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Social Capital Implications for the Gender Gap in Organizational Leadership:
A Case Study of Executive Women Leaders Through a Lens of Intersectionality

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Hood College
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
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by
Amy Castle-Rogers

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	15
Background.....	17
Statement of the Problem.....	19
Purpose of the Study	20
Research Questions	21
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Significance of the Study	24
Strategies to Overcome the Problem.....	25
Theoretical Framework.....	26
Overview of the Research Methodology	29
Key Term Definitions.....	30
Summary	32
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	35
Introduction.....	35
Search Methods.....	35
Barriers.....	36
<i>Internal Personal Barriers</i>	37
Low Self-Efficacy	37
Inequitable Family Demands.....	38
Lack of Support creates Lack of Will.....	39
<i>External Organizational Barriers</i>	40
Bias & Stereotypes.....	41
Lack of Opportunity	42

Intersectionality of Barriers to Leadership	44
Social Capital Theory	45
<i>Social Capital Theories Related to Barriers for Women</i>	47
Tie Theories & Embeddedness.....	47
Network Theory of Corporate Leadership.....	49
<i>Strategies for Women Related to Social Capital without Theories</i>	51
Career Advancement.....	51
Organizational Structure	52
Strategies to Overcome Barriers	54
<i>Individual Strategies</i>	54
Social Capital Development.....	54
Leadership Development Training	55
Mentoring.....	55
Sponsorship.....	56
<i>Organizational Strategies</i>	57
Organizational Culture Adaptation.....	57
Mentoring with Sponsorship	58
Hiring and Promotion.....	59
Succession Planning.....	59
Organizational Structure	60
Societal Mandate through Quota Legislation	61
Summary	62
 CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY	 65
Introduction to the Methodology	65
Research Questions.....	65
Research Design.....	66
Research Sample.....	70

Data Collection	71
<i>Protection of Participants</i>	71
<i>Setting</i>	72
<i>Expert Review</i>	72
<i>Data Collection Tools</i>	72
Data Analysis	73
<i>Role of the Researcher</i>	74
<i>Researcher Bias</i>	74
Ethical Considerations	75
Trustworthiness & Triangulation	75
Limitations and Delimitations.....	75
Summary	77
 CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS	 79
Introduction to the Study and the Researcher	79
Description of the Sample.....	81
Research Methodology and Analysis.....	84
Presentation of Findings with Analysis.....	86
<i>Participants' Habitus of Career Experiences and Behaviors</i>	87
Sally	88
Gloria	89
Coco	90
Sarah	92
Madison.....	94
Hilary	96
Lyndie	98
<i>Decreases in Social Capital</i>	100

External Barriers of Bias, Lack of Opportunity, and Stereotypes.....	101
Internal Barriers of Low Self-Efficacy, Family Demands and Lack of Will.....	105
<i>Increases in Social Capital</i>	109
Organizational Strategies of Culture, Programs and Structure.....	110
Internal Strategies of Development, Mentoring, Networking and Sponsorship.....	114
<i>Summary Analysis of Social Capital in the Participants' Career Journeys</i>	120
Researcher Observations.....	122
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS.....	128
Introduction and Overview.....	128
Discussion of Study Assumptions.....	129
Discussion & Summary of the Findings.....	132
Barriers Viewed as Challenges.....	132
Proactive Strategies to Gain Social Capital.....	136
Intersectionality Created More Barriers and More Growth.....	137
Human Capital with Social Capital Gained Career Success.....	138
Entrepreneurialism Result of Social Capital.....	140
Networking Through Relationships Built Social Capital.....	141
Organizational Capital Builds Individual Capital.....	142
Conceptual Framework of the Findings.....	144
Limitations.....	146
Recommendations for Research.....	148
Recommendations for Practice.....	149
Scholar Practitioner Implications for Growth.....	151
Recommendations for Policy.....	152
Conclusion.....	153
REFERENCES.....	155

APPENDICES	164
A: Interview Protocol.....	164
Phase one - Online Survey.....	164
Phase two -- One-On-One Interview #1	165
Phase two -- One-On-One Interview #2	166
Phase three – Focus Group	167
B: Gender Bias Scale Comparison to this Study	168
C: Online Survey Flyer	170
D: Hood College IRB Approval.....	171
E: Consent Form for Online Survey	172
F: Consent Form for Study Participation.....	174
G: Gender Bias Scale Barriers Indicated by the Participants	176
H: Career Timeline Example	177

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1.1 Study Summary.....	34
2.1 Key Theorists	64
3.1 Research Question Alignment Matrix for Study Participants.....	69
3.2 Methodology Summary	78
4.1 Participant Demographics.....	84
4.2 Participant Quotes.....	126
5.1 Participant Executive Goal	132
5.2 Participant Career Results from Sponsorship	144

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1.1. Initial Conceptual Framework	23
5.1. Revised Conceptual Framework with Study Findings	145

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the women who have struggled through gender barriers, stereotypes, and biases to achieve their career aspirations and life goals. Learning and growth are the key to life success, and I wish this for my children and grandchildren so that they can become their best selves and always love what they do.

