macro environment; managing the meso environment; gendered leadership style; managing human resources; managing financial capital; targeting evolving market opportunities; entrepreneurial management skills; building social capital; gendered

leadership style; work–life balance; and gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders.

My cumulative experience of reading hundreds of sources assisted me in identifying themes that were empirically accurate, complete, value-added, credible, and fair by aiding me in questioning the meaning of repeated patterns of ideas and concepts. This process of interpretation defines the methodological triangulation process of sources of evidence to provide answers to the research questions and ascribe meaning to the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The methodological triangulation of multiple sources of data was undertaken to strengthen this study's contribution to the body of literature regarding women's entrepreneurial leadership, as interpreted and analyzed within the bounds of the study's conceptual framework (Jack & Raturi, 2006; Renz, Carrington, & Badger, 2018).

Summary and Transition

In this chapter I presented a case-by-case analysis of a total of nine individual cases followed by a cross-case analysis and synthesis process to provide answers for this multiple-case study's two research questions.

The first phase of data analysis involved the within-case analysis of data using the descriptive coding method to identify codes and categories from relevant segments that provide answers to the research questions. Based on the findings, I identified and presented a total of seven coding categories grounded in the conceptual framework of the study, and a total of 12 themes, leading to thick, rich data to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business'

start-up phase. The seven categories that enclose a total of 12 themes identified for this study were: gender; entrepreneurial leadership; market; money; management skills; macro environment; and meso environment.

Cross-case analysis and synthesis was used as the data analysis technique to incorporate critical findings of individual case studies and once themes were arranged across the multiple cases in this study. The 12 themes gleaned from raw data within each category are the following: key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation; managing the macro environment; managing the meso environment; gendered leadership style; managing human resources; managing financial capital; targeting evolving market opportunities; entrepreneurial management skills; building social capital; gendered leadership style; work–life balance; and gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the study's data, I employed methodological triangulation of the following data sources: interviews, journaling/reflective field notes, and literature. This triangulation provides enough in-depth information for the study to be replicated by future researchers. I analyzed and interpreted the multiple-case study results through the lens of the conceptual framework and presented how study findings add to the body of knowledge related the central topic of my study.

In Chapter 5, I present further interpretation of the study findings and how these interpretations compare or contrast with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Additionally, I describe how future research can build on the findings of this study and contribute to a deeper understanding of women entrepreneurial leaders in the United

States, their leadership practices, and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study using an exploratory, multiple-case research design was to gain insights into how women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity 5 years after their business' start-up phase. Most gendered entrepreneurship leadership data derives from U.S. studies utilizing quantitative, survey-based approaches and, thus lack in exploratory methods needed to offer a deeper understanding of gendered entrepreneurial leadership practices (Henry et al., 2015; Kirkwood, 2016). To address this gap on the implications of women's entrepreneurial leadership practices for enterprise longevity, consistent with the qualitative paradigm and to provide a strong basis for theory extension, a multiple-case study method was used to provide answers for the two research questions (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2017). This study is framed by McGrath and MacMillan's (2000) concept of entrepreneurial leadership, and Brush's (1992) concept of the intersectionality of gender and entrepreneurial leadership.

A multiple-case analysis of nine interviews and then thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis and analysis revealed the following 12 themes gleaned from raw data within each coding category: entrepreneurial motivation launched by key life experiences; managing the macro environment; managing the meso environment; gendered leadership style; managing human resources; managing financial capital; targeting evolving market opportunities; entrepreneurial management skills; building social capital; gendered leadership style; work–life balance; and gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this multiple-case study confirm or extend current knowledge in the discipline, with each case presenting examples of issues discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2. In this section, the study's findings are presented and reviewed in the context of the coding categories that emerged from the data analysis. I compare each of these seven categories with relevant concepts from the conceptual framework and the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I provide evidence from the nine semistructured interviews to support how the study's findings either confirm or disconfirm existing knowledge, or even extend it. Extension studies, such as this multiple-case study, provide not only replication evidence but they also support extending prior research results and can offer new and important theoretical directions (see Bonett, 2012).

Entrepreneurial Leadership

This study's findings confirmed those of seminal and subsequent theoretical and conceptual studies by Brush and colleagues (2009, 2014, 2018) utilizing the concept of entrepreneurial leader as one theoretically embedded within the intersectionality of gender construct. The participants' experiences confirm that entrepreneurial leadership can be utilized as a lens to view entrepreneurship as a gendered phenomenon and bears meaningful impact on the career development of women entrepreneurs (Brush, 1992; Harrison et al., 2015; McGrath & MacMillan, 2000). Welter et al.'s (2014) work supports the five constructs of gendered entrepreneurial behavior in this study's coding categories and the results of the study confirm the agency of women entrepreneurial leaders to

empower themselves as business owners and overcome social and economic barriers to business longevity (Wu & Zhang, 2019).

The findings of the study delineated and qualified that researchers must take into account the uniqueness of women's entrepreneurship, and additionally extend the conceptual framework to updated facets of gendered entrepreneurship such as the strong contribution of women's entrepreneurial leadership in national economic growth, the rise of Millennial-generation values in strengthening women's entrepreneurship aspirations, new family configurations to support women in business, empowerment of women's entrepreneurship through social and human capital building, and the proliferation of women's professional networks. Although studies continue to identify multiple barriers to women's entrepreneurial leadership aspirations (Wu et al., 2019), the findings of the study also diverge from this concept as a deeply ingrained challenge. The women in this study not only thrived in leading their businesses to longevity but also stated they found it easier to break through barriers confronted by previous generations given their access to education where they learned critical thinking about authority and power issues on the job, online training, financial resources, new forms of work schemas with the advent of the Internet, and new forms of family–work interface.

Market

According to Bates (2007), current entrepreneurship theory explaining business creation is generally organized around three basic constructs, and the first one of these constructs identified as *fundamental building blocks of business sustainability* is that of *market.* To support a successful business venture, an entrepreneur needs to have access to

markets (Kirzner, 1985; Clough et al., 2019). Bates et al. (2007) argued that while these constructs are pivotal to a successful business start-up, minority (women) novice entrepreneurs face barriers when attempting to access markets, money, and management skills (Welsh et al., 2018). The literature findings confirm that location is related to market reach (Berger & Kuckertz, 2016). The participants settled in locations where the entrepreneurial ecosystem was one friendly to high-performing entrepreneurs and offered availability of funding and human capital for women and minority, novice entrepreneurs. Such a favorable economic and regulatory business environment creates market opportunities accessible to women founders.

About half of my sample confirmed the importance of digital technologies to lower barriers to market entry for women entrepreneurs and allow a greater number of people to engage in international market exchange (Aldrich 2014). Though there are a variety of technologies that can fall under the label "digital," my results revealed how women entrepreneurs break the traditional restrictions to market access (Bates, 2002; Simmons et al., 2019) through what Nambisan (2016) defines as digital infrastructures, that is, digital technology tools and systems that offer communication, collaboration, and/or computing capabilities such as data analytics systems, cloud computing, and use of the Internet to communicate with stakeholders such as in online communities or social media. Women who were well versed in digital marketing training had a greater market reach for their products and services. This finding in my study confirms the literature that recommends that by leveraging digital technology, women-led SMEs can have greater market access to both local and international markets (Pergelova et al., 2019).

