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# Where She Came from and How She Leads: A Study of the Patterns Among Women Leaders' Experiences

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# Where She Came from and How She Leads:

# A Study of the Patterns Among Women Leaders' Experiences

## By Emma A Goldberg

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**Acknowledgments**

As a woman coming into the next stages of my life, I have found myself looking at how I fit into the world as a woman, a leader, and what impacts I want to make. I do not have all my answers yet, but I know this research has been a defining moment for me, and hopefully, the first of the positive impacts I plan to make in the world around me.

Thank you to each woman who took the time to email with me, schedule and conduct interviews, and who shared with me their personal experiences to build a new area in leadership research. Your narratives are important and shed light on the experiences of women leaders. The women who make up the data of this research have challenged themselves, overcome obstacles, been innovative, and opened new possibilities that, when starting their careers, many would not have imagined could be accomplished by women.

I must also thank my parents for discussing, supporting, and pushing me through this project, my advisor for her insights and thoughts that made the result so much better, and the Honors Department at Johnson & Wales for the opportunity and tools to take on this thesis.

I hope anyone taking the time to read this takes away a new perspective on the strong women leaders in their life, and what shaped them on their path to where they are now. When we open ourselves up to learn from others' experiences, we can better understand and be a part of the world around us.

**Abstract**

This original research utilizes purposive and snowball sampling methods and semi-structured interviews to answer the question, what common experiences do women leaders have? As well as, how do women leaders view, define, and practice leadership? Through 20 interviews and a multi-part analysis, the research found commonalities in the broader themes of upbringing, family and friends, marriage and motherhood, education, influencers, and leadership viewpoints. The study emphasized diversity in profession, race, marital status, whether they were mothers or not, sexual orientation, and locality. This research uses women leaders' narratives to quantitatively and qualitatively build new data in a lacking area: female representation within leadership research.

*Keywords:* women leaders, women, leadership, common experiences

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Section:1 Introduction

How we understand leadership today, according to scholarly research, is inherently male based. But, with the evolution of leadership and power struggles, women have the opportunity to lead, and this changes the way we look at leadership overall. I have grown up with women leaders since my earliest days, whether in my everyday life or the world around me. As I grew up, I wondered how these women who made me who I am, got to where they were. It took many years, but after multiple conversations, panels, and personal experiences, I grew to wonder: do all women leaders share common experiences? As well, how do each of these leader's view, define, and practice leadership? With these research questions set in mind and limited pre-existing research in the area, I moved forward with designing an original study to discover possible common themes and experiences.

Before and during the planning stages of this project, I looked to the scholarly research in leadership and common women experiences. In the area of leadership, it seems there is an infinite amount of research. When breaking down the research, I found: general definitions of leadership, women's leadership studies, and studies that look to the shared experience of leaders. Scholarly work that critiques the mass amount of research is also available. The overall consensus was that the study of leadership is inherently male-focused because it bases its theories and beliefs on male subjects and their approaches to leadership. There is debate on the true definition of leadership because people view leadership based on their values. Together, the research led to the realization of the need for an original study to answer my research questions.

Leadership is not the new frontier of research, but the unlimited facets in which one can study leadership are continually evolving. Through the centuries, studies have ranged from animal habits to common traits between well-known leaders. The understanding and consensus in the study of leadership have changed continuously over time. My research will contribute to

this knowledge by identifying common experiences that contribute to women leaders' development.  With the study results, a new understanding of the experiences women leaders go through will be documented. Women's views on leadership will be collected and shared to influence how more people view leadership as a whole and the possibility of identifying common experiences. Today, the desire to understand who has the untapped potential to become a leader and what it takes to create a leader has become a new intersection in the research.

This research uses semi-structured interviews, utilizing the skype platform, with purposive and snowball sampling, with women leaders between the ages of 30 and 60 years old. With support from previous research studies, I was able to build methods that allowed for open conversation but also later comparison. Looking to people who were leaders, per my definition of a leader, was meant to limit ineffective interviews. I broke down the analysis into three steps the first by using interview notes to fill in, to the best of their abilities, an original detailed summary form. Second, each interview recording was reviewed to find any missing information or themes that were not filled out or not on the form. Finally, with the completed summary forms, I compared overall common themes based on demographics and comparisons alike. After this process, I was able to draw conclusions and complete my analysis.

Scholarly research must represent the realities of the present day. When they fail to do so, they do an injustice to those who use them for further study, building programs, or solving problems. Today, women leadership rates continue to grow, but the research does not represent this, as it is still inherently male based. This research, and similar nature, marks the beginnings of progress in understanding the women leaders around us.

Along with the lack of women-driven research, there is a lack of diversity in the participants, regardless of gender. This includes, but is not limited to, race, location, profession,

sexual orientation, and whether or not they are married or mothers. If one aims to define the common experiences of women leaders, I believe representing the actual reality makes the research more robust. This original research is overdue, and I feel an essential contribution to the current and future understanding of issues involving women and leadership.

My research concluded that upbringing, family and friends, marriage and motherhood, education, influencers, and leadership viewpoints were the common themes and trends between women leaders' experiences. This research uses women leaders' narratives to quantitatively and qualitatively build new data in a lacking area: female representation within leadership research.

Literature Review

Studying leadership has been an interest of researchers for centuries, while understanding and the consensus around this topic has evolved continuously throughout the decades. In the 1940s, the interest was in the trait's leaders possess rather than how they attained them. Then, in the 1950s, research moved into studying how to understand what characteristics leaders commonly have. By the 1970s and '80s, researchers were looking to understand how leaders "rise to the occasion." During these times, and up until recently, leaders have been mostly white males. In the 21st century, there has been more diversity, in both gender and race, in the ranks of leaders. The rise in women leaders is a more recent phenomenon, and, as a result, the amount of research into leadership and women is limited. This change has highlighted the need to adjust the ways leaders are studied to represent reality better.

Today, the desire to understand who has the untapped potential to become a leader and what it takes to create a leader has become a new intersection in leadership research. A growing interest in understanding patterns between the experiences of leaders and the increase in women leaders has led to the next round of studies into the shared experiences of women leaders. My

research aims to answer whether experiences play a significant role in the development of women leaders and, if so, what common experiences women leaders share. This is important to leadership because, without accounting for the rise of women leaders, the research becomes outdated and inaccurate. Similar actions can be observed in medical research. As more women doctors entered medicine, research into topics such as heart disease was studied from the women's perspective. They discovered that men and women experience symptoms differently, which led to a better understanding of heart disease and how the different symptoms people experience can be based on gender. Similar to the critical changes that took place in the field of medicine, research and changes are necessary for the study of leadership to accurately represent reality.

I am interested in women's leadership and the narrative of how they got to where they are. I believe that women are less likely to share their stories, but when they do, it brings them together and helps future generations. Historically when women share their own stories, other women learn that they are not alone. Examples of this are evident in the women's movement of the 70s and 80s, in which books like *The Feminine Mystique* or magazines like *Ms.* opened the door for women who thought it was "just them." This power can also be observed in the origins of the "me too" movement. When opportunities are available for women to have a platform to share their narratives, the results can have positive impacts for all women. Identifying common experiences of women leaders can do something similar. The research may unify and educate women across generational lines by reminding them, once again, that it is not "just them."

The current research into the roles of experience in leadership development for women is lacking. What has been done up until this point can be split into two major categories: women-oriented leadership studies and gender "neutral" leadership research. My use of the word

"neutral" alludes to the fact that most studies have, and still do use, the male experience as the general "reality" of all leaders. I have reviewed sources from the years 1938 to 2016. This literary review will examine leadership, including building a working definition of leadership, understanding how leaders develop, breaking down case studies that are important to the design and material for my research, and why these factors are essential to my research.

Defining Leadership

Like the phrase " beauty is in the eye of the beholder," an individual's perspective defines leadership. A leader is defined in the oxford dictionary as "a person who leads a group of people, especially the head of a country, an organization, etc.," and leadership is defined as "the state or position of leading." These are widespread definitions, but the reality of forming an accurate depiction is not as simple as some may believe. Each source I looked at had multiple reports cited for how leadership has been defined. In general, leadership can be explained by how leaders influence others and whom they influence Berkowicz (2011). Some examples of definitions are as follows: Richard M Cyert, an economist and former president of Carnegie Mellon, defines leadership as " … the ability to get participants in an organization to focus their attention on the problems the leader considers significant". Cyert cites the definition of (Bavelas 1964, page 206) that "leadership consists of the continuous choice-making process that permits the organization as a whole to proceed toward its objectives despite all sorts of internal and external perturbations" Cyert (1990), Gardner (1995) and Northhouse (2001) define a leader as a person who influences the behaviors, thoughts, and feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings". At the same time, Heifetz (1994) believed that "leadership was either the influence of a leader on the community to follow his vision, or the leader's influence on the

community to face its problems." When researching definitions of leaders, investigators will realize that leadership is defined in an infinite number of ways.

With the rapid development of technology and globalization during the twentieth century, the way we see leadership has evolved at a similar pace. The cause for this is that many times, the definition of leadership is dependent on people projecting their views of what a leader should be. Amanda Sinclaire, a multi-published author, is a pioneer in the study of diversity, women in leadership, and mindfulness applications. In her 1998 work, *Doing Leadership Differently: Gender, Power, and Sexuality in Changing Business Culture*, Sinclaire says, "My experience of not seeing leadership where others did lead me to some useful insights, in particular about the importance of projection in the leader-follower transaction. I have subsequently argued that where we see leadership lying depends on our own experiences and backgrounds" Sinclaire (1998). Sinclaire adds to this in her 2004 work, *Journey Around leadership*, that societies develop 'archetypes' of what leadership is to them. In other words, society's values influence its definition of leadership.

This idea is further perpetuated in the work of Burns (2003), who shares the idea that leadership has been redefined to adapt similarly to the values of liberty and equality that change with the times. Heifetz (1994) reminds us that the term "leadership" evokes emotions because it engages our values. With this reality in mind, investigators can dissect and build a less personally biased definition for their research.

In Kevin Kruise's article for *Forbes Magazine*, he dissects various definitions of leadership from leaders themselves. He builds his definition: the most general, encompassing definition in all of my investigations. This is because his definition has no mention of titles or personality traits, and, as he argues, there are many paths to effective leadership. Removing

personality traits from the definition is the best way to limit one from projecting individual ideals

of what leadership is to them personally. Kruise's definition states, "Leadership is the process of

social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, toward the achievement of a goal"

Kruise (2013). This is the definition I plan to follow in my research.

Understanding the Research on How Experiences Develop Leaders

Of the 56 billion dollars spent in 2006 on organizational learning and development, 45%

was spent on targeted leadership development. O'Leonard (2007) For corporations and

businesses around the world effective, well developed, leaders are essential to success. It is

necessary to note the variety of perspectives in which scholars believe leaders can develop. This

can either be through instinct or learned through situational experiences. Multiple theories in this

section will break down these two categories into more specific terms.

In Berk's (2011) dissertation, she shares theories that have been written about in

leadership literature. The Great-Man Theory comes from the works of Mumford et al. (1993)

that describes "when appropriate methods are applied, differential characteristics can be used to

predict leadership activities." This lends itself to the belief that some people are born with an

innate ability to lead. By understanding what common characteristics leaders may have,

researchers can better predict that they may become leaders. Situationism in leadership believes

that leaders arise from exposure to situations and circumstances instead of personality traits Bass

(2008). These two significant ideas distinguish the two types of people in the realm of

leadership, those with the potential to become a leader and those without. Bass (1997) shares the

valid argument that researchers across the board do not know the real impact that training,

culture, and personality has on one's inherent capacity for leadership.

Multiple sources look to the role experiences play in a leader's development. D. Scott DeRue and Ned Wellman's paper, *Developing Leaders via Experience: The Role of Developmental Challenge, Learning Orientation, and Feedback Availability*, dives into investigating this topic and multiple leadership theories. Both authors are educators and researchers in the field of business and have leadership experience. This connection is not uncommon, as Sinclair mentions in her 2004 work, stating that ideas about leadership commonly come from management and business thinking Sinclair (2004). DeRue and Wellmans' research pulls together multiple theories of leadership development, along with their study. For my research, I only utilized the study's analysis of leadership development theories and research.

Examples of theories that support the idea that experience is a crucial factor in developing leaders range from consensus to specific views. First, the authors cite the work of McCall (2004), who stated, "The primary source of learning to lead, to the extent that leadership can be learned, is experiencing." Later, this idea is followed up with data from Robinson and Wick (1992) and Wick (1989) that an estimated 70% of all leadership development occurs through informal, on the job experiences. In contrast, training and other formal programs contribute to less than 10% of a leader's development. While this source only focuses on the job experiences, the premise that leaders can learn through experience provides a factual basis for my study.

The literature then moves into its exploration of the leadership theories. First, the experiential learning theories of Dewey (1938), Knowles (1975), Kolb (1984), Marsick and Watkins (1990), and Rogers (1969) propose that learning happens as individuals engage in challenging experiences and then reflect upon the outcomes. Next, the cognitive theories of learning Ausubel (1968) suggests that knowledge structures grow and develop when they are

challenged by important information and obtained through experience. Then, Kanfer and Ackerman (1989) motivation-based theory of skill acquisition suggests that challenging experiences facilitate skill development by motivating individuals to exert additional effort to acquire the skills demanded of them. A similar theory, Activation Theory, states that the degree of action in cognitive processing increases when an individual is unfamiliar with a task, situation, or when exposed to a stimulus that is either extraordinarily intense or highly meaningful. Berlyne (1960) Scott (1966) This theory is supported by the work of McCall and Hallenback (2002) and McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison (1988) who found while studying samples of executives that work experience involving "novel" responsibilities and "stretch" assignments were discovered to be more effective than routine, less challenging tasks in developing leaders.