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Social Capital Implications for the Gender Gap in Organizational Leadership:
A Case Study of Executive Women Leaders Through a Lens of Intersectionality

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ABSTRACT

The underrepresentation of women in U.S. business leadership persists due to gender barriers that negatively affect women's ability to acquire leadership roles. The purpose of this qualitative study is to learn from the lived experiences of barriers and the strategies that women use to overcome their barriers, so that it may give insight to women who have not yet found effective strategies to overcome their barriers and to eliminate the gender gap in organizational leadership.

A case study approach was used to look at how American women executive leaders have overcome barriers to leadership based on the social capital theory (SCT) constructs of field, habitus, and capital. From the literature review, conceptual constructs of barriers that decreased their social capital were categorized as external and internal. Strategies to overcome gendered barriers to leadership, which increased their social capital, were examined from conceptual constructs of individual and organizational strategies.

This study consisted of an online survey, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions to triangulate the findings of the cumulative effect in one's career of developing and using social capital to acquire executive leadership positions. Human capital skill development was recommended to the participants by mentors and bosses to improve upon their deficiencies. These mentoring relationships gained them social capital from their allies and sponsors for upward career mobility. Future research and application of social capital development early and often in women's careers is recommended to end the gender gap in executive leadership.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

I started Rogers Consulting LLC in 2015 after a 25-year career in business organizations and not achieving a top executive leadership position. I created my own business to lead and train others in leadership skill development and to coach women in overcoming barriers that they had experienced. I had not felt in the first twenty years of my career that I had experienced any barriers to leadership role acquisition, as I progressed upwardly through increasingly complex management and leadership roles. When I began applying for executive leader positions in the last five years of my career, hiring executives told me that I did not have previous executive leadership titles, so I would not be considered for their executive leadership roles. My accomplishments indicated that I had proven my ability to lead an organization and many employees that I lead confirmed this, but I could not gain executive sponsorship to acquire such a role. I believe that my lack of sponsorship and a lack of awareness of the need for sponsors' social capital to obtain an executive leadership role, kept me from achieving desired positions that I had proven capable of performing. My career experience was quite the opposite of my upbringing in which I was told that I could obtain my highest career goals through hard work.

All my life I have been confident, driven, and consistently produced high work results, as both of my parents had raised me to do. My father often said that he did not raise me like most girls are typically raised, he insisted that I be independent, self-sufficient, high-producing, and achieve the highest levels of work and education to reach my career goals. My mother expected no less of me and was a model of career success. I grew up expecting this of myself and thinking that if you do not like your life, then you must work to make it better, while helping others to be their best, as my parents did in raising me. This was my introduction to leadership that created a strong sense of self-efficacy and work ethic that I exhibited throughout my entire career. And yet,

organizational leaders would not allow me to move into the executive leadership positions that I had proven capable of performing. I could not figure out how to maneuver past the barriers to my executive leadership goal, and I have found that many women in the leadership classes that I train through my business also experience barriers that they do not know how to overcome, as they ask for my advice in every “leadership for women’ class that I train. These constant requests to advise women on how to overcome their barriers to executive leadership prompted me to enter a doctoral program in organizational leadership, to study this phenomenon and share my findings to advise women on how to achieve their career goals. The lack of effective strategies to overcome barriers to leadership roles in organizations are not just affecting my female students, I found in this study’s research that it remains a national issue.

Women accounted for 57% of the U.S. labor force according to 2018 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Samuelson et al., 2019). A seminal study has shown that 55% of women not in management positions express a desire to obtain top organizational leadership positions in their careers (Elmuti et al., 2009). In 2019, women held 26.5% of executive and senior-level leadership positions, of which 5.8% were CEOs or principal executive officers, in S&P 500 companies (Catalyst.org, 2020). These data indicated an under-representation of women in leadership who desire to be an organizational executive leader, which was found to be due to significant barriers that negatively affected women’s ability to develop and acquire leadership roles, thereby creating a gender gap to leadership role acquisition (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Previous studies found that closing this gender gap required overcoming and removing barriers to female upward organizational mobility (Samuelson et al., 2019).

