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**Representation and underrepresentation: a phenomenological study of barriers facing female leaders in the contract management profession**

Tiffany Smith

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

REPRESENTATION AND UNDERREPRESENTATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
STUDY OF BARRIERS FACING FEMALE LEADERS IN THE CONTRACT  
MANAGEMENT PROFESSION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership & Change

by

Tiffany Smith

July, 2023

Dr. Martine Jago, Ph.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Tiffany Smith

under the guidance of an approved Faculty Committee and its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Doctoral Committee:

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom and dad. My mom, Daysi Smith, instilled in me as a child that anything is possible ...all I had to do was put my mind to it. Thank you for showing me strength and encouraging me to run with my imagination! You've been an example of love in which I plan to share with my kids. Bobby Smith, my dad, taught me the meaning of hard work. He worked tirelessly to provide for our family so that my brother and I could attend college and have a good education. He inspired me to learn, set goals and earn my way. It brings me great joy and pride knowing we walked across the same stage. With their unconditional love and support, I have been able to pursue my undergraduate degree, masters and now doctoral degree. Thank you for grounding me, pushing me along the way when things got tough and always reminding me of my worth. I am truly blessed to have you both in my life.

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I would first like to thank my lord and Savior Jesus Christ for without you, this journey would never have been possible. The older I get, the more my faith increases. In Christ I trust as he continues to give me strength during trialed times.

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee, Dr Jago, Dr. Cain and Dr. Weber. I couldn't have done this without your support, encouragement, wisdom and expertise. I have grown tremendously as an individual throughout my doctoral experience.

## VITA

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## ABSTRACT

Theoretical literature and empirical research confirmed the contracting profession is male dominated. Although there has been progression in the total representation, women remain critically underrepresented in leadership roles, specifically, executive management within the contracting profession. The number of women holding C-suite titles such as, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operations Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and Executive Vice President remain low. A democratic leadership view ceases to exist if there is a lack in representation, despite gender. An equitable distribution of organizational power between genders is imperative.

The primary focus of this qualitative study is to understand barriers faced by women in the contracting profession and how these barriers impact underrepresentation of women in leadership. A phenomenological approach was used to interview participants, which allowed the researcher to capture real life experiences to infer similarities and differences. In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 female professionals in the field of contract management who were employed in Government, Nonprofit and Private sectors. Participants in this study varied from different states, career backgrounds and organizational culture. Several themes emerged during the interviews concerning current representation, obstacles, strategies, best practices and recommendations.

This study is a representation of today's contracting environment and best practices employed by today's contracting professionals. Understanding the obstacles women face and strategies used to influence career advancement will help women prepare for challenges. Many women spoke about experienced biases in the sense of pre-conceived ideas or knowledge that resulted in unfair treatment. Conclusions of this study reveal there has been progression in the

contracting profession as findings reveal there is now equal representation of genders in leadership. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to a larger population but results conclude there are initiatives in place for diversity, equity and inclusion within the field.

*Keywords:* underrepresentation, women in contract management, discrimination, and mentoring

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Chapter Overview

Historically, women stayed home to raise children, assuming a domestic role while men worked. Stereotyping women as homemakers inadvertently denies women the opportunity to make use of their intelligence and innovation. Today, women are more likely to work alongside men, achieve higher education, develop their own ambitions and self-identity. Despite these progressions, women still face many challenges surrounding underrepresentation, discrimination, and disadvantages that become advancement barriers in the workplace. Data demonstrates women are represented equally in the workforce but remain underrepresented in executive leadership positions. Within the bound of this dissertation, the term *representation* will refer to the entire workforce, despite gender, and *underrepresentation* will refer to women currently underrepresented in executive leadership. This research explored workplace issues facing women who work in the field of contract management within many different areas of government, Nonprofit, and Private-sector entities. The study focuses on the broad concept of working women and links research to environments most common to contract management. Taking a closer look, this study covers the barrier's women face and how contracting professional women guide other women into leadership positions. Research addresses the relational dynamics between women working with other women. Under this study, the researcher is able to discern these unique inter-relational characteristics and strategies used by women that helped or hindered career aspirations causing upward movement within their organizations. Sheryl Sandberg suggested women are needed in leadership by stating, "We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored" (as cited in LeanIn, n.d., p. 1). This quote captures the

essence of this study, which sets out to understand the current state of underrepresentation, barriers women face, and strategies used to bridge this gender parity gap.

## Background of the Study

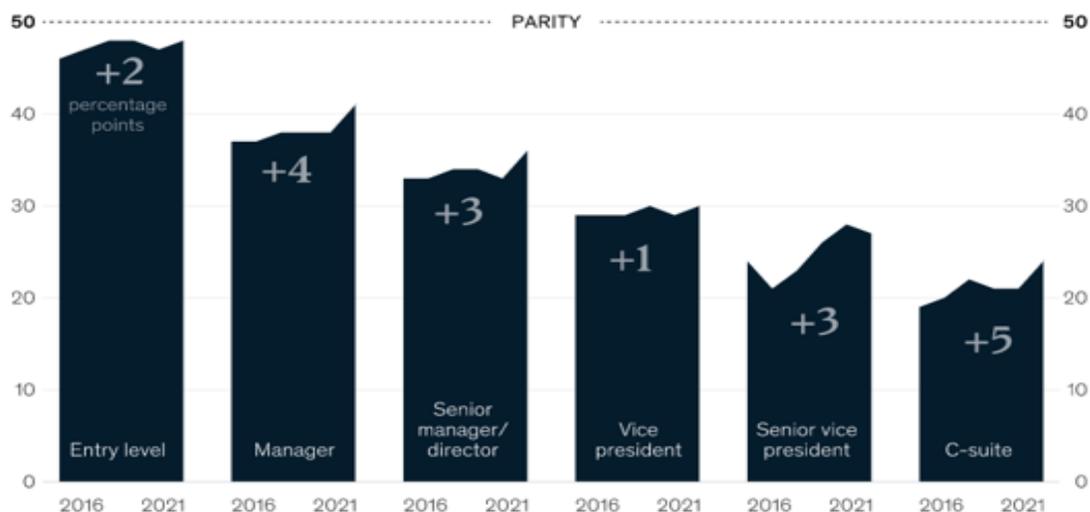
In 2018, women represented 57.1% of the United States labor force (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Positive statistics highlight progression and equality in terms of the representation of both genders in the U.S. labor force. Although there has been progression in the total representation of women in the labor force, women critically remain underrepresented in leadership. The Lean In foundation, in collaboration with McKinsey & Company, have partnered to develop an annual survey titled, “Women in the Workplace Survey,” in order to assess continually female leadership across many organizations in corporate America (McKinsey & Company, 2021). The annual McKinsey & Company workplace survey for 2021 confirmed underrepresentation of female leadership continues to exist in 2021 (see Figure 1).

## Figure 1

### *The State of the Corporate Pipeline*

#### **Despite small gains in the pipeline, women remain underrepresented across the corporate ladder.**

Representation of women by level, 2016–21,<sup>1</sup> % of employees



*Note.* Despite small gains in the pipeline, women remain underrepresented across the corporate ladder. From *Women in the Workplace Survey*. Copyright year 2021 by McKinsey & Company. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1 illustrates women are underrepresented in the corporate America labor force, unambiguously in management and executive management positions. Literature supports women are underrepresented in many fields such as medicine, academia, science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and contract management. The number of women continuously increase in the medicine field but only a small amount reaches the highest academic positions as full professors or editorial board members (Amrein et al., 2011). Nimmegern (2016) stated women are underrepresented “in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields” commonly referred to as hard fields (p. 3529). Research also confirms women are achieving higher education and obtaining occupations in professions considered to be male dominated. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), in 2005, women earned 59% of the master degrees awarded and 49% of the doctoral degrees awarded. The data presented confirm women exceed equal representation in U.S. labor force and are achieving higher education degrees, making them qualified women. Yet, an imbalance exists.

Underrepresentation is problematic because a democratic leadership opinion ceases to exist if there is a lack in equal representation, despite gender. The issue of gender equality is a constant issue within the U.S. and on a global scale. The United Nations Women website identified gender equality as an interlinked global goal and called for action under the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Gender equality is a human right and equal representation in leadership is essential. Throughout the years, there have been various laws, policies, and practices established with the intention of addressing this gender disparity. Notably,

gender quotas have been implemented to increase representation and ensure women have a represented voice in the realm of legislature and politics.

Women and men report different opinions as to the reasons an imbalance in leadership exists. Women have reported gender biases of traditional gender roles and exclusionary corporate cultures create a barrier to leadership. Men have eluded an imbalance exist because women lack experience (Wah, 1998). Northouse (2013) rebutted, stating historically, women have had less opportunity for training and opportunity to increase professional development in comparison to men. The literature review within this study addresses continual and emerging themes leading to possible reasons why there is a lack of progression for women obtaining leadership roles within the workplace. Probing from a critical perspective, the researcher reviewed themes associated to gender discrimination, biases, pregnancy discrimination, work-life balance, working in a male dominated workplace, cultural barriers, and women empowerment.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW, 2016) studied the status of women in leadership and documented, “qualities of a leader—as well as the path to achieve leadership roles—are still largely based on an outdated male model that shuts women out” (p. 3). AAUW-highlighted barriers to leadership consisted of old stereotypes. Gender stereotyping can affect a women’s path to leadership by limiting opportunities for complex work assignments, promotions, and higher income. Women are stereotyped as being more committed to their homelife and kids rather than their work life. Men on the other hand, are traditionally stereotyped as being more committed to their work life (Dubeck & Borman, 1996). This traditional stereotype view of women creates a double standard and additional challenges for progression. This barrier has been referred to as the *glass ceiling* effect, which is a term denoting

unofficial barriers to advancement affecting women because they are perceived through a gendered-stereotypes lens (Northhouse, 2012).

There is evidence that gender inequalities in the workplace stem from discrimination (Verniers & Vala, 2018) Discrimination can take many different forms within the workplace. Discrimination was once commonly referred to as sexual and racial discrimination but has expanded throughout the years to account for different types of unfair treatment. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website (n.d.-a) described *discriminate* as the act of treating someone differently and unfairly involving harassment, denial of a reasonable workplace accommodation, improper questioning concerning privacy, and retaliation. The following types of discrimination are listed on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission website as formal protection responsibilities:

- Age;
- Disability;
- Equal Pay/Compensation;
- Harassment;
- National Origin;
- Pregnancy;
- Race/Colors;
- Religion;
- Retaliation;
- Sex;
- Sexual Harassment; and
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

The issue of discrimination in employment has given rise to many policies and reformism. The literature review covers enacted laws and proposed bills established to address discrimination. Prominent laws include The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, Equal Pay Act of 1963, Civil Rights Act of 1986, Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, Paycheck Fairness Act, White House Council on Women's' and Girls executive order, and Equal Futures Partnership. All of these

workings are aimed at tackling gender discrimination regarding pay standards, recruitment, and promotion (Verniers & Vala, 2018).

The Bureau for Employees' Activities (2017) found that unconscious bias is a leading barrier women face in the workplace. Research acclaims subtle gender discrimination underlines gender disparity and express discrimination has been substituted with unconscious or implicit bias (Peel, 2017). The AAUW (2016) stated this type of discrimination occurs when a person unconsciously makes evaluations of a person based on stereotypes. Unconscious bias is exemplified as stereotyping someone unconsciously based on their gender, name, or appearance. Unconscious bias is problematic because there is no regulation or law enacted to address this type of discrimination. Waltham (2019) suggested unconscious bias needs to be spotlighted in the workplace within the Human Resource department and at the manager level.

During the past few decades, work–life balance has become an emerging barrier for women in the workplace. Kaltreider (1997) suggested women may value priorities differently than men, as women typically try to do it all and create balance between their home and work life demands. Yet, balancing these demands can compromise a woman's ability to achieve leadership positions. Valdez and Gutek (1987) stated work and family demands are concurrent, which creates an impact on women's careers. Poor work–life balance can cause fatigue, low productivity, poor health, and lost time with loved ones. Coping mechanisms concern managing time for personal and work life such as learning to say “no,” and detaching from work.

Working in a male dominated workplace can cause certain implications for women. According to Catalyst (2021), a male dominated workplace is classified as an environment with 25% or fewer women. Sexual harassment is a challenge faced in these types of environments. Other challenges discussed include societal expectations, negative beliefs about a woman's

leadership abilities, the unescapable stereotype of women being, increased stress, lack of mentoring opportunities, and lack of career development. According to Berdahl et al. (2018) a characteristic culturally coded as feminine is “caretaking” (p. 428). Campuzano (2019) stated socialized beliefs that influence organizational culture cause a scarcity of women in leadership. Reaching equal representation of women in leadership positions is a serious challenge for countless organizations. Simply promoting women will not resolve this issue. In order for women to be successful in male dominated professions and organizations, both employers and males must welcome change to support women.

Women may find it problematic to advance in societies in which disadvantages such as low literacy, poor childcare, poverty conditions, and distinct religious or cultural attitudes exist. Norris and Inglehart (2000) suggested major barriers that restrict women include social structure and political institutions. Significant obstacles derive from patterns of capitalism and patriarchy supporting the traditional stereotype that a women’s main role is to support their men (Asiyanbola, 2005). In some world systems, still today, subservience is acceptable and viewed as satisfying religious and cultural views. Women empowerment and advocacy for women’s rights promote gender equality in all societies, homelife, and workplaces (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

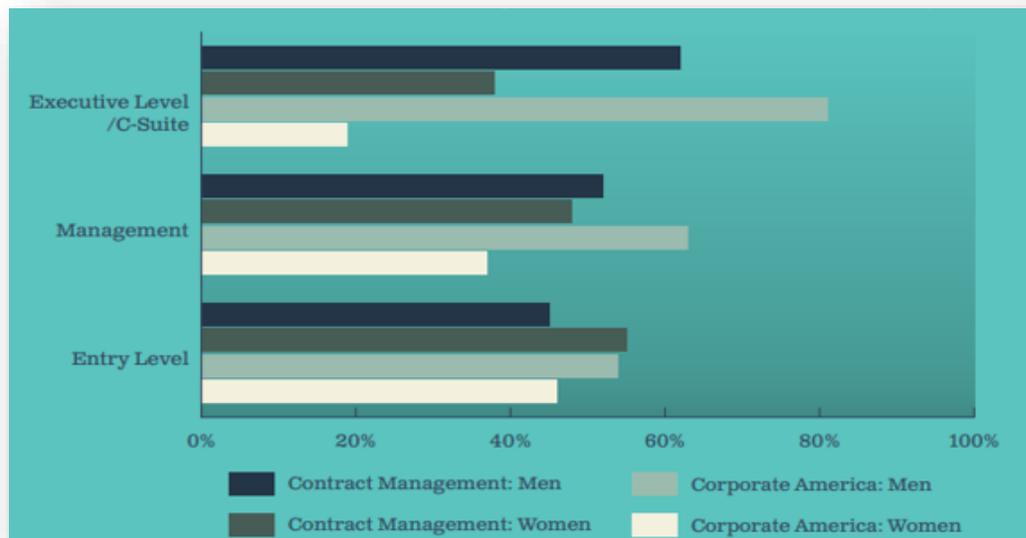
Higgins and Kram (2001) conceptualized mentoring as developmental assistance tool to overcome barriers and promote professional advancement. Women who support other women in the workplace create a pathway for other women to attain leadership positions. Challenges with mentoring surround the lack of female mentors such as accessibility to female mentors who hold leadership positions and mentors who are women of color. Mentoring is not only beneficial for women but is beneficial for men as well. Because women are underrepresented in leadership, the accessibility to female mentors holding a senior role is sometimes not attainable, lending to the

assumption that mentoring is most needed for women working in a male dominated workplace (O’Neill, 2002).

This study is specific to women working in the contracting profession. In 2012, women filled 48% of managerial roles within the contracting profession, but the percentage of women holding executive positions was far lower (Peel, 2017). In 2017, The NCMA, a leading resource for contracting professionals, surveyed its membership base and detected women are still underrepresented in executive leadership positions (see Figure 2). In 2017, women represented approximately 55% of entry-level positions, 50% management, and 38% executive level/C-Suite positions within the contract management industry. For comparison purposes, men held approximately 45% entry level, 54% management, and 64% executive level/C-suite positions.

### Figure 2

*Comparison of Corporate America and the Contract Management Profession: Representation of Men and Women by Level*



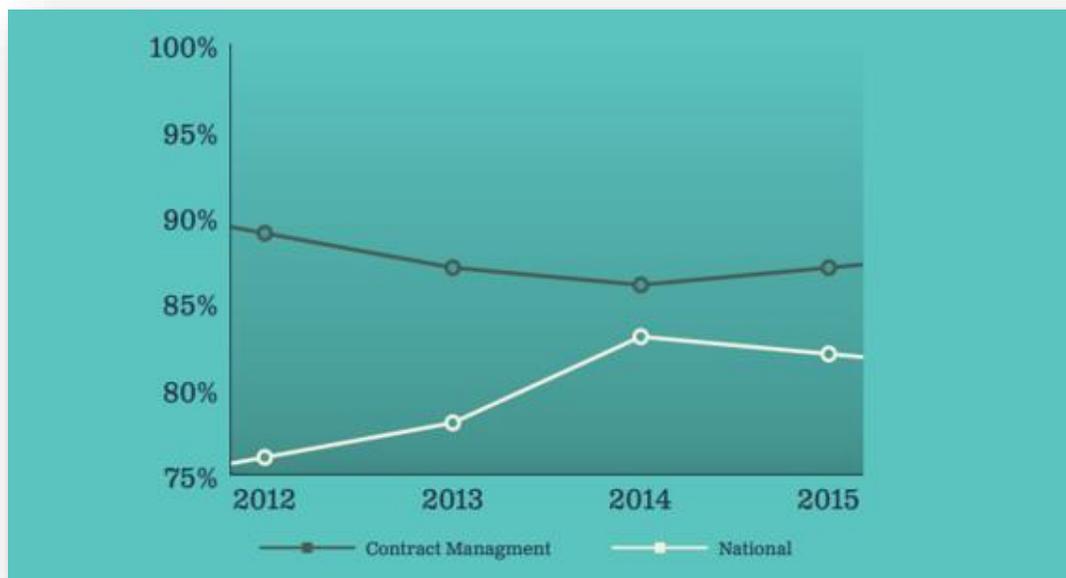
*Note.* From “Gender Equality in Leadership – Is the Contract Management Profession Getting It Right?” by L. Peel, 2017, *National Contract Management Magazine*, p. 45

<https://www.ncmahq.org/common/Uploaded%20files/Insights/gender-equality-in-leadership.pdf>.  
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Women who work in the contracting field might have opportunities for advancement into lower management leadership roles. Studies show women in this profession face gender pay gap inequality. A study was conducted by NCMA to understand how much women earn on a national level in comparison to those working in the contracting profession. Figure 3 illustrates the national average for American women, which is approximately 82% of what men earned in the year of 2015; 87% for women in contracting (Peel, 2017). These statistics may not be as alarming in comparison to other professions, but progression should be directed in correcting this gap in order to retain women.

### Figure 3

*Comparison on the National Average and the Contract Management Profession: The Gender Pay Gap from 2012 to 2015*



*Note.* From “Gender Equality in Leadership – Is the Contract Management Profession Getting It Right?” by L. Peel, 2017, *National Contract Management Magazine*, p. 451

<https://www.ncmahq.org/common/Uploaded%20files/Insights/gender-equality-in-leadership.pdf>  
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### **Problem Statement**

Current research fails to consider adequately the specific barriers women face in the field of contract management. The literature review enumerates many barriers faced by women in the workplace, but research fails to identify which barriers were, and are still, faced within the contracting profession. The traditional view of Western organizations has been based on a deeply ingrained acceptance of the male dominance in our society and organizational culture (Brewis & Linstead, 2000). This male dominated culture tends to compromise self-identity and cause competitive behaviors among women.

The traditional days when women were limited to stereotypically female occupations have vanished. There has been a shift in social norms that has augmented the workplace and family structures, creating more opportunities for women and redefining male dominated working environments. The problem is women are still underrepresented in many fields and face inequality in executive leadership representation and pay. According to Hoobler et al. (2011) there are many assumptions raised to describe this phenomenon, as scholars acclaim women are underrepresented because women lack experience while others believe this is a result of “the old boys club” view of male dominated work cultures (p.151). This type of culture denies women inclusion into informal networks of communication and accessibility to decision makers. This problem is most important today because statistics show a great deal of women have left the workplace because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Women have lost a disproportionate number of jobs in comparison to men as a result of the closure of childcare during the pandemic. According to Dockterman (2021), statistics indicate there are approximately 1.5 million fewer mothers with children 18 or younger in the 2021 workforce than 2020.