The research does present some limitations in terms of the lack of a direct connection between experience and leadership development. This is because there has been no specific research into work experiences specifically impacting the development of leadership skills. To date, there have only been studies on its impact on learning outcomes. Lastly, the authors cite individuals drawing on a single experience and using that experience to explain a developmental effect. DeRue and Wellman argue that relying on a singular experience solely based on individual research confounds the experience's nature with individual differences DeRue, D.S & Wellman, N (2009). The notion that experiences can shape and develop people is supported by multiple theories but limited by studies not directly relating research to leadership.

Common Childhood Experience Studies

Building a basis for the study is very important when taking on a research project. Part of building this basis is finding similar studies to support my research design. Reviewing introductions, methodologies, and results from various studies helps reveal effective paths and

gaps in the research. I only found a few studies that were a match to my research question.

Examples of similar studies were Madsen (2009), who looked into the life experiences of women

governors and revealed patterns and differences in their experiences. Burns' 2003 study

*Transforming Leadership* looked at famous leaders' childhoods and found patterns of similar

experiences, such as Lincoln and Roosevelt's relationships with their mothers (Burns 2003).

Within this section, I will break down the three studies that influenced my research design the

most and include their literary reviews, methodology, and results.

**Study #1**

In *Learning from Leading Women's Experience: Toward a Sociological Understanding*,

the authors critically review the literature on women and leadership to highlight common bias

and to contrast literature with the experiences of six women leaders. Carol Elliot, a professor at

the University of Roehampton Business School, has completed multiple research projects around

gender and management/leadership. Valerie Stead, a Professor in leadership management at

Lancaster University, published works interested in the global challenge of women's

representation in power positions Elliot & Stead (2008).

As mentioned at the beginning of this literary review, most literature around leadership,

which informs the thoughts and theories of leadership, comes from a "limited sector of the

population." The study begins by discussing the existing literature, citing Calas and Smirich

1996. The authors share the common theories that America and the United Kingdom are

influenced by masculinity and adopt it as its basis Elliot & Stead (2008).  In *Mary, Mary Quite*

*Contrary, How Do Women Leaders Grow; Women in Management Review,* James (1989) goes

even further to identify this specifically as a white western form of masculinity. The authors

include the notion that these theories, developed by men, are also based mainly on the

observations of men. Lamsa and Sintonen (2001). With these statements in mind, the idea that women leaders are seen through the masculine perspective indicates the importance of producing new studies that showcase the experience and leadership styles of women.

The lack of women's representation in the area of leadership is not a new phenomenon. In fact, in the UK, women are 45% of the workforce but hold fewer than one in ten senior positions. Research conducted by the United Kingdom Equal Opportunities Commission of 2007 found that women lack leadership representation in both the public and private sectors Olsson (2002) and Wilson (1995). With this in mind, it is understandable that "commonly thought" experiences, influenced by male data, do not accurately represent the women leadership experience Elliot (2008). If the data does not accurately portray the experience's reality, due to a limited participant scope, it does not seem reasonable for it to speak for all leaders' experience.

A common question I have heard being debated, and personally dread being asked, is, "Should women lead like a man, or like a woman?". While many other women may dread this question, it is represented in the data through "gender labeling." A common practice in current research, which labels the styles and traits of leaders by whether they are a man or a woman, aims to suggest where this "type of leadership" best succeeds. In Wilson's 1995 study, the authors suggest that feminine characteristics afford women an advantage within a more participatory and democratically organized situation. These characteristics are cooperation, receptivity, and caring orientation Vinnicombe (1988). The 1990 study by Eagly and Johnson supported that these characteristics were more common in women versus men. Whether discussing the common traits of men or women, the following quote makes important points: "... gender cannot be regarded as an isolated feature of identity, but interacts with the broader structural, social, political, historical, cultural, and institutional context" Ashcraft and Murphy

(2004). I interpreted this quote to suggest that, while gender can be a factor in understanding experience, one must consider outside circumstances to understand its reality. When asking a women leader whether or not she leads like a man or a woman, the answer is not clear as one's gender is not the only influence on the behavior. This type of question should be avoided and phased out in society because it relies on old thinking about essential differences between men and women, ignoring each group's variations. My research does find some traces of themes between women leaders' style, but to look to traits solely based on gender halts modern thinking on women leaders in the 21$^{st}$ century.

The authors' views seem to conclude that women's leadership has been poorly analyzed and documented. The study conducted by the authors aims to highlight women's own stories to increase understanding and what leadership means to them. Using the Bryman (2001) sampling method, they followed the snowballing method in which original participants recommend others. Participants were either currently or very recently involved in leadership. They interviewed a biographical frame to understand how participants saw themselves, their experiences, and how they learned. The results of the studies were analyzed using the qualitative analytic hierarchy style Ritchie and Lewis (2003) analysis of in-depth transcripts method. These methods work together by, first, identifying initial themes and concepts, assigning data to themes, and further refining themes by developing more abstract concepts. Then, investigators used a systematic process of reading and rereading transcripts to familiarize themselves and then reflect Elliot & Stead (2008). Their methodologies are important as they influence how I structured my research, as I follow the same sampling method and similar interview and analytic styles. While not identical, I found similar structures in each of the three studies.

This study found four interrelated factors: upbringing, environment, focus, and networks/alliances. The investigators concluded that the interviews emphasize the importance of local networks, which lent to the conclusion that women leadership leaned toward a community-oriented, social capital approach. Additionally, they noted that women leaders outside of traditional organizations often inspire others. Elliot & Stead (2008) These results will give me themes to look for and compare to in my research. Overall, this study gave some great critiques of existing literature and well-structured methodology and analytic strategies.

**Study #2**

The study, *Do Successful Leaders Share Common Childhood Experiences*, by Vita Akstinaite, who studies and specializes in hubris, linguistic markers, constructive and destructive leadership, aims to add to the limited research between childhood experiences and leadership Murphy/Johnson (2011). With the growing interest in potential connections and patterns to leadership behaviors, this study desired to add to the limited information on childhood and teenage years. The study has a minor focus on the hubris in leaders, but for this research, those parts are not included in this review.

Included in the research are two individual leadership models:

1. Life begins with early factors that shape and influence (Berkowits 2011; Murphy 2011)

2. Genetics, parenting style, early learning, and leadership experiences are common factors, but no definitive formal list of factors exists.

Using semi-structured interviews with CEOs or people with senior management titles, adult leaders were interviewed, and transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis to find common themes. Interviews were conducted with participants from the United Kingdom

and Lithuania. Ratios of four men to one woman from each country were interviewed; all were white.

The results included the following themes:

1. Parenting Style-authoritative and controlled style versus laissez-faire

2. Role Models-subthemes of parents/relatives and outsides figures

3. Importance of school- the importance of education and qualified teachers, a pattern that participants noted they were average in school (neither great nor bad)

4. Trigger for change- "Intrinsic motivation to change a situation within which the participants were dissatisfied at a particular moment in their childhood."

5. Engagement in sports-competition, routine, leadership

    As well as the following minor/sub-themes

6. University years-mentions of leadership activities during this time, but did not stress the importance

7. Reading books

8. Travel experience-moving, or exposure to change

9. Social Status- not unpopular, but not the most popular (this changed for most in college).

    The study concluded that parenting style was the most important factor noted, and the type of parenting style was similar between the UK and Lithuanian parents. The research also suggests that authoritative parents produce teenagers with the best chance of being effective leaders. Concerning education, the author supported the idea that poor/average students learn different skills and lessons in school, which leads to understanding situations later in life. Authors were surprised to find that more emphasis was put on primary school years than their

time at university. This contradicts the common thought of Bartone et al. (2007) study, which argues that secondary school years are more critical in developing leaders.

Finally, the trigger for change was mostly due to a participant's desire to be more financially successful than how they were raised. This is because of the intrinsic motivation of successful leaders since emotional, financial, and social difficulties in childhood shape a strong character with a problem-solving mindset. The findings of this study will be important to keep in mind when I analyze my interviews. In comparison to the participants of this study, I will only be interviewing women, my sample size will be larger and more racially diverse, and women will be from various regions in the United States.

**Study #3**

This education dissertation, *Common Childhood Experiences, and Responses Related to the Development of Leaders of Change*, by Jill Berkowicz (2011), is used to understand common themes of male and female leaders' childhoods. The dissertation comes from a perspective of education insights. This source was beneficial in its background information and literary review, its methodology, and its results and conclusions.

The background section of the introduction begins with a history of leadership studies. Overall, it depicts how broad the field of research is and all of the various lenses through which it can be studied. The literary review provides multiple important sources and can be broken down into significant groupings such as leadership theories, change, creativity and problem solving, parents and family, childhood experiences, and leadership skills. Each of these sections was important in terms of initial exposure to information and providing sources for further inquiry. These studies are most important to analyzing my interview in discussing and understanding its place in generally accepted thought.

The research then broke down its methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine men and six women, over the age of 50, from the northeast region. Two participants were African American, and thirteen were white. Participants who exhibited some leadership qualities were studied to see if any experiences were fundamental in developing those traits. Participants were found using purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods and, of the 17 invited to participate, 15 were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in person, except for one over the phone and one using Skype software. They were also digitally recorded. Interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions from Madsen (2009) based on stages of the participant's life. Once transcribed, participants were allowed to review and redact, or clarify, any information they felt did not meet their intended purpose. After approval, transcripts were analyzed to find common themes.

The results demonstrated consistencies in economic status, influences, lessons learned, parents, extended family, and educational experiences. All respondents had families with consistent routines for them and, all but one was encouraged to work hard at their studies. Berk 2011 cites the most substantial common experience was learning important lessons from parents or other influential persons. The researcher concluded that all were raised with the values to work hard and care deeply for others. Interviews also showed that grandparents and other family members were involved, learned from working during childhood, and were also affected by people outside of their own families but within their community. All respondents were affected by situations where they were believed in, encouraged, and supported by a person of influence. The conclusions were well described and insightful.

Overall, this source has equal importance to the previous two. It provided valuable background information, established suitable research methods, and provided reliable themes or patterns to compare to my findings.

Summary

The literature is informative, but after careful analysis, many theories or themes that are based mostly on white men cannot speak for the experience of all, or in general female leaders. A factual basis and set up for research and methodology were found in each source. My research will cover new ground and be more diverse in terms of participant race, profession, and location.

Methods, Data, and Analysis

To answer my research question of whether experiences in a woman's life play a role in her leadership development and, if so, do women leaders share common experiences and views on the positions of leadership, I needed to design an original study.  This meant taking the next step to determine how and from whom to best collect and analyze data for my purpose. During my research, which is laid out in my literary review, I was able to find multiple sources and explore their methodologies. Using these as the basis for my practices, I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews with women leaders, followed by a three-step analysis technique. This chapter will include sections on sampling, selection of participants, data collection procedures, interview protocol, ethical considerations, and analysis strategies.

In designing my research, I knew I wanted to share people's narratives. This interest fits the description of phenomenological research using grounded theory as better defined by (Creswell 2007). He describes the grounded theory as "A strategy used by researchers that results in an action or interaction based on the views of participants in a study." Later, he defined

phenomenological research as " describing meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences…" His works include further description... " what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon"Creswell (2007). These definitions fit my purposes very well, so I continued to design a study in this area.  I considered surveys followed by interviews, but after considering the limited time some leaders may have, I believed interviews were the best method. With this in mind, I began the research process, and observed interview techniques in most research studies were identical. This included semi-structured interviews that used some pre-written questions but focused on the authenticity of the person's narrative.

Semi-structured interviews can be defined as "having a mix of more and less structured questions, with no exact wording or order of the questions determined ahead of time, thus allowing the respondent to reveal the emerging worldview and new ideas" (Merriam 2009). As I would be surveying women with various disciplines, backgrounds, and narratives, I felt the ability to adjust to the conversation at hand but still allow structure would be the most suitable fit for accuracy and comparison.

I found the methodology of semi-structured interviews, using both a purposive sampling and snowball methods strategy for recruitment, in the following research studies: *Learning from Leading Women's Experience: Toward a Sociological Understanding, Do Successful Leaders Share Common Childhood Experiences, Common Childhood Experiences, and Responses Related to the Development of Leaders of Change.* While all of these sources were not an exact match with my research study, their intended purposes were aligned with mine. That is, to get the most in-depth understanding of the experiences of women leaders. Also, multiple studies cited the use of prepared questions, two of which were used in supplementing and supporting the questions I used in my interview. The two studies I referenced for questions were *Common*

*Childhood Experiences, and Responses Related to the Development of Leaders of Change* and

*Do Successful Leaders Share Common Childhood Experiences.* The questions I used can be

found in the appendix.

Sampling

Similar to previously stated studies, I chose to use purposive sampling and snowball

sampling methods. Purposive sampling is when the researcher selects individuals because they

may understand the research problem in the study. (Creswell 2007) Snowballing or chain

sampling utilizes people who may know other possible individuals for a study and recommend

them to the investigator. (Creswell 2007) These methods shaped who was interviewed.