Background

The barriers to women acquiring organizational leadership roles have been widely studied since the 1970's. Eagly at Northwestern University was one of the most-noted scholars from the 1980's to the early 2000's in leadership research from a social psychology perspective, studying leadership as created by social behaviors, which are learned, modeled, and reinforced in social settings (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Eagly has studied and published on the advantages and disadvantages of women leaders, the sex differences in leadership style, and barriers to women to obtaining the highest organizational leadership positions (Cotter et al., 2001). She frequently referenced the phrase "glass ceiling" which is a term that was first used in a business context in 1978 by Marianne Schriber and Katherine Lawrence in a National Press Club meeting speech to describe a discriminatory promotion pattern of denying qualified females to achieve executive leadership roles at Hewlett-Packard (Cotter et al., 2001). In 2007, Eagly stated, though perhaps prematurely, that the "glass ceiling had shattered," meaning that many barriers for women to leadership were no longer keeping them from obtaining executive leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Yet women still hold relatively low numbers of organizational leadership roles, indicating that barriers still exist as a "labyrinth" of challenges to navigate through women's career paths to leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In my literature review, I found that most research on leadership role acquisition for women in the 1980-1990's focused on identifying barriers to women obtaining leadership roles, with a concentration of study on male versus female leadership styles. Leadership role-attainment strategies could not be identified with this approach because it focused on generalizations of leadership styles that were not proven to be gender specific. Recent leadership studies examine social capital in attaining leadership roles, as it demonstrates successful strategies for capital

acquisition regardless of gender, which will be used in this study and discussed in detail in the Theoretical Framework section of this chapter (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In the past two decades, the study of how women overcame barriers to leadership is prominent in my research findings. The barriers to female career advancement stated by Eagly and Karau in 2002 are still relevant today and consist of: gender bias, workforce absence due to family needs, lack of access to leadership roles, and low self-efficacy (Flippin, 2017). Scholars and organizations, such as Catalyst.org and LeanIn.org, conduct research to understand why the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions persists despite the implementation of strategies to overcome the barriers. The strategies include imposing quota laws that are external to organizations which are created by governments to mandate organizational gender equity, as well as internal efforts inside organizations to increase mentoring and leadership training programs, some specifically for women (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Ibarra, a research scholar in leadership and career development for women, expanded Eagly's research on women in leadership by focusing on strategies to overcome the barriers to leadership for women, to which this research dissertation intends to contribute. Ibarra and other scholars have studied the effects of mentoring, leadership training, and organizational sponsorship of women for leadership role acquisition, noting that training is helpful to develop leadership skills, but sponsorship is vital to the executive level of leadership acquisition for men and women (Ibarra et al., 2010). Sponsorship has been thought of as an act of mentorship, but it is different in that mentoring requires a mentor to give feedback and suggestions for mentee development, while sponsorship requires the mentor to put their name and reputation on the line for mentee career advancement in exchange for enhanced professional reputation and credibility for the mentee's

performance that has benefited the organization. Sponsorship will be described in further detail in Chapter 2's literature review.

Statement of the Problem

Both internal and external barriers have been extensively studied concerning women's lack of leadership role acquisition, most notably by Blum et al.'s 1994 study on male-dominant industries devaluing women's leadership abilities; Eagly and Carli's 2007 study on women's leadership labyrinth of challenges; Martell, Emrich, and Robison-Cox's 2012 study on gender segregation in organizations; Chrobot-Mason et al.'s 2019 study on changing the male= leader identity in organizations; and Diehl et al.'s 2020 gender bias scale to inform organizational change. Often just called "barriers" to leadership, most strategies to overcome them have missed the nuances of cause and effect when external can cause the internal barriers, such as low self-efficacy caused by lack of opportunity to career advancement studied by Hackett and Betz in 1981. This has made it difficult for researchers and women to discern strategies to overcome the barriers when interactions between the barriers need to be recognized. I have organized and described internal and external barriers in my study, then I described personal and organizational strategies to overcome them based on past research with an emphasis on strategies that have proven to be effective.

External barriers included societal and organizational structures, practices and policies that worked against women in the workplace (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Gender bias, the view that women are less able to lead than men due to their gender, created social structures, compensation structures and personnel practices in organizations that worked against women obtaining leadership roles (Blum et al., 1994). Gender-biased views of leadership create organizational segregation in which men are viewed as most appropriate for leadership roles, giving women less

such opportunities (Martell, Emrich & Robison-Cox, 2012). Eliminating human bias is impossible to do but teaching women how to respond effectively to navigate past biases to obtain leadership roles, has proven to be effective (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Diehl et al. published the study “Making the Invisible Visible” in April 2020 noting that multiple types of barriers due to gender bias exist in the workplace and their findings suggested interventions, or strategies, to overcome them from societal levels, rather than past efforts by individuals.