Nevertheless, women need access to the same social network's men have in the workplace, a healthier work environment, training, and educational programs. Employers and employees need to overcome stereotypes and negative social behaviors via formal training and education programs focusing on diversity and inclusion. Forcing individuals to confront negative views and understand biases will help counteract this issue. Therefore, this study should be carried out to confirm barriers and strategies used by women to overcome obstacles.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to understand barriers facing women in contract management and to examine personal capabilities used to obtain leadership positions, specifically, women who work in contract management within many different areas of government, Nonprofit, and Private-sector entities. A qualitative methodology will provide a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of women working in the contracting profession. This study will offer a preliminary understanding of the barriers faced and strategies used to leverage obstacles. There is little to no research examining women within the context of contract management in association to barriers and strategies used to obtain leadership positions.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study exists in the potential implications for women aspiring to obtain leadership positions in contract management within different areas of government, Nonprofit, and Private sectors. The workplace is a minefield loaded with obstructions women face and have to navigate and overcome. It's the responsibility of the employer and managers to continue progression, and mitigate challenges and barriers so that more women can obtain leadership positions. Understanding barriers will aid in the development of new policies or practices to help support and grow women leaders. Understanding the issues women face and

how they influence career advancement will help women prepare for challenges. Investing in women is valuable from a workplace, economic and a social perspective. The women in this study can bring a wealth of knowledge to the profession. The contracting community at large will directly benefit from this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section provides a list of key terms used in the study to convey common understanding of the technical terminology, exclusive jargon, themes, and concepts used within the scope of the study. The following terms were used operationally in this study:

- *Challenges*: Difficult or problematic tasks. For the purpose of this research study, challenge will be defined as any barrier that prevents women's upward mobility.
- *Contract Management*: is defined as the actions of a contract manager to develop and issue solicitations, develop offers/proposals, form contracts, oversee contracts, and close contracts. It is a specialized profession with wide-ranging responsibilities that consist of managing contract characteristics such as deliverables, deadlines, and contract terms and conditions (Norby et al., 2004).
- *Culture*: defined by Schein (1985) as a pattern of shared basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or established by a given group.
- *Disparity*: refers to a difference that is unfair or unequal in access to rights, resources and power in society (Dea, 2016). Collins (2003) referred to disparity as inequality. For the purpose of this research study, disparity will be defined as gender disparity in the context of male power and the idea of women's inferiority.
- *Female Gender*: the state of being female; typically used with reference to social, cultural, or biological characteristics. For the purpose of this study, female gender

will refer to the range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity and what differentiates the two.

- *Gender Equality*: refers to a fundamental right that human beings around the world experience. It results in equal rights and a person achieving their potential as economic, social, and sustainable development change agents.
- *Labor Force*: is the sum of employed and unemployed persons. The labor force participation rate is the labor force as a percentage of the civilian noninstitutional population (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020)
- *Leadership*: is described as a process by which one person influences the thoughts, attitudes, and behavior of others (Carlson & Schneider, 2011). Leaders have the ability to influence our behaviors, what we may achieve, and redefine inspiration.
- *Male dominated Workplace*: typically refers to occupations occupied by mainly men and vertically where often men hold more senior positions (Gianettoni & Guilley, 2016).
- *Mentoring*: the development assistance provided by a more senior individual within and organization (Higgins & Kram, 2001).
- *National Contract Management Association (NCMA)*: is a membership-based professional society that was formed in 1959 to foster the professional growth and educational advancement of its members. NCMA is the world's leading resource for professionals in the contract management field. This diverse community of professions consists of 20,000 members throughout the country, representing various fields such as purchasing, procurement, project management, and contract management. Devoted to education and training, individual members and

- professional groups from Nonprofit, Nonprofit, industry, and government are able to enhance their knowledge and leverage opportunities (NCMA, 2016).
- *Pay Gap*: defined as the gender pay gap or wage gap between women and men earners sharing identical characteristics (Obermann et al., 2020).
  - *Phenomenology*: A study as a strategy of inquiry in which the “research identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13).
  - *Social Class*: often referred to as one’s socioeconomic position (Cole, 2019).  
Conceptually, the term social class is referenced in the context of the domains of hierarchical distinctions that were exhibited between groups of individuals within the society as predisposed on the scope of various advantages that were provided by the legitimacy of social structures.
  - *Sociodemographic Themes*: includes income, household size, and age (Abrahamse & Steg, 2011). Other factors considered are education, sex, migration background, ethnicity, religious affiliation, marital status, and employment.
  - *Underrepresentation*: for the purpose of this study, underrepresentation will refer to the disparity of women to men working in corporations, institutions of higher education, and leadership roles inclusive of the political sector.
  - *Work–Life Balance*: is defined as an individual’s capability to bring one’s career work and family commitments to equilibrium, as well as other nonwork responsibilities and personal life activities (Hill et al., 2001).
  - *Woman*: for the purpose of this study, a woman will refer to an adult human being who identifies with the qualities or characteristics of a woman and is a female

member of a workforce.

### **Research Questions**

The main research question for this study is: What barriers, if any, might women face in contract management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles? The subquestions investigated for this research are as follows:

1. How do women describe the current representation of women in contract management?
2. What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of contract management?
3. What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of contract management?
4. What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

### **Limitations**

Defining limitations of a qualitative study establishes the boundaries, reservations, and expectations of the study (Creswell, 1998). In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher serves as a primary instrument for data collection and analysis. With this, research bias might present itself as a limitation. Although the researcher is acting ethically and in good faith, the researcher's biases may influence the interview process and analysis. The researcher has limited control over participants' demographic themes, education, ethnicity, age, religion, or social class. The researcher will have control once selected. This study will use a sample of the population that may not be generalizable across the entire population. Because of restrictions imposed by COVID-19 measures, limitations such as travel and in-person meetings, face-to-face

interviews with participants were nonexistent. The researcher was limited to virtual platforms, which eliminated any biases that may affect the interview process and analysis.

### **Delimitations**

The survey was delimited to women working in the field of contract management. Delimitations included within this research study pertained to the population of women designated on LinkedIn and search criteria regardless of gender, race, ethnicity age, religion, or social class. The research involved a compact time for the study, which could present time constraints in the methodology. Consequently, this could reflect time parameters regarding the collection and interpretation of the data. The themes, type of measurement, and theoretical assumptions that guide the methodology may provide further delimitations to the validity of data.

### **Assumptions**

Maxwell (1996) stated a qualitative research study allows the researcher to examine explanations. The essence of qualitative research is inductive reasoning that describes the process of seeking information from the data gathered; not specific findings. A phenomenological theory approach will be used for this qualitative study sculpted after Creswell's (2009) phenomenological research strategy of inquiry. Creswell (2009) described "a phenomenological study of inquiry as research identifying the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as describes by participants" (p. 13). This approach allows the researcher to identify the essence of the participants' lived experiences, which will permit the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences they faced in the workplace. In the present study, the phenomenon of interest is the experience of women in leadership working in the field of contract management.

The researcher in this study assumed the participants were not deceptive with their

answers and were forthcoming with truthful and accurate responses to the interview questions. Participants are expected to answer in an honest manner to the best of their ability. Other assumptions included:

- Participants were selected based on their identification on inclusion criteria.
- Observations made by the researcher on participants were truthful and accurate.
- The population size was sufficient for sample selection in order to make inferences about the population for accurate representation.

### **Positionality**

The term *positionality* describes both an individual's world view and the position the researcher adopted about the research and the researchers social and political context (Foote & Bartell, 2011; Rowe, 2014; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Aspects of positionality include fluid and fixed aspects. General fixed aspects include gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality. An individual's experiences, personal views, and personal life history are considered fluid, subjective, and contextual (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). Experiences through which positionality is shaped may influence the researcher's choice of processes and interpretation of findings.

The researcher's positionality stems from professional and personal experiences that ignited personal interest in the significance of this study. The researcher in this study is an African American female who has worked in the field of contract management for more than 10 years. The researcher has worked in different industries, including transportation and aerospace. During this time, the researcher worked in many different contract management positions. This researcher views herself as a senior contract administrator, which is also the anticipated view from others. She is personally aware of the barriers and challenges women working in the profession face. As a mentor to future contract management professionals, she is curious about

the potential barriers that may exist and how they might hinder women leading other women to leadership roles. There is no present ethical researcher bias. Merriam (1988) stated the researcher should identify positioning, biases, and assumptions at the beginning by noting experiences, prejudices, and orientations that may have an influence on interpretation and approach to the study. There are no conditions in which the researcher will discriminate based on gender, age, ethnicity, race, or any other sociodemographic attributes.

In lieu of the literature and relevant data, professional experience will bring implicit knowledge that will enlighten the undertakings within the phenomenon. The researcher will engage in the process of conceptualizing, which is allowed for building a framework and concepts that reflect the subject of the research.

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study; the second chapter describes the review of literature; the third chapter is research methodology; the fourth chapter shows the presentation of findings; and the fifth chapter contains a discussion of the findings. Below are additional details covered within the respective chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduces the topic of women underrepresented in leadership and themes uncovered within the literature review.
- Chapter 2 presents a review of the theoretical and empirical research relevant to this study, which includes a historical perspective of women in leadership and women's present-day leadership status. The literature review is structured around interrelated concepts that include the following topics: assessment of women in leadership, women in the workplace, leadership styles used by women, noteworthy women in

- leadership and supporting organizations, mentoring other women, and women working in contract management.
- Chapter 3 outlines the methods used for this study and identifies the research design, participant overview, protection of human subjects, data collection instruments, data collection process, and data analysis plans.
  - Chapter 4 will include profiles of the participants and present the results of the study, leaving the interpretation of results for Chapter 5.
  - Chapter 5 summarizes the study, providing an interpretation and discussion of the findings and results as they relate to the existing body of research related to the researcher's dissertation topic. This final chapter highlights implications and recommends future research.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 encompassed (a) chapter overview, (b) background of the study, (c) problem statement, (d) purpose statement, (e) significance of the study, (f) definition of terms, (g) research questions, (h) limitations, (i) delimitations, (j) assumptions, (k) positionality, and (l) organization of the study. The number of women in leadership positions specific to the field of contract management continue remain much lower than men. Despite the increase in women entering this workforce, only a small amount holds an executive leadership role. The purpose of this study is to identify the barriers faced and strategies used to obtain leadership positions across many different sectors. The influence of gender discrimination, biases, cultural barriers, pregnancy discrimination, work-life balance, working in a male dominated workplace, and women empowerment will be reviewed and discussed in Chapter 2. The research questions provide a framework for the study and guides the fundamental design and organization of the

data collected through interviews. The research questions focus on identifying strategies and behaviors that aided to the advancement of women in the workplace. The theoretical framework will derive from the analysis of the research problem, concepts relevant to scholarly literature and existing theories used for similar studies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the researcher provides a review of the theoretical literature and empirical research in association with women leadership, workplace barriers, and strategies used to overcome obstacles. The purpose of this study is to understand barriers facing women in contract management and to examine personal capabilities used to obtain leadership positions, specifically, women who work in contract management within many different areas of government, Nonprofit, and Private-sector entities. This chapter includes the following topics: (a) assessment of women in leadership, (b) women in the workplace, (c) leadership styles used by women, (d) noteworthy women in leadership and supporting organizations, (e) mentoring other women, and (f) women working in contract management. The researcher is familiar with the contract management industry and some of the professions and practices related to the field.

The main research question for this study is: What barriers, if any, might women face in contract management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles? The sub questions investigated for this research are as follows:

1. How do women describe the current representation of women in contract management?
2. What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of contract management?
3. What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of contract management?
4. What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

The following themes have been chosen to explore this study: (a) education, (b) ethnicity, (c) age, (d) religion, and (e) social class. The review of the literature was accomplished by reading dissertations, peer reviewed journal articles, conference papers and books. Research mining targeted several countries beyond the United States in efforts to extend the scholar's global understanding.

### **Assessment of Women in Leadership**

This section focuses on a historical perspective of women in leadership and women's present-day leadership status. Historically, women were viewed as mothers, wives, and homemakers who traditionally stayed home to raise children while men assumed the role of breadwinners. However, since the Industrial Revolution between the years of 1760 to 1820 and 1840, women have been seeking access to the same occupations as men. The Industrial Age entailed employment positions that capitalized on one specific trade and demanded physical and manual skills. There has been an emerging shift for higher education, analytical skills, and social skills instead of physical and manual skills. Today, women are working alongside men, developing their own aspirations, making their own decisions and controlling their education, occupation, lifestyle, and identity. Despite these progressions, there is an imbalance between women represented in leadership in comparison to men (Eagly, 2007).

Statistical data confirm the presence of women within the United States labor force has grown throughout the past 71 years and is continuing to grow in the labor force. In 2017, 57.0 % of all women participated in the labor force; 57.1% in 2018. For comparison, in 2018, 69.1% of all men participated in the workforce (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Although representation has increased, women remain underrepresented within senior leadership (Hoobler et al., 2011; McKinsey & Company, 2009). Representation of women holding C-suite titles such

as, CEO, Chairman, COO, and Executive Vice President increased from 17% to 21% between 2015 and 2019. Gender disparity has proved true, as men held 83% C-suite positions in 2015 and 79% in 2019 in comparison to women. The 2021 *Women in the Workplace* report confirmed only 25% of C-suite positions were held by women in 2020 (McKinsey & Company, 2021). Within this amount, the representation of C-suite positions in 2020 were 82% Caucasian and 17% people of color (McKinsey & Company, 2021). This disparity also is present outside the United States. In 2015, men in Australia held a majority of executive positions within Australia's top 200 publicly listed companies (Wahlquist, 2015).

An imbalance exists despite statistics showing women in America are achieving higher education more frequently than men. Women have earned a greater number of degrees (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral) than in the past. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), the percentage of bachelor's degrees earned between 1979 and 2005 by women increased from 49% to 57%; master's degrees increased from 49% to 59%, and doctoral degrees increased from 30% to 49%. In 2008, the number of women who earned a doctorate degree was higher than men (Fiegener, 2009). Following 2008, Bell (2010) reported women were awarded a greater percentage of doctoral degrees than men between 2008 and 2009. As there is a push for progression in education systems and employment, accessibility differs all around the world. Obtaining higher education is desirable because higher education allows for economic mobility, which results in lower unemployment rates and higher income.

Women and men cite different reasons for the lack of women leadership. Eagly (2007) concluded there is still a significant imbalance of women in leadership as a result of workplace gender bias. In a study based on 461 women executives and 325 male CEOs, the Academy of Management Executive examined why women were underrepresented among senior executives.

Findings concluded male CEOs believed women lack experience. Women, on the other hand, blamed the inhospitable and exclusionary corporate culture in which male CEOs lack awareness (Wah, 1998). The gender gap for leadership and executive management have been highly documented in corporate jobs that require line function positions as a prerequisite. Women working in these types of corporations tend to move from line functions to support staff roles such as human resources. Consequently, this results in less women with a career path to higher-level management.

Valian (1998) indicated gender disparities are occasionally attributed to an acculturation problem presented in male dominated cultures and women not socialized to play by men's rules. Some argue there are still obstacles for women because of the great divide, also known as the partisan schism or divide regarding political values and culture. A Pew Research Center survey concluded Democrats are in favor of giving women equal rights with men and agree with the societal shift in gender roles (Parker et al., 2017). Democrats believe men have an easier pathway to leadership and power over women. Parker et al. (2017) stated more than half of Republicans (54%) oppose this view and believe things are where they need to be; 26% of Republicans said the country has more work to do.

Opposite views allude to underrepresentation not being problematic. Steimanis et al. (2020) suggested the belief that men make better leaders than women does not differ between genders. Increased representation of women has not led to adoption of new ideas surrounding leadership roles thus far. Ro (2021) stated a destructive culture of distrust in women leadership exists and the public remains resistant to the idea of women in charge. Key (2016) stated men have a greater tendency to desire hierarchical power and have an innate ability to focus singularly on obtaining a leadership role.

Women are displaying their innate abilities to lead and play a major role in decision-making around the world. Trailblazing women have demonstrated their capability to be powerful agents of change by holding influential positions within legislatures, community councils, courts, and executive boards. Indira Gandhi was the first, and to date, the only female Prime Minister of India. Isabel Martínez de Perón was the first female serving as the President of Argentina. Most recently and noteworthy for the United States, is Hilary Clinton who was the first female nominee of a major United States political party and Kamala Harris, first female Vice President. Harris, as have many other women, made history in paving the way for women in leadership. Although some countries are working to close the gap in gender equality, a greater number of countries face an imbalance in leadership representation. Most of the world's nations have yet to have a female leader. Only 56 of the 146 nations (38%) studied by the World Economic Forum in 2014 and 2016 have had a female head of government or state for at least 1 year in the past half century (Geiger & Kent, 2017).

One aid to gender equality is implementation of a *gender quota*, which is a government quota for women representation within government positions and boards, requiring 20% to 50% of all legislative candidates to be women. Baldez (2004) stated 21 countries have adopted gender quota laws in the past decade. These laws were established as a result of electoral uncertainty, equal protection, and cross-partisan mobilization among female legislatures. Studies confirm that 30% to 40% women representation is needed to ensure women's voices are heard. The lack of women in politics results in a system that cannot function as a representative democracy. Opposing views believe gender quotas are un-American because cherry-picking women creates a gender bias. The notion of women being cherry-picked is a negative impression for women lacking qualifications or leadership skills. Consequently, these women will, thus, only represent

a certain group: women; not the collective. Peel (2017) offered the time for laws and regulations such as gender quotas has passed, as these laws are considered outdated diversity programs.

### **Women in the Workplace**

This section addresses continual and emerging themes in relation to women in the workplace considering disadvantages and reformism. The purpose of this section is to review from a critical perspective the array of challenges facing women in the workplace. Although separate sections are developed to specific issues, it should be noted that they are inseparable and combine in the complex experiences of women in the workplace. The themes researched include discrimination, biases, pregnancy discrimination, work–life balance, working in a male dominated workplace, and women empowerment.

#### ***Discrimination***

Discrimination is the leading challenge women face in the workplace. The type of discrimination takes many forms such as gender discrimination, unconscious bias, social gender roles, and pregnancy discrimination. A survey conducted by the Bureau for Employees' Activities (2017) surveyed companies to uncover the leading barriers to women obtaining leadership positions. Findings confirmed the five leading barriers to women's leadership are associated to discrimination, unconscious gender bias, social roles of men to women, gender perception that management is a male's role, and masculine corporate culture. Parker and Funk (2017) provided approximately four in 10 working women (42%) in the United States have faced discrimination on the job because of their gender.

Parker and Funk (2017) conducted a survey to understand gender pay gap matters. The survey findings concluded women are earning less than male counterparts performing the same jobs and do not receive consideration for important assignments. Studies show women

consistently fall below men in the form of formal income levels and job placement. Women earn 80% of what men are paid (Wilson, 2019). In 2018, women had median weekly earnings of \$789, which equaled 81.1% of men's median earnings. Among these women, earnings were reported highest for Asians, followed by Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). These unfair procedures and practices have many implications on women such as the glass ceiling effect, which is a term describing a syndrome in which a person's gender is considered a barrier for professional advancement. The glass ceiling, recognized as an illegal barrier, hinders women, and specifically women of color, in advancing toward upper-level management because of unfair treatment. A study by Bohnet (2016) examined employees within a large service organization that had no existing gender differences in regard to performance appraisals. Findings confirmed even though there were no gender differences, women were being promoted less than men. Babcock and Laschever (2007) attested women may receive less promotion opportunities because women tend to be less competitive than men. However, women are, thus, not able to meet the job requirements for upper-management positions without the opportunity to work on important assignments or receive promotional opportunities equal to men. Feedback is also considered a problematic component to gender equality. Despite gender, all employees need feedback on their work as an essential contribution to their efforts in order to improve their performance. McKinsey & Company (2016) confirmed women receive less feedback than male counterparts. The glass ceiling phenomenon also exists in other countries, pointing to a much greater, global systemic issue. Baxter and Wright (2000) argued that gender discrimination is an issue women face when ascending the managerial ladder throughout the United States, Sweden, and Australia. Carolina et al. (2018) confirmed overeducation drives the issue of gender pay gap in Italy. In Guatemala, indigenous

females earn lower wages than indigenous males (Vasquez, 2011). Furthermore, nonindigenous males and females earn lower wages than indigenous males.

There are various laws in place to address gender discrimination. Legislation was passed with the intention that policies and practices implemented would correct discrimination (Wasserman, 2003). The most prominent laws enacted and proposed are as follows:

- The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which was established to instill a minimum wage; time-and-a-half and overtime pay standards.
- The Equal Pay Act of 1963, which is a United States labor law designed to eliminate wage disparity based on gender. This law amends the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was introduced because studies confirmed discrimination causes labor disputes and obstructs commerce.
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964, inclusive of Title VII. This law provides protection of gender discrimination in relation to employment by disallowing employers to base employment on race, gender, class, or age (McAnallen, 2015).
- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, was passed to provide a statute of limitation concerning wage discrimination cases and affirm claims can restart when an unequal paycheck is dispensed.
- The Paycheck Fairness Act, first introduced in 1997 and resurfaced in March of 2019, is a proposed labor law that aims to correct the wage gap. This bill is intended to close the wage gap between women and men demanding same job; same pay. This bill has only passed the United States House of Representatives vote but politicians are hopeful this will achieve the Senate's vote. When this bill passes, employers will be required to share data with the Department of Labor as to how much they are

- paying employees. This bill will mandate employers to justify salary differences and confirm differences are not resulted from factors such as sex but instead based on merit factors such as education and experience (Renzulli, 2019). The Paycheck Fairness Act is a step in the right direction, as additional regulation, checks, and balance needs to be established. There is little regulation concerning salary, pay gap, and unfair promotion practices. As a result, employers will hold additional responsibility to ensure they utilize fair practices.
- White House Council on Women's and Girls is an executive order signed under the Barak Obama administration. This order was created in efforts to fight discrimination, support women-owned businesses, and promote women's political and economic leadership on a global scale. In lieu to this establishment, the Obama Administration released an Executive Order and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, which supports women by providing policies and programs that protect women's voices and viewpoints in decision-making. These programs aim toward strengthening peace and security in many countries affected by conflict and political transition by protecting women's rights and empowering women. President Barack Obama highlights, "Communities that give their daughters the same opportunities as their sons, they are more peaceful, they are more prosperous, they develop faster, they are more likely to succeed" (Goldberg, 2015, p. 1).
  - Equal Futures Partnership coined by the United States Government is an initiative intended to inspire member countries to empower women both economically and politically on such actions concerning policy reforms and legal regulation to ensure women are allowed to partake and lead on a local, regional, and national level (White

House fact sheet, Office of the Secretary, 2015). Since 2012, the partnership has grown from to 27 countries, inclusive of United Kingdom and the European Union

On a national level, the United Nations Women supports gender equality advocating to Congress, international non-governmental organizations, and civil society. The United Nations has identified the importance of gender equality and has set a developmental goal for 2030. Goal 5 concerns gender equality and targets to end all forms of discrimination against women, everywhere. According to the United Nations (n.d.), Goal 5 intends to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life” (para. 5).

