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HONORS THESIS

Factors that Lead to Female Leader's Success in Overcoming Gender Barriers: Is There an Industrial Discrepancy?

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at discovering whether there is an industrial discrepancy in gender barriers and factors of success that women in management/leadership positions experience in their professional careers. The purpose of the research is to determine whether female leaders are experiencing higher levels of inequality in industries that are more so traditionally male-dominated than those who lead in industries are non-traditionally male-dominated. The study included all women who are in leadership positions, including those in lower levels, middle levels, and the highest levels of leadership in their company. A survey questionnaire, that consisted of (28) quantitative and qualitative questions was distributed to 215 female leaders from various industries. The study hypothesized that women in traditionally male-dominated industries (i.e. finance or engineering) face different levels of gender barriers and have different factors of success than women leading in industries that are not as traditionally male-dominated (i.e. retail or education). The findings of the survey do not fully support the hypothesis. There were slight discrepancies that indicated female leaders of companies in traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to face a greater level of gender barriers. However, there was not as great of a difference in gender-related barriers or factors of success between the two industry sectors as it was hypothesized.

KEY WORDS: - “Gender Barriers”; “Factors of Success”; “Traditionally male-dominated;”
“Non-traditionally male-dominated;”

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to contribute to past literature that identify gender barriers experienced by female leaders and common factors that have led to women's success in reaching leadership positions within their company. The research will be adding to past works through introducing an industrial factor on the basis of discovering whether there is a discrepancy in gender barriers and factors of success among different industries. The paper sets out to answer the question "Is there an industrial discrepancy with gender barriers and factors of success with traditionally male-dominated industries versus non-traditionally male-dominated industries?"

The motivation of this study is to challenge the claim that women are truly beginning to experience equality in leadership positions through analyzing the experiences of female leaders in very different industries. This study should reveal the existing gender barriers female leaders have or still are experiencing, as well as progress that has been made in their industry to diminish those gender barriers. Types of gender barriers include, pay gap, sexism, harassment, and gender biases. Furthermore, the motivation of this study is to determine the common factors that have aided female leaders in their efforts to overcome adversity, and thus, provide other aspiring females with tools for success.

In today's business world, there are many inspiring women who have made it to the highest levels of leadership in their companies. Additionally, more companies are seeing a trend of more women entering lower-level and middle-level management positions. These women's advancements are being marketed as the female gender's leap toward professional equality. However, just because more women are achieving these leadership positions, it does not mean that the business world is any closer to reaching gender equality. Despite these gains for women in business, women still face many barriers to advancement. For instance, women are 30% less likely than men with the same characteristics to be called for a job interview (Blakely-Grey, 2019). Furthermore, only 4.8% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women and only 40% of management occupations are held by women (Blakely-Grey, 2019). With gender barriers still maintaining a significant presence in the business world, it is vital that women

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aspiring to reach the highest positions in their company recognize these barriers and have the tools to overcome them. Through understanding what industries are more likely to cultivate certain gender barriers and knowing the factors that help women break those gender barriers, female leaders will be able to take charge and create a world where equality is no longer a dream but reality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Gender Barriers and Factors of Success" Explained

Gender equality has always been a pressing issue throughout society, and that is no exception to the business world. Although, women in management have made strides to close the gender equality gap, they are far from truly achieving equality. This literature review will analyze studies that focus on gender barriers to success that females in the managerial sectors most often face as well as factors of success that have helped them overcome those barriers. The barriers to success that are analyzed include pay gap, sexism, harassment, and gender biases. The factors to success that are discussed include personality/behavioral factors, mentorship, and family/societal factors. Additionally, the literature review will refer to the experiences and advice that senior executive or upper-management females, such as CEO Mary Barra of GM, have to offer to other aspiring females. As a result of being aware of barriers that women are likely to face and having advice on how to overcome them, more females will be able to obtain leadership positions, and as a gender, will be one step closer to closing the equality gap. There is a gap in the current literature that address both gender barriers and factors of success. Much of the literature looking at these issues do not acknowledge whether gender barriers or factors of success are general to all female leaders or whether they are different or more prevalent in specific industries. Therefore, this study will be contributing to the literature shown below by adding in an industrial factor and examining whether there are differences in the experiences of female leaders in different industries on the basis of gender barriers and factors of success.

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Barriers to Success:

In order to accurately examine the factors that contribute to women's success in breaking gender barriers into upper management, it is first necessary to understand the barriers that women have to overcome. It is important that women pursuing a career in upper management are aware of the obstacles they are going to face including pay gap, sexism, harassment, and gender biases.