Internal barriers were described as self-imposed and decreased the development of women’s self-efficacy, or belief in one’s ability to perform a job, which included letting fear overwhelm and inhibit women from taking risks and challenging themselves, often based on perceived negative messages from others that they internalized as negative self-reinforcement (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Lack of self-efficacy created a loss of leadership acquisition drive for approximately 50% of women studied early in and throughout their careers and has been identified in prior research because of gender-biased workplace discrimination, stereotyping, prejudice, excessive family demands and lack of work opportunities (Elmuti et al., 2009). Evidence-based analysis on stereotypes, self-efficacy, and psychological effects on women has lacked production of evidence-based management decisions and practices of positive messages to promote women’s leadership equity (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and describe the perceptions and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles, so that it may give insight and recommendations to women who have not yet found effective strategies to overcome their barriers to obtaining desired leadership roles. Women who participated in this interpretive case study were asked to identify any barriers or challenges that they had encountered in their careers

and what strategies they had used or had learned from others. While it is commonly believed in the U.S. that the “glass ceiling” to women’s executive role acquisition has broken, that deliberate efforts to thwart women’s success in leadership role acquisition and career advancement have ended, this study identified barriers experienced by women currently in the U.S. workforce and strategies that have proven successful for current women leaders to overcome and eliminate their barriers to achieve desired executive leadership roles.

The primary focus of this study was to understand gender-related barriers to leadership, but it also examined the intersectionality of barriers that the participants experienced due to their race, weight, and age, that expanded the barriers they had experienced. Social capital has been found to be more difficult for women than men to acquire in organizations and industries that have white, male-dominant cultures with male identities, norms, values, and non-mutual relationships. The social enterprise, such as an organization, defines its capital, so a definition of social capital based on sameness in gender and race would not afford women the same capital in organizations that define them as less than (Seierstad et al., 2020). Most of the study’s participants expressed that they believed that our society has changed since they began their careers, to encourage equality in job opportunities and punish employees who discriminate at work. This study explored barriers that the women participants experienced and the effect that multiple barriers had on their careers.

Research Questions

To understand and interpret the multiple characteristics and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles through social capital terms of field, habitus and capital within them, the following research questions were studied:

1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors, or habitus, of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their field industry or organization?
2. What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race, and any other characteristic they possess that made them lose capital?
3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them to gain capital?

Conceptual Framework

My initial conceptual framework, based on my literature review, used a Triangle symbolizing a Delta of Change in strategies for women to overcome barriers to leadership and end the gender gap in executive business leadership. I had assumed that women who had obtained executive leadership roles in business had a career goal to that end. I had also assumed that women who obtained executive leadership roles had worked in business most of their careers to gain enough social capital in their field for the role acquisition. These assumptions are located in the top and bottom of the triangle.

This study's conceptual framework included internal and external barriers for women to executive leadership role acquisition with proven strategies to overcome those barriers. The strategies for overcoming barriers to leadership roles were deliberately not related specifically to the internal and external barriers discussed in this paper because some strategies affected both types of barriers. For example, professional training helped women improve their sense of self-efficacy and created work promotion opportunities, overcoming internal (low self-efficacy) and external (no opportunity) barriers at the same time.