Sampling, initially, was based on a list of personal and professional connections, then additional

participants were contacted based on the recommendations of those previously interviewed.

Interviews took place in May 2020. Limited time and resources limited the total number of

interviews that could be done. Altogether, 20 interviews were conducted.

Selection of Participants

*Learning from Leading Women's Experience: Toward a Sociological Understanding, Do*

*Successful Leaders Share Common Childhood Experiences, Common Childhood Experiences,*

*and Responses Related to the Development of Leaders of Change* shared other methodologies I

used, which included the use of the definition of who met their leadership criteria. In my case, I

found a general definition of leadership, and if contacts or recommendations met this definition,

they could be interviewed. The only other limitations used in this study required that participants

were women and between the ages of 30 and 60 years old.

After researching all the various ways leaders and leadership can be described, I used the

definition by Kevin Kruise. He said, "Leadership is the process of social influence, which

maximizes the efforts of others, toward the achievement of a goal." I was very receptive to this definition because I was striving for a well-rounded but general description that would not limit my sample to high-ranking women. Generally, definitions are very specific in terms of title or involve characteristics related to the definer's values or leadership views. Instead, this definition left room for a wide range of women to select for interviews, from a stay at home moms to CEO. Some women, who would not have defined themselves as leaders, after reading this definition, felt they could now fit my sampling requirements.

With a desire to best represent the real experience of women leaders, I wanted to actively keep in mind the diversity of my population/respondents/women with regards to race, location, and discipline. Literature in leadership already bases its theories, and the majority of its thoughts, on the masculine experience on forms of leadership. I believed that if I desired to move to reflect the reality of leaders today, I wanted to represent best who encompasses leaders in 2020 and what their stories were. Similar studies either looked at all white men and women or all white men. These participants were usually in the same area or country, as well. These studies would limit their participants by specific leadership titles or professions. In the interest of finding common experiences of women leaders, that I could feel confident in that it represented the reality of women leaders today, I felt that diversifying my population to share the experiences of women of color, mothers, and non-mothers, women from around the United States and abroad, and women in both the humanities and STEM to be the only true way to break the surface of trying to identify trends in their narratives. I believe that to continue innovating, researchers will need to practice and keep this idea in mind; without doing so, they will not reflect the true reality of leadership.

Data Collection Procedures

Initial participants were all sent invitations through/by email to participate in the study. Participants that were recommended by others were either sent the same or similar email. Upon accepting the invitation to participate in the study, initial contacts were asked to name the best three dates and times in the following week. Once a date and time were agreed upon, they were sent the skype link to access the call, information about common technical difficulties and solutions, a consent form, and a pre-interview questionnaire. Participants were asked to fill out both forms and return them before their interview. This process was repeated with recommended participants as well. Upon completing the interview process, I realized that some participants did not have the time before the interview to complete the survey. I also realized that some participants only received consent forms before the interview. This was an easy adjustment, as the questionnaire intended to allow me to personalize or streamline questioning. In those whose questionnaires I did not have on hand for the interview, that information was covered during the call.

Interviews were conducted using Skype audio call software to reduce traveling and the Covid 19 pandemic social distancing guidelines. This was the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved program. Still, in cases where participants could not access the software or experienced technical difficulties, instead of using another program, a direct phone call was made between the participant and investigator to limit security breaches or risks. These interviews were recorded with informed consent from each participant but not transcribed in full. The calls were limited to audio-only, and respondents were asked to shut off their video because they were being recorded. This was my attempt best to keep the security and anonymity of the participants. Upon completion of the call, secure files were labeled with a pseudonym label, participant (a-z), and filed with the consent form, questionnaire, if possible, and the recording of the interview.

Interview Protocol

At the beginning of the interview, I greeted each participant and thanked them for taking the time to speak with me. Following introductions and any pleasantries, I took the time to explain the overall layout of the interview, how each section and questioning would go, and then initiate conversation. Interviews were designed to be broken up by childhood, adolescence, college/graduate years, career synopsis, and type of leadership questions. While there were predetermined questions, due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, I opted to allow each participant to explain, overall, what their experiences growing up, and as a leader were like. This could include, but not be limited to, significant events, moments, or feelings. Once the participant finished sharing their story, I used either the prepared questions to cover topics not yet discussed or personalized questions to dive deeper into issues that needed further elaboration. This format was consistent throughout the entire interview. At times, some participants did not tell their story in a linear timeline from childhood to adulthood. Still, because of the nature of the semi-structured interview, I had no issue allowing the call to go on with the natural flow of the participant's thoughts.

Upon completing each time in the participant's life, I asked if they would like to add before moving on. If nothing was added, the interview continued. But, if something was added, the interview continued after their thoughts were shared. Once I reached the end of my questioning, I prompted the participant to add anything else they felt relevant and asked if they had any final questions before concluding. Finally, the interview concluded by thanking the participants. They were then told they could email me to add anything they might think of later and email me with any recommendations. All participants requested a copy of the thesis once completed. This was the last interaction I had with the participant.

Ethical Considerations

In designing the study, I looked at what was missing in other research. What I found was that diversity lacked representation in nearly all of the literature. While women lacked representation, so were women of different backgrounds, races, and disciplines. With this in mind, during each step of the process, I actively took steps to promote this in my sampling and the recommendations I got from women leaders.

In the modern-day, anyone conducting research or interviews must take important notes in both the planning and execution of the study to protect the privacy of participants. During my interviews, and as I write this today, the Covid 19 pandemic is an active threat to human health, which requires limited interactions between people and social distancing. As a result, all interviews were conducted over Skype or, in some instances, on a direct phone call. When conducting and recording interviews with a person about their narrative and history, privacy is an important factor to plan for. I interviewed women staying at home moms, women involved in private business ventures, and others who work for the government. I believe that to be able to have the best conversations, participants needed to feel secure. To do this, as noted in the protocol section, only audio was recorded. After each interview, all consent forms and videos were placed into a folder labeled with Participant (A-Z), and interviews were not transcribed by an outside source or in full at any time. This made the leaders comfortable and, to my best impression, able to give honest and real interviews.

Finally, in these interviews, we covered mostly their life stories, and in turn, moments that were uncomfortable or painful came up. I was very fortunate that these leaders were so open. In turn, I needed to be very respectful and understand when to move on from a topic or ask more. From grief to divorce, to sexual harassment, and life and death situations, many topics needed to be taken with the utmost care.

Analysis of Strategies

After spending slightly under 30 hours interviewing the women leaders, I needed to prepare to analyze my data and find common themes to conclude. The process for my analysis consisted of three steps. After the interviews, I built a summary form to use when rereading my notes and listening to each interview recording(see **Appendix)**. The purpose of this was to streamline themes and demographics for later comparison and understanding. First, my interview notes were used to fill out the summary form as much as possible. Second, I reviewed each interview recording to fill in any missing information or themes on the conditions. With the completed summary forms, I finally compared overall common themes, themes based on demographics, and comparisons alike. From this point, I began the writing process in what I believed to be an efficient and informed way.

The decision to complete a form was due to the reality of the semi-structured interviews that led to notes from calls not being in the same order.  The form and two-step analysis became a benefit as it enabled me to look, compare, and consider themes three times over while processing my research. During this first round, any additional themes that I had not picked up on were noted and added to the sheet used in the second round. In conclusion, themes that were discussed, thought over, and analyzed twice were given a final consideration before proceeding onto the writing process. This strategy gave structure to massive amounts of information and exact steps to follow in a sea of information.


Findings

The data suggests that upbringing, marriage and motherhood, influencers, and leadership views were commonalities and important to the women sampled. The women leaders also had themes in why they enjoy leadership, education in success and development, the role for women

of outside influence and sponsorship, and the development found in high intensity or hectic schedules long term. Further data will be found in my results section and later in my discussion section.

Section 2: Results

Introduction

The following section covers the results of over 25 hours of interviews. The 20 interviews that were conducted led to the previously noted themes and trends. Still, for this research, it was decided to report on only significant quantitative findings and or qualitative points of interest. These themes and trends have been grouped into the following categories: Participant Demographics, Upbringing/Family/Friends, Marriage and Children, Influencers, and Leadership. Within each grouping, trends will be broken down into both quantitative and qualitative formats. Further discussion of findings will follow and will be placed in the context of the literature.

Of the findings of this research, the major takeaways from interviews can be summed up as that women leaders look to lead more to develop others and organizations rather than for personal gain. Education, for the majority, was influential and thought to be the way to personal and financial success. Women experienced at least one person that was pivotal in exposure or influence, whether positive or negative, for later choices, opportunities,  or views. All women from a young age were extremely busy, which built essential skills and experiences for their later life and career. While this research finds many themes and data points, these major headlines above stand out after all the interviews, analysis, and data review.

Demographics

Participants of this study were recruited through a snowball purposive sampling strategy, but an emphasis was placed on having a well-diversified sample. This included race, motherhood, marriage, discipline, and multiple other factors. An initial interest in varied locations was intended, but due to sampling, this was not successful.

Below you will see in Table 1.1 the ages of participants sampled. The women interviewed had to be between the ages of 30 and 60 years old. The average age of the sample was 46.8 years old. The majority of women were in their 40's. The importance of understanding the ages and generations of the women for which the trends were based is because periods of time can play a role in the experiences women would have had versus 20 years before or 20 years after. I will reference this later in discussing the experiences of the women.
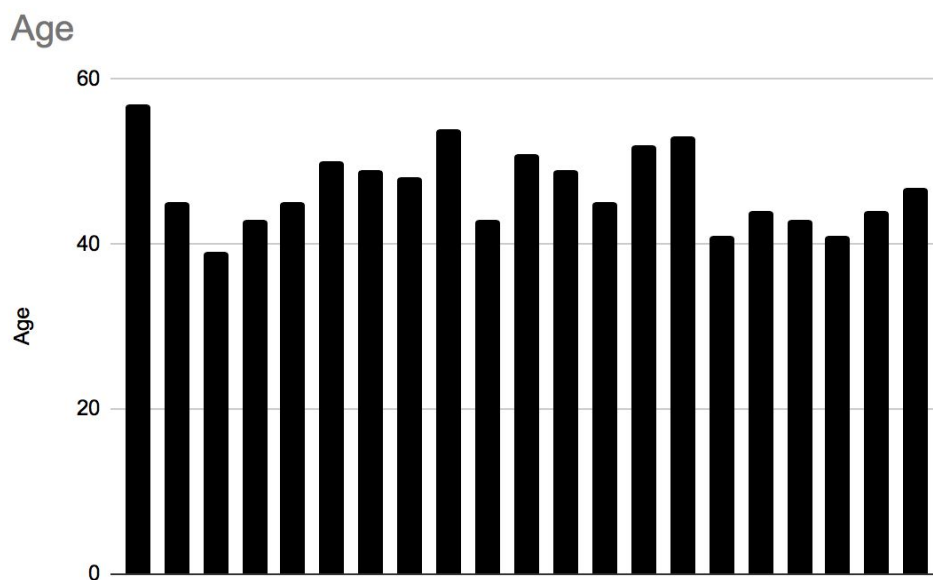


*Table 1.1*

In Table 1.2 below, you will see the breakdown of participant racial diversity.  The table only does a general breakdown of white women and women of color. Within the grouping of

women of color, multiple are a part of different minority groups.  Other studies lacked any

diversity, as all participants were all white. I aimed to have more diversity in many areas,

including race. While I still do not believe the sample is representative enough in this area, I felt

successful in adding the viewpoints and experiences in the lacking research. Due to the sampling

method, it is likely a standard limitation that many white female leaders referenced other white

female leaders based on familiarity. With a 65% to 35% makeup, there is representation in the

sample that starts to express the experience of women of color on their path to leadership.

Sample Participant Racial Demographics
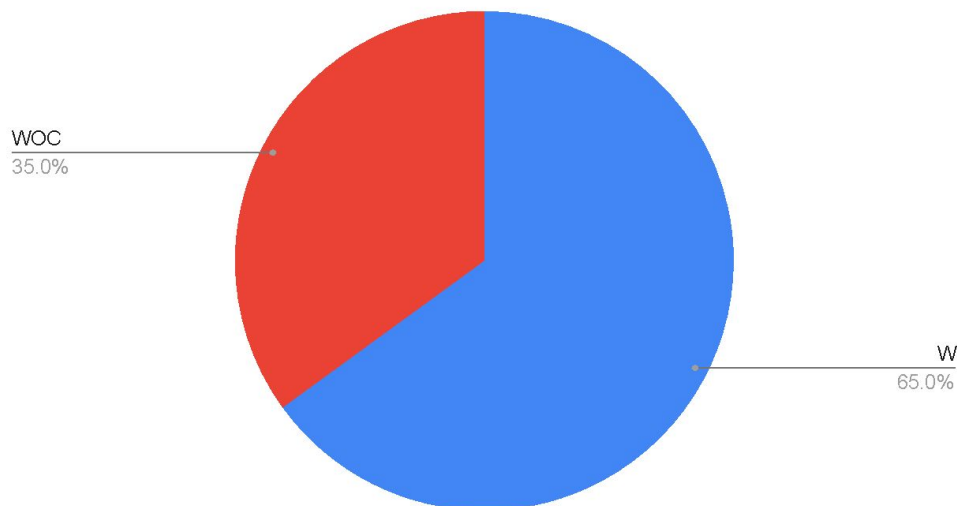


*Table 1.2*

In the area of the demographics of sample disciplines and jobs, positions are broken

down. Again, in terms of varied diversity, I aimed to get narratives from women in different

positions and professions. With some repetitive discipline areas, each participant had a different

role or place within that discipline. The general areas were education, STEM, business, and

government. This research defined motherhood as a leadership position. Data in this area will be

covered later on, but of the sample, 15 of the 20 women were mothers, those who noted the role

of primary parent are represented in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 displays the list of positions participants have within their careers. The list has

multiple titles, with no strong trends within them other than that they are mostly senior positions.