### ***Biases***

A significant barrier for women in the workplace is unconscious bias. The committee on Women Faculty in the School of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1999) examined the status of working women and suggested the campus was slow at recognizing other indirect forms of discrimination. Women Faculty in the School of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1999) reported findings that further suggested “discrimination differs from its original form and definition” (p. 25). Similarly, Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) suggested gender discrimination has not gone away but that it’s now underground. Invisible barriers are holding women back greater than sexism alone (Barsh & Yee, 2011). This category of discrimination has been discussed in the literature under a variety of terms, such as unconscious bias and implicit bias. *Unconscious bias*, refers to ways a person unknowingly draws upon assumptions and stereotypes about an individual and/or group to formulate an opinion or decision about them. Unconscious gender bias is defined as unintentional and involuntary mental associations based on gender, which can stem from one’s norms, culture,

traditions, values, and experience. This type of cognition occurs beyond awareness (Staats et al., 2015). Unconscious biases take place when an individual passes judgment or quickly assess people.

Positive comments state unconscious bias beliefs add value in regard to efficiency. Researchers who oppose this view believe these ideologies often hinder women from advancing in many areas of society and are a hindrance for women seeking senior roles within the workplace. Unconscious gender bias is documented as a significant barrier to women and career advancement (Bureau for Employees' Activities, 2017). Women carry many assumptions and stereotypes in the workplace. Unconscious biases can yield damaging consequences when relying on assumptions and stereotypes to formulate connections between one another whether they are negative or positive attributes. These connections repeat social identity hierarchies that value some individuals over others (Staats et al., 2015). Unconscious bias has been documented to have a negative impact on women when decisions are made without formal rules. Employers bear the responsibility in hiring candidates based on their qualifications and experience, consciously. Employers would not normally or consciously choose to hire candidates based on whether they remind them of themselves. However, those who are unconsciously biased, might favor candidates who look like them or have a similar background, which is problematic. Another term for this process is *Similarity Bias* in which individuals connect well with individuals who share the same group membership, past experiences, or demographic characteristics (Wheeler & Sojo, 2017). Individuals may find it easier or more accepting to take the perspective of an individual who resembles their own over someone who had a different upbringing or set of past experiences. This process is problematic because those underrepresented may be innocently discriminated against in recruitment because of similarity

bias. In the previous section, it was confirmed that men hold more leadership positions than women. Most notably, statistics show men hold more C-suite executive positions than women. With this confirmed, it is reasonable to assume executive management and boards of directors comprise primarily men who unconsciously engage in similarity bias. Consequently, the greater number of men would be recruited in comparison to women, unconsciously. This process only continues the perpetual cycle of men outnumbering women in leadership positions. Phelan et al. (2008) found a double standard exists when women are interviewed. Applicants who smiled and presented themselves as team players were often considered less competent for both genders. However, women are frequently disqualified for being too ambitious or self-reliant even though they are viewed as competent. These types of characteristics lead to being socially deficient (Phelan et al., 2008). Towers (2008) attributed there is inconsistency to unconscious gender bias. A case study by Towers (2008) found that female researchers were only given one third the amount of conference presentations notwithstanding female researchers were on average significantly more productive in comparison to male counterparts.

A study by Trix and Psenka (2003) examined 300 letters of recommendation for faculty new hires, tenure, and promotions in the mid-1990s. Findings concluded women were 2 1/2 times more likely to receive short letters of nominal assurance in comparison to men. These letters were also more likely to include red flags such as weak praises, irrelevancies, negative content, and references to personal life. Letters for men often focused on skills and capabilities while women's letters focused on teaching and training. This is an example of how referrals unconsciously stereotyped recipients on the basis of gender when writing letters of recommendation (Trix & Psenka, 2003).

There are many reasons why gender discrimination can arise within an organization.

Rational biases are considered a component to this problem. *Rational bias theory*, also referenced as a behavioral theory, is set on the premise that discrimination may be situationally predisposed by conditions in which a display of bias seems acceptable by others. Rational bias theory suggests engaging in discrimination acts is justified if these acts are customary to the organizational culture. These discriminating acts are justified even if that person prefers to treat others equally and is aware of regulations prohibiting bias (Larwood & Gattiker, 1985). The general deterrent is that people will engage in acts perceived to be acceptable and will not result in punishment. In order to improve or eliminate gender discrimination, the accepted stereotypes and biases must be refined.

A related theory, *Gender Schema* may also be a component of gender discrimination. Bem (1981) introduced the gender schema theory to describe how an individual's sex identity is essential to the culture in which one is reared. This theory is built on the principal that discrimination is caused by the role of stereotypes in lieu of normal cognitive processing (Bem, 1981). In the philosophy of development, this theory suggests people construct a series of stereotypes schemata, social roles, and worldviews. Schemata may be based on one's experience, or interactions that determine how they view the world. McKinsey & Company (2017) suggested women face many stereotypes and environmental challenges that lead to inhospitable corporate cultures that men do not encounter. Valian (1998) claimed discrimination occurs when schemas are linked to prescriptive roles. This can be problematic for those who still hold a historical, and traditional view of women. Babcock and Laschever (2007) described numerous studies that exposed that people, even women, still hold stereotypes about women. Research proved that women tend to undervalue the work they perform. For example, when offered a specified dollar amount for a particular task, women more often than men accepted the amount offered. Men, on

the other hand, were more likely to ask for additional money. Although the level of success was the same for women and men, women did not feel they deserved more. There are consequences for gender schema, “Consequently, because gender stereotypes are still a prevalent, yet often implicit, component of most social environments, the resulting gender dichotomies become heavily integrated into general cognitive processing and thereby influence personal evaluations and perceptions of both others and ourselves” (The Free Library, 2014, p. 1). These types of gender beliefs limit the potential of women and minorities by not allowing women the opportunity to display what women should, could, and would accomplish (Valian, 1998). The perception of gender schema comes to light when pregnancy and work life is considered problematic for promotional opportunities. Some employers still hold the stereotype that women prioritize their children and homelife before work. This bias handicaps women, particularly working mothers. Positive stereotypes can also become problematic. The traditional stereotype that women are homemakers and caregivers can contribute to women being nurturing, placing women in roles in which caregiving responsibilities are discriminatory and unfair (Peel, 2017). Examples of these roles could be coordinating informal work gatherings, decorating, or cleaning the fridge.

### ***Pregnancy Discrimination***

Pregnancy discrimination occurs when an employer discriminates against a woman expecting or has an intention to become pregnant. Common forms of pregnancy discrimination consist of not receiving employment, promotional opportunity, or being fired because of pregnancy or the likelihood of becoming pregnant. There are federal laws in place to protect women’s rights concerning pregnancy and maternity leave. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, and Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 are most

notable for protecting pregnant women and/or maternity leave rights. The Civil Rights Act protects women from workplace discrimination in connection with maternity leave, as this law prohibits employers from discriminating based on age, sex, race, disability. This law shelters leave and benefits (The Almanac, 1996). The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 “explicitly prohibits sex discrimination on the basis of pregnancy,” as cited on U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.-a). The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 directly concerns working mothers and their right to 12 weeks of unpaid leave and job security (Gault et al., 2014). Federal and state legislation mandating employers to allow reasonable accommodations for work such as teleworking or flexible schedules ceases to exist. Access to maternity leave is a fundamental but the amount of time women take before returning to work may negatively impact potential career advancement, job placement, and could potentially cause gender pay differences. As these laws attempt to eliminate the problem, pregnancy discrimination is still a reality for working women. Unconscious bias may influence how employers view prospective employees. This also extends to how employers view expecting women and parents. Correll et al. (2007) examined mothers in the workplace and concluded there are gender differences even though candidates are equally qualified. In a comparative study between men and mothers in the workplace, mothers were less likely to receive recommendation for hire. If hired, they were offered starting salaries lower than an equally qualified woman who was not a mother. In contrast, fathers were offered higher salaries than men without children.

### ***Work–Life Balance***

In the past, men had wives who were considered homemakers and who stayed home to tend to life issues (Hamilton, 2002). Today, some women find themselves not only working the 40-hour-plus week but also tending to life issues: theirs and those of their families. In 1970, 41%

of women in the United States labor force worked full time; 63% in 2017. For comparison purposes, 66% of working men worked full time in 1970; 75% in 2017 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). A present-day woman struggles to find equilibrium between their work and family life. Sa (2013) confirmed career women who perform work and life activities at the same time suffer from a high level of job stress and other mental pain. Olayeni et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine gender equality and equity in association to workload and family expectations. A survey based on Lagos, Mainland, and Nigerian female construction professionals revealed workload affects 73.20% of family responsibility (Olayeni et al., 2012). Significant responsibilities affected consisted of spending time with family, caretaking of the household, and accommodating school transportation for children. Research suggested there is a shift in the balance between husbands and wives, creating a more democratic lifestyle because of labor force participation among women (Almestica, 2012; Weber, 2009).

While women in America still face significant inequality, there are some employers who are beginning to make exciting policy changes that allow for more women to be able to thrive in leadership roles while still maintaining a family (Dominici et al., 2009). Offering working arrangements such as remote telecommuting, flexible working hours, and part-time work are approaches employers can implement to foster a work–life balance culture. Flexibility may be viewed as a tool to alleviate stress, which can positively affect employee’s performance and positivity. Challenges employers have for allowing flexibility concern the lack of supervision and perceived unfairness. Some believe that workers who practice flexible working arrangements for care purposes are less productive and less committed to the workplace. Chung (2018) examined gender differences in association with perceptions and experiences of this flexibility stigma. Based on the Work–Life Balance Survey conducted in 2011 within the United Kingdom,

findings confirmed 35% of workers believed those who have flexible working arrangements are less productive.

Burnout is a component to work–life balance issues. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis affected both men and women in the workplace. Dockterman (2021) stated feelings of being burned out increased for both men and women from 2020 to 2021. Work conditions such as a lack of childcare, workforce dropout, chronic stress, exhaustion contributed to feeling burned out. *The Women in the Workplace* report from McKinsey & Company (2021), in partnership with Lean In, confirmed approximately 42% of women in corporate America reported they are burned out; 35% men reported they are burned out. Zoom fatigue has also been linked to burnout. As a result of the pandemic, there has been an increase in the use of virtual video meetings. Zoom fatigue has been defined as the state of feeling exhaustion after attending multiple zoom meetings (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020). Video conferring causes individuals to focus more intently on conversations and constantly stare at the screen for minutes or hours at a time in order to absorb information. The lack of visual or mental breaks is a leading cause of Zoom fatigue. Bailenson (2021) published a peer-reviewed article suggesting theoretical arguments for the causes of Zoom fatigue. The four factors identified as contributors to Zoom fatigue are excessive eye glaze, cognitive overload, increased self-evaluation from looking at yourself on video, and decreased physical mobility from having to stay in the video frame. Burnout and Zoom fatigue continue to be a challenge during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is imperative employers address this issue and support employee well-being, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### ***Working in a Male Dominated Workplace***

Women working in male dominated fields face difficulty with informal workplace interactions that may cause inequalities and psychological impact as a result of stress. Being the

only female at the table or in the room is still very common in today's workplace. Women cope with various survival skills in male dominated work fields by trying to fit in, look the part, and developing thick skin. Adapting to a male dominated culture may pose effects on identity development and relationships with other women.

Women are viewed differently than men in the workplace, as they are seen less pleasant to work with than men. Research has concluded women are perceived negatively regarding their behavior, attributes, and language. Women tend to have a bad reputation whether women are in management, subordinates, or peers. In an effort to mitigate negative perceptions, women compromise their individual identity and adapt to the male dominated work culture. Bergman and Hallberg (2002) conducted a study to examine women's general status at work with men and specific experiences they endured in association to workplace culture. Using a Women Workplace Culture Questionnaire, 104 responses concluded women's perceptions of what constitutes workplace culture are formed partly by their encounter with an existing male dominated organization and partly by their systems of norms, expectations, and experiences. Women often think their abilities are questioned and that orienting themselves in the male dominated workplace culture yields a greater outcome (Bergman & Hallberg, 2002). In Germany and the United Kingdom, women in leadership often feel they are marginalized and are obligated to prove their worth more than men in equal positions (Read & Kehm, 2016). Orienting or adapting to a boy's club, macho image may compromise identity development. Identity has many definitions, but the researcher has chosen to describe this term as a measure of who women are, how they identify themselves, and whether they consider their self-worth as positive or negative. The devaluation of women's roles in a male dominated workforce overpowers women's identification with relationships and may cause them to be untrue to themselves in

exchange for a paycheck. A study involving 38 professional women portrayed how women working in male dominated workplaces have constructed their self-identity within the discourse of their sexuality. Conclusions of this research suggested women negotiate expression of their feminine and sexual selves by using various context-dependent strategies (Goodman, 2009).

It is common for women to hear and talk about how poorly women are treated by men in the workplace. Acknowledgement should also go to the notion that women often treat other women as unfairly as do their male counterparts. Women are known to have two types of relationships with women in the workplace that are either truly wonderful or extremely terrible. It is quite rare to see women as friendly acquaintances (Heim & Murphy, 2003). Men, on the other hand, tend not to form actual friendships but hold a level of friendliness. Heim and Murphy (2003) noted that forms of indirect aggression sometimes manifest among women. Women are inclined to avoid confrontation in the workplace; therefore, they frequently, in silence, sabotage other women when they feel threatened instead of developing an open dialogue of communication with women (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Indirect aggression can take the form of spreading ill rumors, insults, gossiping, or undermining women with the intention of defaming. Behaviors such as communicating in a harsh manner, being unkind, being too power-hungry, talking poorly behind their female coworkers' backs, or capitalizing on others women's ideas to get ahead are examples of aggression. Evans (2009) researched success strategies of high-achieving women in the field of business and determined women in a male dominated industry have a competitive relationship with other women, which inhibits their ability to work together. Yet, outward competition for women is often deemed inappropriate (Jones & Palmer, 2011). There are many reasons why women work against women. Kramer and Harris (2019) found that women compete with one another when they are devalued, not recognized, and there are limited

leadership positions. Women may develop covert behaviors to help create an advantage over other women because they are simply frustrated with trying to break through the glass ceiling (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Marvin (2006) suggested there is an overall lack of support from female leaders who are able to break through the glass ceiling. Consequently, young women are often negatively affected. Research by Buchanan et al. (2012) found that young women who enter into a male dominated workforce hoping for a promising career feel belittled by senior female leaders in upper-management positions. Marvin (2006) suggested tension exists between subordinates and senior women in leadership when expectations are not met.

Literature demonstrates women deny support to other women and tend to have micro aggressive behavior. Sheppard and Aquino (2014) linked that women in senior leadership positions hinder the progression of other women. This phenomenon has been given the name *queen bee syndrome*, introduced by Staines et al. (1974). This syndrome denotes women who attain success in a male dominated organization are likely to oppose another women's success. Ellemers et al. (2004) examined male and female stereotypical perceptions within academics to help understand the reason for underrepresentation of women in academics. This research study revealed females were more likely to express stereotype views of women more than their male counterparts. This study was repeated 15 years later to see if the queen bee syndrome phenomenon was also found among current generations of academics. Faniko et al. (2021) concluded the findings from the initial study conducted in 2004 still exist. Findings show both genders at advanced career states self-identify in masculine characteristics more often than those in an early career stage (Faniko et al., 2021). This discovery supports the conclusion that successful women imitate masculinity in the workplace. Ellemers et al. (2004) argued, "Survival of women in a male dominated work environment entails a form of individual mobility, in the

sense that they have to prove to themselves and others that they are unlike other women in order to be successful” (p. 333). This phenomenon has been used to describe a potential reason why successful professional women are highly competitive toward each other, and thus unwilling to support other women. Terms such as “Tug of War” and “Cat Fights” have been used to describe this competitive behavior (Tanenbaum, 2003; Williams, 2014; Williams et al., 2016; Williams & Dempsey, 2014).

### ***Cultural Barriers***

Fetterolf (2017) collected data to understand what percentage of women constitute the workplace in comparison to men on a global scale. Data from 2010 to 2016 attested women make up at least 40% of the workforce in more than 80 countries out of 114 nations; median share is 45.4% across all countries. Women continue to gain accessibility to education, healthcare, and various women’s rights through advocacy and women empowerment. Yet, recognition and progression are inconsistent around the world. In some societies, the level of independence that Western women have taken for granted will forever remain a dream. Studies suggest culture (e.g., institutions, religion, societal trends, and economic system) are perceived barriers and challenges for women that inhibit progression. Although women around the world have different points of view in relation to beliefs and traditions, the desire for the pursuit of happiness is shared. Some women desire to hold leadership positions and obtain higher education while others strive for economic and/or social privileges.

Progression might be difficult in societies where women suffer disadvantages such as low literacy, poor childcare, poverty conditions, and distinct religious and cultural attitudes. Norris and Inglehart (2000) suggested, “Major barriers continue to restrict women’s advancement in public life...reasons behind this phenomenon, include the importance of cultural attitudes, social

structure, and political institutions” (p. 3). There is evidence that nations with a traditional culture are difficult and challenging because traditional views do not support women (Norris & Inglehart, 2000). Studies show significant obstacles derive from religious beliefs and obedience and from traditional standards such as family dynamics. There are patterns of capitalism and patriarchy that support the traditional idea that women should support the men (Asiyanbola, 2005). In some world systems, subordination to men is acceptable and viewed as satisfying religious and cultural views. Traditional masculine and feminine roles in a household might also play a factor in women advancement. Ahad and Gunter (2017) argued that Bangladeshi women struggle to achieve leadership positions because women need permission from not only a male dominated industry but also permission from the men in their households to move into leadership. Women in countries where they still need permission from their husbands to make any decisions in the home and in the workplace face inequality, gender bias, and discrimination when attempting to achieve authoritative leadership roles (Ahad & Gunter, 2017; Baxter & Wright, 2000; Eagly, 2007). Alternatively, some women respect traditional views. Women who are positioned as conservative and highly religious might believe tradition comes first. The desire to educate oneself and pursue a career could be perceived as a pointless ambition and against one’s culture. Because of this, the lack of women supporting other women will hinder the overall progression of women.

Pakistani society is known to have a patriarchal framework that places women in inferior positions compared to men. Pakistani women are underprivileged, without rights to education, opportunities for employment, health, and decision-making authorities (Wantimba et al., 2010). Traditional tasks for women include cleaning, and washing dishes and clothes. The female literacy rate is considerably low, which shows investment in human capital leans toward men

over women (Skalli, 2011). The literacy rate in Pakistan overall is 49.9%; 35.2% for females. China, on the contrary, capitalizes on women as an economic resource. In 2011, the *Gender Diversity Benchmark Report* for Asia revealed women's economic participation was approximately 50%; equal to men.

A common phenomenon in India is spousal support for violence against women. Indian society is known to be conservative and a male dominated orthodoxy that raises girls to endure male aggression without protest. This type of environment discourages women's from seeking employment. Consequently, women who obtain employment are prone to more spousal abuse in comparison to unemployed women. A study by Biswas (2017) revealed that the majority of Indian employed women are skilled or unskilled manual workers, and the majority of them are suffer spousal violence.

In the United Arab Emirates, women are permitted to work, vote, own property, and obtain education, but approval from their guardian might be required (Sergon, 2021). Women in the United Arab Emirates are obtaining leadership positions but are not equally represented. A reason for underrepresentation might stem from the lack of leadership preparation. Young women obtain an education in their childhood and youth but lack any form of leadership preparation. The majority of young women in the United Arab Emirates are not exposed or taught foundational leadership skills and, therefore, young women tend not to explore such ideas (Madsen, 2010).

Women around the world have different cultural and religious circumstances. Cross-cultural experiences show women with different cultural settings have similar interpersonal and social experiences. Inside and outside the workplace setting, women face exploitation and harassment all around the world, whether its physical, emotional, or sexual. Harassment is a fear

all women face when it comes to work life and/or homelife. In addition, all women face the challenge of maintaining a healthy work–life balance. Some cultural and economic practices place high importance on family life and the status of one’s family. Many cultures still support child marriage, which is a main element hindering the progression of women. Because of this, women must adhere to supporting their husband and family before education or career goals. Bigotry and classism are all elements of cultures that have delayed the progression of women for decades.

### ***Women Empowerment***

Empowerment has been viewed as a way to define and overcome barriers, which, in turn, increases women’s capability to shape their environments (Sharma & Varma, 2008). The concept of women empowerment is defined as a process that examines women’s behavior by applying a specific clinical sociological theory–identity empowerment theory (Hall & Hall, 1990). Sharma and Varma (2008) defined women empowerment as an active, multidimensional process that enables women to realize their full identity and power in all spheres of life. Sharma and Varma (2008) further suggested that, “Empowerment in the context of women’s development is a way of defining, challenging and overcoming barriers in a women’s life through which she increases her ability to shape her life and environment” (p. 2). Women empowerment can also be inferred as the ability to take control of one’s decision-making, career, and homelife. The readings provide confusion as to what women empowerment means, as there is no standard definition or process for women' empowerment. By not having a standard definition or basis to evaluate the progression of women empowerment, data and conclusions may be compromised. As many variations of women empowerment exist, the researcher believes women empowerment stems from the platform of first being denied the rights and then acquiring the ability to gain by

encouraging and inspiring women to raise the status of women.