Money

The second of the three constructs embedded in current entrepreneurship theory and as part of the trifecta of *fundamental building blocks of business sustainability* as theorized by Bates (2007) is that of *money*. My study results provide confirmation that a woman entrepreneur needs to have access to money to launch and sustain a successful business (Aldrich, 1999; Balachandra, Briggs, Eddleston, & Brush, 2019). The literature reveals that while money is necessary for the entrepreneur to build a successful business, there is a gender bias that hinders the access to money for women entrepreneurs (Balachandra et al., 2019; Leitch et al., 2018). My results confirm that with a broader network, men entrepreneurs have greater access to private equity funding than women (Aaltio & Wang, 2015). Women entrepreneurs tend to be discriminated against by customers and suppliers, causing financial hardship (Shinnar et al., 2012).

My study results provide affirmation that even though women entrepreneurs need ongoing financial capital to ensure sustainability of their businesses (Brush et al., 2018), they were confronted with challenges in obtaining the financing needed (Leitch et al., 2018) in the form of loan denial and poor access to venture capital and angel investors. These challenges required the women in this study's sample to look for other means of financing their businesses at start-up, with most using personal funds or looking to their network of family and friends for funding (Welsh, Kaciak, Memili, & Minialai, 2018). Of course, a personal network funding scheme works for business launch if one's family and friends have financial means. Women coming from a middle- or lower-middle–class background can find themselves excluded from access to the financial capital needed for

business launch (Wu, Li, & Zhang, 2019), and research confirms such exclusion happens often to minority women (Tucker & Jones, 2019), the older woman entrepreneur (Ratten, 2018; Stirzaker, Galloway, & Potter, 2019), and women pursuing high-growth entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2019). This finding in my study confirms the literature that recommends that changes in regulations and advocacy efforts are needed to open up greater access to venture capital to encourage both business start-ups and high-growth entrepreneurship for women (State of Women's Business Report, 2017; Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Ribes-Giner, Moya-Clemente, Cervelló-Royo, & Perello-Marin, 2018).

Management Skills

The third of the three constructs embedded in current entrepreneurship theory and one of three *fundamental building blocks of business sustainability* as theorized by Bates (2007) is that of *management skills* (Aldrich, 1989; Gupta et al., 2019). To survive and thrive within an entrepreneurial ecosystem, a woman entrepreneurial leader must have strong management skills to manage human, social, and organizational capital as the foundation needed to sustain a business venture past the 5-year mark from start-up (Neumeyer & Santos, 2019). While some researchers have argued that there is no difference in the management style between the male and female entrepreneur, others have argued that women entrepreneurs have a unique management style that focuses on the values of the women such as nurturing and relationship building (Dean et al., 2019). My results confirm that women entrepreneurs have a management style that values employees and have used that style to build their business, capitalizing on the work–family structure (Brush, 1992; Adkins, Samaras, Gilfillan, & McWee, 2013).

The literature has shown that for business success, the woman entrepreneur must develop managerial competencies and that these competencies have been shown to be linked to a transformational leadership style (Bamiatzi et al., 2015). Bamiatzi et al. (2013) further suggested that for women leaders of SMEs it is even more important for them to have these competencies for enterprise success as the line between leader and manager is blurred. The leader of the SME functions as a visionary to engage their employees to perform effectively, thereby helping the organization create growth (Galloway et al., 2015). My study results provide confirmation that women develop the competencies needed to run a successful business and that those competencies are characteristic of a transformational leadership style.

Gender

To understand the role of gender in entrepreneurship, a poststructuralist feminist stance is needed away from the masculinization of the entrepreneurial leader (Dean et al., 2017; Hamilton, 2014; Henry et al., 2015). Drawing on the insights of Bates et al. (2007) for an initial platform, Brush (1992) and Brush et al. (2009) argued that to holistically study women's entrepreneurship one must also consider norms, values, and external expectations (Elam, 2008). Markets, money, and management skills must be defined to include the uniqueness of women's entrepreneurship in regional and national economic growth (Dean, Larsen, & Ford, 2019). Additionally, *gender* can be extended to represent family and household factors influencing one's entrepreneurial practices (Brush et al., 2009; Welsh et al., 2018). The findings from my study confirm that being a woman business owner creates unique challenges that male entrepreneurs do not face, including

barriers to accessing markets, money, and management skills (Welsh et al., 2018). Entrepreneurship has traditionally been associated with a masculine identity and women have been encouraged to adopt those masculine traits to become a successful business owner (Hamilton, 2014; Lewis, 2015; Lewis, 2013). My study results can be regarded as confirmation that women are expected to lead and manage their business from a masculine perspective to be seen as a credible business owner who is valued by customers and other business owners.

Much of the literature on entrepreneurship has been biased in its description of the entrepreneur, viewing them through a masculine lens (Conroy & Weller, 2016). Women deal with conflicts in leadership identity and what constitutes a successful entrepreneurial leader due to the masculine approaches and higher value placed on the male leader (Diaz-Garcia & Welter, 2013; Marlow & McAdam, 2013). Research has shown that women construct identities differently and accomplish their business practices through a gendered perspective, which includes balancing work and family (Chasserio et al, 2014; Diaz-García & Welter, 2011; Stead, 2017). The finding in my study confirms the literature that recommends the need to consider the constantly evolving nature of the entrepreneurial identity when gender intersects with social identities (Chasserio et al., 2014; Diaz-Garcia & Welter, 2014; Hamilton, 2014; Stead, 2017).

Macro Environment

The macro/meso environment captures considerations beyond the market, including factors such as expectations of social and cultural norms for women entrepreneurs. Macro environment typically includes national policies, strategies, and

cultural and economic influences (Dopfer et al., 2004; Pitelis, 2005). The macro environment influences women's entrepreneurship leadership by way of spatial-institutional contexts (Ahl et al., 2006) and Welter's notion (2011) that place itself is gendered, reflecting local institutions. National economics and social conditions within regional contexts of a nation can have a profound effect on women's entrepreneurial leadership in terms of barriers to entrepreneurship entry and long-term sustainability. (Ribes-Giner et al., 2018). The findings from my study confirm that for women entrepreneurs to operate a successful enterprise, they not only need access to markets, money, and management skills, they must also be able to operate within the economic and social conditions of their regions.

The macro environment consists of things that women have little or no control over and limited ability to change (Brush et al., 2009). Brush et al. (2009) have posited that those social, cultural, and institutional arrangements will determine not only how women perceive opportunities for building a business but also how the business is viewed by others. My study results align with the findings in the literature that while women need to operate within societal constraints, they have confronted challenges in obtaining the support they need in the form of market, money, and management skills. For women entrepreneurs to be supported and make changes to the existing norms, more of them are required in male-dominated industries (Brush et al., 2009).

Meso Environment

As previously noted, the macro/meso environment captures considerations beyond the market, including factors such as expectations of social and cultural norms for

women entrepreneurs (Brush et al., 2009). The meso environment reflects support policies, services, and initiatives (Dopfer et al., 2004; Pitelis, 2005). The findings from my study confirm that networks and business associations are integral to ensure success of the women entrepreneur's business. From my study, more knowledge can be added to the extant literature on the significance of meso environmental factors and spaces, such as incubators and entrepreneurial universities for women entrepreneurs to firmly embed their businesses within their regional or local entrepreneurial ecosystem (Brush et al., 2019). My study also confirms the value of women entrepreneurial leaders negotiating their meso environment to better leverage digital technology for business expansion to international markets (Pergelova et al, 2019).