This made sense when considering that most women interviewed are in the middle to end of their

careers. Not noted in the table, many of these women hold positions on or for multiple boards

and groups outside their noted professions. These are important positions that are a part of their

experiences and passions.

| Participant Current Title | Participant Current Title ▼ |
|---|---|
| Vice President | 3 |
| Founder/CEO | 2 |
| Fitness Coordinator, Primary Parent | 1 |
| Head of Team | 1 |
| Senior Director, Associate Dean | 1 |
| Professor, Associate Dean, President Of Organization, Published Author | 1 |
| State Senator | 1 |
| Co-Owner, Primary Parent | 1 |
| History Teacher, Union Representative | 1 |
| Program Director | 1 |
| Non Equity Partner | 1 |
| Superintendent | 1 |
| Financial advisor, Business Owner | 1 |
| Professor, Head Research Analyst, Fellow | 1 |
| Founder/Non profit, Primary Parent | 1 |
| Chief Growth Officer, Former Vice President | 1 |
| Assistant Vice President | 1 |

*Table 1.3*

Upbringing, Family, and Friends

Referenced in my literature review, nurture vs. nature, experiences in one's childhood,

and many other factors can influence a future leader. The following will be a breakdown of

common themes and trends within the sample's childhood experiences through the end of adolescence.

Socio-economic status can influence how and where someone is educated, the environment they grow up in, and the responsibilities one can have at a young age. For many of those I interviewed, they mentioned that until later in life, they did not realize their financial status as a child because their parents went out of their way to make it possible for them not to be aware of having anything less. Other women did express some events that made them aware of finances like a death, a move, or other moments that at a young age made reality clearer.

Table 2.1 below breaks down the women's statuses growing up. This portion of the data is based on the self-reporting of each participant. It is important to note that class status, unless using income estimates, is considered unreliable. Labeling economic status is based on personal views, which can differ between participants. For this research, the data represents the labels, at the word of the participants, not a specific income divide. The large majority reported in the middle-class range, which was further broken down by the particular label each woman stated. With 40% labeling themselves as middle class, a common explanation that came with this was that "while they always had what they needed, there was not much room for extras." Upper-middle-class responders did not make much mention to finances, other than that they never went without. Those who put themselves in the low or middle class to lower class range made some references to going without and working for the money their parents could not spare. The importance of all of this is connected to a small trend in a desire for financial stability and independence later in life. A more major trend was in the age at which women started working. Those who began working from a younger age noted added responsibility, early emotional

growth and independence, and a hectic schedule from an early age. These factors have multiple

possible causes, but socioeconomic status is a likely player in the result.
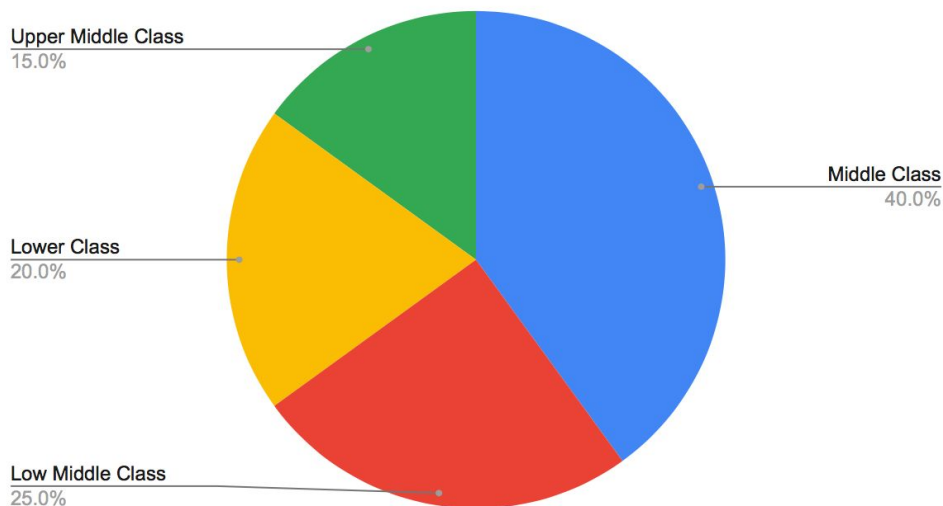
**Count of Socio-Economic Status**



*Table 2.1*

From early on, a clear trend was that every participant was extremely busy from early

childhood. This included sports, activities, commutes to school, religious studies, and work.

Some students did all of the above, others did a mixture of a few at a higher level, but what was

undeniable was aside from work ethic in school, these leaders' involvement and ability to juggle

responsibilities as a child followed them throughout the rest of their adolescence and later

adulthood.

In Table 2.2, the data for the age women began working is laid out. The average age was

12.4 for beginning to work. With 84.2% of the sample also participating in sports, and 90% in at

least one, but more often, 2-3 activities at some point during childhood and adolescence.

Altogether, most leaders said this busy schedule seemed normal at the time, later when reflecting

with me, some said it played a role in their development and later abilities to handle multiple

objectives and tasks.

Examples of the influence of these busy schedules included multiple working positions that taught them lessons and activities or leadership opportunities that lead to responsibility and independence. The common reason for beginning to work was the need or desire for the financial freedom that came with working. The earliest positions observed were paper routes and babysitting. Those with paper routes were handling money, navigating neighborhoods, and getting up to work before school. Others who were babysitting, whether for younger siblings or other families, were heavily responsible for the care of children, one participant noting " I felt like I raised so many children when I was still a child" when discussing her working experiences. Participants worked at retail, food service, and other typical jobs once at the legal working age (14/15-year-old). Lessons, both positive and negative, were learned in these jobs. One participant shared her experience working in an ice cream shop and being required to wear a sexualized uniform. She said she knew that felt wrong and inappropriate at that young age but said it just felt "not right." The role of employment at a young age opened these women to lessons and responsibility from early on, and that carried out lifelong.

The participants noted time spent in extracurriculars, sports, internships, etc. were, for those engaged heavily in them, extremely important. For one participant being the only freshman selected for the varsity cheer team was pivotal for her growth and confidence. She later went on to be the cheer captain as a senior. For another woman interviewed, the experience of running for school council was empowering but also a reality check. She always felt well-liked but never understood how others saw her. When she had a swastika drawn on a campaign poster, her reaction was less anger and more learning that she had a label, whether it was as a Jew, a little sister, or a woman later on. Finally, an example of a participant who not only went to a highly intensive and competitive school was spending her days commuting to school in the city,

studying and engaging in her academics, but also leading school clubs, doing multiple

internships while in high school, and working. While these experiences had many take-aways,

she reflected on how juggling many things and finding passions were driving factors throughout
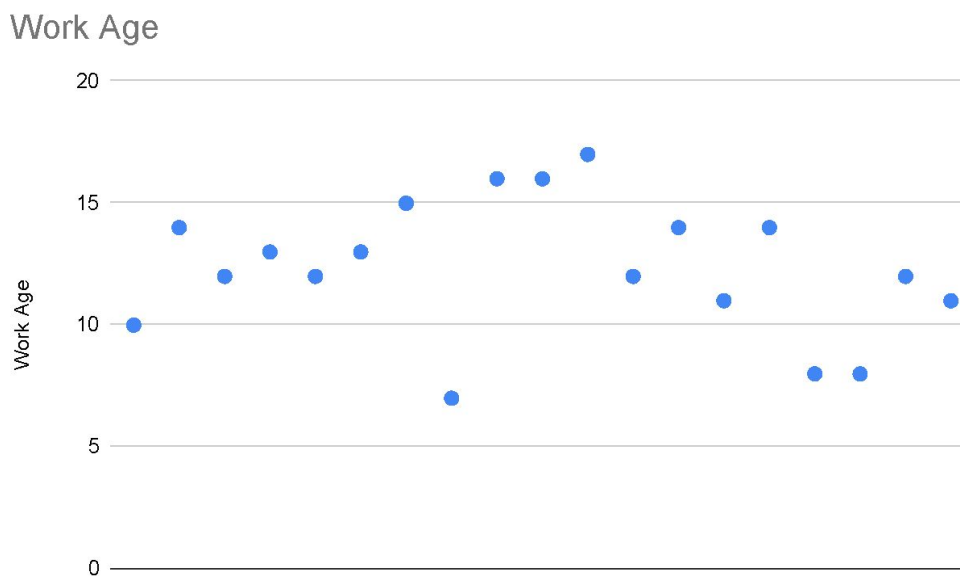
her life.

## Work Age



*Table 2.2*

Family structure for these women compared to the norm today was, for the majority,

traditional. Traditional in this context was defined as having one or more of the following

characteristics: a mother as a primary parent in the parental structure, gender roles in the home,

fathers as the primary providers, and or other thought of as traditional practices. Table 2.3 shows

the 95% to 5% split, with the vast majority of women saying they would describe their family

growing up as conventional. The 5% that said a mixture was referring to a combination of

traditional and modern practices. Within each interview, discussing the family environment's

topic and the possibility of gender roles was an interesting conversation as some women could

recall strong gender roles. Others started the interview, noting that they never felt different

treatment than their brothers or because they were a girl, only to later note an instance or practice

that singled them out because they were a girl. Some gender role experiences included one

participant noting expectations for modesty for her, not her brother, another noting that her

brother would be in charge of painting the office versus her being expected to work the front

desk with her mother.
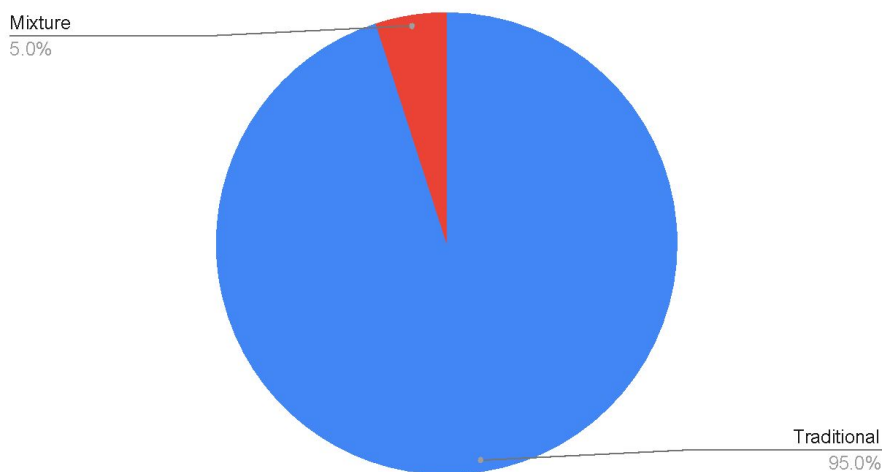
Count of Parental Relationship

Mixture
5.0%

Traditional
95.0%

*Table 2.3*

Within the women's upbringings, 65% noted that their mother was the primary parent

and considered a stay at home mom. 46% of those women also expressed that by elementary age,

their mothers went back to work part-time while still being the primary parent. Staying on-trend,

most women described their fathers as the monetary provider for the family who they did not see

as often as their mothers. Ironically, women cited watching their fathers' work and work ethic as

something that pushed them, and they aimed to model themselves. A moving experience came

from the narrative of a woman who grew up in poverty who noted that her father "… worked 364

days a year, and watching him do that, and my mother in a sweatshop embedded a strong work

ethic from early on". Multiple women discussed fathers who went to school at night while they

worked full time and saw that with that education, their family gained more financial stability.

This instilled a belief in the role of education in success and work ethics at an early age.

Parenting style and the ability to make decisions with or without guidance were other

areas of study in the topic of upbringing. When asked to describe whether their parents were

more authoritative, laissez-faire, or a mixture, the data showed 70% of women grew up with an

authoritarian style, 10% had a great deal of freedom, and 20% had a mixture of the two. I

predicted that there might be a correlation between parenting trends and the ability to make

choices for these women, but the data ended up split in an interesting way. 50% said they had the

freedom to make decisions independently, and the other 50% noted their freedom in decisions

was still guided by their parents. No one responded that their parents made decisions for them.

Due to the qualitative nature of collecting this data, I understood this better through the

explanations by many of the women. While they grew up in strict households with high

expectations of their parents as they grew up, they established trust and freedom in

decision-making. The participants that noted the authoritative parenting style made sure to add

that their parents many times still had fun but would still describe it as a very strict style of

parenting.

In the area of family, another trend was in sibling relations. All participants noted having

at least one sibling. 60% of women surveyed reported they were close with their sibling(s), 30%

were somewhat close, and 10% were not close. Regardless of how relationships were defined,

not every participant felt that their siblings were influential in their development. For those that

did, the conversation tended to revolve around an addition, whether by others or by themselves, a

responsibility factor. Those who held the role of older siblings felt a responsibility to their

younger siblings; whether this came as an older influencer or third parent affected the level of

impact, they thought it had. For those who were the youngest sibling or had older siblings, the

women felt if the relationships were impactful because they were a role model, they desired their

approval or played the role of parent to them. Not all participants felt this impact, but those who

did that were the majority opinion on influence—Tables 2.4 and 2.5 charts the data regarding

having siblings to how many siblings and birth order.