Women empowerment is an intriguing topic and movement around the world, focusing on topics such as women's rights, fundamental freedoms, and promoting gender equality in society, homelife, and the workplace (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Men were allowed the rights to education and trade skills prior to women. Women empowerment is the belief that women deserve the same opportunity to learn skills and technology capacities as men. In this age, women need to obtain higher education, certifications, and technical skills to withstand competition of others, despite gender. Women need to empower themselves and others technically in order to cope and adapt with the evolving workplace. Allowing women accessibility to greater economic resources could accelerate this development. Because of this, and other reasons, there has been more focus on the empowerment of women. The researcher read many articles to help understand the need for women empowerment among various countries. From the readings, education, health care, human rights, domestic violence, and sexual trafficking were presented as themes encouraging women empowerment (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Sathiabama (2010) applauded progression stating women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others. Sathiabama wrote:

Women entrepreneurs need to be lauded for their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investments, finding a niche in the export market, creating a sizeable employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector. (p. 1)

Women entrepreneurs contribute to society by providing different solutions to management, organization, and business problems as well as to the exploitation of entrepreneurial

opportunities (Sathiabama, 2010). Creating enterprises not only enhances production but it also helps generate employment and economic freedom. Empowerment without reinforcement hinders further progression. There needs to be reinforcement from immediate society, employers, and homelife for this movement to progress.

There is little evidence to conclude how women empowerment is presented in the workplace in association with organizational behavior. The workplace needs to evolve and adapt to the needs of women, as women are increasingly entering the labor force. New generations are changing social attitudes through technology and learning behaviors. Empowering women in the workplace to have control over their lives, careers, and sense of freedom is imperative to organization effectiveness. The empowerment of women should lead to autonomy in creating programs, gaining new skills, taking risky opportunities, and promoting female leadership that will redefine the role of women.

### **Leadership Styles Used by Women**

When considering leadership styles used by women, the differences between the way women lead in comparison to how men lead must be considered. Theories of leadership are considered neutral and nongender specific. However, leadership scholars have argued that there are gender differences between the typical leadership style of men in comparison to women (Vinkenburg et al., 2011). Leadership has been depicted largely in masculine terms and many theories of leadership have focused primarily on stereotypical masculine qualities (Miner, 1993). Women's self-reports often identify discrete leadership styles and characteristics linked with gender (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Leadership characteristics associated with women versus male leaders include being task oriented, transformational, cooperative, collaborative, and partaking in mentoring. Males, to the contrary, are characterized as transactional, performance focused, and

have a command-and-control style. Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992), authors of *Megatrends for Women*, described behaviors that characterize women's leadership, suggesting central themes comprising behaviors that empower, restructure, teach, provide role models, encourage openness, and stimulate questioning. Gillet-Karam (1994) suggested women express four behaviors: vision, people, influence, and values.

A number of studies have acknowledged that women tend to practice transformational style leadership. Based on the work of Burns (1978) and House (1977), among others, "transformational leadership theory" explains the unique connection between a leader and their followers (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994, p. 47). Components of transformational leadership include idealized influence charisma, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and inspiration motivation (Avolio, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leadership is known as a process whereby leadership emerges to inspire growth and change in followers (Clemmer, n.d; Yukl et al., 2013). Transformational leaders work to stimulate and inspire followers to develop their own leadership capacity and achieve extraordinary results. This type of leadership tends to make positive interactions with subordinates, encourage participation, share power, share information, increase other people's self-worth, and get others enthusiastic about their work (Rosner, 1990). Women practicing transformational leadership embrace relationships and establish themselves as role models who are open to sharing (Chilwiniak, 1997; Eagly & Carli, 2007). This type of leadership is known to mentor and empower followers by gaining their trust and confidence so they are encouraged to develop their full potential. In return, followers are able to contribute more effectively to their organization. Rosner (1990) interviewed women to understand women's association with transformational leadership. She uncovered that women characterize transformational leadership as getting subordinates to change

their own self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a larger shared goal. Another leadership style linked to women includes *collaborative* or *shared leadership*, built on the principal that followers can influence leaders reciprocally. Shared leadership has become increasingly important in today's organizations and offers the idea that leadership may be provided to anyone who meets the needs of the team to address complex issues (Morgeson et al., 2010; Pearce et al., 2009).

Some argue effective leadership is good leadership. However, the question posed is what characteristics or traits make up an effective leader? Effective leadership may entail implementation of authority, the capability to support and inspire followers, or the ability to motivate teams to participate in collaborative efforts. To account for this, consideration has been given to leadership styles typical of either gender. Bass and Avolio (1994) introduced the full Range Leadership Model, which includes transformational, transactional, and non-transactional styles. This model has been described as the leading model for describing leadership styles (Oberfield, 2014). A meta-analysis by Lowe et al. (1996) concluded that there are various combinations of factors that relate to effective leadership and these are moderated by contextual factors, including leadership role and organization type. Scholars argued context is the difference in leadership style that makes one gender more suitable over the other for specific leadership roles. Situational theorists of leadership believe the suitability of particular types of leader behaviors depends on context features such as organizational culture, nature of work/tasks, characteristics of followers, and societal ideals (Ayman, 2004). Female leader characteristics of include cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration, which are considered to be best suitable in situations demanding teamwork. Men are considered to be more suitable in circumstances requiring authority. Social expectations and discernments influence the leadership styles of

women leaning toward being more relationship based in circumstances of self-assessment.

Women conform to stereotypes of being more interpersonal, self-sacrificing, and concerned with others and men conform toward social stereotypes such as being more self-assertive. Researchers have concluded this is often distinguished as an individual's orientation. Women, being task-oriented in tends to have an advantage over men (Bass & Avolio, 1994; McGregor, 1985). In some situations, female leadership may be considered more of an asset in flatter organizational structures, composed heavily of team-based management and increased globalization (Nash et al., 2017).

### **Noteworthy Supporting Women in Leadership and Supporting Organizations**

The research of Almestica (2012) made a case that women need to influence other women in order for women to achieve their goals. Women need to stand together and display a united front. Women who publicize to the world how much they support other women understand how crucial it is to society. Each of the women mentioned below are taking steps that demonstrate how powerful women can be when they join forces and work together. Women voicing their opinions in the workplace will encourage women to follow their desires and voice their opinions.

- Oprah Winfrey is a renowned talk show host, journalist, entrepreneur, and philanthropist who is a proponent of girls and women around the world. Winfrey is the CEO of the Oprah Winfrey Network and the Oprah Magazine also referred to as *O*, which are predominantly female-led and female-based entertainment channels promoting women empowerment. These media channels give women what they want, trust, and need. Winfrey has not only made history by breaking down doors in media spaces where the doors were otherwise closed to women, but by leading many women empowerment

organizations centered around education. Women for Women International, led by Winfrey, is an organization set to improve the quality of life for women who have survived poverty, injustice, and war (Sands, 2016). This organization provides financial, educational, and interpersonal support. Another organization led by Winfrey is the Girl Effect. This organization, launched in 2015 with a primary goal to end poverty, is an organization that offers a safe place for communal expression in which girls are able to build confidence and gain insight on topics such as health, nutrition, education, and relationships. The most notable and well-known empowerment endeavor is the Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa. This school was built in 2007 for girls in Grades 7 through 12. This school provides hope for students and acts as a pathway for students to finish their studies and potentially continue into higher education.

- Arianna Huffington is an author of 15 books, a columnist, and co-founder of the *Huffington Post*. In 2009, the *Forbes* list of the Most Influential Women in Media listed Huffington as 12. Huffington is the founder and CEO of Thrive Global, which is a health and wellness start-up intended to increase employee well-being by using media and technology to reduce stress and burnout at work. The Thrive Global organization offers behavior change technology and tools such as the Thrive application, micro learning programs, and live webinars that will allow employees to live and work with less stress and become more productive. Not only has Huffington created a platform that has allowed her and many other women to have voices, she is also a big supporter of leaning in and having women help each other succeed.
- Sheryl Sandberg is the COO of Facebook, founder of the Lean In Foundation and coauthor of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. Sandberg is dedicated to

helping women come together in an effort to learn from each other and achieve goals by way of Lean In Circles. The Lean In Foundation, with more than 380,000 members, is responsible for providing community, education, peer groups, and annual campaigns at the national level such as #BanBossy and #LeanInTogether, advocating for women to have better public policies, equitable workplaces, and equal pay. Most notably, the Lean In Foundation and McKinsey & Company have partnered to develop an annual survey titled, “Women in the Workplace Survey,” examining female leadership and diversity management across organizations in corporate America (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

There are many organizations that support women by promoting fairness and equality in socioeconomic issues and women’s rights and putting opportunities at the forefront. Below are noteworthy institutions that were established for the advocacy of women:

- The United Nations Women USA (n.d.) is an independent Nonprofit, organization that supports UN Women programs. These projects promote social, political, and economic equality for women and girls, spanning 100 countries around the globe. This Nonprofit is one of the 14 national committees that support women’s rights and endorse movements through empowerment.
- Women’s Global Empowerment Fund (n.d.), established in 2007, has been advocating for inequality and poverty for underprivileged women in Uganda by supporting women through social and political programs. This organization creates opportunities and offers business training so women have the tools to achieve professional independence.
- School Girls Unite is a Nonprofit organization that addresses the education crisis and discrimination among young women in developing African countries. This organization is a youth-led organization located near the nation’s capital. School Girls Unite advocates

for equal education opportunities. Young girls making it to seventh grade is uncommon. Because of this, the School Girls Unite organization encourages young women to keep going by subsidizing their education. School Girls unite has been offering a scholarship program for 14 years that supports 20 young girls who live in a cluster of villages. With their volunteer-run program, the cost per student is \$75 for an entire school year (School Girls Unite, n.d.).

- Times Up Legal Defense Fund—With the support of the National Women’s Law Center, the Times Up Legal Defense Fund provides legal assistance to women fighting harassment in court around the world. Sexual harassment is a major problem in today’s society. Women may find it gut wrenching to speak up in the workplace, as professional relationships could have negative consequences. The Legal Network for Gender Equity connects people, despite gender, who face sex discrimination at work or at school with legal assistance. This organization offers help with retaliation against sex discrimination complaints and helps pay for legal fees. In 2020, this organization extended its network in response to COVID-19 to include concerns associated to accessing paid sick leave and paid leave to care for childcare (National Women’s Law Center, n.d.)
- Equality Now, founded in 1992, is a Nonprofit organization with a mission to use the legal system to defend and advocate the human rights of girls and women all over the world. Specifically, achieving legal equality, ending sexual violence, sex trafficking, and harmful practices are the organizations essential goals. This organization is focused on unjust and gender-based equal rights laws and has helped change more than 50 laws. Jessica Neuwirth, cofounder of Equality Now, highlights the organizations mission by stating:

When we launched in 1992, we had a deep conviction that we could and must act against the violation of women's rights around the world.

Equality Now has become a standard for activism on the ground where we try to translate women's needs into national, regional, and international law, policy, and practice. (Equality Now, n.d. para 3.)

Achievements of this organization's involvement entail women in Kuwait obtaining voting rights and law prohibiting sex tourism in the United States.

- Friendship Bridge is a Nonprofit organization established to create opportunities and empower women in Guatemala in association to education, entrepreneurial training, and financial resources so they can build a better life. This organization's primary focus is indigenous women within rural areas where poverty and illiteracy are highest. The Friendship Bridge organization encompasses three areas of service that include microcredit plus services, bridge to success, and handmade. The microcredit plus services includes group loans, parallel loans, chanim-chanim (fast) loans, nonformal education, health for life programs, women's agricultural credit and training, and advanced business training. Bridge to success includes entrepreneurial services such as individual loans, lines of credit, business development, and peer-to-peer connections and mentoring. Handmade by Friendship Bridge focuses on artisan entrepreneurs offering technical and business training to women entering local and global markets.
- Dress for Success—for more than 20 years, this global organization has helped women by providing professional apparel for job interviews. This organization empowers women to achieve economic independence by providing apparel women might not otherwise be able to afford. Dress for Success accepts donations and dispenses them to countries that

lack wardrobe resources. This organization has helped more than 1.2 million women and expanded to almost 150 cities in 25 countries, providing a support network, professional attire, and developmental tools so women may thrive in the workplace and homelife (Dress for Success, n.d.).

### **Mentoring Other Women**

Women face many challenges and barriers in the workplace, but research shows these barriers can be mitigated and leveraged through mentoring relationships. Many scholars believe mentorship contributes to success within the workplace because research determined competition is a barrier among women. Women who collaborate, mentor each other, and promote career advancement tend to open more doors (Almestica, 2012; Evans, 2009; Liggins-Moore, 2016). Mentoring relationships have been accepted as a fundamental approach to foster learning in the workplace, advance careers, and provide developmental and psychological support (Hansman, 2002). Women who build, support, and promote each other in the workplace create a pathway for other women, therefore, expanding the leadership landscape (Almestica, 2012). Iskra (2007) found that women were mentored (or sponsored) by many through the course of their career. In turn, these women gave back to others as others gave to them, establishing networks and mentoring protégés. Mentoring has frequently been presented as the way women can overcome barriers to advancement within the workplace (Merriam, 1983). Building a culture of women mentorship and leveraging relationships bridge social and cultural barriers that may exist (Almestica, 2012; Evans, 2009; Liggins-Moore, 2016). Mentoring relationships do not always provide a successful outcome. There are many factors that may affect the inner dynamics of mentoring relationships such as gender, race, and issues of power. The purpose of this section is to probe mentoring from a critical perspective, consider women in mentoring relationships,

discuss problems of marginalized groups, and reveal reasons mentoring does not produce a successful outcome.

Kram (1983) theorized two broad categories of functions: (a) career development functions such as sponsorship, coaching, and visibility; and (b) psychological functions such as encouragement, feedback, and advice. Liggins-Moore (2016) examined the common dilemmas of women in the workplace with respect to mentorship, highlighting it's important for women to have another female as a mentor. The access to women mentors is crucial in comparison to men because women are more likely to provide professional advice while understanding of social and mental aspects a woman faces. There is a tendency for people to choose mentors most like themselves; however, women are underrepresented in the workplace and within leadership roles. The number of women who obtain leadership positions declines after entry level, which creates a leak in the pipeline after the junior level. Underrepresentation of women in senior leadership is problematic for numerous reasons, but mainly because the lack of women in senior leadership positions insinuates upper-level management is unattainable to those seeking mentorship. Women who do not hold leadership positions might have less power and influence than their male counterparts. Consequently, women mentors without power and influence may be perceived as less able to propel a protégé to career success (Hale, 1996). Kalbfleisch (2000) found that from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés, "Same sex mentoring relationships occur more frequently than cross-sex mentoring relationships...further, the sex of the mentor or protégé was the best predictor of the sex of the corresponding partner in a mentoring relationship" (p. 59). This quote suggests women and men seem to prefer both mentoring and being mentored by someone of the same sex.

Opposite views state the gender of either the mentor or protégé does not affect the

development of the mentoring relationships (Merriam, 1983). Even if female protégés are involved in mentoring relationships with women mentors, there is no assurance of successful outcomes. Women appear to emulate masculine characteristics and cutthroat politics at play in male dominated institutions. Women who are not cautious of this problem might not represent female protégés' needs and the realities of their protégés' everyday lives. Women proteges may have unrealistic psychosocial expectations for their women mentors and may make unreasonable demands on them for time or emotional commitments (Eldridge, 1990). Women who interrupt or delay their careers because of family concerns may also face problems participating in mentoring relationships (Hansman, 2002).

Women can experience difficulty in developing and participating in mentoring relationships as a result of their race and ethnicity. Hansman (2002) highlighted women of color face more difficulty. Mentoring for women of color has been described as the difference between “isolation and integration, failure and success” (Dickey 1997, p. 73). Studies show 36% of Black women receive advice to help them advance (Krivkovich et al., 2017). Grossman and Johnson (1998) discussed the unwritten rules of an institution or dominant work culture and how difficult it is for African American women to learn them; these rules can include such things as unwritten dress codes and social norms. Grossman and Johnson found that women African American women are able to communicate these unwritten rules to African American protégés without the protégés dreading the stigma of trying to sound or act white.

### **Women Working in Contract Management**

Since this study focuses on the issues surrounding women specific to the field of contract management, it is important to understand the roles and responsibilities, female representation, and related aspects to the profession. The contracting profession is commonly referred as

contract management, procurement, purchasing, or acquisition. An individual working in the contracting profession typically holds positions titled *Contract Manager*, *Contract Administrators* or *Purchasing Agent* and these titles denote individuals who administer contracts. Roles and responsibilities of a contract professional include source identification, solicitation development, source selection, awarding competitive procurements, drafting terms and conditions, negotiating, and postaward management of contracts. Individuals within this role tend to be detail oriented and analytical. Skills needed for success include analytical, decision-making, math, and negotiation skills (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Both men and women agree that communication is the leading skill for this role. Women believe relationship management and interpersonal skills are important; men believe analytical skills are important (Cummins, 2019). Norby et al. (2004) added that a successful contracting professional has working knowledge in the areas of technical, conceptual, and human relations.

Accredited education requirements for contract professionals vary, depending on the position, type, and size of the organization. Typically, a bachelor's degree in the field of business is preferred/required for entry-level positions. A master's or doctorate degree may be required as a tradeoff to years of experience for senior positions. Cummins (2019) confirmed men and women working in this profession have similar education and professional background qualifications. Data show 57% of both genders hold a professional qualification: 81% of women hold a bachelor's or doctoral degree; 90% for men (Cummins, 2019).

Contracting professionals have access to many training and professional development opportunities such as learning courses, professional certifications, journal/guidebook publications, and educational conferences. The Defense Acquisition University (DAU) is a learning platform that supports approximately 180,000 professionals by offering an array of

courses in person and online to help develop qualified contract administrators (DAU, 2021). The DAU is a corporate university established by the United States Department of Defense and provides training courses such as business, acquisition management, engineering, grants, logistics, and program management. Leading organizations such as DAU and the NCMA offer widely known certifications. The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act is a valuable certification for the civilian and military workforce, specifically, individuals who are working or seeking to work in the government defense sector. NCMA offers four certifications that are applicable to government, Nonprofit, and Private companies, which include; Certified Professional Contract Manager, Certified Federal Contract Manager, Certified Commercial Contract Manager, and Certified Contract Management Associate. These certificates are highly valued in the profession. Successfully passing these certifications demonstrate an individual's ability to exhibit knowledge from a mastery perspective concerning many different contract management competencies. The *NCMA Contract Management Magazine* is a monthly publication intended to educate contract professionals at all career levels within all industries. This magazine is considered a flagship publication in the industry, featuring articles associated with best practices, professional insights, and lessons learned (NCMA, n.d.-a). Notably, the NCMA has an online bookstore comprising publications widely used for growth and development. Noteworthy publications used from NCMA include desktop guide to Key Contract Terms and Conditions, Federal Acquisition Regulations, Contract Management Terms, Salary Survey, and the Contract Management Body of Knowledge. The Contract Management Body of Knowledge provides fundamental, subject matter, and task-level competencies that serve as essential building blocks to become a successful contracting practitioner and leader. Continuing education and development are ways to enhance a contract manager's area of knowledge. The

core competencies identified include contract principals, acquisition planning and strategy, contract administration, specialized knowledge areas, and general business (Norby et al., 2004).

The NCMA organization is commonly known in the contracting community for hosting large, in-person training events covering current trends and industry highlights. These conferences are highly attended, as attendance is sometimes upward of 1,000 contracting professionals.

Educational conferences allow contracting professionals the opportunity to network and learn from individuals traveling from all over the nation, working in different organizations and sectors.

The contracting profession was considered to be a field highly populated by males. According to the NCMA (n.d.-a), women have been making strides since 1978. In 1978, women represented approximately 7% of NCMA's membership. There is inconsistency in the reporting for today's representation but statistics show representation has increased since 1978. NCMA reported women make up 55% of the contract management profession (Peel, 2017). Cummins (2019) published statistics through the World Commerce & Contracting, formally known as the International Association for Contract & Commercial Management (IACCM), stating 32% of the overall community was reported as female and less than half were likely to be in a senior management role. Almestica (2012) conducted a qualitative study to understand women working in the contracting profession. Empirical work confirmed the contracting profession is still a male dominated environment (Almestica, 2012).

The IACCM conducted a talent survey in September of 2019. Findings confirmed there is significant disparity in the male-to-female ratio, depending on geographic region. The ratio for North America is 58:42, 64:36 in Europe; 89:11 in the Middle East and Asia; Oceania and Africa each shows an approximate 80:20 ratio. Findings also confirmed there are differences, depending

on industry type. The public sector had a ratio of 55:45; 57:43 in aerospace and defense; 82:18 in engineering and construction; and 78:22 in manufacturing (IACCM, 2019).

Women who work in the contracting field have opportunities for advancement into leadership roles more so over other professions but still face gender pay-gap inequality. The NCMA, a leading resource for contracting professionals, conducts an annual salary survey that provides data on multiple variables, including compensation, experience, and education. In 2012, women filled 48% of managerial roles within the contracting profession but the percentage of women holding executive positions was far below that number (Peel, 2017). In 2017, women represented 55% of entry-level positions, 50% management, and 38% executive level/C-suite positions (Peel, 2017). For comparison purposes, men held 45% entry level, 54% management, and 64% executive level/C-suite positions. This data confirm women are well represented in the overall contracting profession but lack representation in positions higher than entry level. According to the NCMA (n.d.-b, para 3.), many contracting professionals will be eligible for retirement within 10 years, which may open more doors for women.

A study was conducted to survey how much women earn on a national level in comparison to those working in the contracting profession. Studies show the national average for American women was approximately 82% of what men earned in 2015; 87% for women in contracting (Peel, 2017). Although these statistics indicate positive progression, the contracting profession must ensure women continue to make progression and thus close the gender pay gap in its entirety. Progression for women has been labeled as stagnant and subject to backtracking if left unresolved (Peel, 2017). Employers need to adapt in order to retain women talent as competition continues to increase (Chang & Milkman, 2020). Cummins (2019) confirmed

women enjoy the contracting profession because of teleworking and the option to work from home.