Literature reveals that networks and social capital have an influence on the woman entrepreneur's access to financial capital (Brush et al., 2009). These networks can not only assist in providing access to financial capital, human resource capital, and potential clients, but also provide much-needed emotional support and encouragement (Welter, 2011). The findings from my study confirm the literature that recommends the need to extend conceptual frameworks used to study women entrepreneurs' leadership practices to include the meso environment to better understand the challenges confronted by women entrepreneurs.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations, a characteristic of every research study, are those elements of the study that are out of the researcher's control and can impact the trustworthiness of the study results (Golafshani, 2003; Sinkovics et al., 2008). The first limitation I addressed in

my study was that of being a woman. My gender could inadvertently contribute to gender bias and judging research participants and their responses solely by the values and standards of my own gender (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2011). To minimize female gender bias, I asked a male debriefer skilled in qualitative methods to analyze the same data and the results were compared and contrasted with my own results (Anney, 2014). This additional trustworthiness check also mitigated this limitation as the external debriefer, Prof. Nicholas Harkiolakis, is both a qualitative and quantitative methodologist and published author in research methodology (Harkiolakis, 2017).

The second limitation of the study was that the case study method has received scholarly criticism for not offering statistical generalization, which prevents transferability of data results or the general population from which the sample of nine U.S. women entrepreneurs originated (Yin, 2017). This limitation was mitigated by using a multiple-case study design. I utilized the multiple-case study method for my investigation as it strengthens external validity and cross-case comparison, safeguarding against observer bias (Stake, 2013). The multiple-case study method advances theory extension and does not require representativeness as a relationship of sample and population (Ridder, 2017). While I made use of the multiple-case study to enhance a profound understanding of women entrepreneurs' leadership practices, the data collection method was limited to nine participants and based on the data saturation (Maxwell, 2013). Participants' willingness to answer the interview questions in a straightforward and honest manner contributed to the third research limitation, although it was assumed that participant responses to interview questions by the researcher would be truthful and

transparent (Sinkovics et al., 2008). Given that my study on women entrepreneurial leaders took into account national, economic, and political conditions, the rich, thick descriptions of the interview data and checking for researcher's reflexivity mitigated limitations on the interview process.

Recommendations

Through my research I have provided insights into the leadership practices of women entrepreneurs in the United States and the implications of those practices 5 years after start-up. Findings from this research have shown that the women entrepreneurial leaders in my sample have a unique leadership style specific to their gender that has contributed to enterprise longevity. Future research should promote and capture alternative views of entrepreneurial leadership that aim to create new possibilities for women's working lives, and in which the diversity of their experiences are captured and disseminated. This study was exploratory and the findings provided opportunities for both qualitative replication and quantitative validation in future research.

Methodological Recommendation 1: Qualitative Replication

The data for my research was collected from regions across the United States. There is the need to replicate this exploratory multiple-case study in other geographical locations as research has shown that leadership behaviors have cultural implications (Aritz & Walker, 2014). This is supported by participants' references to particular circumstances such as cultural environment, weak job market, and gender-based challenges in their specific locations, and relate to the following three themes: managing the macro environment (seven of the nine participants managed their leadership practices

within the context of national policies, laws, and their cultural environment; for example, P4 stated that San Diego has a lot of military and individuals with PTSD); key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation (for example, P7 referred to the news industry in Los Angeles being not at all supportive of women); and managing the meso environment (six of the nine participants managed their leadership practices within the context of regional support, policies, services, occupational networks, and business associations).

Additional exploratory multiple-case studies with participants selected from other geographical locations will greatly enhance the existing knowledge on the leadership practices of women entrepreneurs and the implication of those practices 5 years after start-up. Researchers could also explore the meanings that entrepreneurs ascribe to failures, setbacks, and survival, raising questions as to how these meanings are constructed, whether they are contradictory, and what factors are shaping them.

I believe an important note for future researchers to consider is challenging classical models of leadership by considering alternative economic theories that are known to better capture the dynamic nature of women's entrepreneurial leadership experience, such as Schumpeter's (1934) theory of economic development. Entrepreneurial research remains grounded in traditional conceptual frameworks that exclude a gendered perspective of entrepreneurial leadership (Dean & Ford, 2017; Henry et al., 2015). The adoption of Schumpeter's theory of economic development as a lens through which to study the experiences of women entrepreneurial leaders can engage future researchers with new questions and methodologies (Dean et al., 2019). The

findings of this study support this considering certain themes that emerged. The theme managing the macro environment describes how participants managed their leadership practices within the context of national policies, laws, and their cultural environment. P4 referred to community, P9 to industry, and P5 to early life experiences. For the theme managing the meso environment, it is possible to glean men's and women's different approaches to business. For example, P5 stated that men's "idea is to grow it sell it, and my idea is grow it, sell it, maintain it, expand it … and include other community members, build a better community". However, she further noted that she "reached out to men all the time and asked them to share the knowledge with me, their advice with me. And when I asked, they gave it to me". Also, on the basis of the data, there is the indication that women are calling on other women, with P9 sharing how connections with other women from her past supported her leadership ideas. With respect to the theme of gendered leadership style, which describes how participants managed their leadership style within the context of gender to include family and household factors, most of the participants agreed that their leadership style was influenced by their gender and their family and household factors. In particular, P5 noted how being a mother influenced her leadership style, along with hiring and scheduling practices. This recommendation to challenge classical models of leadership is also based on data in the theme managing human resources. Here, for example, P4 noted: "It may be gender specific because women tend to be- the, the operatives behind the scenes."

Methodological Recommendation 2: Quantitative Validation through Mixed Methods

I believe that a quantitative research method such as a survey may provide additional insight into the transferability of my exploration into women entrepreneurial leaders' daily experiences. Despite the fact that several portions of my study provided rigorous results that converge with the views of all the participants, the strength of their voices may alter based on workplace locations. This is supported by the data, based on participants' comments regarding cultural and work-based environments in their specific locations (e.g., Los Angeles and San Diego), and relates to the themes of key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation, managing the macro environment, and managing the meso environment. A quantitative study might substantiate discrepancies and similarities not picked up on through qualitative research and may generate further recommendations for future studies.

Certainly, there is a positivist approach to doing research that dominates the literature with standardized data collection and statistical multivariate techniques for data analysis (Harkiolakis, 2017). Previous research on the individual entrepreneur as well as firm-level studies use instruments developed and tested on samples of men, hence characteristics of women or their firms may be missed (Dean & Ford, 2017; Henry, 2015). The efficacy of such techniques in explaining real-life phenomena is increasingly questioned in the methodology literature as being relatively quick to yield results yet an almost mechanical approach to analysis of what is termed as the dynamic entrepreneurship process (Brush et al., 2009). Given these issues raised by

methodologists in the study of women entrepreneurs and based on the data produced in this study and specifically related to the themes of managing the macro environment, gendered leadership style, managing human resources, entrepreneurial management skills, building social capital, gendered leadership style, work–life balance, and gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders, I would recommend that a quantitative approach be part of a mixed methods study for a broader perspective and stronger generalizability than can be provided by a qualitative multiple-case study design regarding women entrepreneurs' leadership behaviors. Given the limitations of a qualitative multiple-case study design, incorporating a constructivist/interpretive paradigm with any quantitative components from the positivist approach may create a unique research design to answer questions about women entrepreneurial leadership practices (Stenz, Clark, & Matkin, 2012).

Recommendations for Future Research

Some of the themes that emanated from my study provide opportunities for future research that will allow for a more contextual examination of the leadership practices of women entrepreneurs. In particular, they could be used as a basis in future research to explore how a full or partial application of specific leadership practices can improve the performance and sustainability of small to medium enterprises in the United States. Based on the data and findings of this study, I have developed relevant recommendations for further research in three areas in particular.

Entrepreneurial competencies for business success. The theme 'entrepreneurial management skills' provided insight into the competencies needed for building a

successful business. There is a need to explore competencies at various stages of business growth to understand the impact they have on enterprise sustainability. Another key area for further research is a greater understanding of how women entrepreneurs develop those competencies, how those competencies interact, and how they are used for business success. Entrepreneurs have acknowledged the need to develop competencies to compete in the current knowledge-based environment (Mitchelmore & Rowley, 2013a). As my study revealed the need for women entrepreneurs to have management skills in the form of competencies to remain successful, gaining a better understanding of competency development is needed.