A minor trend in those who felt an influence by their siblings was in the negative light.

Whether it was an illness, an unplanned event, or other cause, the impact was a negative

response by a parent or tremendous added responsibility to the participant as a child. Not all

adverse reactions were seen as bad by the women interviewed, as some noted they experienced

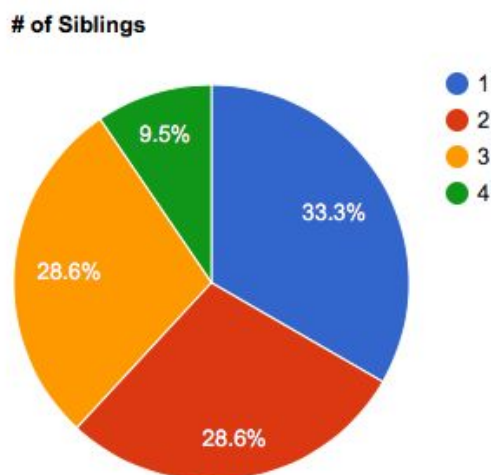freedom they had not before. Others say it made them better prepared for the world later on.



*Table 2.4*

The data revealed 100% of participants grew up with siblings, 35% had one sibling, 30% had two siblings, 30% had three siblings, and 5% had four siblings. With the information found below in Table 2.5, most participants were the oldest, with 45% stating this.

## Count of Birth Order
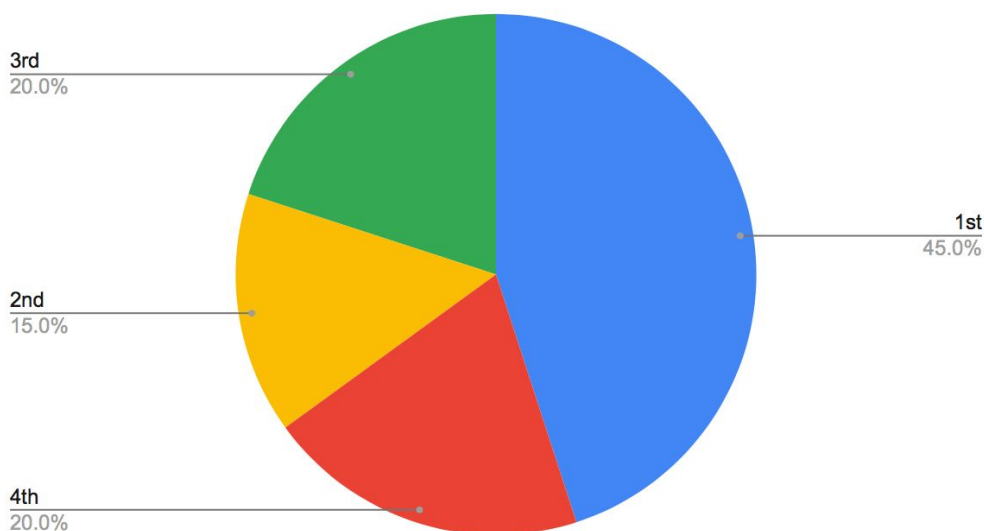


*Table 2.5*

In the area of extended family, multiple participants noted them non-influential or not involved. Those that did make a note of them as influential were most commonly referencing one to two family members that taught, showed, or gave lessons or experiences that were impactful. For this reason, the role of extended family will be later covered under the influences category, as that is where the conversations tended to revolve around.

One last trend in this grouping is friends and socializing during childhood and adolescence. The most prevalent trend was that 85% of women reported having multiple separate groups of friends, usually divided by neighborhood, sports, activities, and other areas of their life. For all the women, it was common that they further specified that they had 2-3 close best

friends, and for many, they were friendly with everyone and well-liked. Those who described

challenges in social areas were bullying, tensions and prejudice based on race, and normal

"awkward" growing up feelings. Altogether, while most of the women who participated grew up

all over the country, many moved and faced various environments, the above trends were what

became prevalent in each interview that was a commonality between them all.

Marriage and Children

Marriage and motherhood are two areas that have evolved in the last 30 years, especially

in the generation of women interviewed. With many being brought up in traditional households,

with a stay-at-home mother, gender roles, and majorly authoritative environments seeing the

parallels between that and their current-day partnerships and motherhood experiences was

fascinating.  As stated in the demographics section, it was aimed that this sample of women

would include diversity in this area. With this, 80% of women shared they were married, and one

woman is recently divorced. The data in this section for marriage will reflect those respondents'

answers. In terms of motherhood, 75% of the participants noted they had at least one child. This

section will cover the women's marriages and motherhood experiences, which will later be

contrasted in my discussion section with those they were exposed to as children.

Table 3.1 displays that 10% of women have never been married, 5% are divorced

currently, and 5% are remarried. Of the 17 marriages represented, 16 are heterosexual

relationships, and one is a same-sex relationship.

Count of Marriage Status

Never Married
10.0%
Divorced
5.0%
Remarried
5.0%

Yes
80.0%
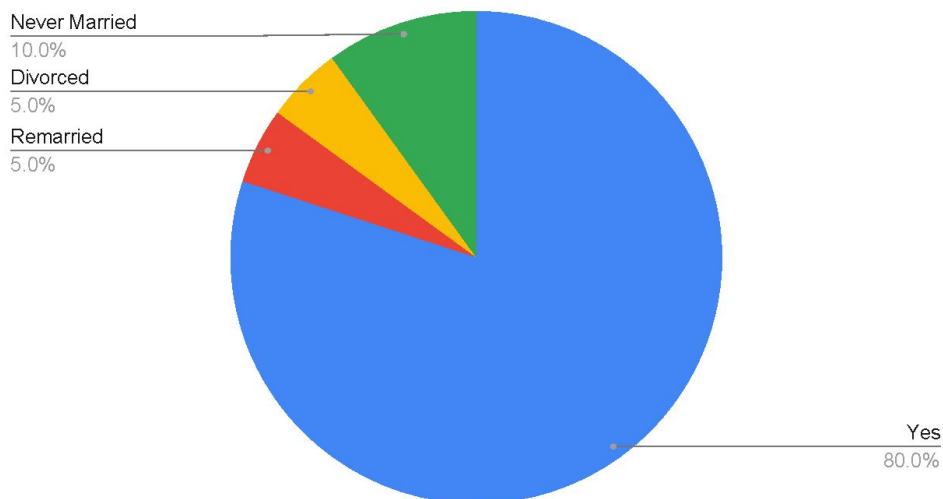
*Table 3.1*

Of the relationships that were discussed, Table 3.2 lays out the data about how women

would describe the type of relationship they are in. 75% of the women labeled their marriage as

modern, and 25% said it was modern with some traditional element's mixture.  This data highly

contrasted what the women were exposed to during childhood and adolescence. Including the

women who hold the primary parent position in their household, within the conversations, an

undertone of expectations for their partners to truly be partners, to split up tasks based on

individual strengths, and to both be involved was seemingly universal. One participant described

it that in their household, they both parent and split the chores in the home based on interest and

skill. She cooks, and he does the laundry. Other participants noted when they had younger

children, the balance was off-kilter with more responsibility on their shoulders. Still, it was

interesting to learn that they became more balanced over time or after situations that put the

mother's career as the priority. In one case, after the 2008 recession, the participants' company

needed her attention, and her partner took over the primary parenting role so that her focus could

be on her company until her later retirement where both parents resumed an equal partnership in

the role of parenting.

Count of Type of Marriage
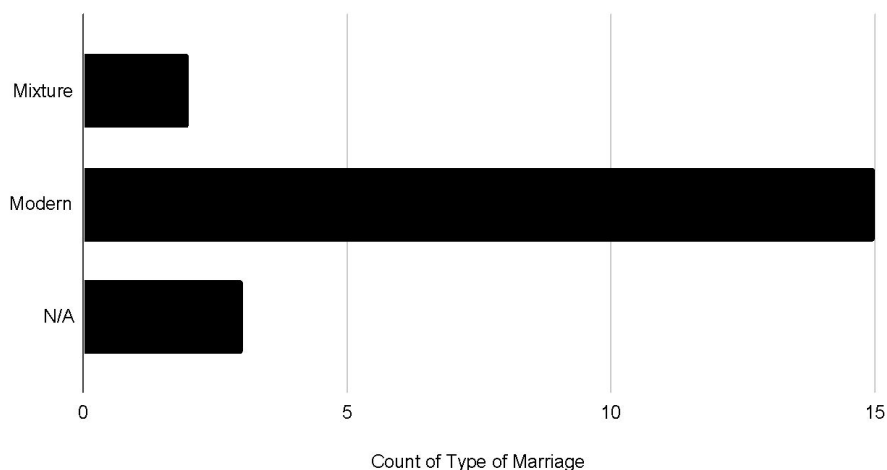


*Table 3.2*

The idea of splitting tasks based on individual skill flows well into the next finding,

which was that when asking to describe and expand upon the influence and dynamic of their

marriages, the same keywords and phrases were repeated like they were scripted. 100% of

women referenced partnership, 94% used the term supportive, 82% referenced their partner as

their opposite and balancing force,  82% noted their partner pushes them to be better or to grow

in all aspects of their life, and 53% said their partner helps them be better at having a better

work/life balance.

Within conversations, it was common to hear that "... I could not do what I do without

him", or that "She is a saint, putting up with all the responsibilities and late nights I have." Two

women went on to include that their husband took steps back in their career to be the primary

parent so they could do what they needed in their career. Many of the women interviewed had

been with their partners since college, or early in their careers, so this partnership was built while they were building their careers as well.  One participant noted that her husband supported and pushed her to go and take opportunities for her career, following her lead. Overall, this experience in women's lives seemed impactful. Interestingly, the respondent that is currently divorced shared the reasoning behind this was due to her husband's desire for her not to work, which seems to fit into the data that the partnerships hold the vital role of being a supporting force, and without this are not the right fit for these women leaders.

Table 3.3 lays out years married for the sample. The average for this data set of 20 women was 15.35 years. For the most part, the relationships that were described were long term and well established. It is important to note that many of these women dated or were in committed relationships with their partners for many years before marriage, which is not evident in the data shared.
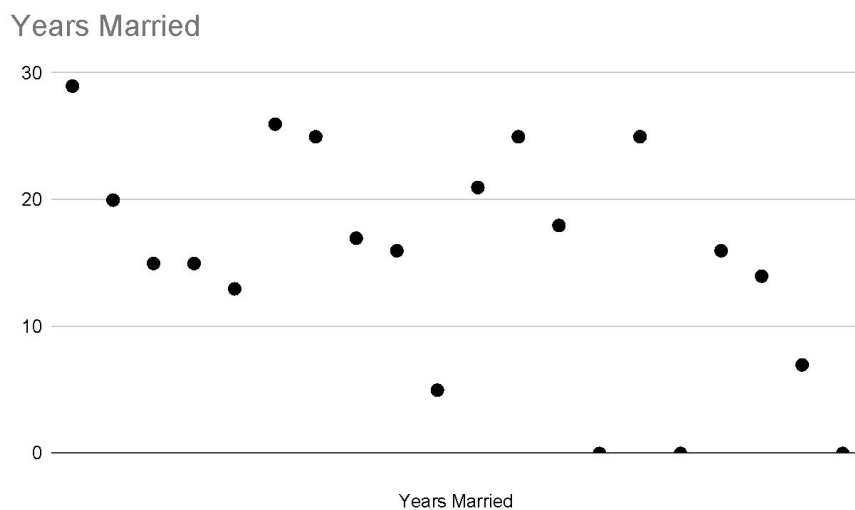
Years Married



Years Married

*Table 3.3*

Of the 20 women, 15 shared that they have at least one child. With 75% of the sample mothers, again, it was quite intriguing to compare how many children they had to the upbringing

data, as they all grew up with at least one sibling. The interest of the research came to be more

about the influence had by women from experiencing motherhood. In this area, again, the

reasoning was pretty universal overall. Table 3.4 lays out the data for how many women had

children, and if they did, how many children they had. Of the 15 women who were mothers, 20%

had one child, 53% had two children, and 26% had three children. I will compare my findings

with the United States national averages later in my discussion section.

# of Children

20%  25%  15%  40%

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
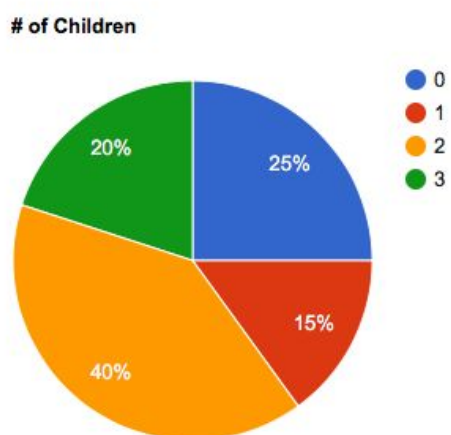
*Table 3.4*

The overall response I got from the women who had experienced motherhood was that

their outlook, whether of their career, the world, or their definition of joy or success, changed

once they had children. Most discussed the influence on their leadership skills, which was

overwhelmingly reciprocal. Being a leader made them a better mother, and being a mother made

them a better leader. Seeing this in interviews multiple times was curious, and when asking the

two women who are stay at home mothers now, they describe their leadership style as a mother,

the same way as most women did about their career. A common thought about the strong, adaptable abilities of mothers to lead seemed to fit in with the information collected. The specific skills highlighted that being a mother influenced were work-life balance, communication, patience, confidence, ability to develop others, and compassion.