Sexism is the act of stereotyping or discriminating against individuals on the basis of their gender and, in the business world, can be received from superiors, co-workers, partners, inferiors, or customers. Sexism can be seen in both lower levels, when women are aspiring to advance in the company, and upper levels when women have secured a senior level position. Carty (2018) addresses sexism in the automotive industry in her article "Change is a Slow Climb: Yes, there's More Talk about Sexism in the Industry, but Not as Much Willingness to Act." According to a survey she conducted of women in the automotive industry, although sexism is being discussed more, only 50% of women believe that their industry has worked on the issue of sexism, and even less respondents at 42% said their leaders were more willing to address sexism. In terms of sexism itself, 64% of respondents believe the issue has remained consistent, while 25% believe it has improved and 11% claim it has gotten worse (Sharon, 2008). Not only is sexism present in lower levels, but women who have achieved the highest leadership positions still remain challenged by gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Many women who have made it to the top are expected to spend time and resources helping other women. Although, the idea of female leaders mentoring aspiring females has a positive connotation, many women feel that the expectation to mentor other women places too much emphasis on their gender in comparison to their skill. Marvin examines this in her article that challenges the gender structures that blame women in executive positions for failing to mentor and help aspiring women make it to the top. These women are given a "Queen Bee" label which suggest that their choice to not mentor other women is a result of selfishness and a need to retain their powerful position (Mavin, 2008). The article explains that executive females do not want to be thought of as representatives for women, but rather want to separate their

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gender from their talents and abilities. This demonstrates the double standard of gender, as there is no "Queen Bee" label for men, pointing out the sexist perspective that women should be responsible for the success of women below them. An additional study that highlights the issue of sexism in upper management is a study of a company's perception of their CEO, Lisa. The responses indicated that Lisa enforced gender barriers by ensuring that women experience the same obstacles and must overcome them in order to advance to the highest positions, just as she did (Muhr, 2011). Lisa would be seen as a Queen Bee, however, what her employees may see as a failure to help enforce equality, may be a result of Lisa simply wanting to be seen for her abilities rather than gender.

Sexism can often be intertwined with gender bias. However, sexism refers to the discriminatory or stereotypical thoughts based on an individual's gender, while gender bias has to do with the actions that result from those stereotypical views such as not getting promoted (*Gender bias*). Many women working toward attaining a senior level position will be exposed to many forms of gender biases. Women need to be aware that they will likely experience a situation where they share the same level of performance as their male counterpart but do not receive the same outcome. For instance, many female managers have to put forth more effort than their male counterparts in order to gain recognition (Muhr, 2011). A survey was conducted by Baker and Cagemi (2016) who were motivated by the fact that women make up a significant amount of middle management, and are earning more bachelor's degrees than men, and yet there are still few women in senior positions. Thus, the two were motivated by the gender biases that lead to women receiving less recognition and therefore less promotional opportunities. The participants in the survey were composed of female executives who have broken the glass ceiling. The survey found that the most important strategy that female executives identified as contributing to their success was consistently exceeding performance expectations. The survey results determined that 77% of the respondents identified with this factor (Baker et al., 2016). The results of the study support the claim that gender biases are obstacles that women have to overcome, which many do through putting forth more effort and sacrifice. However, a study by Michelle Angier and Beth Axelrod (2014) demonstrated that gender-bias toward females can have a negative effect

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on male counterparts. Their article looked at a survey with the purpose of identifying the attitudes and experiences of eBay's top 1,7000 leaders. The survey results led to the conclusion that men fear backlash in the scenarios that they accidentally offend a female coworker (Angier and Axelrod, 2014). The fear that men feel as a result of gender inequality, could lead to a hostile environment in the workplace, and thus lead to disconnect between the two genders.

While sexism presents an ideological obstacle to overcome, another challenge women face that leads to discomfort at work and will likely challenge their ability to persevere into leadership positions is harassment. Harassment is offensive and unwelcomed behavior, and on the basis of gender can also be experienced in a sexual nature, known as sexual harassment (*Harassment*). A survey was conducted that asked women who worked at traditionally male-dominated industries about their personal experiences in the workplace. The results demonstrated that women did experience harassment and bias in the workplace (Carty, 2018). Therese Tucker, CEO and founder of cloud accounting software company BlackLine also claims that harassment is major barrier that women face. Tucker explained that throughout her professional career, she faced many forms of harassment and bias from college professors to bosses, and to investors that she has interacted with (Aspan, 2017). Tucker witnessed the level of impact that harassment has on a women's professional journey through the experience of one of her female peers. Her co-worker reported harassment in the workplace, and consequently, lost her job. Personally, for Tucker to overcome harassment, she believes that it is easiest to avoid harassment by creating your own business where you can establish an environment that does not allow for bias or discrimination (Aspan, 2017). Although women are entering more management and leadership positions, and persevering through gender barriers created by sexism, gender bias, and harassment, some industries are not seeing the same trend of women emerging to the top.

Traditionally Male-Dominated Industries vs. Non-Traditionally Male-dominated Industries

Although, women are seeing an increased presence in leadership positions in the business world, many traditionally male-dominated industries are falling behind this trend. Although

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all industries are traditionally male-dominated, the ones that fall under that classification are those that are behind the curve in establishing a greater level of gender-equality in leadership positions. Industries under that sector include agriculture, finance, engineering, insurance, manufacturing, technology, and transportation and utilities. Women in these industries are surrounded by more men in terms of peers, superiors, subordinates, or clients, than most other industries and therefore are likely to have to overcome more barriers. However, there is a new trend, where more women are entering senior positions in these industries. For instance, the traditionally male-dominated FTSE 100 businesses are seeing a slight gender shift as three females have obtained FTSE chief executive positions (Maitland, 2006). Furthermore, according to Alison Maitland, there is a growth of women's emergence in senior positions in engineering dominated industries such as electricity, oil, and gas. However, mining, energy and construction industries do not have female CEOs, and ironically, are underperforming in the Fortune 500 (Maitland, 2006).