Impact of women entrepreneurs' social capital on financing. The theme 'building social capital' indicated that the women entrepreneurs interviewed in this study have built strong networks that have helped lead their businesses to sustainability. The impact of these relationships on the performance and growth of their enterprises needs to be investigated. It is also important to understand if women have different network structures than men and how those networks may affect funding. Brush et al. (2017) found that women entrepreneurs continue to experience a gender gap in financing and the embeddedness of entrepreneurs in networks can lead to the connections needed for funding. Since my study has revealed the presence of strong networks among women entrepreneurs, it is equally important to evaluate how those networks differ from their male counterparts' and how those networks may affect the potential for funding.

Impact of gendered leadership style on business success. The theme 'gendered leadership style' for RQ2 indicated that the women entrepreneurs interviewed in this

study have a unique style of leadership that has helped them lead their businesses to be successful past the 5-year mark. Women entrepreneurs are judged based on the masculine hegemonic norms for success, thereby finding them as underperforming against a range of measures (Dean et al., 2019). To address the subordination of women entrepreneurs, further exploration of the woman entrepreneur in relation to their wider socioeconomic environment is needed. Further research should be conducted to consider the agency of the entrepreneur and the power relations shaping the meaning of success, failure, growth, and survival. Additionally, historical analyses can reveal the structural role that institutions play in the shaping of women's experiences. There is an inherent value to be gained from adopting an oral history approach as it contributes a well-grounded feminist critical stance (Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Dean & Ford, 2017). Such an approach, termed also the 'history from below', brings attention to previously unheard or unspoken stories and voices that are absent from mainstream history (Gluck & Patel, 2016).

Implications

Positive Social Change

One important finding from my study is that the barriers challenging sustainability for women's enterprises must be addressed at the micro, meso, and macro levels as the impact is felt across communities and the nation (Brush et al., 2019). Gender is one aspect of this discrimination and remains significant in determining inequity in access to network, financing, and markets for women entrepreneurs. Those women who have emerged as entrepreneurial leaders mostly found their own way around the socioeconomic barriers before them. As such, this study may support positive social

change in offering recommendations for practice and policy to understand if the creation of alternate work settings such as women leading successful SMEs will impact the culture at large. Further, researchers can give women entrepreneurial leaders a voice that is shaped by their distinct experiences with workplace discrimination and gender inequities in the business sphere (Cheraghi et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2015).

Through this study, a sample of women entrepreneurs had the opportunity to voice their experiences regarding both gender and entrepreneurial leadership, an area that remains largely unexplored and undocumented (Brush et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2015). Capturing the differences made by women entrepreneurs also contributes to social change by opening new avenues for business growth and building new bridges of communication between the business world and society (Chasserio et al., 2016). With this study's results documenting the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur, this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo in existing formal work structures and promoting more diversity in the world of privately owned firms.

Policy Implications

This study has critical implications for policymakers in that the women entrepreneurial leaders asked that private firms, universities, and government and entrepreneurial business organizations put increased effort into establishing networks for women entrepreneurs. The formulation of effective entrepreneurship policy for women entrepreneurs is one that needs to be developed in synchrony between policymakers, practitioners, and scholars (Arshed, Carter, & Mason, 2014). There is one point of caution to be noted for all collaborating actors on developing entrepreneurship policy to

address gender inequities. Entrepreneurship policy is a delicate balance. Offering women-only networks and services may be well-intended interventions, but can also unintentionally perpetuate women's secondary position in the context of equality, business, and life. Recent researchers have recently highlighted that further support on this issue is not merely a vague concern for women entrepreneurs (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; McAdam, Harrison, & Leitch, 2018).

Institutional Implications

According to institutional economists, informal institutions supporting entrepreneurship are classified by gender roles, ideologies, social norms, religion, family, and codes of conduct; formal institutions are classified by economic rules, political rules, regulations, and education (Giménez, & Calabrò, 2018; McAdam et al., 2018). Although formal institutions are highly important for encouraging women to participate in entrepreneurship, there is still a gap in the literature that assesses the impact of gender equality laws, social programs, and political rules in women's entrepreneurship literature. From a practical perspective, the results of studies on women entrepreneurial leaders can also provide important evidence on how institutional environments affect women-owned ventures and business longevity, and thus improve the lives of women and their businesses, which leads to economic and social development (Brush et al., 2019).

A growing number of scholars recognize the importance of different contexts in which women entrepreneurs operate (Hughes et al., 2012; Noguera et al., 2015). Consequently, the need to develop a deeper understanding of women's entrepreneurship

across different cultures, social norms, and institutions has been strongly advocated. As my study sheds light on the leadership journeys of women entrepreneurs who have achieved business sustainability beyond the 5-year benchmark, implications can be surmised on financing women entrepreneurs in an institutional context. Depending on the institutional context, industry, and age of small firms, entrepreneurs' personal networks were found to have a significant and positive effect on the performance of small businesses (Stam et al., 2014).

Based on my research and findings, there is a clear indication that social capital is a critical factor in the start-up phase, in addition to the fact that the use of personal sources of funding is positively affected by network diversity in the case of women entrepreneurs. Most likely because of their increased resilience and inner strength acquired when striving against adversarial institutional conditions, women entrepreneurs have also been found to improve their business performance while facing obstacles (Brush et al., 2019). Mentoring, role models, networking, and socialization events, both self-generated and institutionally provided, may all affect this phenomenon. We focus on one such initiative, the creation of women-only entrepreneurial networks as an instrument of regional entrepreneurship policy (Simmons et al., 2018).

Theoretical Implications

The lack of exploratory research on women's entrepreneurial leadership practices and their implications for enterprise longevity is a critical knowledge gap resulting in leadership theoretical frameworks lacking diversity, generalizability of findings, and gender inclusivity (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Henry et al., 2015; Yousafzai et al., 2015).

Scholars concur on an existing research gap regarding the role of gender in entrepreneurial leadership practices and its effect on enterprise longevity (Bendell, Sullivan, & Marvel, 2019; Devine et al., 2019). The findings of this empirical study contributed original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework, and are aimed at advancing knowledge on gender-inclusive leadership practices in SMEs. The entrepreneurial leader can be a catalyst for change that is needed for women to advance in their careers, providing socioeconomic development among women business owners (Dean et al., 2019).

My study confirms the importance of anchoring women's experiences in their specific social and economic contexts and the need for more multi-level analysis to capture the complex interplay of micro-level individual, meso-level organizational, and macro-level national influences. These are all pathways of future theoretical investigations that better inform academics, policymakers, financiers, and women entrepreneurs. Through empirical investigation into women's entrepreneurial leadership to fill the gap of missing knowledge in the theoretical foundations of the conceptual framework, this study contributes original, qualitative data to social capital theory and intersectionality theory that may prove useful in future related research.

Recommendations for Practice

Several interesting findings from my study can be derived for practitioners. Specifically, my results are informative for women entrepreneurial leaders as they show that women need to find the environment that provides the necessary resources—financial, human, or social capital—to successfully grow their businesses. Women

entrepreneurs must pursue their professional training and development, possibly through competency-based certificate programs now offered to non-degree students at many business schools, in order to adjust to today's everchanging business environment, including that of digital transformation within small and medium-sized businesses. Entrepreneurship, like most things in business, not only does not remain static but changes rapidly in today's global marketplace.