I found it interesting when looking at the interviews of two mothers who chose to leave their careers after having a child with health complications at or around birth. They tried to do it all, keeping up with a career, being a wife, and being a mother to multiple children, including a child with added needs and attention. In both instances, the women stated they realized they could not do it all and decided that felt right to them. But they were leaders whether in their initial career or not. One went on to be on multiple boards and started a non-profit. The other took on roles in her community, later doing some contracting work, and now has an active role in her family's business. These women noted motherhood was influential, but while their original career paths did not align with their reality, they found other ways to lead and make essential changes in the world around them regardless. This felt like such a great example of why I looked to have an open definition of a leader because, in today's society, it seems too easy to overlook women who lead every day of their lives outside of the boardroom, whether it is at home, in their community, or with specific topics that are important to them.

When discussing with the 25% of women that chose not to have children, most noted it was a personal choice they made. The reasons varied, including their extensive responsibilities for their siblings or other children as a third parent during childhood, the lack of desire, and the focus on careers for them and their partner. One participant who had previously noted her large amounts of babysitting as a child herself also made it clear that all of this experience led her to make the active choice never to have her children. Another leader, who had gender roles heavily

placed on her as a child, always felt she would never be a mother herself.  Interestingly, these details were shared that multiple noted that they always knew, or early on knew they did not want children. Marriage and motherhood, when experienced by the sampled women leaders, had many similarities in influence.

Education

Education played a significant role for most of the women in the sample. Overall, an expressed joy for lifelong learning was consistent and current. For multiple women, an expression of a safe place or an escape from their world academically was vital to them. The majority of students attended public schools, with only 25% attending another type of institution. Understanding the role of education in these female leaders was interesting and eye-opening. This section will cover grades, abilities, emphasis by families, and college experience.

K-12 Education

In terms of grades, the results were that the majority were high, or A, A/B students. 80% of women were in the high range, and 20% said they were average students. No women reported being below average students. Table 4.1 displays this data. Comparisons with the findings of other studies can be found in my discussion section.

Count of Grades
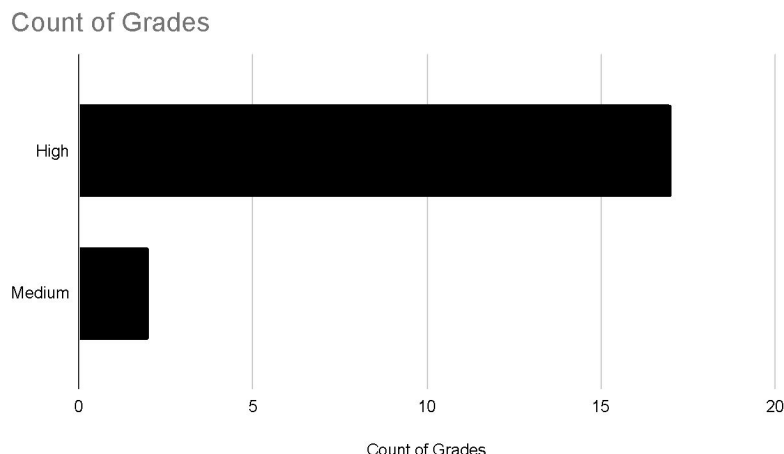


Table 4.1

In terms of achieving those grades, I asked the women if school was easy and natural or more challenging to get high marks, followed by if they wanted or needed to work hard. The following results are representative until university years. Table 3.2 lays out the combination of the findings in this area. Overall, 30% said school was easy, and they did not work hard, 30% said they had to work hard to do well, and 40% said while school was easy, they still worked hard. For those who said school was easy, and they did not work hard, I felt it was important to dive more into this. In these cases, the women still had strong work ethics, but in other areas, they were commonly strained, whether by hectic schedules, a need to work, or heavy responsibilities. These women had strong work ethics overall, so when they did not have to try as hard in the area of education, that is where they gave themselves slack.

Count of Difficulty



Count of Difficulty
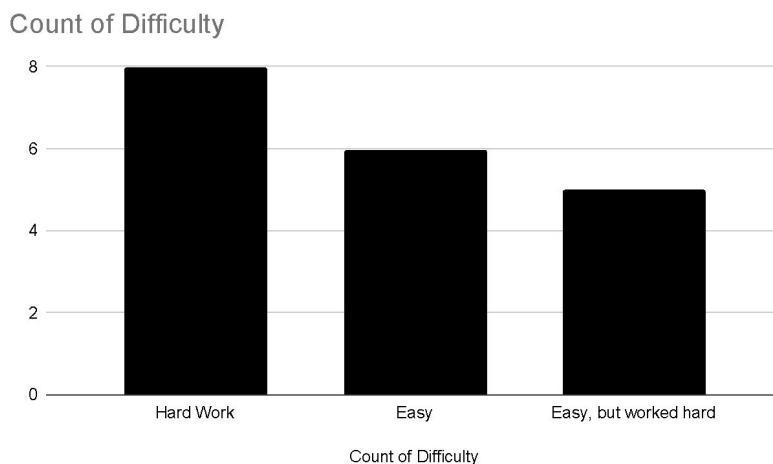
*Table 4.2*

In the area of grades and achievement, another trend was whether or not women experienced a family emphasis on education. The majority did, with many reasons and explanations as to why, 60% responded yes that there was an expectation and push from their parents to do well in school. Multiple even explained if they got C or below, they would get punished. For most of the 40% that did not have this emphasis, and some of those even with a family emphasis expressed a desire to please, family and teachers, and excel was their driving force to do well.

A trend that was not major in this data set, as women of color (WOC) did not hold a majority within the sample, was the environment experienced by WOC experienced in their education. Every woman of color that was interviewed mentioned being underestimated in their education, which was a driving force to work hard. Understanding that for all the women interviewed that experienced this, it was noted that they enjoyed academics, but the social aspect , due to racism at school was challenging.

University/College

Secondary education was not an area with many trends compared to other topics. But some that were very interesting include why they chose to attend that college, transitions, and the highest level of degree. The majority of women did not note that these years were the most influential but did emphasize the takeaway of development and lessons learned that carried on throughout their careers and lives.

In deciding where to attend college, the women had to contend with many factors, including parental health, ability to pay, major offerings, sports, etc. The two major trends were that many participants made choices based on the best scholarships or the most challenging or top dream school for themselves. Most had multiple reasons for their final decision but of all of the reasons these two were the most common.

Transitions to the first year of college are commonly accepted to be difficult for some. I was not expecting to find a trend, but while minor, a trend of difficulty during the first semester of college was seen multiple times. The two reasonings behind it were, for women, that school was always easy, all of a sudden, the way they studied or managed their time was not working anymore. They had not had the freedom they now had and or went to a very challenging school. With either cause, the women cited either failing their first semester or starting rough and then recouping and finishing strong. The important thing was what the leaders took away from this; those who had this as a wakeup call learned how to structure, how to study, and set them up for later success.

All 20 women completed bachelor's degree programs, 45% completed a masters, and 30% went on to further complete a Ph.D., MBA, or JD. Table 4.3 lays out a more detailed breakdown of the highest degree achieved data. The large majority of women at least continuing on to masters was very interesting, and upon further conversation, most obtained this due to

being told or under the impression that without it, they could not advance to where they desire in their career. A large grouping of those who did get their masters did so during their career either because they needed it to advance further or because it could be paid for by the company and seemed important to the woman.

**Participants Highest Level of Education**

JD
5.0%
MBA
5.0%

PHD
20.0%

Masters
45.0%

BA
25.0%
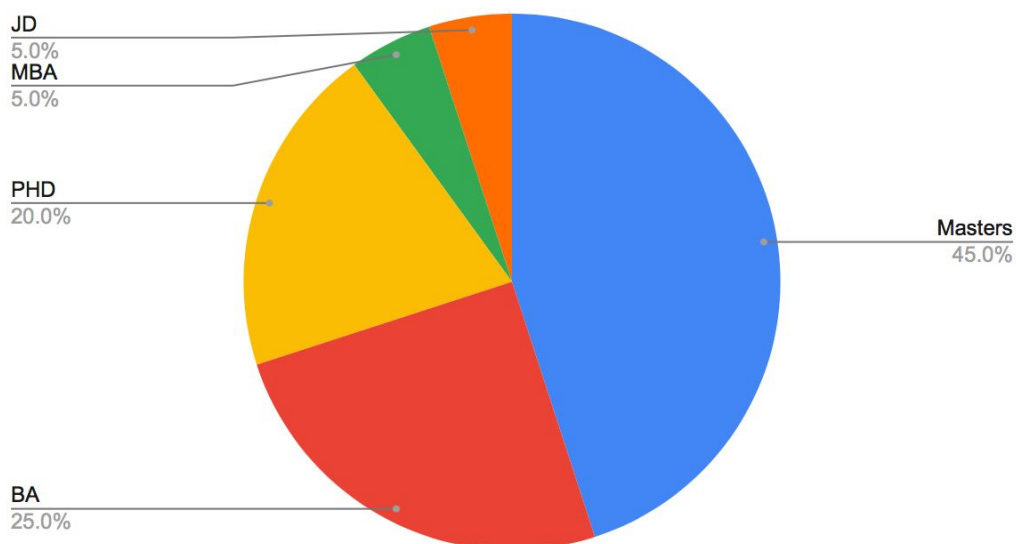
*Table 4.3*

Influencers, Sponsors, and Negative Role Models

       This section will cover the influencers, sponsors, and negative role models throughout these women's lives. This includes childhood, adolescence, college, and career. The results do not name every influencer listed, rather the trends and the data that supports them will be listed.

       During childhood, parents, teachers, and family were the most influential. 50% of the women mentioned at least one parent, 40% mentioned teachers, 35% mentioned non-parental

family, 20% mentioned outside (celebrities, scientists, leaders), and 5% mentioned coaches. The majority of women mentioned multiple influencers during this time, the data represents the percentage that made reference to that group. Adolescent influencers had much different results. In this time, 65% of women mentioned teachers, 40% mentioned parents, 35% mentioned outside, 30% mentioned coaches, and 15% mentioned non parental family. During college, the majority of women (60%) said they did not have any influencers during college. Of the 40% who did mention someone, it was either a boss or a teacher. The most consistent influencer overall was teachers, from childhood to college, they were evident, and from individual stories from taking them under their wing, to getting them to go to college, to being an advocate for a second chance, teachers made the largest impact on the sample overall.

In the careers of these women when asked who influenced them the responses were either a boss or peers and were mostly referred to as mentors or sponsors. The clearest differential factor between a mentor and a sponsor is that a mentor advises and influences, whereas a sponsor advocates and opens opportunities for someone.  Mentors helped these women navigate their paths, but sponsors are those who showed or opened new paths that they did not know were available. 100% of women made mention of sponsors, persons that made opportunities or connections for career advancement, in their career. 10% said they had no influencers or mentors in their career. Of the other 90%, 50% mentioned having mostly female mentors' influencers, and 40% mentioned having mostly male mentors. Sponsors from conversations about careers seemed to be the most impactful, a topic to be explored in my discussion section. Women tended to be less inclined to have formal mentors but were clear that many opportunities or experiences were the results of people reaching out or sticking up for opportunities for them.

Negative role models were not a significant trend. With 75% making no negative references, the idea of negative role models did not hold a majority. What was interesting was that of the 25% that did note seeing behaviors that made them aim to do the opposite were all made about mothers. Specifically, references were made in that instance to financial stability and independence and being a different type of mother than they experienced. Behavior such as not understanding their finances, being reliant on a man, and being uninvolved or emotionally unavailable were noted. Three participants made note that their mothers had an emphasis on their weight and were common times unavailable or emotionally absent due to participation in weight watchers anonymous. The majority of participants noted good relationships with parents, but in terms of influencers for women as girls to see what they did not want from their mothers was interesting and possibly a generational trend.

Leadership

During interviews, data on how each leader defines leadership, what they view as the most important characteristics, and what they enjoy about it most were evaluated. Reading each definition and hearing characteristics and enjoyment points, it was intriguing to see differences and commonalities. Below you will find a listing of the definitions, a discussion of the most common traits mentioned, and what leaders most enjoy. Other than definitions, the other two groups will list the trending topics rather than individual responses and data.