Non-traditionally male-dominated industries are those who have been more successful in their efforts to place more females in leadership positions. Although these industries may not have experienced exact gender-equality in their leadership roles, they are much more successful in establishing a gender equality in leadership positions. Under this category are industries such as communications, education, entertainment, food, health, advertising/marketing, real estate, and retail.

Factors of Success

There are many personality or behavioral factors that women have to possess in order to give them the determination and thick skin that is needed to overcome gender barriers. One factor is a female's ability to be confident. Women's self-perception impacts their chance of obtaining executive positions. Women must perceive themselves as strong and able because if they are not confident in their ability, it is likely others will also not be confident in the woman's ability, or they will lack resilience in the face of adversity (Kazmi et al., 2014). Businesswomen, Katie Brodock, further supports the claim that confidence is key through recognizing that that many females drop out of the game too soon because of their lack of

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confidence in themselves with obtaining high positions. Brodock advises women to remain confident even when their progress is not recognized and that they must keep moving forward (“A CEO’s Advice for Aspiring Women”, 2017).

Many successful female executives also share similarities in the big five personality traits, which look at personality based on five factors including openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. In a quantitative study to create a benchmark that would help to identify the women that would be successful in executive positions through assessing their personality traits, 62 female executives were used to measure the dimensions of personality traits that were commented on by female executives in the United States foodservice industry. Executive women scored higher on measures of extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness, and lower on neuroticism (Gmelin, 2005).

The success of women in breaking gender barriers is not only contingent on internal personality traits but also in the way that women present their personality in their careers through their level of masculinity or femininity. The amount of masculinity vs. femininity that a female possesses can influence her chance of acquiring a senior level position. In terms of personality traits, masculinity is the behavioral factors that are associated with being a man, while femininity is the set of behaviors that are regarded as being an attribute of a woman. Many women feel that in order to succeed in a male-saturated environment, they have to adapt masculine characteristics and suppress their feminine traits. Although, many successful women often increase their level of masculinity, it is also important that they find a balance and preserve some of their femininity, as it gives them an advantage over their male counterparts. For instance, a common strength that many women possess is their assumed nature of compassion and empathy. Women are thought to be better at crisis management situations due to their ability to form relationships and network, demonstrating the importance of maintaining their femininity (Kazmi, 2014). A study that was conducted to prove that women in management can be both masculine and feminine looks at the concept of “Cyborgs”, who are tough females that advance to the highest positions in their companies. The study conducted 14 in-depth interviews with employees of a large Scandinavian

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knowledge-intensive company. The interviews were centered around subordinates' perspectives on the company's female CEO, Lisa, and was conducted over a 6-month period (Muhr, 2011). This study was mentioned earlier, in the sexism section, as it demonstrated that Lisa enforced gender barriers, because she thought it was important that women experience the same tough obstacles that she did to reach her position. The study found that many companies do not want a woman with soft skills, and therefore, push women to adopt masculine characteristics and move toward a the "cyborg", machine like, concept. However, the CEO Lisa, was able to adopt the masculinity without having to give up her feminine characteristics.

As seen with masculinity and femininity, people's perceptions of female's personality also have an impact on a female's ability to advance within a company. In an article that analyzed recruiter's perception of project managers, it was found that female candidates were perceived in significantly higher levels of likeability and trust, which leads to job and promotional opportunities. This serves to show why more females are entering in project management positions, as it demonstrates they are evaluated favorably in their field (Pinto, 2015).

Whether in project management or other fields, women are likely going to be less represented in higher positions and therefore must feel comfortable being a minority. Many women who rise to the top of male-dominated industries are comfortable being a minority, and most likely expose themselves to it when they are young through family dynamics, college classes, clubs, jobs, or other activities (Maitland, 2006). Even if women are comfortable being a minority or not, they are still going to experience setbacks based on their gender and need to remain resilient. Resilience helps women to recover from setbacks and persevere through the challenges presented to them on the basis of their gender. The fact of the matter is that every woman will face difficulties based on her gender and will feel discouraged at some point in her career, but the ability to recover from those adversities is what separates women who make it to the top from those who do not. Mary Barra emphasizes the importance of resilience in her personal success and offers advice to other women, saying, "stay in the game". Barra explains that many women remove themselves from opportunities to advance in their careers

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much too early, whether it is from family demands or self-doubt in their ability to advance. Barra explained a time where she was raising a child and was pregnant, yet she still took a new job in GM. If Barra did not stay in the game, it is likely that she would not be where she is now (Nagesh, 2015). Therese Tucker, CEO and founder of cloud accounting software company BlackLine also explained that resilience led her to continue to work toward her professional goals even when she was experiencing personal problems including divorce and financial struggles.

In order to remain resilient in the face of adversity, it is beneficial for aspiring female leaders to have a mentor who can provide them with advice on how to overcome obstacles and serve as a reminder that the climb is worth it. The use of mentorship also appears to be a common factor that contributes to women's emergence into management/leadership positions.