To sustain entrepreneurial longevity, women entrepreneurs must focus on what is needed from them as business people and leaders from the business start-up phase, including long-term financing, an affordable location, and connecting with the local community to better respond to changes in their immediate economic and regulatory environments, a combination of both the meso and macro environments of entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009). Most of the women interviewed in this study were not aiming to build large, expansive businesses. Yet, for those women wanting to pursue an aggressive growth strategy for their businesses, they will need to build networks that help them raise risk capital and recruit new employees to satisfy growth needs (Neumeyer et al., 2018).

On the basis of my study's results it is evident that women need to focus on developing their bridging social capital, as it will enable them to access resources that are outside of their strong-tie networks, and therefore will contribute to the survivability of their ventures, and that includes moving much of their business to e-commerce functionality (Wu et al., 2019). Supporting organizations such as universities, incubators, and small business development offices need to promote and incentivize activities,

initiatives, and meetings that help women entrepreneurs to diversify their networks and thereby increase their bridging social capital (Neumeyer et al., 2018).

Conclusions

While there has been a great deal of research on the gender differences between male and female business owners, there is a lack of research on the experiences of women entrepreneurial leaders and the factors that promote or hinder their success. This highlights the need for a new perspective that integrates the human and social relationships needed when women decide to start their own business (Brush, 1992). The integration of human and social capital will allow a more complete perspective of the complex nature in which society and business operate (Brush, 1992; Cole, 2009). The number of women business owners in the United States has doubled over the past 20 years (American Express OPEN, 2017) and their contribution to the economy has been studied by researchers; knowing what factors contribute to the success of these businesses is important (Cabrera & Mauricio, 2017; Terjesen & Amóros, 2010).

An entrepreneur needs to have access to markets (Kirzner, 1985; Clough et al., 2019), money (Aldrich, 1999; Balachandra et al., 2019), and management skills (in the form of human, social, and organizational capital) (Aldrich, 1989; Gupta et al., 2019) to launch a business. Bates et al. (2007) argued that while these constructs are pivotal to a successful business start-up, minority (women) novice entrepreneurs face barriers when attempting to access markets, money, and management skills (Welsh et al., 2018). To be successful and seen as valuable contributors to entrepreneurship, women need to find the environment that provides the necessary resources—financial, human, or social capital—

to successfully grow their business. Due to the rapidly changing business environment, women entrepreneurs must focus on what is needed from them as business people and leaders from the business start-up phase, including long-term financing, an affordable location, and connecting with the local community to better respond to changes in their immediate economic and regulatory environment, a combination of both the meso and macro environments of entrepreneurship (Brush et al., 2009).

The leadership practices of women entrepreneurs and the implications of those practices was explored in the present study. This study potentially bears social change implications in understanding if the creation of alternate work settings such as women leading successful SMEs will impact the culture at large. By documenting the leadership practices of the woman entrepreneur, this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo in existing formal work structures and promoting more diversity in the workplace.

The women in this study played a pivotal role in understanding the leadership practices of women entrepreneurs and the implications of those practices for enterprise longevity. They provided an in-depth insight into the challenges they endured during the start-up phase of their businesses due to gender. Although they have been judged based on the masculine hegemonic norms for success, these women have persevered to create successful businesses. While women are making strides and being recognized as important contributors to the national economy, future research should promote and capture alternative views of entrepreneurial leadership that aim to create new possibilities

for women's working lives, and in which the diversity of their experiences is captured and disseminated.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction and Recruitment

Good day, I am a doctoral student at Walden University inviting you to participate in my research about the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase. The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership practices of women entrepreneurial leaders and the implications of these practices for enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase. I believe that your experience would be a great contribution to the study. Therefore, I am reaching out to discern if you might have interest in participating in the research.

The study is important as the findings may provide future female leaders of small to medium-sized enterprises with the tools and strategies needed to address inequities in employment faced by women. Additionally, leadership research often focuses heavily on studies conducted from the masculine perspective and this contribution would add to the female leadership body of knowledge. Finally, the social change impact of this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo in existing formal work structures and promoting more diversity in the workplace. Economically, these benefits both the individual worker and the company as a whole, while also benefiting the society that the worker lives within.

If you would be interested in being a part of this study please review and return the signed consent form which is attached to this email. If you would like to request additional information, you may reply to this email. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Debra Howard

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

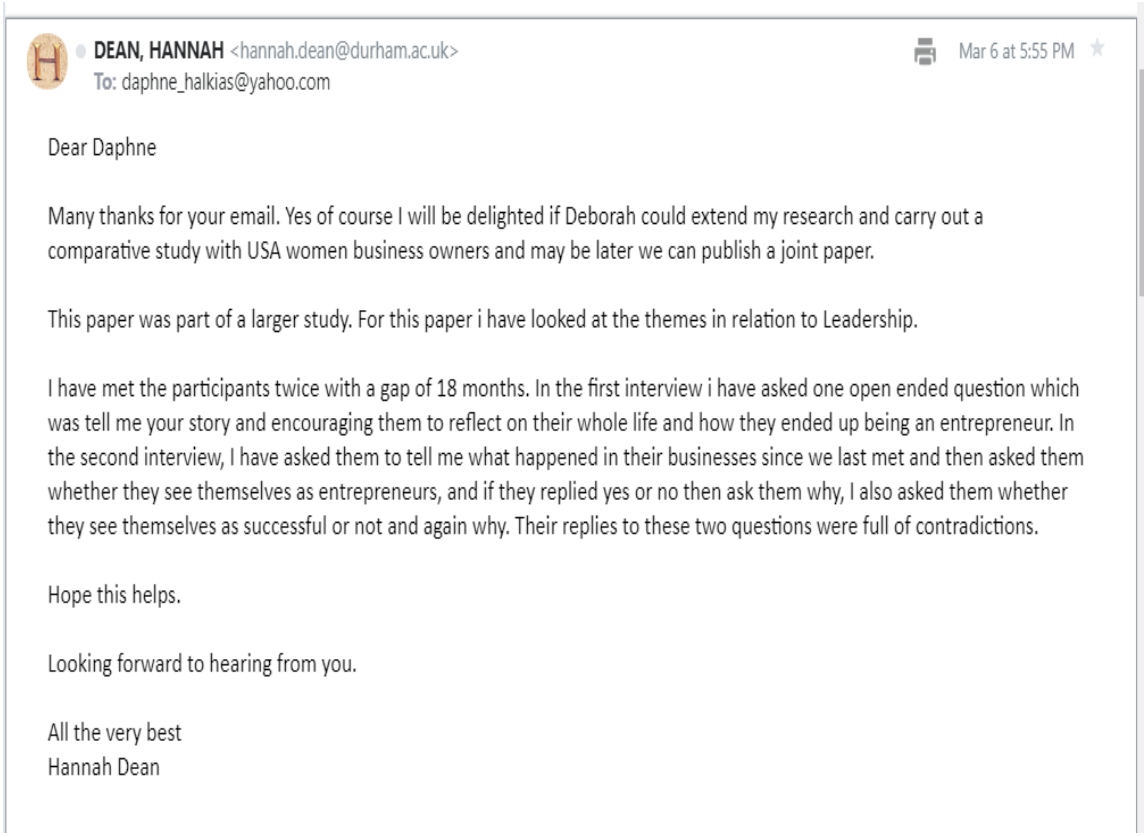
Age____

Type of Business____

Age of Business____

1. Please tell me your story by reflecting on your life, and why you chose to be an entrepreneur. Can you recall any specific circumstances, events or decisions that led you to entrepreneurship?
2. What personal traits do you believe have supported your journey as an entrepreneurial leader?
3. How do you believe your gender influenced you on becoming an entrepreneur?
4. Do you believe that being a woman has offered any advantages in your leadership development ? If so, can you please give me some specific examples ?
5. How has your leadership style helped you as an entrepreneur?
6. How would you describe the ways in which your leadership style hindered you as an entrepreneur?
7. How would you describe the main challenges you experienced as an entrepreneurial leader due to gender at the start-up phase of your business?
8. You have led your business to sustainability past the five-year mark, a first stage benchmark for many economists of a successful entrepreneur. How is the goal of sustainability for your business prominent in your day to day thinking of management responsibility?
9. How do you describe your application of management responsibilities that led your business to sustainability beyond 5-years?
10. Once your business moved past the start-up phase, at about year 2, what else do you believe about your leadership style as a woman entrepreneur helped you lead your business to sustainability past the five-year mark.
11. Every entrepreneurial leader runs into problems and even failures as a manager of one's own business. What would you say was the greatest problem you confronted in leading your business and how did your qualities as a leader help support you in its resolution?
12. What challenges, if any, do you experience today as a successful entrepreneurial leader due to gender ?