### **Gaps and Inconsistencies in Literature Review**

The researcher found little to no literature printed on the barrier's women face specific to the contract management profession. The research was inconsistent as to the current representation of women working in the field of contract management. Research confirmed the contracting profession is considered a male-dominate culture and that women are underrepresented in leadership. The reasons for gender disparity may lead to gender discrimination, biases, pregnancy discrimination, work–life balance issues, cultural barriers, and the lack of women empowerment within this male dominated culture. There is inconsistency as to which barriers still exist and which, if any, are most prevalent today within the field of contract management. Significant research confirms mentoring mitigates challenges and barriers. The importance and attributes of mentoring are inconsistent for women in the workplace. This study should be carried out because there are gaps in research concerning the barriers faced and mentoring strategies used to lead other women into leadership positions within the contracting profession.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a literature review related to the study of women who work in the contracting field by providing themes linked to leadership, barriers, and strategies to overcome obstacles. The literature review provided a generalization of the female community among women in leadership, women in the workplace, leadership styles, noteworthy women in leadership, supporting organizations, and mentoring other women. Since this study focuses on

women specific to the contracting field, the researcher discussed the roles and responsibilities of contracting professionals, female representation, and related aspects attributed to the profession.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the researcher presents the research design, overview of participants, processes for the protection of human subjects, data collection instruments, process, and analysis plans. The purpose of this study is to understand barriers facing women in the field of contract management and to examine personal capability strategies used to obtain leadership positions. Specifically, women who work in contract management within many different areas of government, Nonprofit, and Private-sector entities. This study explored the narratives linked to the experiences of women concerning challenges, barriers, their perceptions of other women, and personal capabilities that allowed them to overcome problems. A qualitative approach fit best with this study because this approach lends itself to study problems that take place in the participants' natural settings. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to obtain data from interviews in order to infer findings. In this qualitative study, interviews were used to capture life experiences of the participants' to describe similarities and differences women face leading other women in the workplace (Creswell, 2013).

The main research question for this study is: What barriers, if any, might women face in contract management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles? The sub questions investigated for this research are as follows:

1. How do women describe the current representation of women in contract management?
2. What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of contract management?

3. What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of contract management?
4. What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

Empirical literature was found addressing female leadership characteristics/traits that have contributed to career advancement, women leading women in academia, women working in a male dominated workplace, women's experience of sexuality, work-life balance, and coping strategies for the contracting profession. However, the researcher found little to no literature published on barriers facing women specific to the contracting profession and strategies used in leading other women into leadership positions. The goal of this study is to uncover perceived and experienced barriers within the field and examine strategies used by women to help other women achieve leadership positions. This research benefits employers, women, and men in the workplace.

### **Research Design**

The researcher adopted a qualitative researcher role (Maxwell, 2013). This role consisted of investigating the problem(s), interviewing, and then evaluating. The researcher used a qualitative research strategy, aiming to recognize the world from the viewpoint of the participants. This approach was well suited for this research because the researcher investigated the meaning ascribed to a human or social problem. This process involved asking questions, collecting data, and analyzing the data so the researcher could make interpretations regarding the meaning of the data collected (Creswell, 2009). This approach allowed the researcher to understand women's experiences within the workplace and permitted the participants the opportunity to describe and define events in their lives.

A phenomenological approach was used for this study, sculpted after Creswell's (2009) phenomenological research strategy of inquiry. Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as an approach to qualitative research focusing on the commonality of a lived experience within a specific group. This approach leveraged lived experiences to develop an overall description as a foundation to discern the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this approach was to arrive at an explanation of the nature of the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Van Kaam (1959, 1966) described phenomenological research in psychology as the investigation of the participants experience of really feeling understood. Van Manen (1997) explained conducting phenomenological research encompasses studying the way that a person experiences or understands their world as meaningful or real. Meaning is considered to be embedded in practices, cognitions, and feelings. This approach allowed the researcher to identify the essence of the participants' human experience as they lived it and as it describes the phenomenon. This research uncovered the meanings attached to certain phenomena by individuals working in the contracting profession. This method permitted the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the personal experiences the participants faced in their everyday life at work and understand meaning by use of interviews. The phenomenological research method is effective at surfacing deep apprehensions and provides a platform where the voice of the participants can be heard. The researcher transcribed the interviews and concluded how participants made sense of the challenges and barriers they faced. Individual studies allow the researcher to identify problems "that show discrepancies, failures, favorable inferences, and attention to distinct situations" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 87). Phenomenological research methodology allowed the participants to "provide detailed comments on situations of individuals that otherwise do not lend themselves to direct generalization" (Schutz, 1970, p. 81).

Greening (2019) provided four essential steps for conducting a phenomenological research methodology:

1. Bracketing—The bracketing process is one in which “the researcher brackets out the surrounding and any presuppositions” contained in data (Sanders, 1982, p. 33). This is the process where predetermined beliefs concerning the phenomenon are identified and held in question. Maxwell (2013) stated memoing is a method of bracketing.
2. Intuiting—The intuition step is one in which the researcher remains focused on the attributed meaning of the phenomenon found in previous research. This process involves a shared understanding of the phenomenon under study.
3. Analyzing—The analyzing process involves coding and inferring major themes of the phenomenon.
4. Describing—This describing stage is composed of comprehension and defining the phenomenon. The purpose of this step is to provide final distinctions and critical descriptions.

### **Participant Overview**

In an effort to sample from a large pool of candidates and obtain diverse representation, the researcher used LinkedIn and the NCMA website. LinkedIn is an American-based business and employment-oriented online professional social networking service. The researcher is familiar with this network service and has had an account for many years. LinkedIn provides access to people, jobs, news, updates, and insights that help professionals become more productive and successful (Utz, 2015). The NCMA is a renown professional organization and resource for contracting professionals. With over 20,000 members across the nation, the researcher used this website as a tool to directly reach contracting professionals. LinkedIn and

NCMA are the most practical and accessible platforms to reach contracting professionals across the nation and internationally working in different sectors. Advantages of using LinkedIn and NCMA lend to the speed of recruitment and snowballing effects. The researcher will gain credibility with these participants based on her LinkedIn profile, familiarity with contract management, and affiliation with the NCMA.

For this study, the researcher solicited to 150 individuals from LinkedIn and 78 NCMA chapters from the NCMA website. The researcher selected the first 20 respondents who received the recruitment letter (Appendix A) and met the selection criteria. Amongst respondents, seven participants were recruited from LinkedIn and 13 from NCMA. A sample size of 20 is intended to discern sufficiently a common perspective. Creswell (2013) recommended a sampling size of 20 to 30 individuals for a phenomenological study. Dukes (1984) suggested a sample size between three and 10 participants. Payment for participation was not offered. The researcher anticipated she may have worked or currently works with a portion of the participants but has no personal relationship with the participants. The researcher anticipated that the participants will represent diversity inclusive of different races, ethnicity, age, religious backgrounds, and social class. Inclusion criteria for this study was as follows:

- A female or identifies as a female;
- A professional woman working in the field of contract management; and
- An employee of a government, Nonprofit, or Private company.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The researcher complied with Pepperdine's University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and provided a full circle of protection for research participants (Appendix D). The researcher promoted and facilitated the protection of rights, welfare, and dignity of human research

participants. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of all participants throughout the process by conducting herself in a professional manner and keeping information secure. In order to ensure compliance, the researcher abided by federal regulations, state laws, university policies, and national standards for research involving human participants. Obtaining IRB approval is a legal requirement before research activities commence. The researcher obtained approval before analyzing existing data, performing a critical review of literature, collecting data, and analyzing data collected. There was no obligation to participate per the Consent Form for Participation in Research Activities (Appendix B). The consent form advised participants that their participation is voluntary and that participants may opt not to participate in a telephone/virtual interview. During the telephone/virtual interview, the researcher reminded the participants at the beginning of the interview that their participation and responses are voluntary in efforts to ensure they are comfortable.

For purposes of the IRB, the research under this study fall under exempt/expedited research, which is the most common application. The research study involved human subjects, which falls under exempt instead of expedited. The researcher notified all participants that the researcher will not use names and instead employ the use of codes in the researcher's notes to manage confidentiality. The researcher anticipated solely electronic records will be used and kept transcripts secure via a USB drive to which only the researcher had access. The researcher will delete all electronic records within 3 years of publication.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

In Chapter 2, the researcher utilized articles, journals, books, and published dissertations as a foundation of this study. Empirical data for this study was collected through interviews. Each participant received a copy of the Interview Questions (Appendix C) prior to their

interview. The interview questions included two sections for participants to complete. The first section included personal information so that the researcher could obtain sociodemographic information to develop an overall demographic analysis of the full group. The second section included a set of open-ended research questions. The researcher carefully designed these questions to coincide with ethical guidelines for researchers (Brickman & Kvale, 2015). The development of these questions included the following:

1. Section A—A set of general sociodemographic questions inquiring about participants identity, years of experience in the field of contract management, and sector identification. This is important to understand the general domain to make the implicit explicit without necessarily freezing or limiting the researcher's vision.
2. Section B—Open-ended questions will query leadership beliefs, obstacles, expectations, perceptions, success outcomes, strategies, and advice to others. The researcher chose to include open-ended questions to allow flexibility with the research questions and the data collection process.

The interview process was structured with a clear focus to learn and comprehend the issues and problems women working in the contracting profession face within different sectors. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested collaborative interviewing is a way to approach equality within questioning. Weis and Fine (2000) offered considerations in association to interviewees, stating interviews allow participants to articulate the experienced phenomenon and inherent power structures. Participants may erase their own experiences and avoid difficult questions during the interview. With this, the researcher was sensitive to ethical concerns that may arise when researching personal lives and complexities.

Validity refers to the extent a study correctly reflects or assesses the concept or ideas

under investigation. The researcher ensured validity by confirming the findings of this study are true and are supported by evidence. The participants in this study are from different sectors and career backgrounds. The researcher selected participants for this study from a wide range of divisions and organizations. All interviews were recorded to collect phenomenological and qualitative data. The researcher sent the interview questions to experts who are familiar with the research and research protocols for suggestions, modifications, or validations. Therefore, the interview instrument established process validity. The intention of using experts is to confirm there is no ambiguity or potential misunderstandings of the words and meanings of the questions. The question instruments were revised upon responses of the expert panel.

The researcher ensured reliability to the extent other researchers can replicate the study (Oluwatayo, 2012). In this qualitative study, reliability was determined by establishing the dependability of the researcher following protocols and validity in truthfulness and certainty. Angen (2000) described validation as a judgment of the researcher's trustworthiness. The researcher was conscious of the need to maintain trustworthiness and communication involving the researcher and participants in the research process. This awareness will make it possible for participants to share honestly and openly.

Ethically, valid research must suggest practical answers to social and theoretical problems. Substantive validation is reflected through understanding of the phenomenon through self, as well as others, which is then conveyed through the writing. Creswell (2013) described this as the researcher acting as a sociohistorical interpreter who works with participants and setting to construct meaningful interpretations. These are explanations outlined through previous literature and expanded on through the use of descriptive documentation and narrative, which helped to construct a truthful account that powerfully engages the researcher's audiences. The

researcher occasionally paused and reflected on the reality of the situation, validated the participants viewpoints that may differ from the researcher's expectations, and used observational skills to further the conversation.

### **Data Collection Process**

Upon IRB approval, the researcher solicited for participants using a recruitment letter (Appendix A) through LinkedIn and NCMA website. The researcher conducted a generic search for contract management professionals using the search tool within LinkedIn. This tool detected all individuals who profile themselves as contract management professionals. The researcher left filters unselected with exception to profile language, and allowed for all connections (first, second, and third), locations, companies, school, industry, and service category, which is how LinkedIn filters people. The researcher will filter solely English-speaking participants. The researcher then messaged the first 150 individuals listed under this search, directly transmitting the recruitment letter. As a secondary source, the researcher used NCMA to recruit participants. Within the NCMA headquarters website, there is a list of local NCMA Chapters across the nation and one international chapter. Along with this list is contact information for each Chapter President. The researcher sent an email to all 78 chapters seeking volunteers. Interested participants directly messaged the researcher for consideration. The researcher selected 19 participants who were deemed eligible per the inclusion criteria. Once selections were made, the researcher asked LinkedIn participants for an email address to send the Consent Form for Adult Participation in Research Activities (inclusive of audio/video consent; Appendix B). For NCMA participants, direct and secured emails were sent to transmit and send Appendix B. Once necessary forms were signed and returned, the researcher sent a follow-up email initiating the coordination of a telephone or virtual interview. Once a date and time were confirmed, the

researcher scheduled a meeting and formally transmitted the interview questions.

The researcher informed the participants that the interviews will be conducted over the phone or via a virtual platform at their convenience and were requested to take place within a month. The researcher informed participants that interviews will last no longer than 45 minutes and that a virtual interview with camera is preferred to allow the researcher to observe body language and other cues. A telephone interview will be acceptable as a secondary method in order to capture data and reach more participants. To establish rapport with the interviewees, the researcher dedicated the first 5 minutes to explain the interview process and the importance of the study with each participant. The researcher then dedicated 5 minutes prior to questioning to answer any questions or concerns the participants had. The intent was to make the interview process as comfortable and convenient as possible. The researcher reminded each participant that their interview will be video and/or audio-recorded and requested they acknowledge consent prior to the interview.

During the interview, the researcher adhered to the technique developed by Trochim and Donnelly (2008) for conducting interviews. Interviews were conducted in a consistent manner that consisted of initiating the interview, putting respondents at ease, acting businesslike, keeping the interview as Private as possible, avoid stereotyping, be thoroughly familiar with the interview instrument, ask every question in its proper sequence and exactly as written, not assuming the answer to any question, speaking slowly and clearly with a well-modulated tone, not answering for the respondent, using an appropriate probe when necessary, and taking notes during the interview.

After the interview, a transcribed document of the interview was sent to all respondents for them to read through and detect potential discrepancies in the information gathered. The

researcher rectified discrepancies before proceeding.

### **Data Analysis Plans**

The researcher collected data, categorized, coded, and conceptualized,. The researcher used software such as HyperRESEARCH to transport collected data and organize them. Before the researcher coded data, the researcher read transcripts and collected data numerous times, in its entirety. Agar (1980) acknowledged the researcher should consider the holistic aspects of the research before trying to break it down into parts. The researcher detected major themes and breakdown data into chunks with assigned designations. This process, described by Bryman (2008), entails breaking down data into component parts, which are then given names or labels. This type of coding method or technique can be best classified as interpretive and consists of asking questions about the data and permitting the researcher to reduce unnecessary data and combine data. Creswell (2009) described this as “lean-coding” where the researcher finds five to six categories that are given shorthand labels. These labels are then revisited for expansion. Coding categories derive from the researcher’s alertness to themes, patterns, concepts, and surprises that define the meanings of a study that will construct a theoretical framework. Coding is a common technique for qualitative research and phenomenological research. This technique represents pertinent phenomenon and allows the researcher to cut and syndicate data. The researcher relied on direct quotes from participants’ and the researcher’s own professional personal experience and intuition in developing themes.

The researcher used the triangulation method to increase credibility and validity of research results. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) stated accuracy in a study comes from the validity of the research, the dependability of the findings, and the use of triangulation in data collection. This study produced valid work that is acceptable, supported, and convincing.

Triangulation can enhance research, as it offers a diversity of data sets to explain different aspects of a phenomenon of interest. This method is used in qualitative research to validate a study by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. For this study, environmental triangulation was applied. This type of triangulation consists of the use of different locations, settings, and other key factors associated to the environment. The researcher used participants from different industries with many different missions. Every industry has its own culture such as government versus Nonprofit. The two environments associated with these industries differ, which, in turn, could influence the findings. The results might remain the same under different environment conditions, which would increase validity.

Qualifications of the researcher are also a consideration. Daiute (2014) suggested that the researcher is cognizant of the meaning within the data collected. Professional experience working in the field of contract management will bring implicit knowledge, sensitizing the researcher to the happenings within the phenomenon. The researcher in this study is an African American female who has worked in contract management for more than 10 years. She is personally aware of the challenge's women face in the field of contract management; hence, her interest in this specific group of individuals. In addition, the researcher has been a protégé, a mentor, and has led a professional mentor program.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the overall methodology of the research, explaining the research design and methodology of the study, presented an overview of participants, data collection instrument, interview process, analysis plans, and explanation of the protection of human subjects. This chapter explored a qualitative research strategy and a phenomenological theory approach that was used for this study, sculpted after Creswell's (2009) phenomenological

research strategy of inquiry; qualitative researcher role adopted modeled after Maxwell (2013); and Greening's (2019) phenomenology steps. The goal of this study is to uncover obstacles women face in the contracting profession and understand strategies used to obtain leadership positions.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings**

### **Chapter Overview**

In this chapter, the researcher will present findings for this qualitative study, including the research questions, participant profiles, participant responses, and key findings. The study focused on women who work within different areas of Government, Nonprofit, and Private sectors. The researcher explored the narrative linked to the experiences of women concerning challenges, barriers, perceptions of other women, and personal capabilities that allowed them to overcome obstacles. The findings are organized according to the four sub questions of this study. Chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to understand barriers facing women in Contract Management and to examine strategies women use to obtain positions of leadership. The overarching research question is: What barriers, if any, might women face in Contract Management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles?

The sub questions are as follows:

1. How do women describe the current representation of women in Contract Management?
2. What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of Contract Management?
3. What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of Contract Management?
4. What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

## Data Collection Process

A qualitative approach allowed the researcher to obtain data from interviews, infer findings and understand major issues that emerged through the data. Interviews were used to capture life experiences of the participants in order to describe similarities and differences women face (Creswell, 2013). Data collection began the week of February 27, 2022, after obtaining Pepperdine University's IRB approval on February 18, 2022 (see Appendix D). The sampling techniques used to source participants were purposive (purposeful) and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to obtain information-rich cases as these participants have the required status, experience, or knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013). Participants were recruited according to the pre-selected inclusion criteria relevant to this study. Inclusion criteria for this study was as follows:

1. A female or identifies as a female.
2. A professional woman working in the field of Contract Management.
3. An employee of a Government, Nonprofit, or Private company.

Initial sourcing effort was conducted through a generic search for "Contract Management" using the search tool built within LinkedIn. This tool detected all individuals who profile themselves as Contract Management professionals. In lieu of this tool, the researcher solicited 150 recruitment letters directly to individuals. The second source used was the NCMA, which is the leading Contract Management professional organization with a membership base of over 20,000 professionals. The NCMA homepage provides a listing of all local chapters whom you can connect to. NCMA provides contact information for peers and leaders in your area for knowledge sharing. The researcher sent an email to all 78 Chapter Presidents listed transmitting the recruitment script to share with their board members and chapter membership. Recruitments

via LinkedIn and NCMA were transmitted to everyone; not a specific gender. With this, *Snowball sampling* also known as “chain referral” or networking sampling was widely used and extremely valuable (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019). This type of sampling allowed the researcher to request participants put the researcher in touch with others who may be of friends, relatives, colleagues or other significant contacts that may be willing to participate.

Participants who agreed to be interviewed received the informed consent form and interview questions prior to the interview. The researcher ensured each participant was comfortable with the interview process and reminded participants the interview is voluntary. Prior to the interview, the researcher asked if there were any questions related to the risk and benefits as outlined in the form. All 19 participants completed the consent form and consented to the interview. Interviews were conducted in a consistent manner which comprised of asking every question in its proper sequence and exactly as written. The researcher spoke slowly and clearly with a well-modulated tone and took notes during the interview. All participants consented to audio recording of the interview which helped the researcher foster accuracy in the transcription and data analysis process. The recruitment letter stated each interview will last no more than 45-minutes for each participant. However, the interviews ranged in length from 15 minutes to 30 minutes. Once the transcripts were completed, the researcher read through them once again to remove filtered filler words (uh, you know, like), nonverbal communication and false starts. This approach clarified responses and completeness of understanding. Thereafter, the researcher emailed each participant a copy of their respective interview transcription requesting them to read through so they can detect discrepancies in the information gathered. Two of the 19 participants communicated minor edits; 17 accepted with no further edits.

## Data Coding Process

Through analysis and coding of responses, the data yielded insight into common themes employed by women who are seeking leadership or have obtained leadership within the Contract Management field. The researcher organized the data using HyperRESEARCH license software program provided by Pepperdine University. This program allowed the researcher to transport the transcribed interviews and visualize all the major themes in an organized matter. This software also allowed the researcher to explore and better understand the individual data collected.

The interview items were checked for validity, as documented in Chapter 3. The interview protocol was divided into two sections: sociodemographic items and open-ended questions. The researcher engaged in both categorizing and coding in order to appropriately organize the data. Creswell (2009) described this as “lean-coding,” where the researcher finds 5-6 categories that are built with shorthand labels. The determination of categories was as follows: representation, obstacles, strategies, best practices and recommendations. From these categories, major themes emerged. The researcher used axial coding, which is a process where similar codes that were split during the initial coding are sorted and reassembled into conceptual categories (Saldaña, 2016). The intent for using axial coding is to separate relevant codes from redundant ones. These different categories are based on the grouping of the original 15 questions: Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are grouped (Category A - Representation); questions 6, 7, 9, and 10 are grouped (Category B - Obstacles); question 8 is standalone (Category C - Strategies); 11, 12, 13, 14 are grouped (Category D – Best Practices) and 15 is standalone (Category E - Recommendations).

Creswell defines coding as identifying a work or short phrase that represents a prominent and essence-capturing attribute for a portion of the data. Coding derived from the researcher's alertness to themes, patterns, concepts, and surprises that define the meanings of a study that will frame a theoretical framework. The researcher used Creswell's process of describing, identifying and interpreting these codes into themes that would allow interpretation of the experiences. This method allowed the researcher to identify similar issues with each participant individual experience and extract common themes discovered. In addition, the researcher analyzed the data and relied heavily upon direct quotes from the participants. The researcher referenced the method of Moustaka (1994) to pinpoint themes, which stated themes are the textural description of verbatim examples of what happened and the textural description is defined as an integration of the individual interpretations of experiences. Table 1 shows category formation.