Although having a mentor can lead to a women's success, unfortunately, many women struggle finding a mentor because of mentorship inequality. Within many companies there is a lack of representation of women in senior level positions. As a result of this low representation, not only do women have a hard time finding female mentors but many of the males are not longing to offer their time to take on a mentor role. As a result, there is a gender inequity of mentorship opportunities for women in comparison to the higher level of opportunities that their male counterparts experience. There was a study conducted that used first-time board directors at US companies between 1999 and 2006 as their sample group. There were two variables used in the study, with the first being a racial minority director and the second being a female director. Both directors were given questionnaires 6 months after they obtained their seats. The study found that women and racial minorities do in fact receive less mentoring, however when a woman or minority holds a position on the board, the two groups are more likely to receive mentorship. The study also discovered that there was in-group favoritism toward white male-first time directors, especially among those white males currently on board (McDonald et al., 2013).

It is vital that this level of inequity toward mentorship is reduced because mentorship can truly provide women with insight and relationships that could help speed up their journey to

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higher-level positions or provide them with the tools necessary to properly deal with gender-barriers (McDonald et al., 2013). CEO, Sarah Brodock, offers that through mentorship, women can work to overcome obstacles that they are inevitably going to face such as pay gap, sexism, and gender biases. Mary Barra, CEO of GM, also recognizes the importance of mentorship. To help women advance in GM, the company held a Global Summit, where female leaders gather together and converse about ideas to help the company. This Summit allowed for not only the exchange of ideas but also allows for connections.

Not only is mentorship important in general but the timing can make it more advantageous to women, if they have a mentor earlier in their career. A study was conducted to examine the benefits of a mentor relationship on women in management early in their careers and determine if that helps them overcome gender-related obstacles. (Burke et al., 2006). The methodology used an anonymous questionnaire, and 98 participants who were business school graduates. The participants were asked to identify a senior person who has had a positive influence on their career path. Subsequently respondents described characteristics of the relationship. The survey found that the participants that experienced more mentorship in their earlier careers experienced higher levels of job and career satisfaction and were more optimistic in their future career and less stressed (Burke et al., 2006).

Similar to how mentorship in a woman's early career can help her to succeed, the experiences she is exposed to through family and societal influence also has an impact later on in her pursuit to achieve an upper management position. The lessons, experiences, and adversities that a woman encounters during a foundational period of her life, with her family, will shape how she handles her experiences in the business world. Many women who have become successful CEOs were either exposed to the business world at a young age, had a family member who served as a mentor, experienced hardships that they had to overcome, or were exposed to the "male culture" that they would encounter in the business world. For instance, Mary Barra, the first female CEO of General Motors, had a lot of experience with GM as she was growing up, as her father worked there (Nagesh, 2015). The CEO and founder of cloud accounting software company BlackLine, Therese Tucker, also was influenced by her family,

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as she grew up as a farmer’s daughter, which gave her the reputation of being tough (Aspan, 2017).

While family factors impact women at the foundational level, societal factors have a current impact on women. An example of a societal factor in terms of the opinions of members of society is in their perception of women’s success. In a survey that analyzed ratings of Female CEOs in comparison to their male counterparts, it was found that women were valued more favorably for successful performance. This can be attributed to the generalization that people hold the perspective that when women advance to senior positions, they have to be extremely skilled (Rosette, 2006). This societal view can be advantageous to women as their voice may hold greater weight once they reach those senior positions. An example of a current movement in society that has an impact on women is the #MeToo movement. Although this movement has proved to be beneficial to many women, it has had some undesirable effects on women in the business world. The #MeToo movement has almost made it more difficult for female leaders to advance, as some women claim that it has caused men to fear losing their power and therefore resulted in them strengthening the gender barrier (Carty, 2018).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research of this thesis attempts to investigate gender barriers and factors of success for female leaders and answer the question on whether there is an industrial discrepancy with those two variables. Given that there has been much research on the topics of gender barriers and factors of success for female leaders, this study tries to address a gap in the current literature. Through addressing the gap, the research incorporates two industrial variables to determine if female leaders in some industries experience greater gender barriers than females in other industries. The study classifies each participants’ responses based on their industry and places them in one of two categories (1) “traditionally male-dominated” and (2) “non-traditionally male-dominated” in order to examine any trends and deviations between the two industry splits. Specifically, this study tries to answer the following questions:

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1. Are there any identifiable trends in gender barriers that female leaders face? If yes, are these trends similar or dissimilar between traditionally male-dominated industries and non-traditionally male-dominated industries?
2. Are there any identifiable trends in factors of success that have aided female leaders in overcoming gender barriers? If yes, are these trends similar or dissimilar between traditionally male-dominated industries and non-traditionally male-dominated industries?

HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis for this paper was motivated from findings of past literature that examine female leaders with a focus on gender-related barriers, factors of success, or male-dominated industries. This paper hypothesizes that regardless of the industry, women in management/leadership positions experience gender barriers in the workplace. However, with the understanding that some industries have experienced women’s emergence into leadership positions more rapidly than others, it also hypothesizes that gender barriers in traditionally male-dominated industries will be greater than those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries. Furthermore, this paper hypothesizes that due to different levels of gender barriers between the two industry sectors, female leaders in certain industries will leverage different factors of success in order to overcome those gender barriers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey was distributed in order to determine whether there are industrial discrepancies in gender barriers and factors of success for women in traditionally male-dominated industries versus women in non-traditionally male-dominated industries. A 28-question survey was distributed to a random population of women. The survey included a mixture of quantitative and qualitative question types. The quantitative approach served to collect objective data and factual responses. The qualitative questions provided participants with more freedom in answering each question which served in gaining insight on valuable trends.