Appendix C: Permission to use Interview Protocol



DEAN, HANNAH <hannah.dean@durham.ac.uk>
To: daphne_halkias@yahoo.com

Mar 6 at 5:55 PM

Dear Daphne

Many thanks for your email. Yes of course I will be delighted if Deborah could extend my research and carry out a comparative study with USA women business owners and may be later we can publish a joint paper.

This paper was part of a larger study. For this paper i have looked at the themes in relation to Leadership.

I have met the participants twice with a gap of 18 months. In the first interview i have asked one open ended question which was tell me your story and encouraging them to reflect on their whole life and how they ended up being an entrepreneur. In the second interview, I have asked them to tell me what happened in their businesses since we last met and then asked them whether they see themselves as entrepreneurs, and if they replied yes or no then ask them why, I also asked them whether they see themselves as successful or not and again why. Their replies to these two questions were full of contradictions.

Hope this helps.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

All the very best
Hannah Dean

Source:

Dean, H., & Ford, J. (2017). Discourses of entrepreneurial leadership: Exposing myths and exploring new approaches. *International Small Business Journal*, *35*(2), 178-196. doi:10.1177/0266242616668389

Appendix D: Coding and Theme Examples for RQ1: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe their leadership practices?

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
Participant 1	"I was sitting in a lobby of a hotel waiting for my ride to go to a conference and I spoke to a lady, who told me that I had more spark for what I was doing than any man she has ever met and we need more people like me, to bring the balance back to a very male oriented world of entrepreneurship. I could easily say, that my mother had always built up confidence and fearlessness as a single trait that has helped me all the way from dreaming, to conceptualizing to materializing a Global company within a short span of six years. I had decided even when I was five that I will be a business woman, selling handmade greeting cards and at times reading out the stock exchange part of the newspaper as my reading material for homework."	Gender	Key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation
Participant 2	"I think there's a relatability. Granted, I think if I wasn't an expert in my domain expertise- It wouldn't matter as much. But because I'm an expert and I'm a woman I think there is a, a strong comfort, um, and I can give you, I guess, one example of this. So just this week, uh, I was asked to, um, come in and meet with a woman entrepreneur. She runs a comm- a very successful communications firm. I've known her for quite some time. And you know, I'm really the first consultant she's bringing in to truly sort of share everything with full transparency, you know? 'Here's our financials, here's my vision for growth,' you know? 'That could mean, you know, acquisition or selling this business after five years. Um, how do I align my workforce planning, goal planning, um, with that?' So I, I do think there is this stronger comfort and willingness to be transparent versus some guy	Entrepreneurial leadership	Gendered leadership style

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	from, you know, the private bank up state."		
	"I am very focused, regular, I mean, to a point where it's a weekly discussion with the team. Um, around, you know, clients in pipeline, I do client segmentation, um, again, all around this alignment. I look at the numbers, profitability, the revenue, the run rates, um, so those things, to me, um, oh and overlaying that, like no services business is successful without retaining your best in class talent, right?"		Managing human resources
	"So I think part of it is just what I'm looking at and how frequently I'm looking at it. And then how do I, how do I translate that in the form of communication to my team? So if, just from like, my financials perspective, um, I look at that and review those in depth- Monthly, if not sooner, or you know, more regularly. Um, I, I mean, I even look at like, okay, well what, with every large new client I look at like, what new tools or technology or investments in the business might make sense. I actually discuss those with my team and let them share opinion and weigh in."		Managing financial capital
Participant 3	"I would, I would say that the thing that really catapulted me into entrepreneurship was after incorporating the crochet business, not being able to find a job with ease. Which had been my experience prior to setting up a formal business. Um, I became extremely depressed with the process of looking for jobs- I maxed out on unemployment three times, completely- by the time I was 30 and I, I just got to a point where it was either you're going to do this thing that you started or you're going to be unhappy for the rest of your life."	Market	Managing the macro environment

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
Participant 4	"I had the-Need in the community to figure out why we are not incorporating on the spectrum. But not just on the spectrum, but I live in San Diego where we have lot of, of military and a lot individuals with PTSD. Our health, uh mental health system which is outside of you look at people on the spectrum, people with mental health issues PTSD, we have what I would call the cognitive spectrum, And I thought, 'You know what, there's a need here to figure out how to get them trained or retrained and into the workplace'."	Money	Managing the macro environment
	"I've noticed that the men in my circle or the men that I come across their idea is to grow it sell it, and my idea is grow it, maintain it, expand it to include in, in, and include other community members, build a better community."		Managing the meso environment
	"But you know I'm really having trouble putting myself out there and just wanting to kind of be behind the scenes and make things go. And um, you know so I think that might have been a limitation for me, but I don't know that that's gender. It may be gender specific because women tend to be- the, the operatives behind the scenes. Um, but reaching my market that has been my, and, and you think given my company is actually a training ground for high what, high functioning individuals on the cognitive spectrum. So hiring individuals with, with, with um that are on the cognitive spectrum that I would call it, so you think that's where my challenges would be- but not at all. My challenges were always getting sales."		Managing human resources
	"Very creative in how you get things paid, and, and um, and paying really close attention to you know, the costs and uh because for my business everything's been you know with the exception of a couple small business loans everything's been home grown. I mean everything been out of my pocket so, in the		Managing financial capital

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	business, so it's been really challenging."		
Participant 5	"I was raised in an environment where, um, I never felt really slighted, um, as far as opportunity by boys or men. Um, I was a kind of a tomboy and I hung out with a bunch of boys when I was a young adolescent. I would play tackle and did pranks and kick the can and hung out with my boy cousins. Um, I always felt really safe and protected and equal to them. I learned also how to - you know, how to stand up for myself."	Management Skills	Managing the macro environment
	"I reached out to men all the time and asked them to share the knowledge with me, their advice with me. And when I asked, they gave it to me."		Managing the meso environment
	"My company is built on ... built with maybe, employees and contractors that that need flexible schedules. So we have one full-time person. The rest all work up to 40 hours, and they have a completely flexible schedule. And that is from being a mom. That's from being a person who had a baby and it changed my life, and that's the reason I got into this business, and that ... I kind of use that as my model. I hire people who have, it could be an elderly parent at home. It could be a child who's disabled. I have I think four people that raised their kids working with us ... working from their homes, 30 hours a week. And they balanced parenting and they had a really great professional role. So I have to say that, you know, really specifically being a woman entrepreneur, that impacted the way I hire people and what I allowed as far as schedules and flexibility."		Gendered leadership style
	"My employees stay. You know, we have very little turnover. Um, and I		Managing human resources