**Table 1**

*Category Formation*

Research Question	Interview Question Title	Interview Questions	Category
1	Representation & Leadership	1,2,3,4 & 5	Representation
2	Challenges & Obstacles	6, 7,9 & 10	Obstacles
3	Challenges & Obstacles	8	Strategies
4	Educating Women & Best Practices	11,12,13 & 14	Best Practices
	Educating Women & Best Practices	15	Recommendations

**Participant Profiles**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 19 female professionals employed in the field of Contract Management. Although, 20 participants consented to participate in this study, participant #12 was deemed ineligible to participate in this study because she identified herself as retired during the interview. The approved inclusion criteria mandates that all participants must

be working in the field of Contract Management; not retired. This participant was therefore eliminated. The resultant 19 interviews were transcribed, analyzed and documented.

The first portion of the interview pertained to sociodemographic questions so that the researcher could better understand the general domain of participants. The following questions were asked:

1. In terms of gender, how would you identify yourself?
2. How many years of experience do you have in the field of Contract Management?
3. Which classification best describes your employer sector? (prompt if necessary - Government, Nonprofit, or Private company)?

**Table 2**

*Participants Demographics*

Participant #	Gender Identify	Years of Experience	Employer Sector
1	Female	12	Private Company
2	Female	15	Private Company
3	Female	5 ½	Private Company
4	Female	9 ½	Government
5	Female	12	Private Company
6	Female	7	Private Company
7	Female	20	Private Company
8	Female	12	Private Company
9	Female	2	Government
10	Female	30+	Private Company
11	Female	12+	Private Company
Eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated	Eliminated
13	Female	22	Private Company
14	Female	13	Private Company
15	Female	3 ½	Private Company
16	Female	25	Private Company
17	Female	14	Private Company
18	Female	15	Nonprofit
19	Female	8	Private Company
20	Female	10+	Private Company

As presented in Table 2, all 19 participants identified themselves as a female. These participants work at various employers throughout the United States. Together, the participants represented all three sectors; Government, Nonprofit and Private. Two participants identified working in Government; one in Nonprofit and 16 identified working at a Private Company. Participants in this study ranged in Contract Management experience from 2 to 30+ years.

### **Field Notes**

The approved recruitment letter stated interviews will be audio and/or video recorded upon participants consent. All 19 participants agreed to video and audio recording; 10 turned on their video camera for a portion or duration of interview. During the interview, the researcher recorded observations including body language, tone of voice and non-verbal communication. In all instances, participants were observed as calm, passionate and confident. On occasion, participants smiled and laughed about their experiences despite their story being a negative or positive experience. A few participants paused to collect their thoughts as a means to provide detailed responses. These field notes helped prompt insights and context during the analysis of transcripts.

### **Research Question No. 1**

#### ***Current Representation***

The following interview questions relate to the first sub question (How do women describe the current representation of women in Contract Management?):

1. Would you describe leadership representation in terms of gender within your current organization?
2. Within your current organization, how would you describe the organizational culture in association to gender? Are you able to provide specific characteristics?

3. What are your perceptions of women holding leadership positions in the contracting profession?
4. Do you identify yourself as a leader within the Contract Management field? Can you please describe characteristics you have that classify you as a leader?
5. As a woman, which characteristics can you identify with that have been an advantage or disadvantage in leading others within the contracting profession?

The major topic that arose from the discussions was: Equal Representation. For this question, the researcher coded representation as either equal representation, higher female leaders or higher male leaders. The highest frequency reported was equal representation of genders holding leadership positions. This researcher was specific to Government, Nonprofit, and Private sectors. The literature review revealed the contracting industry has a strong military background and was widely known to be male dominated. Findings negated this review for all sectors. The two participants who identified their employer sector as Government stated their leadership representation is equal. Participant #18 from the Nonprofit sector stated higher male leadership. Within the 11 individuals working at a Private company, 7 stated equal; 4 stated higher female leadership. Table 3 illustrates these findings.

**Table 3**

*Leadership Representation*

Code	Frequency
Equal	9
Higher Female Leaders	4
Higher Male Leaders	6

Participant #3 confirmed equal representation by stating:

My direct boss is a male. His boss is a female and the group president is a female. It's kind of male, female, male, female but I have been very, very impressed thus far about the number of women in the leadership positions. I work solely with military and

veterans' health. I focus on the VA. It's been very refreshing to see a lot of women in management roles in the position because I definitely wasn't used to it at my old company.

Participant #6 stated:

Currently I am the manager and my director is a male. And that is the only other person in our contract management group. Someone who is lower than myself, who is also a male. There's three of us in the organization at this time. We've previously had managers before I was in the role that have been both female and male and we've had other people in our group that have been both female and male, but definitely on the lower tier it's skewed way more on the female end.

Participant #19 stated "The leadership representation, I would say would be 50% male, 50% female."

**Theme 1: Inclusion.** During the course of interviews, inclusion was noted as one of the main findings for this question. Responses highlighted both gender and ethnic inclusion. Heinz (2022) defined Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in the work place as recognizing the value of voices from diverse race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic class, and physical ability centering around inclusivity. In order to ensure equal circumstances, employers must implement programs and initiatives to actively make the workplace more diverse, equitable and an inclusive space. Participant #2 stated:

I think it definitely encouraged for there to be female leaders, but I found that in the last few years because there's such a big focus on D and I, the priority has been to promote and encourage individuals from racial backgrounds that may be underrepresented, which I definitely support, but I found that there's less of an emphasis on advancing female leaders now and more an emphasis on focusing on people from underrepresented groups. Yeah, so we actually have numbers that I wouldn't say we have to hit cause that, that sounds negative, but we do have goals like 20, 25 of demographics that we're supposed to hit. And again, they don't really focus on a big breakdown of male versus female leaders. They focus on different advocate groups, reaching leadership percentages in each one of those groups.

Participant #5 stated, "In general it's inclusive and they want to promote females into leadership."

Participant #11 stated:

From a cultural perspective, I will say that I think we are attempting to really be intentional in our diversity and inclusion efforts. I think that we have employee groups. For example, we have a forward committee or ERG, that's what we call them employee resource group. We have forward, which is a women's empowerment group. We have Asian in motion AIM, which is for Asian sort of population, black employee network. It's focused on those sociodemographic areas, but like I joined them myself actually as a white woman and patriciate. We have a pride one LGBTQ plus. We're trying to educate one another about our cultural backgrounds and we're trying to build community and connection and of understanding of what it means to be a good ally. So, from that perspective, I think we are doing. We're at least attempting to do good.

**Theme 2: Capability.** During the interview process, women were asked to discuss their perceptions of women holding leadership positions within the field. All 19 women spoke about the perception of women being capable to hold positions of leadership. Some women highlighted qualities women endure while some acknowledged a shift or challenges.

Participant #1 stated:

They can do it. I think it's an excellent area for a female to go into. They're absolutely as qualified as anybody else in that role. But, like, I was just explaining, I've seen them give the titles. I haven't seen them give the titles equally. I see them tweaking the title and the job responsibility and tailoring it for a female. Where it becomes essentially a different role than the male who held it before, did it. So, I think to answer your question more succinctly, I feel like that there are leadership roles in contracting, but they're not going to look like they're male counterpart. They're not going to be identical to the male counterpart's role.

Participant #4 stated:

I feel like there are a lot of women holding leadership positions. In terms of what those women are like is I feel like there's some very strong, independent, intelligent women in those positions. I feel like they're often very outgoing and have a network as well.

Participant # 7 stated:

Well, my perception is that when I first started in government contracting, I did not see a lot of women at very senior levels...I remember seeing some that were maybe figureheads, but not necessarily ones who could make decisions and who were in a role to help others, other women and just in those powerful roles to impact contractors and policy so in the 20 years that I've been in the profession, I have definitely seen a shift both in the government space. I've seen more women in decision making positions. I've

seen more women on the Private sector, commercial side and decision-making positions. And I'm very encouraged by the shifts and the changes. It's still a long way to go, but I'm, I'm very encouraged.

Participant #17:

Um, perceptions. I mean, I guess I would say when I first got into the business in the DC market, which is where I started, I'm now in Atlanta. They were few and far between, um, you know, at events when there would be a panel speaker, special topics. The SME type folks that were called, were usually males. Uh, but I would say over the course of the 14 years that I've been in the business that there have been a lot more females that have risen up, you know, pretty much consistently when attending events or going to panels and things. There are females, you know, that are asked to participate in the panels and that are, that are welcomed with their ideas, their opinions. So, I would say it's definitely changed for me. At least I've seen a significant visible shift since I got into the business.

**Theme 3: Identification.** During the interview, participants were asked if they identified themselves as a leader within the Contract Management field. Sixteen respondents identified themselves as a leader within the field. Attributes to this identification pertained to title, knowledge, experience, role and/or being a member within the contracting community.

Participant # 5 stated:

Yeah, I would. Aside from having a team of people that I'm responsible for, I would say, you know, subject matter expert in multiple areas of contracts, acquisition field. An active role in the community and kind of just being an example of getting out there and, kind of leading these employees to. I don't know how to say it, not actually giving them the answer, but like helping them, build them up, teaching them where to go, who to talk to. Etc.

Participant #7 stated:

I do consider myself as a leader primarily because I held the position of president of the NCMA, Atlanta chapter. I was the last president of the Atlanta chapter. My term ended in 2020 and so the current president took over since then and I'm still on the board. And at some point, probably in the next 2 years, I will seek an office at another level at a higher level within that organization. I consider myself a leader in that respect. I try to get on different panels and share my experience as a CEO and share my experience as a leader in a NCMA and encourage other people, other women to get involved at a leadership level.

**Theme 4: Double-Edge.** Women were asked to identify characteristics that have been an advantage or disadvantage in leading others within the contracting profession. Amongst the response's advantages and disadvantages arose. However, due to the number of times it was articulated during the interview process, double-edged sword or standard was noted as one of the main findings. Women vocalized how certain characteristics inherent to women can be viewed as both a strength and a weakness. Many women highlighted their position of disagreement with these negative perceptions/views. Participant # 2 stated:

And I think I probably would've struggled to vocalize it before reading the book I recommend to you. The likability Trap. One of the things that I thought was happening but the book like actually put in writing is that as women continue to advance, they're actually viewed as less likable. So that was something that I keep in my mind that I of course need to be really confident as a leader. I need to be able to give really good advice. I need to be able to grow my people, but as I continue to move up, people due to bias will view me as less likable. I almost need to try extra hard and lots of respects to be really competent, to care for my staff. And then also just to show myself as being extra warm, to counteract any biases that people might have.

Participant #3 stated:

I think as females, we do have that perspective that we can understand people a little bit better on a human level rather before you get to the professional level. I think we have a lot more empathy for individuals than maybe men do. That's obviously not saying all men, but I think with women, we can kind of understand the bigger picture and see if somebody on call is giving us an attitude or speaking to us in a not appropriate tone. Some people might take that person and write them off or yell right back. Whereas I think female's kind of stop for a second and think, well this person doesn't normally act like this. What's going on behind the scenes that maybe is making them act that way? And I think that empathy or a concern is the strength that women have. The unfortunate thing with another characteristic of being outspoken is it can be both good at that. You have the situation I feel like every female knows this, you know, you can either be strong authoritative and everybody takes you seriously. And you're a great boss, but the flip side to that is sometimes you're seen as being difficult or being somebody who doesn't know what they're talking about. It's definitely a very double-edged sword for females. I think in the profession of walking into a room and not going in with a Bull Booser. We have to be very careful how we act because we have to take other people's feelings and reactions into account. Whereas if man were to do it, they would walk in, they would walk into any room and just do what they want. And everybody would say, oh, he's such a great leader,

you know? And he knows what he's talking about. He gets things done. I definitely think that's kind of an unfortunate double standard.

Participant #14 stated:

Advantage? I would say being able to be more genuine, problem solver, creative and, putting people at ease, but I've also had a supervisor whose female telling me that I was too nice to the point of it was a risk to the company, which I don't believe. I think sometimes like getting a little more passionate about things and also being pretty communicative or asking a lot of questions. I don't think that's negative but I can see people seeing the assertiveness as, they see as a negative, but I don't.

Participant # 15 stated:

So, I see this as both an advantage and a disadvantage, but women tend to feel like more empathetic and understanding of people's emotion, emotional needs, and kind of have like more emotional intelligence than most male leaders. And that can be good because you can connect well with the people you're leading, but also at times to other people that's seen as a weakness because you are constantly worried about feelings and not business per se. Um, so it's kind of a double-edged sword. To be honest though, I feel like it tends to be more of a strength overall because when you're doing contract management, negotiations are all about win-win and if you can't reach across the table and understand how those people are feeling and where they're coming from, it's so hard to get any sort of good outcome. And it's the same internally. Like if you can't look at your employee and go, "Hey, I understand what you're going through." Like, and identify with them it's hard to kind of get their trust and buy in with what you're trying to do.

Participant #18 stated:

I think a disadvantage is that seems to be something that has held me back some is being a mother. That nurturing type of characteristic. And I say that because one, there's a perception that if you are a mother or you have that caregiving characteristic that you cannot be assertive or aggressive that you can't balance. However, I feel that that is something that gives me an advantage for me personally, because to be able to balance your work, your life, your personal, especially as a mother, because we do it all. We're an accountant, we're a doctor. I think that that should be seen as a strength instead of a weakness.

## **Research Question No. 2**

### ***Obstacles to Leadership***

The following interview questions relate to the second sub question (What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of Contract Management?):

***Leaders:***

1. Tell me about your experienced obstacles to leadership within the Contract Management field? Please give examples?
2. How would you describe obstacles moving from management to executive leadership positions?

***Non-leaders:***

3. Please tell me about the perceived obstacles to leadership you believe are specific to the contracting profession. Please give examples.
4. Please describe your experiences working with women in leadership roles within the profession?

**Theme 1: Biases.** This study found biases as the most notable obstacle to obtaining leadership positions. Women spoke about pre-conceived ideas or knowledge that resulted in unfair treatment. The most common biases discussed concern conscious and unconscious bias. Within these categories, instances of gender, ageism, and beauty bias was detected. One participant stated, “I previously was denied a promotion due to not having an executive air or an executive aura. Yeah, that was the entire reason. I doubt that my male boss would've said that to the guy on my team.”

Participant #2 stated:

I tried to get a promotion from manager to senior contracts manager and I'm a very bubbly individual, I'm very outgoing and my manager at that point tried to tell me like, okay, I just didn't have enough grit in her opinion. Like I wasn't strong enough to be a

leader cause I'm just overly cheerful in her perspective. And the book that I recommended again, did touch on that females. If you're overly cheerful, people assume you're not competent, but then if you come across as more rigid than you're not likable, so it's a little bit hard that that perception of a leader is like, how are people viewing you? Not from even your competency perspective. Cause she kept telling me I was competent, but then also what people think of your level of grit and whether you really have like what they pictured her as a leadership tone or leadership style.

Participant #4 stated:

I think in the beginning, being taken seriously. I know when I first started at my company for the first few years, it was kind of like - oh, you're just a pretty girl. And we're not taking you seriously. If I did do something really well, it was like, well, you only got to do that because you're a pretty girl.

Participant #7 stated:

People who are older than let's say maybe 55, then you still may have some gender biases that are steep and older notions and people just trying to hold on tight to those positions. There still may be some gender biases around what roles women should have. They may think when a woman comes down to an executive board, for instance, while they should be the secretary or they should not, they may not be thought of for the, you know, for the top-level positions, as soon as they step on the board. Well, you should be on the board for, you know, three or four years before you are considered for a higher-level position. Whereas oftentimes I'll see that a man comes on board and immediately the assumption is, well, they're ready for the top little level positions. And the whole notion of their qualifications is not considered unless, you know, so the qualifications conversation does not even come up unless it's a woman or a minority.

Participant # 14 stated:

I would honestly, I would say it's the old, I still think there's a lot of old guard in contracts. I think more of my age has in a hindrance. I think old, there's a lot of old mentalities about things and I come with creative, innovative thoughts that I think some people are scared to embrace. And then just, I don't think it's my gender. I think it's my age. That just getting a buy-in from higher level leadership, but that they are actually hearing me.

**Theme 2: Competing with Women.** Many of the women interviewed shared their bad experiences working with women and frequently reported competitive behavior. Respondents articulated bad experiences when seeking sponsorship or community and unfair treatment because they are mothers. Participant # 2 stated:

For example, of trying to apply for Contract Management Leadership Program (CMLDP). At that point, I had four years of experience when I was applying, five years of experience by the time I graduated. And at that point, CMLDP did require a chapter at NCMA chapter, president level, letter of support. I did go to my local chapter president and her response to me was, no, I don't want to endorse you. And I said, why? And she said, well, I think you need to focus on finding a boyfriend and a husband and, and getting married. And this occurred only 10 years ago. So, it's not like we're talking about like the 1950s or 1960s and that was answer that was given to me. And unfortunately, the president elect heard that. He's a male and he approached me afterwards and said, I'll write your letter and I don't think her answer was appropriate. But that was one example of somebody trying to limit my path to leadership and it was actually another female who was trying to limit my path.

Participant #4 stated:

There's also been some of my obstacles in the past kind of, I was writing my NCMA article where there were other females within the office that were very competitive. I had no idea that we were in a competition, but there were always people talking about me and kind of the same stuff, like, oh, why is she getting to do that? Or, oh, she doesn't deserve that or like this and that. And that was like a pretty big obstacle at the time.

Participant #6 stated:

I've had not the best time working with women on my team in the past. And I don't know how much of that was just my company. How much of that was how they got to this team, how much of that was just the not great environment that previously we had with this being something that hasn't totally been bought into. There's been a lot of flux and a lot of not feeling entirely secure, so breathe a lot of anxiety within the team. The women that I had worked with, both those in leadership above me and those who were on my same level, or even below me. There was always a bit of I don't want you ever to exceed me because I don't want you to take my job. I have fought to get to where I am. You seeing someone who is bright and I am threatened. Whereas I never want to take someone's job. I think we can work well together but there's always been that fear that has been built in.

Participant #8 stated:

I think this is head to head competition. As I said, the majority of the leaders in my group in the higher position, actually the legal counselor is a woman and I can see the difference. The treatment is different when one has the family and the other one decided to go to the career. So, I can see a competition there. I mean, it's like the women are pretty competitive and they don't tend to be very helpful with another one that decided to share responsibilities with the, within the family and the career. So, I would say that is a disadvantage even among the women.

**Theme 3: Not in Network.** Several participants stated an obstacle to leadership

specifically, executive leadership is not being in the network. Within responses, the term network referred to the social and business connections among executives and/or an old boy network (also old boys' club). Amongst these two meanings, equal weight was distributed in responses. A participant stated:

I think if your senior leaders are heavily male-dominant, then it can be a little more difficult to break the barriers in terms of getting into senior roles. So, I've worked for an organization where it was all male-dominant. It was difficult to kind of break into that little sector and in that instance, it made more sense to just leave the organization.

Participant #2 stated:

I would say there's some companies that have a really good succession plan where they're reaching out to people with potential and then helping them shadow. They're giving them mentors, they're giving them sponsors and they have a very clear path to growth. Which is great. Other companies I found is more who knows who? Who's connected to whom? and I think that's the obstacle that I'm going to have at my company. So, most people stay at my current company for years, they stay there for decades. Everybody knows them. They have a huge network and that's really how they get their next job and how they get their promotion is through their network. Versus I joined two and a half years ago as an experienced hire. I think without having relationships with other employees. I'm really going to struggle to move to more of an executive role. Even though I have a very good relationship. I get great performance rating. People can't say like I've known her for 10 years or 15 years.

Participant 15 stated:

So honestly this is just my, from the outside looking in perceptions, but I still feel like, especially in the defense industry, once you get up into the executive level, it's still being the good old boys' club. There's still very much a culture of, "Hey, we're all best, buds." Then depending on the culture of your executive team, being a woman in the executive leadership, you might get to the point where you're just so exhausted. You don't want to do it anymore. And it's hard to get up there to begin with. That's not to say that's true at all C-suite but at least in my company, it's very much, I, see it that top level, it's a lot of men and the women that are up there, um, are kind of just like floating around and trying to stay afloat. So that's for my industry, like I've worked outside of the not an even in contract management and it's different, but it's still very much like a cultural thing at the top where it's like all boys' club.

**Theme 4: Logistics.** During the interviews, women spoke about logistics as an experienced or perceived obstacle specific to executive leadership. Logistics emerged as a theme relating to fewer positions. Participant # 4 stated, “Sometimes there's people there already and they're not leaving yet. So that's in a way just a logistical thing.” Participant # 11 stated:

When you look at any organization - As you continue to grow up the corporate ladder, the opportunities are fewer, right? I mean, it just does funnel, right? To one top position. So, there are fewer of those types of positions available to all.

Participant # 17 stated:

I think just in general positions, in leadership within companies, a lot of times...I have friends that are in consulting world versus kind of staffing world but all-around contract management. And a lot of them have felt like there just weren't positions that were available.

### **Research Question No. 3**

#### ***Personal Capabilities and Strategies***

The following interview question related to the third sub question (What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of Contract Management?):

1. Describe ways and examples as to the personal capabilities and strategies you used to overcome these obstacles?

**Theme 1: Proving Yourself.** Many of the women interviewed spoke about proving themselves as a strategy to overcome obstacles. Participants stated in order to counteract negative perceptions and biases, many women focused on competency. Women highlighted professional development as a way to prove aptitude and ability. Participant # 2 stated:

I always focus on competency. Trying to take out some of those of those subjective areas of leadership and focus on things that we can all hopefully agree on. Cause they're more objective. For me, I went through NCMA leadership development program. I've earned all of NCMA's certifications. Right now, I'm actually in charge of the leadership program. It's a two-year term that I'll be running it on a volunteer basis. I've been collecting all of those skills and evidence that I have the leadership ability so that people can't focus on the subjective things like, oh, is she likeable? Do I think she has enough grit? I can

hopefully show the level of grit by saying I helped create this leadership program and I'm running this leadership program.