The survey is organized along three themes. These themes were identified based off of the two variables addressed in the literature review and the gap that was identified in terms of investigating any industrial discrepancies. The first category, “industry”, is the first theme that

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is used to establish the company that the female executive is in. This will be useful for the remainder of the survey because it will help to establish if there are discrepancies in gender barriers to advancement and factors for success among different industries. The second theme is “Gender-related barriers to success” which provides information on the barriers that women have to overcome to achieve leadership roles and continue their professional growth. The final theme is “Factors that have Contributed to Female’s Success in Emerging into Leadership Positions”. This theme includes several categories addressing personality/behavioral factors, mentorship, past experience, and family/societal factors.

Research Population and Sample

The research population for this study included women in leadership/management positions. This population consisted of women at entry levels of management/leadership, middle level management/leadership positions, and those in the highest management/leadership roles. The research sample is similar to the research population as it consisted of women in leadership positions. The survey was distributed to the research sample randomly through means such as LinkedIn, the Bryant University Alumni Association, and through networking chains. The survey sample included responses from 214 women. Each respondent varied in terms of age, industry, and geographic location.

DATA COLLECTION

The research data was generated by using both a qualitative and quantitative forms in the survey. Data was collected from women in leadership positions along various industries. A total of (214) survey responses were collected during the months of February and March 2021. Each survey participant was provided with a cover letter that explained the purpose of the survey and the objective of the research itself. Furthermore, each participant was provided with a consent form, which explained how the survey would be used and confidentiality concerns. The first question in the survey asked participants if they agreed to everything stated in the consent form, in which they were given the option to consent or answer “no.”

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Among the 214 female respondents, (1.87%) were Asian, (2.33%) were Black or African American, (.47%) classified as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and the majority at (88.32%) were white. However, (.93%) respondents preferred not to say and (5.14%) respondents left that question blank.

In regard to participants age, (2.80%) fell between the range of 21-30, (29.44%) were between 31-40, (21.03%) were between the ages of 41-50, (31.31%) fell between 51-60, (7.48%) were between 61-70 years old, (1.87%) were 71 years or older and (5.14%) left that response blank.

In terms of the participants’ industry, the ones that received the lowest number of responses include Agriculture (.47%), Communications (.47%), Food (.47%), Engineering (.93%),

Table 1. Study Sample Distributed According to Industry: Classification of Traditionally Male-Dominated versus Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated Industry

| <u>Industry</u> | <u>Traditionally Male-Dominated</u> | <u>Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Agriculture | .47% | |
| Communications | | .47% |
| Food | | .47% |
| Engineering | .93% | |
| Entertainment | | 1.40% |
| Transportation & Utilities | 1.87% | |
| Manufacturing | 2.34% | |
| Advertising/Marketing | | 2.80% |
| Real Estate | | 3.27% |
| Retail | | 3.27% |
| Technology | 6.07% | |
| Education | | 8.84% |
| Insurance | 9.35% | |
| Health | | 11.68% |
| Finance | 20.93% | |

Entertainment (1.40%), and Transportation and Utilities (1.87%). Other industries that received a smaller percentage of respondents include Manufacturing (2.34%), Advertising/Marking (2.80%), Real Estate (3.27%) and Retail (3.27%). Respondents also classified as being in the Technology industry (6.07%), Education industry (8.84%), Insurance industry (9.35%), and Health industry (11.68%). The industry that most respondents classified under is Finance (20.93%). Furthermore, some respondents chose the other option (13.08%) or left it blank (11.68%).

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RESULTS

Gender Barriers

The survey included 7 questions aimed at discovering whether there is a discrepancy in gender barriers for traditionally male-dominated industries versus non-traditionally male-dominated industries.

Table 2. Gender Barrier Related Questions

| Question | Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated | | |
|--|------------------------------|--------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | Yes | No | Blank | Yes | No | Blank |
| Do you feel that your industry is male-dominated? | 76.67% | 18.89% | 4.44% | 39.13% | 53.62% | 7.25% |
| Do you feel that in your industry, you are often perceived as less qualified in comparison to your male counterparts? | 36.67% | 58.89% | 4.44% | 30.43% | 62.32% | 7.25% |
| Have you experienced gender bias in your industry? | 62.22% | 33.33% | 4.44% | 59.42% | 33.33% | 7.25% |
| Have you ever performed better or the same as a male counterpart but experienced a less positive outcome? | 50.00% | 45.56% | 4.44% | 47.83% | 44.93% | 7.25% |
| Do you feel that sexism has acted as a barrier to promotional opportunities? (Regardless as to whether you have overcome them or not?) | 50.00% | 45.56% | 4.44% | 42.03% | 47.82% | 10.14% |
| Throughout your professional career have you experienced forms of harassment? | 24.44% | 24.44% | 51.11% | 36.23% | 13.04% | 50.72% |

- The first research question was “Do you feel that your industry is male-dominated?” The majority of the responses for traditionally male-dominated industries answered yes at 76.67% while 18.89% answered no. In contrast, the majority of responses for non-traditionally male-dominated industries was no (53.62%), while 39.13% answered yes. The large industrial variance between the

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percentage that answered “yes” suggests that traditionally male-dominated industries (i.e., finance, insurance) are continuing to foster an environment that makes females in those fields feel that they are a gender minority. Furthermore, the majority of females in industries that are not traditionally male-dominated (i.e., education and advertising/marketing) do not feel that their industry is oversaturated with males.