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	think it's because of the leadership strategies we put in place to have very clear culture and values. And our culture is defined as teamwork, resilient, flexible, smart, and resourceful, and respectful, ethical."		
	"You know, money's coming in and going out, and as you grow you have to figure out where you want to spend the money on the people."		Managing financial capital
Participant 6	"As a woman I think I was more invested in my employees- Which created more family, uh, environment and it created loyalty."	Macro environment	Managing the macro environment Gendered leadership style
Participant 7	"I think being a woman I'm a naturally good listener. I very naturally care about the clients that work with us**.** So I don't just see my client as revenue. I see them as people through our services that we're taking really good care of. So I think being a woman, um, uh, and having the natural traits of caring and good listening-has enabled me, um, to be more successful. I think is also, it also enables me to build a really great environment for my employees, again, as a mom who had a hard time finding balance in my life and having a hard time finding an employer who would respect that I say to my team, you know, work from wherever you feel you need to work from."	Meso environment	Managing the meso environment Gendered leadership style
Participant 8	"I would say that that my ability to take all sorts of information and analyze what move, you know, how the move didn't just affect getting what you wanted to get done affected the bigger picture, too. I would say that that is a strength of mine and I think that that is actually, with generalities, a female strength- of being able to think of, you know, not just like, okay, I want to get X done and I'm going to achieve it through doing this, but what else does that impact and how does that move me? Okay, that gets my micro goal done but does it contribute to the, you know, the ultimate goal? Is this moving us in the direction that we want to go in?"	Gender	Gendered leadership style

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
Participant 9	"It's really, honestly, an idea I had in graduate school. It really started then as I learned about, you know, the job of being a school psychologist and sort of went through the training and-and had some experience in the schools. Even from the very beginning, like I said, as a student I felt like there was probably a different way to do what we do- With less sort of bureaucracy and um, less sort of restrictions. Probably the real impetus for making that happen was having kids. So, when I had my first child I realized, you know, there was no way I was going to go back to the eight to five, kind of requirements of the job that I had. And so that pushed me to think about, you know, really developing, you know, the idea that had been floating in my head for years into an-an, into an actually plan."	Entrepreneurial leadership	Key life experiences launch entrepreneurial motivation
	"In my industry it's not unusual. I don't know that gender has played a huge role. Because mental health and education are predominantly female um, dominant-it probably is perceived as fairly logical and expected that a female might be the person who delivers this service and who's, you know-had this idea or whatever."		Managing the macro environment
	"So, I met up with um, a couple of women that I had known many, many years prior, probably been ten years since we had seen each other. Um, back, actually back from gradual school, so it had been about ten years, this is 2011. Um, and we ran into each other at a conference and started talking you know, reconnecting and, 'What are you doing?', 'What are you doing?' and they were both doing some contract work as well and kind of having the same thoughts and feelings about doing it well, you know, and that working independently felt... didn't feel as good as it used to because you didn't feel like you were able to complete assessments as-as, with the quality that, you know, that you		Managing the meso environment

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	wanted to. So, we talked about, 'Well, maybe we could help each other out,' you know? Maybe we could, you know, 'Let me talk to the school where I do contracting and see if they'll, they're open to, you know, having you come participate in some evaluations when needed,' and that kind of a thing. Uh, I knew a speech therapist who was also doing some contracting-contracting as well and so, you know, brought her into that equation too, knowing that we needed a couple different disciplines to participate. Um, and it kind of grew from there into, 'Well, you know, maybe we should all go into business together and-and market ourselves as a team versus an independent contractor.' Um, and so we started that and-and the business just literally flew, you know"		

Appendix E: Coding and Theme Examples for RQ2: How do women entrepreneurial leaders in the United States describe the implications of their leadership practices on enterprise longevity five years after their business' start-up phase?

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
Participant 1	"We need to have incremental value methodology, a mechanism that supports and uplifts people to do their jobs better, share with them your concerns about the growth patterns and your vision. It is very important that there is a fair share of responsibilities that you transfer to those empowered individuals in the organization that act as the key people who uplift your motto and promote your ideology."	Gender	Entrepreneurial management skills
	"A sustainable business requires working outside of your comfort zone at times and I am more than happy to do that. Always trust your instinct but also always be talking to your team all the time, make sure you have their confidence in matters that mean the most to your company."		Building social capital
	"Where being a woman can be challenging in this field, it also offers many benefits that many women overlook, women are born with the traits of management, whether we realize it or not. We are naturally comfortable with multi-tasking and taking charge when given due respect and confidence. Our jobs revolve around HR and making it better, so we know, no matter how nice your product is, if you don't take care of the people in your company, nothing is going to work out according to your plan. There should always be a "human" element, when dealing with your employees I just believe, that sustainability is not just numbers, figures and ratios of success, it is also about how good a leader you are."		Gendered leadership style

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	"Take motherhood for example, nurturing and raising responsible citizens, that are capable of functioning fully in a society is no less than building a huge company, my being a mother had never hindered my process of evolving business wise. It only helped me more, as I matured and took over different roles in my company, like all start-ups, I had to wear many hats in the beginning and had to tie up a lot of loose ends and being a mother only helped me fit into all those roles at once."		Work–life balance
Participant 2	"So I think part of it is just what I'm looking at and how frequently I'm looking at it. And then how do I, how do I translate that in the form of communication to my team? So if, just from like, my financials perspective, um, I look at that and review those in depth- Monthly, if not sooner, or you know, more regularly. Um, I, I mean, I even look at like, okay, well what, with every large new client I look at like, what new tools or technology or investments in the business might make sense. I actually discuss those with my team and let them share opinion and weigh in. If they feel strongly about something and, you know, walk through-Pros and cons sort of; it's very collaborative in that regard."	Entrepreneurial leadership	Entrepreneurial management skills
	"Yeah I think probably the number one is being, you know, pretty astute on what my team needs. So I have, you know, I have one of my partners has, you know, four children and his wife's um, you know, does homeschooling with their kids. I have, you know, another um, coworker that has um, a child with special needs. So part of it is just seriously understanding what each of my team needs from a work life integration."		Building social capital
	"I didn't think of it immediately, but I do observe some clients/peers being intimidated by me and one other female partner at the firm.		Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	Example, a billion dollar manufacturing client who is the VP of HR demonstrated this. Both my colleague and I felt that he was protective about giving us exposure to the executive team, in part because he was most concerned about protecting his image/ego rather than advancing the business. Our approach is always to make our stakeholders become innovative and solution-focused leaders, but in his case, he was scared that he'd look less knowledgeable, less capable than us women. We successfully completed a small consulting project and decided not to work directly with them (at this level) of the company, despite him requesting more help without offering exposure to other stakeholders in the business. We have also experienced this "protective-thinking and approach" with a female business leader within HR in a private equity setting."		
Participant 3	"When I started out the very first swimsuits I made were with this yarn that I would never use now it's so laughable. But I sold them for $25. By the time that I had gotten to six years my swimsuits were $250. And I think that what allowed me to continue pushing through to the point of success, not necessarily things financial but just having the ability to have stuck with something that I didn't see working out for me right away, would be attributed to the fact that I have a serious passion for it. And to, to reach a level of success which, for me my definition of success for June Alexander has been brand recognition. I have created a way to connect or link myself in a person's psyche with crocheting or knitting even. So, and so, what I mean by that is...people send me inbox messages, text messages, email, 'I saw this piece and I immediately thought of June Alexander,' and to have the association in peoples psyche that, no matter where they at, where they're at, or what they see, they instantly think of June Alexander."	Market	Targeting evolving market opportunities