Participant # 11 stated:

I got my top-secret clearance so that I could further show my value. I became certified with NCMA. I got a certificate for CFCM. I went through the NCMA leadership program and then became a fellow with NCMA. So, I'm attempting to prove my value as a leader in the acquisition community both so separate from my company to show like that. I do have that aptitude and that ability.

Participant #19 stated:

I think, sometimes allowing your work to speak for itself, but that only goes so far. So, some of the strategies it's really making those mentorship opportunities or the skip level meetings, highlighting your achievements and what you've done. Those are very important. And then quantifying how that made an impact in your organization. That's typically really big in terms of getting the ears or the visibility on the scope of work you're working on.

**Theme 2: Networking.** Respondents noted networking within and outside your organization is beneficial. Participant # 5 stated, "My strategy is to just expand my network outside of contracts and then get involved in initiatives outside of the contract management bucket. Participant # 13 stated:

So, I've worked really hard to build a network with other women in the organization, as well as when I come across somebody who's at the leadership level that is willing to mentor and help me develop my skills. I try to work with them to utilize that opportunity to find ways that I can grow. Reading books how to thrive in a male dominated organization and also being a part of the networks like women's network and ethnic.

Participant #17 stated:

I also surround myself with positive females. Where we all feel like we're in a safe space, we can encourage each other. We really bring each other a lot of positive vibes. Whether that's sending a text to a coworker, colleague or friend, girl power, um, you know, let's, you know, we got this, you know, just kind of the constant encouragement within my network of females that we give each other.

## Research Question No. 4

### *Recommendations*

The following interview question relate to the fourth sub question (What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?):

1. In what ways, if any, do you offer support to other women following in your footsteps?
2. How important is having a mentor to you?
3. What attitudes, behaviors or attributes do you value and look for in a mentor?
4. What attitudes, behaviors or attributes do you value and look for in a mentee?
5. What advice do you have for the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

The major topic that arose from the discussions was: Mentoring. During the interview process, mentoring was emphasized as the major theme when as how do you offer support to other women following in your footsteps? All 19 respondents stated mentoring is an important developmental assistance tool to overcome barriers and promote professional advancement. Mentoring was described invaluable in the form of both informal and formal mentoring.

Participant # 2 stated:

I was a mentor for - that would've 8 and a half years. I mentored other. As far as female mentees, all but one was male. I would've had seven female mentees. And even now, like, I know I have no band for Mentees while running the program, but I always do offer if people want to reach out to me. If they want to talk about the Leadership development program. If they want to talk about my career path. I say at least once a month, I will have a female reaching out to me with those sorts of questions. And that's really why I volunteered for this survey. I saw that it was focusing on women and I was like, I know I'm a little pressed for time but I can fit it in while I'm driving so let's go ahead and do that.

Participant #10 stated:

Mentoring! It's huge. Having a mentor is probably the best thing that any person coming into the field. Especially a woman who wants to exceed. I never had a mentor, so I've really kind of learned by the seat of my pants. I'm providing some mentoring to another girl within our company. Who's looking to get into this role. She and I have gotten together and talked. She asked a lot of questions and I am, hopefully, hopefully I'm giving you all the right answers. But she is already a leader in her role in the company right now, she's in the accounting department, but being a, having a mentor is probably the best thing that any woman can do in getting into this field.

**Theme 1: Honest Mentor.** During the course of interviews, six codes emerged concerning mentor characteristics. Among these codes, honesty was the leading code followed closely by experience. Participant #2 stated:

Yeah, I say definitely honesty because some of my students who are going through the program and they have mentors who are just very happy go lucky. I'll say where they're not giving them feedback. The student will go to the mentor and ask for feedback about an assignment. For example, they're giving Ted talks tomorrow, actually, and the mentor will just say everything's great and there's all this room for improvement. So as a mentor, you have to be able to get that tough guidance but in a way that is kind, considerate and actionable. Being able to get that tough guidance, but to get it in a nice way.

**Theme 2: Willing to Learn Mentee.** Approximately 70% of participants stated mentees have to be willing to learn. Participant # 3 stated:

Definitely somebody, I mean, it seems so simple to say, but somebody willing to learn. I feel like sometimes when can get into a profession, they think, okay, well I'm going to get a mentor to like jump their career, to get a new position, anything like that, more networking. And you know, they have no actual interest in a box. I think when, in my opinion, a waste of the mentees time, if that's their perspective to it, because you should want to learn. Throughout the CMLDP course and any time I've ever had conversations with my mentors, I always learn something. Whether it's usually something professional related, but sometimes personal it's just, you have to be open that even if you've done something a certain way for 10 years, there may be a better way or not a better way.

**Theme 3: Be Yourself Theme.** Participants were asked to provide advice for the future generation of female leaders. Of the 19 respondents, there were many offerings of advice and life lessons. Amongst these responses, being yourself and not limiting yourself was most spoken. Table 4 illustrates the frequency of this theme.

**Table 4***Advice to Future Leaders*

Code	Frequency
Be yourself	5
Don't limit yourself	5
Find a mentor	2
Keep learning	2
Network	2
Set boundaries	2
Find your passion	2
Find work-life balance	1
Have a plan	1
Support others	1
Cross-train	1

Participant #3 stated:

Be yourself. I think what happens is women tend to think that they have to fit into a box and they have to act a certain way, which you know, to a certain degree that is true, but you have to be yourself in it because if you decide you have to be that that strong will, big presence in the room. That has to be your natural way. I don't think you can fake that. Whereas it, you know, I'm a little bit quieter. I'm a little bit more timid. I'm going in play that up because that's my strength and that's, you know, I can't be the bowl in the China shop. So, if you stick with what you know and what you're good at, that's how your leadership is going to evolve. And that's how your leadership is going to be effective. Because if you try and fake it, people are number one going to see that but then they're also going to completely dismiss you in that leadership position of, well, she doesn't know what she's talking about. The good thing with leadership, with that is you can be who you are. There's no one path for it. There's no one personality for it, but you have to stick with, I think, you know, what's natural to you. Otherwise it's just going to cause a lot more problems first. You're trying to, act and cover things up. Whereas if you're just being yourself you're true to yourself and you can keep going on the path that you know is true.

Participant # 8 stated:

Try to be consistent and patient and I think be original and be their selves. I mean, that is the most important thing. Not try to compete with men. I think it's important for females to be there ourselves. What is the most important thing? I mean, once you are authentic and you are a hard worker, you're going to reach your goals. If it's that, if their goals make you happy. I mean, the idea to reach the goals are consider the things that you want to have for other people that are just happy, what, uh, the position they're doing in the company. So, I think it all depends, but if you are looking for a leadership position, I

think you have to be just yourself and be truthful and work hard. And yeah, I think it's, uh, be sincere and be yourself.

**Theme 4: Don't Limit Yourself.** Participants encourage future female leaders to not limit themselves. Experiences were shared regarding salary, applying for positions and the need to be confident. Babcock and Laschever (2007) attested women may receive less promotion opportunities because women tend to be less competitive than men. Participant # 1 stated:

My best piece of advice for that is don't sell yourself short. Always ask for more money than your initial instincts tell you to. I always ask for more responsibility than your initial instincts tell you to because we have to sort of fight ourselves as females. Because our mind is always, we will. We tend to make sure we know what we know and we can do something a 100% before we step up to do it. Whereas others looking at that same position can just look at it and say, well, I know about 60% of it and I'll fake it till I make it on the rest. And women don't tend to do that. I'm not an advocate for the fake it until you make it. I feel like if you claim to know something, you better know it, but I do feel like women sell themselves short. And I know I've done it to myself in the past. I actually had a manager calibrate me and have a conversation with me on the side and say, you understand, you're making about 20 grand less than you should be and it was just because how I drove my career. I have no clue that I was so misaligned in the in the pay scale. So, they helped me get to where I needed to be, but I just thought, wow, all these years, you know, how much money I left on the table. I would say, make sure you know you're worth. You test the market, you talk to other people and you don't sell yourself short. I think that would be the best advice I can give you.

Participant #15 stated:

I would just say don't be afraid to put yourself out there. You never know what people are looking for in a leader. To be honest. I feel like we, women, especially we get in our own way so much. That we stop ourselves before we've even had the chance to try to get up in the leadership. So, being able to just kind of put yourself out there is so important, even if it's scary and even, I mean, you're going to get told no sometimes, and it is what it is. It's just the way life is with anything. To just go for it and be confident in the fact that while you may, your internal model on may be saying that you are, you're not what you think you are, you really have something to add to the conversation and we need more women in contracts leadership, because it just adds so much to what we do every day.

## Chapter Summary

This study presented the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 19 female professionals currently working in the field of Contract Management. During the interviews, they

shared their perceptions and experienced obstacles to leadership and various strategies. The contribution of each participant allowed the researcher to learn and understand the barriers women face and how they have overcome. Participants represented various states and all three targeted sectors; Government, Nonprofit and Private. The level of experience ranged from 2 years to 30 plus years, which provided further insight into perceived obstacles versus experienced obstacles. Based on the feedback from these Contract Management professionals, this study affords barriers and strategies used to obtain leadership positions.

Uncovering barriers that might influence representation or underrepresentation is the main purpose of this research. Some women shared their belief that the Contract Management industry as a whole is still very male dominated. Others shared experiences of a fair and equally represented organization. While responses were inconsistent, equal representation was most spoken. Participants highlighted challenges with titles, quotas, and a strong push for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Obstacles most prevalent were competing with other women and biases. The most common strategies used to overcome these obstacles were proving yourself and networking. Women offered advice and best practices for the future generation of female leaders by highlighting mentoring. Many women spoke of mentoring as being invaluable and crucial to their career success. Chapter 5 will discuss the listed key findings in detail:

- Equal Representation
- Inclusion;
- Double-edge;
- Biases;
- Competing with Women and;
- Mentoring

Chapter 5 will summarize the study, providing an interpretation and discussion of the findings and results as it relates to the existing body of research related to the researcher's dissertation topic. This final chapter highlights implications, limitations, recommends future research and closing comments of the researcher's reflections.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, study conclusions, theoretical implications for future studies, recommendations for future research, and a chapter summary. Conclusions and limitations provide a basis of comparison with literature reviewed, which is presented in Chapter 2. To build on these findings, the researcher compared findings to research conclusions from other related studies. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the narrative linked to the experiences of women concerning challenges, barriers, their perceptions of other women, and personal capabilities that allowed them to overcome obstacles leading to leadership.

### **Context**

Underrepresentation of women in leadership was highlighted in the literature reviewed regarding executive level/C-suite positions. The purpose of this study is to understand barriers facing women in Contract Management and to examine strategies women use to obtain positions of leadership. Empirical literature was found addressing female leadership characteristics/traits that have contributed to career advancement, women leading women in academia, women working in a male-dominated workplace, women's experience of sexuality, work-life balance, and coping strategies for the contracting profession. However, the researcher found little to no literature published on barriers facing women specific to the contracting profession and strategies used to obtain leadership positions.

This study collected data from 19 professional women currently working in the field of Contract Management. Together, the participants represented all three sectors of interest: Government, Nonprofit and Private. Two participants identified working in Government; one in

Nonprofit, and 16 identified working at a Private Company. Participants in this study ranged in Contract Management experience from 2 to 30+ years. Through coding of responses, the data yielded insight into common themes employed by women who are seeking leadership positions or have obtained a leadership position within the Contract Management field.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are formulated to explain, evaluate and understand an underlying phenomenon. Within this study, the theoretical framework derived from the analysis of the research problem, which consisted of concepts relevant to scholarly literature and existing theories used for similar studies. The strategy used to develop an effective framework entailed ensuring the research problem anchored the entire study. The research problem formed a basis for constructing the theoretical framework. Abend (2008) defined theoretical framework as the process of challenging and extending current knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. The researcher reviewed course readings, related research dissertations, and studies for logic models relevant to the problem.

The problem at hand is that women are equally represented in the total labor force but underrepresented in leadership positions. With this understanding, the main research question for this study is: What barriers, if any, might women face in contract management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles? The research questions considered key variables of the study and guided the fundamental design and organization of the data collected through interviews. The research questions focused on identifying representation, underrepresentation, obstacles, strategies, best practices, and recommendations that aide in the advancement of women in the workplace. The researcher engaged in the process of conceptualizing, which is used to move data from a compound state to a theoretical framework

that reflects the subject of the research. The literature reviewed addressed continual and emerging themes in relation to women in the workplace. The concept of barriers was based on gender discrimination, biases, working in a male-dominated workplace, women empowerment, mentoring, pregnancy discrimination, work-life balance, and cultural barriers. Within the bounds of this study, the researcher was able to uncover the barriers facing women in the contracting field specific to Government, Nonprofit and Private sectors. Discrimination and biases are still the leading barrier for women in contract management. Almestica (2012) provided empirical research related to mentoring strategies for women in the contract management profession. The findings within this study revealed that the contracting profession is a male-dominated environment. This study challenged this knowledge and revealed that there is a shift in representation and the field is no longer male-dominated.

### **Methodology and Methods**

A phenomenological approach was used to interview participants, which allowed the researcher to capture real-life experiences and infer similarities and differences (Creswell, 2013). The researcher sourced women via LinkedIn and professional networks specific to Contract Management. All participants were required to meet inclusion criteria, which included:

1. A female or identifies as a female.
2. A professional woman working in the field of Contract Management.
3. An employee of a Government, Nonprofit, or Private company.

Sampling techniques used were purposive (purposeful) and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling permitted the researcher to obtain additional participants who may be of friends, relatives, colleagues, or other significant contacts of initial participant.

The interview protocol was divided into two sections: sociodemographic items and open-ended questions. Sociodemographic questions pertained to gender identity, years of experience, and employer sector. This interview protocol offered a lenient structure for the women being interviewed. During the interview, the researcher ensured the participants were well informed of risks and made the interview as comfortable as possible to allow an open dialogue for candid and truthful responses. Each interview was audio and/or video recorded upon consent. All 19 interviews were transcribed, analyzed and documented. Transcribed interviews were transported to HyperRESEARCH for visualization of all major themes in an organized matter.

The researcher highly relied on the method of Moustakas (1994) to pinpoint themes, which stated themes are the textural description of verbatim examples of what happened and the textual description is defined as an integration of the individual interpretations of experiences.

Categories are connected to one main research question and four sub-research sub questions. The main research question for this study is: What barriers, if any, might women face in contract management and how might they impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles?

Sub questions:

1. How do women describe the current representation of women in Contract Management?
2. What are the experienced or perceived obstacles to leadership for women in the field of Contract Management?
3. What personal capabilities have been used by women to overcome obstacles in the field of Contract Management?
4. What recommendations would women give the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

## Key Findings

During the interviews, the researcher became alert to many themes, patterns, and concepts that defined meanings. From the collected data, 16 themes emerged. Table 5 provides a summary of the categories formed and themes collected through the data analysis process.

**Table 5**

*Summary of Themes for Research Subquestions*

Research Sub-Question	Category	Themes
1	Representation	Equal representation, inclusion, capability, identification, and double edge
2	Obstacles	Biases, competing with women, not in network and logistics
3	Strategies	Proving yourself and networking
4	Best Practices and Recommendations	Mentoring, honest mentor, willing to learn mentee, be yourself and don't limit yourself

Amongst these themes, the researcher chose to analyze 7 themes that were most relevant to the main research question and sub questions. These themes became the key findings of the study.

The following key findings are as follows:

- F1 - Equal representation. Within the bounds of this study, participants described the leadership representation within their current organization as equal, in terms of gender. For strategy purposes, the researcher did not define the meaning of *representation* during the interviews. Instead, participants were able to respond to representation based on their individual understanding and comprehension of the meaning and context. The nuance around representation allowed the researcher to understand the many shades of meanings in regard to representation from the participants' view. One participant described her organization stating, "The

leadership representation, I would say would be 50% male, 50% female.” Some participants described their organization as being male dominated or female dominated, but the majority of responses stated leadership representation is equal among both genders. Of the respondents, 68% stated their organization has higher female or equal representation; 31% reported higher male leader representation. This finding negates the literature reviewed and empirical research regarding underrepresentation. Prior research confirmed women are well represented in entry-level positions but remain underrepresented in leadership positions, specifically, executive level/C-suite positions. The contracting industry has a strong military background and is widely known to be male dominated. Almestica (2012) conducted an empirical study titled, “Work–Life Balance Issued and Mentoring Strategies for Women in the Contract Management Profession,” which confirmed the contracting profession is still male dominated. In 2017, it was reported that women represented approximately 55% of entry-level positions, 50% management, and 38% executive level/C-Suite positions within the contracting industry (Peel, 2017). Based on the responses, findings reconfirm the male dominated characterization and there is a shift in leadership representation. One participant shared her insight about this shift stating, “It's been very refreshing to see a lot of women in management roles in the position because I definitely wasn't used to it at my old company.”

- **F2 – Network and Inclusion.** The literature reviewed highlighted women working in a male dominated workplace can be problematic as women are denied inclusion to the old boys’ network. An old boy network or old boys’ club refers to social and business connections among males, specifically males on the executive level. This type of

culture denies women inclusion into informal networks of communication and accessibility to decision makers. Wah (1998) stated women blame the “inhospitable and exclusionary” corporate culture in which male CEOs lack awareness for underrepresentation (p. 88). During the interviews, respondents confirmed exclusion from networks is an obstacle to leadership and networking is a strategy used to overcome. Findings support the body of knowledge that an exclusionary culture can hinder representation of female leadership. One participant communicated her struggle with exclusion by stating, “I found its more who knows who? Who's connected to whom? and I think that's the obstacle that I'm going to have at my company.”

An emerging theme of inclusion was noted in responses and referred to organizations pushing gender and ethnic inclusion. One participant described her organization by stating, “In general, it's inclusive and they want to promote females into leadership.” Findings support employers are empowering women and implementing formal inclusion initiatives focused on diversity and inclusion. These types of initiatives force individuals to confront negatives views, confront social behaviors, eliminate stereotypes, and understand biases. Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts may be problematic for women as initiatives recognize both gender and ethnic groups. A participant attested to this problem by stating, “I found that there's less of an emphasis on advancing female leaders now and more an emphasis on people from underrepresented groups.”

Another element to inclusion is mandated quotas. Gender quotas are found in the literature review as a strategy for gender equality. Baldez (2004) stated 21 countries

have adopted gender quota laws in the past decade. Findings from this study conclude gender quotas are still being implemented. A participant from this study confirmed this by stating:

I think there is a little bit more concern about the quotas than the real skills. So, there are more of a concern about how many women, LGBT, person do we have in the organization instead of concentrating in the skills sense.

The literature review highlighted opposing views to gender quotas as some believe these laws cherry-pick women and create a gender bias. This opposing view was evidenced in the study as one participant discussed a negative comment from her male counterpart who stated, “I guess I need to put on a skirt to become a president at this company.” This participant then stated, “so there's still some stigmas, stereotypes and inappropriateness that happens,” which adheres to the literature reviewed.

- F3 – Discrimination and Biases. Preceding literature stated discrimination is the leading challenge women face in the workplace. Parker and Funk (2017) provided approximately four in 10 working women (42%) in the United States have faced discrimination on the job because of their gender. Baxter and Wright (2000) argued that gender discrimination is an issue woman face when ascending the managerial ladder throughout the United States, Sweden, and Australia. During the interviews, women spoke about biases in the sense of pre-conceived ideas or knowledge that resulted in unfair treatment. This finding fit the literature reviewed, specifically gender and unconscious bias. Gender bias is defined as unintentional or intentional mental associations based on gender that can stem from one’s norms, culture, traditions, values, and experience. Unconscious bias, refers to ways a person unknowingly draws upon assumptions and stereotypes about an individual and/or

- group to formulate an opinion or decision about them. The committee on Women Faculty in the School of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1999) suggested unconscious bias is a form of indirect discrimination. Unconscious gender bias is documented in the literature reviewed as a significant barrier to women and career advancement (Bureau for Employees' Activities, 2017). Eagly (2007) concluded there is a significant imbalance of women in leadership as a result of workplace gender bias. This is proved to be an obstacle within the bounds of this study as one participant described gender bias stating, "There still may be some gender biases around what roles women should have."
- F4 - Double-edge. The meaning of double-edge varies. For the purposes of this study, double-edge will be defined as a double-standard and is referenced as form of bias. The term double-edge was noted as a standalone finding because of the number of times this term was voiced during interviews. During the interviews, women vocalized how certain characteristics inherent to women are often times viewed as both a strength and a weakness. Participants highlighted women carry many assumptions and stereotypes in the workplace, which can yield unfair treatment and negative perceptions. There are negative beliefs about a woman's leadership abilities like the unescapable stereotype of women being *caretakers*. This belief is found in the study as one participant stated, "There's a perception that if you are a mother or you have that caregiving characteristic, that you cannot be assertive or aggressive that you can't balance." A second respondent stated:

I think a disadvantage is that seems to be something that has held me back some is being a mother. That nurturing type of characteristic. And I say that because one, there's a perception that if you are a mother or you have that caregiving characteristic that you cannot be assertive or aggressive that you can't balance.

However, I feel that that is something that gives me an advantage for me personally, because to be able to balance your work, your life, your personal, especially as a mother, because we do it all. We're an accountant, we're a doctor. I think that that should be seen as a strength instead of a weakness.

Phelan et al. (2008) found a double standard exists when women are interviewed.

Applicants who smiled and presented themselves as a team player were often considered less competent for both genders. However, women are frequently disqualified for being too ambitious or self-reliant even though they are viewed as competent. This framework was supported as one participant communicated, "I've also had a supervisor whose female telling me that I was too nice to the point of it was a risk to the company, which I don't believe." Another participant stated, "If you're overly cheerful, people assume you're not competent, but then if you come across as more rigid than you're not likable." Campuzano (2019) stated socialized beliefs that influence organizational culture cause a scarcity of women in leadership. Findings from this study support unconscious gender bias is profound within the contracting profession.