Definitions
- "The ability to inspire others to be the best they can be, towards a common goal."
- "Leadership is the willingness to be bold in both thought and action. Leaders try new ideas and if they fail, they pick themselves up, learn from that failure, and try again. Leaders are willing to do the right thing even when it's hard or isn't popular. Leaders

put other people in front of themselves. Leadership is the opportunity to make a difference in the world."
- "Leadership is the ability to get people to follow you, even when you have no authority."
- "Motivating people to create and achieve team goals while striving to be the best version of themselves."
- "Modeling behavior, actions, and establishing policy that sets the tone for an institution or group"
- "The buck stops here"
- "Leadership is about transparency and communication. Caring about other people. Making decisions by trying to do the right thing based on how it affects other people, through empathy and compassion."
- "The best leaders are the ones who model respect, kindness, and have the ability to learn"
- "Leadership is the ability to be a team member who is relied on to organize and get things done. Leadership is the ability to recognize your weaknesses, acknowledge those weaknesses and surround yourself with people who have that as a strength. Leadership is being able to make tough decisions, but also being able to apologize if you get it wrong, and most importantly leadership is getting people to see a common goal and helping them to work towards it in a productive manner."
- "Motivating and inspiring people to be and achieve their best"
- "People that have a vision, a strategy that are able to communicate and share them to motivate others, hit an emotional tone with others to get people going in a common direction."
- "Using your gifts and talents in order to make the change in the world that you want to make. Doing so in a collective and consistent way."
- "Leadership is the unique ability to guide a group of people into a certain action or decision with respect, but without force. A leader has the ability to make her followers feel empowered in their decision to follow because they believe and trust in the authenticity and skill of this leader."
- "Does not personalize the work to make and stand by tough decisions, understanding that it can be lonely. They need to be empathetic, adaptable, and honest."
- "Being willing to say and do the often-unpopular things, nurturing others, furthering what you are a part of, and as a guide stepping up for what others won't do. It is not about the spotlight being on you. People desperately need to be led; people need hope."
- the capacity to listen, to synthesize information, to choose a path forward, and to accept responsibility for the consequence of that choice."
- "Showing people what your vision is"
- "The most important thing about successful leadership is that people follow you and believe in you."
- "Leadership is doing what's right for your team, your organization and the mission of your organization. It's having the vision, strategy and the follow through, backed by the fortitude to support or make decisions that serve your people."
- "A practical skill that encompasses so much more than simply 'being the boss of others'; which would include mentorship, sponsorship, coaching, big-picture visionary,

understanding, risk-taking, leveraging resources, emotional intelligence are some elements that come to mind and yet ever important must have followers to be a leader."

The definitions above range in length, wording, and viewpoint, but what is common throughout them all focuses on vision, ability to gain others' respect and following, and being the best version of yourself possible. This allows for personal development, goals, and ability but truly emphasizes being an example and leading others toward the vision you or an organization set. I further discussed each definition with the women in their interviews, and during these conversations' women expressed either this was how they led, what they are striving to be, or what they see in others that they desire to adapt to their style.

Characteristics

Each interview was full of characteristics, good and bad that were admired or disliked. Upon more in-depth discussion and evaluation of all interviews the following characteristics were repeated time and again: empathy, vision, motivational, decisive, accountability, developing others, and respect. Empathy was mentioned in every interview with no exception. Women leaders lead with this in the forefront of their mind and look for others that do as well. Tying together the ability to empathize to strength and leadership was a common trend in each conversation. Vision, as seen in the previous definitions, and each interview itself was also an important topic. The women believed that having a clear goal, articulating that goal, and motivating others to have the same vision was utterly crucial to successful leadership. Accountability and decisiveness go hand in hand when being shared in each interview. Leaders felt that ability to make hard choices but also own up to your failures makes a leader strong but also respected by those around them. Developing those around them was not only something the women enjoy but essential in making an organization successful in creating a strong team. Only

worrying about themselves or caring about others being better than you is a weakness in these

women's eyes. Finally, respect was also covered. This included the women having a desire to

earn the respect of those that worked above and below, and with them. In terms of negative role

models, the participants noted that they saw the failure of others due to a lack of respect.

Enjoy

To start a section of data about what leaders enjoy mentioning that 30% of them began

their answer that it can be a curse and not always fun seems fitting. I did not further explore the

idea of it being a curse in-depth. Still, initial comments seemed to be in the toll it can take on

work-life balance, stress, and other emotional/physical responsibilities that are not always

enjoyable. The women then tell me almost identically the same reasons they enjoy being a leader

and what makes it worth the at times curse. First and the most common was helping and

developing others around them. Second, problem-solving and seeing the result. Third, building

relationships. Fourth, and the less common was a controlling factor, getting to use their vision

and influence to have a voice on a final product. In the following discussion section, I will add to

this further. Overall, women enjoy less about what they are getting out of leading than what they

are giving and producing. Whether or not at times it seems a curse, each woman felt what they

got out of it, and the positive results they gained made leadership feel a part of who they are.

Section 3:Discussion of Findings and Drawing Conclusions

Discussion of Findings

Throughout reviewing interviews with 20 women leaders, I have interpreted my findings,

drawn non-statistically significant conclusions, and reached areas for recommended further

study. Due to the narrative nature of my research when discussing my findings from the previous section, I will now be able to add explanations as well as more thorough context that was found within discussions. Common themes in my results section were broken down into the following groupings: Upbringing, Family, and Friends; Marriage and Children; Influencers; and Leadership. The rest of this section will cover the findings, compare other referenced studies, address limitations in my research, and suggest possible implications of my research and possible future research avenues. Overall, I felt from these interviews the biggest common takeaways were the enjoyment of leadership, the influence and desire for education for various reasons, the shared experience of influential persons or exposure to multiple ways of life, and the experience of continually high intensity or hectic schedules.

Before laying out the results of my study, I laid out the sample participants' demographics. With prior mentions of mindfulness toward diversity, I felt it was important to share as many relevant sample demographics when making claims about shared experiences so readers know what narratives influenced the data. Multiple studies that I referenced made claims of common experiences, some of the failures of diversity in those was that people were within similar regions, mostly male and white, and within the same title area, i.e., senior management. I did not pick the large majority of my sample, my initial contacts led to the sampling I had, but when asking for recommendations, I emphasized a desire to represent the diversity in female leadership.

I was glad that with the sample size and time frame, I had to get the group I did. I don't believe I can make inherent conclusions for common experiences of all women leaders due to the small sample size and, in my opinion, lack of sufficient diversity. Where I was excited in terms

of demographics was actually getting various disciplines, mothers and non-mothers, and other areas that for women are underrepresented in points of experience on a large scale.

There were minimal requirements for women who were to participate in the study, this included age, being a leader, and agreement to participate. With the limited range in age and women within a similar generation, the results here are an excellent snapshot for women who entered the workforce in an entirely different world than women do today. In the area of having mentors vs. sponsors and other topics that are more popular today, some discussions brought light to this. Within those discussions, women said when I started, there were not many other women to be mentors, or that mentoring was not common. They said time and time again, someone gave them an opportunity, a connection, or support and that opened doors. Today, these women say mentors are much more common, and they aim to be that and sponsors for other women that can now experience it.

The result for upbringing, family, and friends was broken down into the interviews' narratives collectively through the age of 18 or so. Understanding socioeconomic status, parental and sibling influences and relationships, and other factors painted an image of what across the board majorities of the sample experienced and influenced later years of their life. It was interesting to see that most women defined their upbringing in the range of the middle class. At the same time, having women that grew up in wealthy suburbs and apartments in the city describe their status with the same or similar terms was at first odd. It was later explained by the viewpoint of them at the time being a child, and the reality that class labels have no real structure rather how you view your situation yourself.

Also, within this grouping, the clearest theme came to light; women during childhood and as it later revealed itself throughout their lives have always been busy. With responsibilities,

work, school, extracurriculars, sports, etc., these women were involved in a few things, and some taking on them all just did it without thinking it was abnormal. Many commented they knew they were busy and had a lot on their plate, but that felt normal to them. One can conclude that it could be natural for a born leader to be skilled in managing multiple areas of their life well, and or that those who believe leaders can be taught that having such a schedule from a young age taught these women how to handle multiple obligations and responsibilities successfully, and overtime in the most healthy way. It seems from this research that it's likely some combination of the two. Many women said leading and being involved felt natural, but usually later noted they had skills they lacked they had to learn to lead or that they needed to refine and develop skills to be effective.

McCall (2004) stated that the primary source of learning to lead, as much as leading can be learned, is through experience. Understanding that these women were busy because of taking on parenting/caring giving responsibilities, taking family members to state agencies and being translators, commuting from a young age alone to school in the city, captaining sports teams, starting social movements at school, and working from ages as early as eight seem like experiences that if someone needed to begin learning skills would be strong areas to initiate lessons. These early experiences in these women's lives fit in with the experiential learning theory, the cognitive theories of learning, the motivational theory of skill acquisition, and activation theory that all state how one can develop. I think these times prior to the age of 18 were initial lessons and that these theories could and were applied in situations in college, career, and adulthood.

An area that also stood out in the upbringing and later marriage and children groupings was the idea of at-home and cultural environments. For 95% of women to grow up in a

traditional home, and 75% of those who chose to marry, to later in their own marriage cite a modern relationship was very revealing. With a change in society, ability to work and have independence, and other social movements it's not surprising that there would be a change in partner expectations. I wonder the extent of the experience of viewing the traditional lifestyle as almost a negative role model for marriage that in itself somewhat led those women to desire something different. Some resemblance of this possibility was seen in the 25% that referenced the lives their mothers led as a negative role model and influence in the life choices they made. Those women said they wanted and set themselves up for the ability to be independent financially and socially. Other women made mention to why they chose to wait to get married, why they didn't have children, why they are the type of mother they are, and other lifestyle preferences that had some connection to an experience during their upbringing. There was not a majority in the data in clear negative role modeling, but with strong hints this is an area that stood out to me.

Data in the realm of marriage and motherhood percentages was an area of interest post interviews. Before beginning my research, these were minor questions that I did not feel would carry much important information, in these were the most uniform responses of the entire study, and many references were made to the role of these in their success. With 80% of the sample married, I heard a wide variety of experiences and influences by these women's significant others. As explained in the results section above, the vast amount of positive terms indicated to me overall that women choose partners that enabled their success, abilities, and life. A typical discussion for women is if they can have it all. For years people said it is impossible to have "it all," but what came to light was that these women could have what they wanted, and their partner was, for them, an important piece of obtaining that.

In terms of motherhood, the result was less like a partner (understandably, motherhood didn't enable success), but in the eyes of the sample, being a mother made them a stronger leader, and being a leader made them a better mother. The interconnected nature of these roles, as motherhood by this research is defined as an area of leadership, lends itself to this interesting finding. In both marriage and motherhood, the influence of making women better at a work-lifebalance was intriguing.  Many said without them, they would work 24/7, but whether it was a partner or a child, that role in their life made them look for a balance.

I decided to look at the American national averages for the percentage of women that have children and the average amount of children a woman has for understanding where my sample fits in on the national scale. Looking at the US census data shared through The Pew Research Center, in 2016, 86% of women in the US were mothers. My sample has 75% of respondents of motherhood.  This is 11% lower than the national average; while not extreme it was surprising to me that that high of my sample could balance both the demands of leadership roles and motherhood because it was still common to hear growing up that it is difficult to achieve both. For many future female leaders, this could be a crucial up trend in having both career success and motherhood if desired. This change could be possible for more women having children later, as one participant noted, " I waited to have children until I was at a place in my career that it would not affect my ability to achieve my goals." Other factors that may have supported this change are more employer acceptance and support for motherhood and work-life balance, and societal acceptance and push for better partnerships. One participant shared that she was demoted in her career after having children, and while it can still be difficult, it has begun to improve for women in her field due to women like herself advocating for change.

My sample found an average of the 20 women to have had 1.55 children. In 2016 the census found that women were having on average 2.07 children. But when taking into account, most of these women had their children in the early to mid 2000's, it was more accurate to compare to the 2006 census that found women having 1.86 children nationally. In this area, the women of my sample were only slightly lower for the times. With a recession, still societal unacceptance for a good work-life balance, and other changes that were not common until more recently, this seemed normal. Ironically, one leader noted in our conversation that when she went to a leadership conference for women, it was very common that the women had two children on average across the board. I did not ask why women had the number of children they did, but seeing a national rise in the average amount of children could be related to leaders having children later once able, more single women choosing to be single mothers, or organizations seeing the important role of women and learning they must develop to accommodate better both women and men being parents and achieving career success.

I asked women in our  interviews whose primary role was to define how they lead in their household and as a parent. The result was identical to how women explained their style of running a company or organization. That finding further backed the idea that originated at the beginning of this study that mothers are leaders, a new and slowly on the rise accepted concept in society.

Education was also interesting because after prior research, I had some expectations about the results in terms of grades. In Akstinaite (2016), the study reported that most respondents noted getting average marks in school. This did not line up with my findings, with the vast majority of women reporting high and above-average marks. The women I interviewed truly took pride in doing well or being, for some, at the top of their class. The differences in

studies made it hard to make any clear comparisons or conclusions, but the similarities in

purpose and style leave room for some interpretation. Variations included that Akstinaite's study

had an 8:2 ratio in terms of gender, being male dominant. As well as, that this study took place in

America while hers was done in the UK and Lithuania with different education systems.

Generally, this study, which was the closest in desired findings, was on par with the

themes I found but had different details. Including the substantial majority having authoritative

parenting, the emphasis on the importance and enjoyment of education, the "trigger for change"

referred to in my study as negative role models, and the early age of beginning to work. Another

difference was that Akstinaite (2016) noted most did not find college years to be essential or

impactful, while college in my study held results lacking major events most noted the experience

itself and its takeaways were significant in the long term.

The other two studies I made reference to in my literary review as close to my own

research were harder to compare to but did have some overlapping themes. Elliot and Stead

(2008) had very close themes to my own. Their research that utilized an all-female sample found

that the role of upbringing, environment, and networks were common between the participants.

My results also as stated found upbringing important in setting the stage and teaching lessons,

environment as an influencer and situation maker, and networks and or sponsors important in the

success for women that lacked mentors. Berkowicz (2011) had overlap in economic status

somewhat, the role of influencers, success in early and lifelong education, and outlook on the

world- in my research similarities in outlook on leadership. In the Berkowicz study, leaders were

male and female but were required to meet a specific standard of leadership, rather than my

studies' more open concept of defining leader. Altogether, I found that each study had

similarities in the importance of various themes I identified as well. I think the varied response or

details within those themes varied based on location of collection, gender ratio, and other

differential variables in the structure of the research.