- Following was the question “Do you feel that in your industry, you are often perceived as less qualified in comparison to your male counterparts?” Both traditionally male-dominated industries (58.89%) and non-traditionally male-dominated industries (62.32%) saw the majority of respondents answer “no.” These similar percentages suggest that regardless of the industry, female leaders do not feel that they are viewed as less qualified than their male counterparts.
- The survey question “Have you experienced gender bias in your industry?” demonstrated similarities among each industry grouping. Both industry splits saw that nearly half of respondents answered yes, with traditionally male-dominated industries being just over the half point (62.22%) and non-traditionally male-dominated industries following (59.42%). Therefore, regardless of the industry, it can be suggested that experiencing gender bias is subjective, and nearly 50% of women in each industry pool have had to deal with that barrier.
- The following question asked “Do you believe that your company has worked to diminish gender bias in the workplace? If yes, was it successful?” The percentage of responses that answered “no” was practically even for both sectors at 28.88% for traditionally male-dominated industries and 28.99% for non-traditionally male-dominated industries. The answer choice “yes; it was successful” had the highest percentage of responses with 54.44% of those in traditionally male-dominated industries choosing that answer and the other industrial sector having a percentage of 52.17%. However, there was a higher response rate for the choice “yes; it was not successful” for those in traditionally male-dominated industries. This suggests that although that industry category is attempting to make strides toward gender equality, it is less successful in doing so.
- Presented next in the survey was the question “Have you ever performed better or the same as a male counterpart but experienced a less positive outcome?” Exactly 50% of the respondents for traditionally male-dominated industries answered “yes,” while 45.56% chose “no” and the remaining participants left the answer blank. This was a similar response in comparison to female leaders in non-traditionally male-dominated industries where 47.83% answered “yes” and 44.93% answered “no.” This suggests that regardless of the industry, there is a high possibility that a female leader will have to overperform in comparison to her male counterpart to achieve the same positive outcome.
- The following survey question addressed the gender barrier of sexism, asking, “Do you feel that sexism has acted as a barrier to promotional opportunities (Regardless as to whether you have overcome them or not?). For responses of

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traditionally male-dominated industries 50% answered “yes,” while 45.56% answered “no” and the remainder left the question blank. A larger percentage (47.82%) of female leaders in non-traditionally male-dominated industries answered “no,” while 42.03% answered “yes.” Therefore, regardless of the industry group, a large number of women feel that sexism has been an obstacle in terms of increasing their level of leadership. Additionally, more female leaders in traditionally male-dominated industries have experienced sexism as a barrier in their professional growth.

- In order to address the gender barrier of harassment, the next survey question asked, “Throughout your professional career have you experienced forms of harassment?” For both industry splits, the majority of responses were blank, as participants chose not to answer. 51.11% of participants for traditionally male-dominated industries left it blank and 50.72% of those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries also left the question blank. This high number of blank percentages could reflect how women often try to ignore or remain silent on the topic harassment in the workplace.

Factors of Success

The survey included 6 questions that are intended to determine any common factors of success that have aided women in their efforts to achieve leadership positions. Through sorting the responses by traditionally male-dominated industries and non-traditionally male-dominated industries, this also helps to identify any discrepancies in certain factors of success.

Table 3. Factors of Success

| Question | Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated | | |
|---|------------------------------|--------|-------|----------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | Yes | No | Blank | Yes | No | Blank |
| Do you feel that you had to demonstrate more about your capabilities for a higher position than your male counterparts? | 57.78% | 33.33% | 8.89% | 44.92% | 42.03% | 11.60% |
| Is/was your family involved in the industry that you are currently in or in business as a career? | 20.00% | 72.22% | 7.78% | 14.50% | 73.91% | 11.60% |
| Have societal events influenced your career path (i.e. the #MeToo movement)? | Positively 8.89% | 83.88% | 7.78% | Positively 17.39% | 69.57% | 11.58% |
| | | | | Negatively 1.45% | | |
| Have you had a mentor in your professional journey? | 63.33% | 28.89% | 7.78% | 65.22% | 23.19% | 11.59% |