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	"Placing myself in environments and situations where I was the person who didn't know a lot. And, and I, and learning from other people and watching them and facilitating, uh, conversations and rapports and ... it's a lot of personal development."		Building social capital
	"I think that people are less likely to help women ... When we decide that we want to create in industries or businesses that may not have anything to do with, uh, a standard of beauty or something superficial I don't feel that I have always been taken seriously, um, due to my gender and I think that as a Black woman, specifically, and being a single mother because that creates a financial ... hardship. Um, people are less likely to want to invest in you being a, a, single mother, Black, woman, business woman, entrepreneur."		Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders
Participant 4	"To find for market it takes money. And then reaching your market because you have to reach a certain economy of scale before you can really make any progress."	Money	Targeting evolving market opportunities
	"Working really hard and uh, and without the tenacity, with the personal quest there's no way"		Entrepreneurial management skills
	"And from, and I think maybe one of the downsides for me as a women is not wanting to be out front, and maybe that's more of a personality thing But you know I'm really having trouble putting myself out there and just wanting to kind of be behind the scenes and make things go. And you know so I think that might have been a limitation for me, but I don't know that that's gender. It may be gender specific because women tend to be- the operatives behind the scenes I'm not as ruthless, I'm more… like I've had individuals tell me, men 'Well don't do all those great things you are doing, and then put that money towards profit.' And I won't do that, and I'm and I'm just hellbent on		Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	proving that you can do the right thing and still make money."		
Participant 5	"Developing processes for everything we do and documenting them. And so it's a repeatable process so that you have consistent quality. You have very clear expectations of what someone's supposed to be doing in their role and exactly how they should be delivering it ... so every single customer encounters the same experience. It also allows me as a management person, you know, management responsibilities, to take those things off my desk ... and know that somebody has a very clear roadmap as to how they're gonna do their job. Or, you know, whatever it may be. Whether it be we have all the recruiting mapped out, we have sales. You know, whatever it may be, documentation of the process has been really, you know, the core I think to that."	Management Skills	Entrepreneurial management skills
	"So, you know, we're focused on sustainability, and we really control it through delivering very high-quality service, making sure we're delivering results. and that drives repeat business, which is really the core foundation of our- our business."		Building social capital
	"So I have to say that, you know, really specifically being a woman entrepreneur, that impacted the way I hire people and what I allowed as far as schedules and flexibility. we also have compassion for people."		Gendered leadership style
	"When I was- when I was younger the biggest challenge was always balancing family with my business. so those years were really, really difficult. And, um, but that's why I started the business too was so that I could balance it out. And the kids always came first. So if I had to keep my client base down, or, you		Work–life balance

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	know, maybe we didn't take on another client because I didn't want to be too busy when the kids were in school or something, or in the summer. It was usually in the summer. You know, we just did that. That's how we how we rolled."		
	"What I don't know is how many people didn't take my call or didn't say yes to me because I was a woman and maybe they had somebody in their good old boy network. I hang out with a lot of business owners. I've experienced a few things, every single year, and I know all women can talk about this, but where, you know, somebody's more sexist or they have a gesture or they do something inappropriate at a Christmas party or something. Dealing with all these men, is, you know, when you have to build relationships. I mean I'm selling business to business, and I'm talking to business owners and IT VP's and ... you know, HR VP's. And I mean these are the decision makers, and you know, you encounter things like that. You know, you have to figure that out, how you're gonna handle it. And I think over time I've really just drawn lines in the sand, you know. And now, you know, something happens I say, 'That's not appropriate.' You know, and I don't care if I lose their account, because it doesn't fall under our values, our culture."		Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders
Participant 6	"As a woman I think I was more invested in my employees- Which created more family environment and it created loyalty."	Macro environment	Gendered leadership style
	"Time resources over how much time do you invest in the business over, you know, family-personal. There were sacrifices, you know And a lot of it was your personal sacrifices you know. There was no sleep. There was just, you know, family and work."		Work–life balance
	"Men hitting on you know, I-I still get clients that I know that I cannot meet one on one in my office- Uh,		Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	you know, I have clients that wanna ... That when they hug you they hug you inappropriately. I have clients that say inappropriate things to you and you just have to shrug it off, you know? I have women clients who you know are doing things because they-they're just- because you're a woman and they're just- If you were a man they would not be acting this way. It-it's because they're ... It-It's ridiculous. We- I have this one client now and-and my head developer, she just has- She says, 'You know she's acting this way "cause we're women".' Women having to demand respect. You'll always have it. And sometimes it's subtle. Sometimes it's just straight in your face, but you're always having to do it. I'm not on all of the stages as a man. And I don't think I ever will be because, um, I could have a no-name come up and-and say something and, you know, and because he's a man he'll have- he'll get the face before I will."		
Participant 7	"It's how I empower everybody on the team, um, to own their own roles, um, not just in what they provide for our clients on a day to day basis, but in how they're managing their time. And their budget. So we created a tiered, um, system of responsibility for profit and loss, um, and for budgets where our directors, uh, ultimately own profit and loss as part of their team. But everybody on their team has very clearly defined responsibility- We also talk as a team. I'm very transparent with financials. back to I think delegation and team ownership-being a big part of it- I think to transparency with the team, uh, that is just one important step that I take, uh, with the team, uh, again to empowering my directors, um, and ensuring that their direct reports are also empowered in their role, um, that there is an open line of communication, and, and I think those are some of the stuff that I take. We also invest in professional development of our employees. working to lead through people, um,	Meso environment	Entrepreneurial management skills

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	our success becomes their success not just mine."		
	"I took a job with a start-up company, um, uh, focused on executive search. So, I had the chance to work with CEOs, senior level business leaders who worked Or they had problems that they were hiring my team to solve. So, I had the chance to get very involved with the strategic thinking and the problem-solving, solutions, creation, um, of our start-up company with those, uh, entrepreneurs and those CEOs. Um, I was hired away from, from uh, my recruiting tradition by one of those CEOs."		Building social capital
	"I think being a woman I'm a naturally good listener And I'm, I very naturally care about the clients that work with us. And so as, uh, a good listener, an active listener, I'm able to, um, uncover business problems that they may not be aware of, um, and provide very, uh, customized, uh, solutions for them. Um, because when I'm a good listener too I really care about their success. So I think being a woman, um, uh, and having the natural traits of caring and good listening- has enabled me, um, to be more successful."		Gendered leadership style
Participant 8	"Just being recognized. If I was more of the, you know, the charismatic, self- promoting type I think that that would be not a challenge for me. I'd say that if I were a man maybe more people would know what I'm doing."	Gender	Gender-based challenges for women entrepreneurial leaders
Participant 9	"You know, I think to be an entrepreneur you have to be very self-motivated, very organized, and very self-sufficient. And, it's a little stereotypical, but I do think that women in general are better at those kinds of skills. And so that quality, I think, as a woman probably has been very helpful in terms of sustaining success, you know. Just keeping on track of the day-to-day because ultimately, you know, when you've had a business for as long as I have, you are so far removed from the	Entrepreneurial leadership	Gendered leadership style

Participant	Interview Excerpt	Category	Theme
	day-to-day actual working with kids, kind of you know, on campuses role. So to sustain it, I've had to move into a much more managerial role and I think you know, those skills that sort of are... like I said, I know it's relatively stereotypical. I think because I'm a woman who hires a lot of women I was able to empathize and relate to the people we hired. You know, we hire a lot of moms- New moms who are struggling with the same things I struggled with, and relate the-the business is built on- The back, the structure of a young mom who wanted to have flexibility, who loved what she did and wanted to keep doing it, but wanted flexibility and wanted to be a mom, too, and wanted to find that, you know, work–life balance that so many of us strive for. So, when I interview and hire women that's very frequently their story as well. And I'm able to say, 'I can relate to that, and I experienced that'."		