My findings lined up with the theories (experiential, cognitive, motivation, activation theories)

previously mentioned in my literary review. First, the experiential theory fits because my sample

of women learned through experiences, both positive and negative, and through those challenges

and later reflection they developed skills for the future. The cognitive, motivational, and

activation theory fit a similar pattern, unsurprisingly as they are close definitions, that when the

women were challenged with unfamiliar tasks that took exerting extra effort, they grew to do

what they needed to do to be successful. Examples of this included one participant facing losing

her business during the Great Recession, and instead building a more successful model that put

them on the top business lists and profits over 20 million annually. Other examples were the

women that had trouble academically transitioning to college, and after failure and sitting down

in some cases and making actual written plans for success they turned their experiences around

to be successful students and later leaders. Finally, most women cited failing or receiving

critiques on their own leadership abilities as making them the leaders they are today. One

participant had lacked effective cirques from her superiors and when someone that she worked

with told her to learn people's names, to engage and personalize, and other honest feedback she

was able to be a more effective leader in that and later positions. These theories fit the

experiences of each woman I interviewed, and also their shared thought that they never stop

learning and can always be better.

Limitations

        Within any study, a researcher aims to limit the limitations present in the collection of

data. Understanding and sharing the limitations one experienced is important in the peer review

and building of future research in similar topics. In my study, the limitations to be noted are in the small sample size, technological challenges, and participant memory and self-reflection. Due to a limited time frame, resources, and researchers conducting 20 interviews was on par with the goal but in terms of statistical significance lacks the representation of the true demographics to make claims. Due to the presence of a global pandemic all interviews were conducted over skype or phone call. With this environment dropped calls, difficulties in sound, and missed recordings were possible but happened only a limited number of times. Participant error in memory and self-reflection is a risk with an interview or data collection, but in the case where they are recalling 40-50 years ago it can be increased. Limitations are a part of the research process; every precaution was taken to prevent and limit these, but I was well aware of the possibilities.

Implications of Findings and Possible Future Research

This research is a start to influencing further inquiries into current day female leaders. Research in the area of leadership is based on male observations, rather for future studies researchers should aim to build research based in a current day reality of leaders. I would recommend further inquiries could do comparisons between the narratives of women and men, in terms of experience in their careers and relationships. Also, it would be interesting for research that does similar inquiries, but on a statistically significant scale.

I also think an implication of this study is hopefully the push for a more open definition for how we look and observe the leaders around us. Having girls grow up seeing the women around them as leaders can be inspirational for them to believe they can lead. But, making sure children don't just see CEOs and other common positions as the only way to lead I believe could be a positive influencer to what the next generation believes leadership to be.

This and other similar studies find the themes of upbringing, education, and networks as key common experiences. Focusing on the idea of networks, from this research and personal experience networks for everyone, men and women are important, but for women it seems networks not only make room for opportunity and mentorship but a space for growth and inspiration. Networks like those the women I interviewed have described a more a peer-based level. A possible future area of research or development is how you connect those networks for younger women and developing girls to open them up earlier to inspiration, mentorship, and growth.

Conclusion

This study aimed to break the surface and present a more well-rounded modern experience for women leaders to the area of leadership research. I feel it was successful in breaking the norm in the research and targeting a diverse sampling. It overall concludes that upbringing, marriage and motherhood, influencers, and views of leadership were areas of commonalities and importance as well as my findings in common thought in why women enjoy leadership, the role of education in success and development, the role for women of outside influence and sponsorship, and the development found in high intensity or hectic schedules long term. Taking various narratives and trying to find where they overlap is a large task, but eye-opening during and after which new conclusions can be shared with people across gender and leadership lines to hopefully educate more people on the experiences and views of women leaders. Research can influence societal and academic focus and growth, adding to this and possibly leading to added attention to this important and impactful topic is not only worthwhile, but important for success for women, men, private and public organizations, and society as a whole

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# Appendix

*Pre Interview Questionnaire*

Please fill out the form below prior to your scheduled interview. Some questions may be repeated during the interview. Thank you.

1. How old are you?

2. What undergraduate university/college did you graduate from?

3. What was your major?

4. If you attended graduate school, where did you attend/ graduate from?

5. Are you currently married/ in a long term partnership?

6. Do you have children?

7. What field of study do/did you work in? What is your current position title?

8. How would you define leadership? (I look forward to discussing this topic further in our interview)

Pre Written Interview Questions

**Ages: 0-12 ( This first group of questions is focused on your first twelve years)**

1. Where did you grow up? Can you describe the type of environment in your home life?
2. What did your parents do for a living? What was their educational background? How would you describe them and their parenting style? (IE strict, authoritative, did you have a lot of freedom and independence?)
3. How would you describe the economic status of your family as a child?
4.  Do you have any siblings? Are they older or younger? Did you get along well with them in your childhood? Looking back, do you think your siblings had any influence on your development and if so, how?
5. Did you have a close relationship with extended family? If so, who were they and how would you describe the roles they played?
6. What are your earliest memories of your education? How would you describe your early school experiences, your responses to them, and the significance of them?
7.  How did you perform in school? Were your marks good? Were you successful in any particular subject or field?
8. How would you describe activities you took part in during your childhood e.g., sports, 4-H, dance, art, plays, choir, clubs, places of worship?
9. During this period of time who would you describe as influential in your development (as a leader?)
10. Have you identified specific significant events as contributing to your development in general and as a leader? If so, would you mind sharing them and how you responded to them?
11. Tell me about a time when you experienced challenges and opportunities during these years. How did you respond to them? How did those around you respond to them?
12. How would you describe your childhood personality?
13. During these years did anything change in your life? For example, did you move? Did you have any experiences you consider as significant? Can you talk about changes and your response to those changes that may have taken place e.g. family structure or situation, hometown location, responsibility during these years?
14. If you had to choose three most important childhood experiences which helped you to become a successful leader, what experiences would you mention?
15. If you can remember, who were your role models during this time? (personal connection, or someone you looked up too)

**Ages: 13-18 (This next set of questions focuses on your teen years from thirteen through eighteen years of age)**

1.  During these years did anything change in your life? For example, did you move? Did you have any experiences you consider as significant? Can you talk about changes and your response to those changes that may have taken place e.g. family structure or situation, hometown location, responsibility during these years?
2. What extracurricular activities did you take part in outside of school? How would you characterize them?

3. During these years did you work or volunteer in either paid or non-paid/service? If so, how would you portray these experiences?
4. At what age did you start working?
5. If you held leadership positions, (both formal and informal) can you talk about your reasons for seeking them? And your experience with them?
6. Who were influential individuals during this time in your life? e.g., parents, relatives, neighbors, teachers, members of your religious group, coaches, friends, role models, mentors.
7. How would you describe your experiences in middle school/High school? Would you say any particular experiences during these years played a role in your development? Who were the people who influenced you during this time and how?
8. Can you report about any specific influential, meaningful, life changing events? Include influence on leadership development, leadership training and education, stories, challenges and opportunities.
9. Did you experience challenges and opportunities during these years? How did you respond to them? How did those around you respond to you?
10. Did you receive any awards, recognitions, and titles?
11. Did you have any experiences that revealed leadership, personality, self-esteem, strengths, learning preferences, important values, work ethics etc.?
12. Were you aware of events, individuals, leading change, people skill development that
13. may have influenced you?
14. Who were your role models during these years?
15. Are there any people you knew or events you experienced that, upon reflection you might credit with your development as a leader or leadership style?
16. (After asking the questions on childhood, I'd like to ask if they have anything to add and/or anything to add specifically to the first two sections of questions.)

**Adulthood (College and graduate school)**

1. Did you go to college? If so, did you complete your undergraduate degree? What year did you complete your degree?
2. What was your major in college? Did you ever change your major?
3. What was your college experience like? Was your experience negative or positive/ both?
4. What activities did you take part in during your undergraduate years? Did you have any leadership opportunities in these activities?
5. Did you work during college? If so, where did you work? How would you say this experience influenced your development in general and as a leader?
6. How did your years earning your undergraduate degree shape you? Would you say it had an effect on your leadership development?
7. Did you attend graduate school? If so for what? What year did you complete this degree?

**Adulthood (personal)**

1. Have you ever been married? If so, what influence (if any) has your relationship had on your development on a personal and leadership level?

2. Do you have children? If so, has being a mother influenced your development on a personal or leadership level? Please explain.
3. Do you have any hobbies or outside activities you do currently? What do you enjoy about them/why do you do them?
4. How would your family or friends describe you?
5. Do you have any role models today? If so, who are they?
6. Do you have any sayings or beliefs that have a significant impact on how you live your life? (example the golden rule or quotes by family or leaders)

**General Leadership Questions**

1. Looking back, what is your earliest memory of leadership? Personally and in terms of recognizing the idea of leadership.
2. How would you define leadership? In your opinion, what are the most important character features in a successful leader?
3. Who are your role models in terms of leaders today?
4. How many years have you/ or did you been/work(ed) in a leading position?
5. What were the main difficulties/obstacles you had to overcome in order to achieve a leadership position?
6. Can you identify any transformational change(s) that made a difference in an organization you have led?How did you determine the need for this change?What steps did you take in order to set the change in motion? How did you get others to join you in this change? Has this change become the standard for the organization?Why do you think you were successful in this transformational process?
7. How would you define yourself both personally and professionally with regard to the label of leader?
8. What do you enjoy about being a leader?
9. What circumstances led you to become a leader?
10. How would others describe you? (colleagues and subordinates)
11. Closing: Are there any other thoughts you would like to share at this time? Do you have any questions for me?

Consent Form

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study**
**Johnson & Wales University**

**Title of Study:**    The Creation of Leaders: Patterns Between Female Leaders Experiences

**Investigators:**

**Name:**    Emma Goldberg          **Dept:**    Honors    **Phone:**    339-933-1078

You are being asked to be in a research study of/about the experiences of female leaders from childhood to current day. You were selected as a possible participant because of either being identified individually or at the recommendation of another participant. Please read this form. You may also request that the form be read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice. You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary; however, you may withdraw at any time.

The purpose of this study is to determine the common life-experiences that female leaders share. Ultimately, this research may be presented as a paper or published at a later date.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: agree upon a date and time in which to conduct the interview, prior to the interview fill out a brief demographic and basic information questionnaire, agree to give informed consent, and then on a predetermined date join the meeting call on a skype audio call which will be recorded. (No skype account is necessary to access the call.) Participants will next answer questions from the investigator and the call will be ended. It is estimated that this will take between 45 to 60 minutes. Upon request participants may ask to be sent the recording or notes of their interview for approval or for redactions.

In the case a participant would like to alter or remove information upon review they are asked to write which information they would like to clarify or redact. The investigator will then make note of the changes in the interview notes and use any updated information instead of prior responses.

While there are no expected risks, in the process of interviewing participants may remember memories that are triggering to them.

Although there may be no direct benefits to you as a result of taking part in this study, the results may indirectly benefit you through discovered data and resulting future studies.

This study does not provide any compensation or other incentives for participation.

If published the identities of all participants will be kept anonymous. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected account. All recordings will only be accessed and reviewed on a private device by only the principal researcher. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you unless you provide additional consent.

**May I refuse to participate in the study?**
- Yes. The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you.
- You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Johnson & Wales University.
- You have the right not to answer any single question, and you have the right to request that the researcher not use any of your data.
- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the university.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

**What if I decide I no longer want to participate in the study? May I withdraw?**
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
- If you choose to withdraw from the research study there will be no penalty to you
- If you are not satisfied with the way in which this study was conducted, you may convey your concerns to the chair of the JWU IRB at instutionalreviewboard@jwu.edu or 303-256-9640

**What are my rights as a research participant?**
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.
- If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator(s), you may contact the chair of the JWU IRB at institutionalreviewboard@jwu.edu or 303-256-9640.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- For more information regarding this study, please contact the principal investigator Emma Goldberg at 339-933-1078
  - If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research-related injury, please contact the chair of the JWU IRB at institutionalreviewboard@jwu.edu or 303-256-9640.
  - If you have any concerns or problems that you believe occurred as a result of your participation, you may report them to the chair of the JWU IRB at institutionalreviewboard@jwu.edu or 303-256-9640.

**Will I be informed of the findings from this study?**

- If you would like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you.
  Would you like a summary of the results sent to you?        Yes          No

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily. My signature below indicates:**

- **I understand the information;**
- **I consent to participate in this study;**
- **I am 18 years of age or older.**

*You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.*


Participant's signature or                                            Date
Legally authorized representative



Printed name

<u>Researcher's Statement</u>

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

Principal Investigator's signature                                    Date

Printed name

**Sample Addition for Consent to Audio Recording/Video Recording and Transcription**

The study involves the audio recording/video recording of the interviews. Neither the name nor other identifying information about the participant will be associated with the recordings or with the transcript. Only the researcher(s) will listen to or view the recordings.

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**Please check one of each of these pairs of options.**
Recording the Interview
      q  I consent to having my interview recorded.
      q  I do not consent to having my interview recorded.

Signature of Participant _____
Date _____

I hereby agree to abide by the participant's instructions as indicated above.

Signature of Principal Investigator _____
Date _____