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- The first survey question that addresses factors of success is “Do you feel that you had to demonstrate more about your capabilities for a higher position than your male counterparts?” There was a disparity between the responses for traditionally male-dominated industries and non-traditionally male-dominated industries. The majority of respondents answered “yes” (57.77%) for traditionally male-dominated industries, while only 33.33% answered “no”. For the latter, 44.92% answered “yes” and 42.03% answered “no.” These findings suggest that regardless of the industry, female leaders feel that they have to put forth more effort than their male counterparts in order to gain recognition for their capabilities. However, it is more common in traditionally male-dominated industries that females have to put forth more energy in order to prove themselves.
- The next question of the survey focuses on family factors that may influence female leaders, saying, “Is/was your family involved in the industry that you are currently in?” For both industry sections, the majority of responses were “no”, with 72.22% of those in traditionally male-dominated industries choosing that option, and 73.91% choosing “no: for non-traditionally male-dominated industries. Therefore, it can be concluded that female leaders are not more inclined to pursue leadership in a specific industry due to influence from their family’s involvement in that industry.
- Subsequently, societal influence was addressed with the question “Have societal events influenced your career path (i.e., the #MeToo movement)?” For traditionally male-dominated industries the majority of respondents chose “no” (83.33), while very few chose “yes” (8.89%). Similarly, for responses in non-traditionally male-dominated industries there was a trend toward the answer “no” (69.57%). However, more respondents from that sector believed that societal events have impacted them in a positive way (17.39%). These results indicate that regardless of the industry section, societal events are not likely to influence a female leader’s professional journey. However, those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to achieve favorable outcomes in their careers due to societal influence.
- Mentorship is a major influence on a women’s professional journey, and therefore was largely addressed in this survey. The first question that addresses mentorship was “Have you had a mentor in your professional journey?” For both industry sectors, the majority of respondents have had a mentor, as 63.33% of those in traditionally male-dominated industries answered “yes” and 65.22% of those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries also chose that answer. This demonstrates, that regardless of the industry grouping, a large percentage of female leaders have had the opportunity to engage in mentorship, which has been a factor of success for the majority.
- Of those respondents that answered “yes” to the previous question, they were asked to answer the survey question “What was the gender of your mentor? (If there are multiple mentors, please reference your most influential).” For

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traditionally male-dominated industries, slightly more respondents had a male mentor (33.33%) than a female mentor (32.22%). The opposite was true for non-traditionally male-dominated industries as the majority of respondents had female mentors (37.68%) and less respondents had male mentors (28.99%). This indicates that those in traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to have male mentors, while female leaders in non-traditionally male-dominated industries have a greater likelihood of having a female mentor. Therefore, female leaders in the latter industry section are placed at an advantage in their opportunity to learn from a female who has overcome many gender-related obstacles.

Table 4. Mentorship Based on Gender

| Question | Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | | Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|-------|--------|
| | Male | Female | Other | Blank | Male | Female | Other | Blank |
| What was the gender of your mentor? If there are multiple mentors, please reference your most influential) | 33.33% | 32.22% | 7.78% | 26.66% | 28.99% | 37.68% | 4.35% | 28.99% |

- The final survey question that addressed mentorship was “At what age did you have your first mentor?” Responses of traditionally male-dominated industries included 18 or younger (5.56%), 19-24 years old (24.44%), 25-34 years old (27.78%) and 35-44 years old (11.11%). Significant responses under non-traditionally male-dominated industries were as follows: 18 or younger (8.70%), 19-24 years old (20.29%), 25-34 years old (31.88%) and 35-44 years old (7.25%). These results demonstrate that regardless of the industry sector, it was most common that female leaders had their first mentor in the age range of 25-34 years old. However, for traditionally male-dominated industries there was a much lower percentage of those who had a mentor at 18 or younger and for females in non-traditionally male-dominated industries it was less common to have a mentor above 35 years of age. Therefore, it can be suggested that those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries have greater access to mentorship at a young age, placing them at an advantage in their professional growth.

Table 5. Mentorship Based on Age

| Question | Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------|--------|
| | 18 or younger | 19-24 years old | 25-34 years old | 35-55 years old | 45-54 years old | 54 or older | Blank |
| At what age did you have your first mentor? | 5.56% | 24.44% | 27.78% | 11.11% | 1.11% | 1.11% | 28.89% |
| | Non-Traditionally Male-Dominated | | | | | | |
| | 8.70% | 20.29% | 31.88% | 7.25% | 2.90% | 0% | 28.99% |

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FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

In today's society, female leaders are still experiencing inequality, regardless of strides that have been made to close the gap. Throughout the years, there have been trends of common gender barriers that make it difficult for female's professional advancement. Nonetheless, female leaders have discovered factors of success that would aid in their ability to overcome those barriers. The main findings of this research discovered that gender barriers for female leaders are largely prevalent regardless of their industry sector. However, females of traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to experience and recognize them. Furthermore, it is evident that there are slight discrepancies in factors of success between the two industry sectors but overall, they are very similar. Therefore, it can be inferred that female leaders face similar challenges and have common methods of overcoming those obstacles regardless of the industry that they work in.

The hypothesis of this research assumed that non-traditionally male-dominated industries, such as education, have been more progressive in promoting gender equality in leadership positions. It was hypothesized that there would be a large discrepancy in gender barriers and in factors that female leaders leverage to overcome those existing gender barriers. However, the findings did not fully support that hypothesis. It was established that regardless of some industries appearing to foster higher levels of gender quality in leadership positions, there are only slight discrepancies in the level of gender barriers between the two sectors. Furthermore, female leaders leverage on similar factors to help them succeed, regardless of the industry.