- F5 - Competing with women. This term has many meanings. For the purposes of this study, this term relates to bias or a behavior. The literature reviewed specified acclimatizing to a male dominated culture may pose effects on identity development and relationships with other women. Women tend to deny support to other women and have micro aggressive behavior. Forms of indirect aggression sometimes manifest among women resulting in spreading ill rumors, insults, gossiping or undermining women with the intention of defaming. This framework was noted in responses as many women shared negative experiences working with other women in the profession. One participant shared her experience and stated, "I had no idea that we were in a competition, but there were always people talking about me." Unfair treatment was vocalized when seeking

sponsorship or because they are mothers. One participant stated the treatment is different when one woman has a family and the other woman decided to go the career route stating, “I can see a competition there. I mean, it's like the women are pretty competitive and they don't tend to be very helpful with another one that decided to share responsibilities with the family and the career.” Evans (2009) researched success strategies of high achieving women in the field of business and determined women in a male dominated industry have a competitive relationship with other women, which inhibits their ability to work together. Sheppard and Aquino (2014) linked that women in senior leadership positions hinder the progression of other women. This phenomenon has been given the name, queen bee syndrome, introduced by Staines et al. (1974). This syndrome denotes women who attain success in a male dominated organization are likely to oppose another women’s success. Faniko et al. (2021) found that such behaviors emerge when gender bias and a lack of gender solidarity come together. Queen Bee behavior emerges when gender bias is experienced, and a woman doesn’t base her identity on gender. A participant shared her experience with Queen Bee behavior, stating:

It seems what has been done to her is trickling to the rest of the team. So, she was here for 8 years before she got a promotion and now it seems to be her way of doing things with the rest of the team.

- F6 – Mentoring. Every participant in this study stated mentoring is important. The literature reviewed praises women who support other women in the workplace to create a pathway for other women to attain leadership positions. Women who collaborate, mentor each other and promote career advancement tend to open more doors (Almestica, 2012; Evans, 2009; Liggins-More, 2016). The spirit of mentoring was highlighted, as one participant stated, “Mentoring! It's huge.” She further confirmed having a mentor is the

best thing that any person can have coming into the field. The literature reviewed denoted same sex mentoring relationships are most prevalent. Kalbfleisch (2000) found that from the perspectives of both mentors and proteges, “same-sex mentoring relationships occur more frequently than cross-sex mentoring relationships...further, the sex of the mentor or protégé was the best predictor of the sex of the corresponding partner in a mentoring relationship” (p. 59). Having a women mentor was considered crucial for women in comparison to men because women are more likely to provide professional advice while understanding social and mental aspects a woman faces. The literature stated there is a tendency for people to choose mentors most like themselves; however, women are underrepresented in the workplace and within leadership roles. Opposite views state the gender of either the mentor or protégé does not affect the development of the mentoring relationships (Merriam, 1983). The findings from this study negate the research of same-sex mentoring relationships as participants stated they need an honest mentor; not a female mentor.

- F7 – Be Yourself. The literature reviewed confirmed women working in a male dominated field face difficulty with informal workplace interactions that may cause inequalities and psychological impact as a result of stress. Women have to cope with various survival skills in male dominated work fields by trying to fit in, look the part, and develop thick skin. The need to fit in is documented in findings, as one participant stated, “I think what happens is women tend to think that they have to fit into a box and they have to act a certain way.” The literature reviewed stated adapting to a boy’s club or *macho image* might compromise identity development. Faniko et al (2021) found that both genders at advanced career levels self-identify themselves in masculine

characteristics. Findings from this study support identifying with masculine characteristics is/was a pattern. One participant advised the next generation of female leaders to be themselves and not emulate men by stating, “Well, I think that the first thing is to be encouraged that times are changing and that we don't have to try to be like men.” Another participant said don't compete with men stating, “Try to be consistent and patient and I think be original and be their selves. I mean, that is the most important thing. Not try to compete with men. I think it's important for females to be there ourselves.”

### ***Literature Review Not Supported***

Pertinent literature reviewed that was not supported in this study included work–life balance and pregnancy discrimination. The researcher documented work–life balance as potential barrier. The research noted achieving work–life balance is an issue within the contracting profession. Almestica (2012) provided empirical research that women within the contracting profession struggle to maintain a balance between work and home. Within the bounds of this study, only two participants mentioned work–life balance as an obstacle to achieving leadership. Findings support the literature review in that work–life balance is still an issue but negates this is a leading obstacle. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has caused a shift as many companies are offering flexible working arrangements such as remote telecommuting, flexible working hours, and part-time work that help foster a work–life balance culture. One participant quoted work-life balance during COVID stating, “Some of the women have families or children and we are flexible with time...I have one person on my team who leaves at 2:30pm every day to go pick up her kids and then she comes back and

works.” Flexibility became the norm post pandemic shutdown which allowed parents to have a better work-life balance.

Another barrier presented within the literature reviewed was pregnancy discrimination. The literature noted pregnancy discrimination occurs when an employer discriminates against a woman expecting or has an intention to become pregnant. Many federal laws have been implemented to protect women’s rights against pregnancy discrimination. The study findings negate previous research that pregnancy discrimination exists. The concept of pregnancy discrimination was not found within the bounds of this study.

### **Study Conclusions**

Based on the data collected from 19 female working professionals, and the literature reviewed on relevant data, the researcher reached the following conclusions:

- C1 – Based on F1 and F2, this study concludes there has been a shift in leadership representation within the Contract Management industry. The Contract Management industry, once male dominated, is shifting to equal leadership representation. Conclusions negate the previous research that the contract management industry is still male dominated. The majority of women confirmed this conclusion to be valid as 68.4% of respondents stated their organization has either higher female leadership AND equal representation. Descriptions behind this phenomenon concern women empowerment, diversity, equity, inclusion, and mandated quotas.
- C2 – Based on F3, F4 and F7, this study concludes discrimination and biases are still the leading barrier for women in Contract Management. Overall, 84% of participants shared negative experiences and/or perceptions in connection to obtaining leadership positions; 16% of participants stated no obstacles. Among obstacles experienced/

perceived, 47% related to biases. Within the realm of bias, the most common biases discussed were gender, unconscious, ageism, and beauty bias. Strategies used to overcome obstacles were proving yourself and networking. Participants stated in order to counteract negative perceptions and biases, many women focused on competency.

- C3 – Based on F5, this study concludes women in contract management compete with other women. The framework of micro aggression and competitive behavior is supported in the findings but it's debatable if this behavior is a result of women working in a male dominated workplace. The literature reviewed offered women may develop covert behaviors to help create an advantage over other women because they are simply frustrated with trying to break through the glass ceiling (Jones & Palmer, 2011).
- C4 – Grounded on F6, mentoring is concluded as the number one best practice. Mentoring relationships have been accepted as a fundamental approach to foster learning in the workplace, advance careers, and provide developmental and psychological support (Hansman, 2002). Within the bounds of this study, mentoring was described as being a crucial element to development and advancement within the profession. In lieu of mentoring, women offered desired characteristics for both mentor and mentees. The majority of participants desired an honest mentor and a mentee who is willing to learn.

### **Implications for Scholarship**

The compilation of results for this study is beneficial to the learning and practitioner communities at large. Findings of this study provide theoretical contribution to scholars on

underrepresented groups in leadership positions. This study was specific to women working within the Government, Nonprofit and Private sector. However, the researcher found that findings are applicable to all sectors of contract management. The researcher assumed data would reveal different themes in regard to each sector. In result, no findings or conclusions were specific to one sector over the other. The findings and conclusions are generalized and are valuable for all three sectors and more. The phenomenon revealed in this study is that there has been a shift in gender representation for leadership. This is important for the contract management field. Chapter 1 presented the significance of the study and discussed the potential implications for women aspiring to obtain leadership positions. It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure equal opportunity, and mitigate barriers so that more women can obtain leadership positions. The findings within this study provide an understanding of the barrier's women face which are biases, competing with women and not being in the network.

Understanding these barriers will aid in the development of new policies or practices to help support, and grow women leaders. Employers can eliminate barriers by removing biases and redefining the culture. Educational trainings and listening sessions have become widely used to unfreeze stereotypes and provide a different perspective. Disruptions need to occur in order to change the culture and see an impact. This research benefits contract management employers, women, and men in the workplace.

### **Study Limitations**

A qualitative study establishes the boundaries and expectations of the study (Creswell, 1998). The study is limited to the research and conclusions drawn from the responses of the participants who were interviewed. The study focused on the experiences of 19 women working in the field of Contract Management within in different sectors across the United States. The

researcher had control over participant demographic items such as gender identity, years of experience and employer. The researcher had no control over age, education, ethnicity, or marital status. Sourcing efforts pertained to purposive and snowball sampling. The main limitations with snowball sampling is that the researcher is required to rely on referrals from initial contacts to generate additional participants.

This study used a sample of the population that may not reflect a generalization of the entire population. The researcher used interviews as a data collection tool. Interviews pose minimal control over the order in which the topics are covered. Because of the associated cost and time of interviews, a small sample size was limited. Because of restrictions imposed by COVID-19 measures, limitations such as travel and in-person, face-to-face interviews with participants were nonexistent. The researcher was limited to virtual platforms that eliminated further observation of non-verbal communication.

### **Internal Study Validity**

Validity refers to the extent a study correctly reflects or assesses the concept or ideas under investigation. The researcher ensured validity by confirming the findings of this study are true and are supported by evidence. The researcher used the triangulation method to increase credibility and validity of research results. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) stated accuracy in a study comes from the validity of the research, the dependability of the findings, and the use of triangulation in data collection. This study produced valid work that is acceptable, supported, and convincing. Triangulation enhances research, as it offers a diversity of data sets to explain different aspects of a phenomenon if of interest. This method was used in this qualitative research to validate the study by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives. Environmental triangulation was applied to this study. This type of triangulation consisted of the

use of different locations, settings, and other key factors associated with the environment. The researcher used participants from different industries with many different missions. The participants in this study are from different states, sectors and career backgrounds such as environmental, defense or veteran affairs. Every industry has its own culture and structure. The environments associated with these industries differ, which, in turn, influenced the findings. The results differed under different environment conditions, which increase validity.

To increase validity, the researcher sent the interview questions to a panel of experts that were informed of research protocols. Responses did not alter the basic research questions but suggested minor modifications to the open-ended interview questions. Therefore, the resulting interview instrument established some validity in this process. This helped identify any ambiguities and solidify the final version of interview questions. The resulting interview questions are shown in Appendix C.

### **Evaluation**

A qualitative methodology provided a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of women working in the contracting profession. This study aimed to uncover why women are not obtaining executive leadership positions. The methodology remained unchanged with exception to the number of participants and sector representation. The researcher aimed to obtain 20 participants working within Government, Nonprofit and the Private sector. Due to time constraints, the researcher selected the first 19 participants who met the evaluation criteria. Two participants identified working in Government; one in Nonprofit and 16 identified working at a Private Company.

Since women in executive leadership positions are scarce, this study revealed a preliminary understanding of the barriers faced and strategies used to leverage obstacles in

obtaining general leadership positions; not executive leadership as planned. During the interviews, women described biases, competing with women and not being in the network as leading obstacles. The researcher was surprised and disappointed to find that competing with women is still a leading obstacle to obtaining leadership positions. Many participants spoke about negative experiences with women that should have been uplifting experiences. To overcome these obstacles, women often have to prove themselves worthy or find a way to be in the network. A phenomenological approach was used for this study which is sculpted after Creswell's (2009) phenomenological research strategy of inquiry. Creswell (2013) described phenomenology as an approach to qualitative research focusing on the commonality of a lived experience within a specific group. The researcher found a large common theme amongst the women that negates previous research. The contracting profession, historically viewed as male-dominated has shifted. The participants of this study have either seen a shift or are living through a shift in which more women are obtaining leadership positions. Participants within this study confirmed leadership positions were typically held by men and that this shift in representation is refreshing to see. The goal of this phenomenological approach was to arrive at an explanation of the nature of the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Based on the interviews, initiatives for diversity, equity and inclusion have been the root of this shift. Women are also proving themselves capable and earning a place. This is not surprising to see because women are propelling over men in regard to the number of men and women obtaining higher education degrees.

This study was specific to women working within the Government, Nonprofit and Private sector. However, the researcher found that the findings are applicable to women across every industry that is male dominated. Chapter 1 discussed women representing more than 50% of the

United States labor force. Although women have an equal representation in the total labor force, women remain underrepresented in executive leadership positions. The phenomenon of women shifting into more leadership positions can be reasonably assumed for other industries. The root of this shift is universal and not specific to contract management operations. Initiatives for diversity, equity, and inclusion is a global initiative that is undertaken by many companies. Therefore, the findings and conclusions are generalizability valuable for all industries that were viewed as male dominated.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study sought to understand what barriers women face in contract management and how they might impact the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. As a result, the study yields general information about experienced and perceived obstacles, strategies, best practices, and recommendations. Findings may not necessarily apply to one given situation. Nonetheless, the study is a representation of today's contracting environment and best practices employed by today's contracting professionals. Understanding the issues women face and strategies used to influence career advancement will help women prepare for challenges. During interviews, women attributed success to proving yourself, networking, and mentoring.

- This study used a sample of the population. It is recommended that future research be directed to investigate a larger population of women working in contracting.
- This study called for individuals specific to Government, Nonprofit Sector, and the Private Sector. Some individuals voluntarily offered their sub-sector of employment such as environmental and medical. It is recommended that a future study could explicitly investigate sub-sectors for additional demographic data.

- Because of COVID-19 restrictions, this study was limited to virtual interviews; not face-to-face interviews. It is recommended that future research include in-person, face-to-face interviews to better understand different organizational cultures and nonverbal communication.
- This study was limited to women. It is recommended a future study be carried out to obtain the perspective of men working in the field of contract management.
- This study demonstrated that there is a shift in representation within the contracting community. It is recommended that a study be conducted to understand the cause and effect of this shift.

### **Chapter Summary with Closing Remarks**

This study negates the theory that the contracting profession is still male dominated (Almestica, 2012). Based on responses, women are no longer underrepresented in executive level/C-Suite positions (Peel, 2017). The researcher notes, this study is specific to today's contracting profession and conclusions are not applicable every industry. The goal of this study was accomplished, as the researcher uncovered barriers women face in Contract Management and strategies used to obtain positions of leadership. From the data collected, many obstacles arose concerning biases, competing with women, not being in network and logistics. Women spoke of strategies such as proving yourself and networking to overcome obstacles. This study did conclude a male dominated culture is imprinted. Exclusion from networks was a noted obstacle to leadership and networking was a strategy used to overcome exclusion. Employers are taking an active approach to empower women and make working environments more inclusive.

The workplace, in general, is a minefield loaded with obstacles and challenges that a person has to navigate and overcome. The participants in this study shared many negative experiences in trying to obtain leadership positions. It is encouraging to the researcher that times have changed and will continue to progress with diversity, equity, inclusion, and quota initiatives. With this change, it is with great hope that women will lend more support to other women and discontinue competitive behavior. Participants in this study advise the next generation of female leaders to be yourself and not limit yourself.

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## APPENDIX A

## Recruitment Letter

*Graduate School of Education and Psychology*

Dear [Name],

My name is Tiffany Smith, and I am a doctoral student of Graduate School of Education & Psychology Department at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study to understand why women are underrepresented in leadership roles in Contract Management and the barriers women face. I need your help! I am seeking volunteer participants for this project that will involve a virtual or telephone interview. The interview will last no longer than 45 minutes. Your participation in this study will be video and audio recorded upon consent.

Participation in this study is voluntary and your identity as a participant will remain protected before, during, and after the time that study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place. During and after the study, your data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for three years after the study is complete. Each interview will have a distinct, individual password to protect each participant. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institution Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me via email at [Tiffany.Smith@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Tiffany.Smith@pepperdine.edu).

Thank you for your time,

Tiffany Smith  
Pepperdine University  
Education & Psychology Department  
Doctoral Student

## APPENDIX B

## Informed Consent for Adult Participation in Research Activities

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY***Graduate School of Education and Psychology***INFORMED CONSENT FOR ADULT PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH  
ACTIVITIES****IRB NUMBER # 20-03-1319****STUDY TITLE**

Representation and Underrepresentation: A phenomenological study of barriers facing female leaders in the contract management profession.

**INVITATION**

Dear Participant,

My name is Tiffany Smith. I am conducting a study to understand barriers facing women in Contract Management and to examine personal capabilities used to obtain leadership positions, specifically, women who work in Contract Management within many different areas of Government, Nonprofit, and Private sector entities. If you are 18 years of age or older, a non-pregnant female or someone that identifies as a female over the age of 18, a professional woman working in the field of Contract Management, a Contract Management employee of a Government, Nonprofit, or Private company, you may participate in this research.

**WHAT IS THE REASON FOR DOING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

This is a research project that focuses on women in Contract Management. In 2012, women filled 48% of managerial roles within the contracting profession but the percentage of women holding executive positions was far below. This study examines underrepresentation in executive level/C-suite positions. In order to participate you must be over the age of 18, a non-pregnant female or someone that identifies as a female over the age of 18, a English speaking professional woman working in the field of Contract Management, a Contract Management employee of a

Government, Nonprofit, or Private company, you may participate in this research.

### **WHAT WILL BE DONE DURING THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

Participation in this study will require approximately 45 minutes. You will be asked to participate in an interview. The preferred method for interviews is virtual with audio and video recording. Recording data allows the researcher to go back and review interview for verification of data in the event deemed necessary. Telephone interviews will be used as a secondary method upon request.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study are no more than minimum risks involved in day-to-day activities. Any risks involved in participation are those associated with basic computer tasks including boredom, fatigue or mild stress. Breach in confidentiality is of risk. The researcher will ensure all participant names remain confidential.

### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO YOU?**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, results of this study have several anticipated benefits to society which include:

1. The compilation of results of the study will be beneficial to the learning and practitioner communities at large.
2. Findings of the study will shed light and inform scholars and practitioners on inclusion of underrepresented groups in leadership positions.

### **HOW WILL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU BE PROTECTED?**

Your responses to this survey will be kept anonymous and confidential. Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and for three years after the study is complete. Each interview will have a distinct, individual password to protect each participant. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institution Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data; your identity will remain strictly confidential.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT?**

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. For study related questions, please contact Tiffany Smith, Principal Investigator.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

Phone: 1(310) 568-2305

Email: [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu)

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO BE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY OR DECIDE TO STOP PARTICIPATING ONCE YOU START?**

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study (“withdraw”) at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

**DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. By clicking on the I Agree button below, your consent to participate is implied. You should print a copy of this page for your records.

I agree

I do not agree

## APPENDIX C

## Interview Script and Questions

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY*****Graduate School of Education and Psychology*****Opening:**

Participant, you have been selected because you identify as a female and are employed in the field of Contract Management for a Government, Nonprofit or Private company. This study focuses on barriers facing women, if any, and strategies women use to obtain leadership positions. The intent of this interview is to grasp your challenges, barriers, perceptions of other women, personal capabilities to overcome obstacles from your viewpoint based on your lived experiences. I would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and video and/or audio-recorded [WILL/WILL NOT] be used. Do I have your consent?

I am committed to making the interview process as comfortable and convenient as possible. At this time, do you have any questions for me regarding the informed consent, risks, or benefits as outlined in Appendix B ? At any time, please let me know if you would like a break. I have prepared several questions, but I want you to feel free to add any comments or thoughts that might add to my understanding of your thoughts and ideas.

**Section A - Socio-demographic Items:**

*I would like to start off by asking a few socio-demographic questions to better understand the general domain of participants.*

1. In terms of gender, how would you identify yourself?
2. How many years of experience do you have in the field of Contract Management?
3. Which classification best describes your employer sector? (prompt if necessary - Government, Nonprofit , or Private company)?

**Section B – Open ended Questions:**

***Representation and Leadership*** –Tell me about your organization and role at work.

4. How would you describe leadership representation in terms of gender within your current organization?
5. Within your current organization, how would you describe the organizational culture in association to gender? Are you able to provide specific characteristics?
6. What are your perceptions of women holding leadership positions in the contracting profession?
4. Do you identify yourself as a leader within the Contract Management field? Can you please describe characteristics you have that classify you as a leader?
5. As a woman, which characteristics can you identify with that have been an advantage or disadvantage in leading others within the contracting profession?

***Challenges and Obstacles*** – *The next set of questions will pertain to the obstacles you perceive or have faced in the contracting profession and personal capability to overcome.*

Leaders:

6. Tell me about your experienced obstacles to leadership within the Contract Management field? Please give examples?
7. How would you describe obstacles moving from management to executive leadership positions?
8. Describe ways and examples as to the personal capabilities and strategies you used to overcome these obstacles?

Non-leaders:

9. Please tell me about the perceived obstacles to leadership you believe are specific to the contracting profession. Please give examples.
10. Please describe your experiences working with women in leadership roles within the profession?

***Educating Women and Best Practices*** – *Finally, I would like to hear what advice you have for other women in the contracting profession who are seeking leadership positions.*

11. In what ways, if any, do you offer support to other women following in your footsteps?
12. How important is having a mentor to you?
13. What attitudes, behaviors or attributes do you value and look for in a mentor?
14. What attitudes, behaviors or attributes do you value and look for in a mentee?
15. What advice do you have for the future generation of female leaders seeking to obtain a position of leadership?

Closing:

Thank you, Participant. I appreciate your time and honesty in answering questions about your perspective of female representation in Contract Management. Please let me know if you think of any other ideas that you may want to share with me on this particular topic.

A transcribed document of the interview will be sent to all respondents for them to read through to detect any discrepancies in information gathered. If discrepancies are detected, I will rectify before proceeding forward.

## APPENDIX D

## IRB Approval Letter

Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

**NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH**

Date: February 18, 2022

Protocol Investigator Name: Tiffany Smith

Protocol #: 20-03-1319

Project Title: REPRESENTATION AND UNDERREPRESENTATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BARRIERS FACING FEMALE LEADERS IN THE CONTRACT MANAGEMENT PROFESSION

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Tiffany Smith:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research