Gender Barriers

In terms of gender barriers specifically, the main findings of my research suggest that both industry sectors face gender barriers, however, there are slight discrepancies in the level to which they exist. It is evident that female leaders who identify with companies in traditionally male-dominated industries recognize that their industry is still fostering an environment where there is a greater number of males present. A majority of them do not feel that it influences the way that they are perceived within their industry but do recognize that similar performance to their male counterparts will not result in equal outcomes (i.e, promotional opportunities, or bonuses). As a result, female leaders put forth more effort to increase their

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performance and achieve more positive outcomes. Regardless of whether female leaders perceive their industry to be male dominated, it was a common theme that regardless of the industry, there is a gender bias. Many females from both sectors indicated that they have personally experienced gender bias in their careers. Furthermore, female leaders recognize their company's effort in diminishing gender bias in the workplace. Although many females believe their companies were successful, those in traditionally male-dominated industries are less likely to experience positive results from their company's efforts. Sexism is also a prevalent gender barrier for female leaders. For both industry sectors, a large percentage of female leaders feel that sexism has acted as a barrier to promotional opportunities. However, there was a slight disparity as a larger percentage of women who lead in traditionally male-dominated industries view sexism as a gender barrier.

Factors of Success

The majority of women in traditionally male-dominated industries do rely on resilience in terms of demonstrating their capabilities more so than those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries. However, a large percentage of women, regardless of their industry, recognize that putting forth the same effort as their male counterparts does not make them appear equally capable. As a result, they adapted to that reality and put forth more energy in demonstrating their capabilities.

Family factors do not appear to have an influence on the industry that female leaders chose to pursue a career in with either industry sector. Similarly, societal factors seem to have little influence on female leader's success in their industry regardless as to which sector they fit into. However, female leaders in non-traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to experience positive outcomes in their professional careers from societal influences such as the #MeToo movement.

Mentorship for both industry splits is extremely similar with over half of the respondents having mentors in their professional careers. However, a disparity present is that those in non-traditionally male-dominated industries were more likely to have female mentors than those in traditionally male-dominated industries. This puts the latter at a disadvantage because it limits

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the opportunities for those females to learn more about how they should navigate any gender barriers that would be presented to them in their careers.

In conclusion, gender bias is largely prevalent for female leaders regardless as to whether they work in traditionally male-dominated industries or non-traditionally male-dominated industries. However, female leaders of traditionally male-dominated industries are more likely to experience these barriers and recognize the prevalence that they have in impacting their professional journey. Nonetheless, gender inequality has no bias as to which industries it influences, and female leaders in every industry have to face that current reality and discover ways to persevere.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations

Although the survey was administered to a random population of women, one means of its distribution was through the Bryant Alumni Association. After the Bryant Alumni association distributed the survey, the number of survey responses increased significantly. This spike in responses could imply that a majority of the responses could have been from Bryant Alumni, which could jeopardize just how random the survey was administered. This also relates to another limitation in that the majority of the respondents of the survey were from the traditionally male-dominated industry sector, specifically in finance (20.93%). This could also be attributed to a large number of survey responses coming from Bryant alumni. The fact that many Bryant graduates have studied in fields that are male dominated, such as finance, can explain why so many survey responses came from females who lead in those industries.

Question 18 of the survey “Are you confident being a minority in your industry?” was disregarded for the results section. The question was deemed to be ambiguous as 61.45% of respondents chose the answer “I am not a minority.” Given the mainly white demographic of the survey participants mentioned in the data analysis, it can be assumed that many of those participants interpreted the question in a racial manner as opposed to its intention of addressing gender minorities.

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In order to examine whether there are discrepancies in gender barriers and factors of success in traditionally male-dominated industries versus non-traditionally male-dominated industries, a generalization about which category each industry fit into had to be made. Although the decision was based on research, it was also subjective as other researchers could have deemed certain industries to be placed in a different category. Furthermore, it should be noted that due to the history of the United States and the slow pace that society has taken to close gender gaps in the workplace, technically every industry being examined is traditionally male dominated. This study more so classifies traditionally male-dominated as those industries who have continued to systemically experience a greater percentage of men in comparison to women. For instance, the education industry has experienced a faster pace in closing the gender gap in comparison to the engineering industry.

Future Research

Once the survey was collected, the results and feedback from the participants led to other questions that could be addressed in future research to add onto the findings of this study. One topic that can be addressed is looking at how many female leaders “drop out of the game” too soon, or in other words, leave the business before a promotional opportunity presents itself. Along with that question, it is important to understand the underlying reasons as to why these women are leaving their jobs. In relation to this study, it would be interesting to look at whether more women are leaving male-dominated industries too soon in comparison to the other industry sector.

An additional implication for future research is to investigate just how beneficial having more female leaders is for those females aspiring to follow in their footsteps. With the number of women in leadership positions increasing, is it more difficult or easy for aspiring female leaders to achieve professional success? In other words, do females tend to uplift their female subordinates or do female leaders actually make it more difficult for other females to succeed?

A gender barrier that was not addressed in this research is the impact that pregnancy and maternity leave has on a female's ability to achieve higher leadership roles. Future research

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could look at how a female that is approaching maternity leave is perceived in her company and whether that anticipated absence influences her promotional opportunities.

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