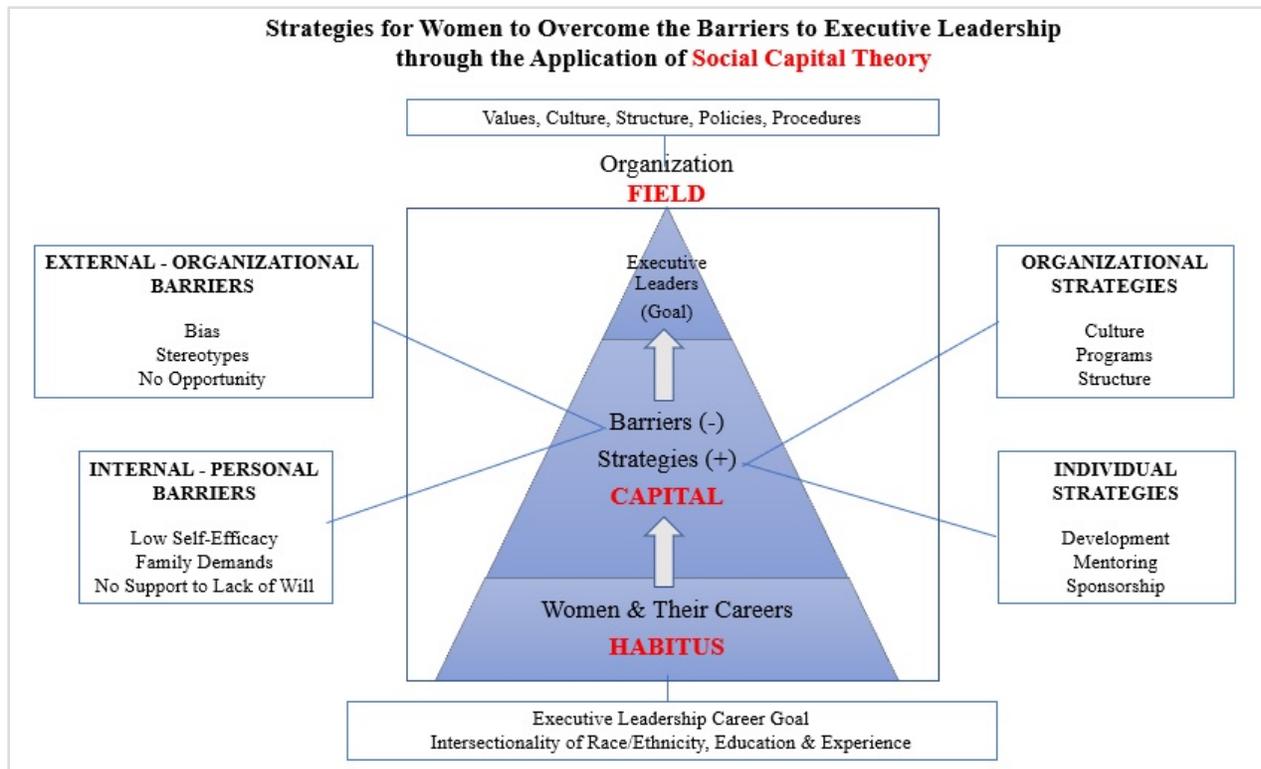


Figure 1.1. Initial Conceptual Framework

The concept map in Figure 1.1 visually demonstrates the study’s participants who acquired an executive leadership role in their careers, the concepts of barriers and strategies that they have experienced to obtain an executive leadership role, and the application of Social Capital Theory (SCT) theoretical terms to their career experiences. The SCT terms are a “field” in which one works, which is an organization or industry in this study, “habitus” are the actions that one takes toward career progression, and “capital” is social capital acquisition and use of that capital that is positive “+” when used to achieve career leadership goals and negative “-“ when the lack of capital works against obtaining a leadership career goal (SCT terms are in red in Figure 1.1). While gender barriers were the primary focus of this study, intersectionality of multiple demographic characteristics that can be additional barriers to leadership roles and career progression were examined

Significance of the Study

The gender gap in business leadership needs continued research to develop proven strategies that work for women to obtain executive leadership roles and realize their full career potential. Previous organizational research showed that when women are full partners in the workplace, as empowered by organizational leaders who value equity, diversity and inclusion, the organization had a collaborative and innovative workforce that produced increased and better business results (Daley, 2019). According to a national study through an online survey in June 2017, women still experienced external barriers to career advancement of gender bias and lack of access to leadership roles, as well as internal barriers of exiting the workforce due to inequitable family demands and low self-efficacy (Flippin, 2017). This study showed that in 2020 the participant women executive leaders had experienced the same external barriers, but they did not impose internal barriers upon themselves as the survey recipients had done, therefore obtaining executive leadership positions. Five out of seven participants achieved an executive leadership role in others' organizations, while two participants achieved their first executive roles in their own organizations.

Beaupre (2019) recently identified that women are opting out of leadership tracks due to internal and external causes, even when they outperform men. This "opting out" of a leadership career track indicates an ambition gap caused by women's early career years' experiences that contrast their leadership role ambitions in college (Beaupre, 2019). Beaupre's study found this to be primarily due to a lack of connection to the organizations' culture and leadership; feeling dissatisfied with their jobs; and expecting that upward job movement would cause less personal life satisfaction. This disconnectedness indicates a lack of professional relationship and network activities to create social capital in women's careers. The study's participants increased their

social capital inside their organizations and outside in professional associations, as well as developed their human capital skills to better compete for the promotions that they desired, not necessarily for executive role attainment. Only three out of seven participants had a career goal of achieving an executive leadership role, but all stated that they were driven by the desire to continually learn and grow in their careers and acquire jobs that challenged them, not just for a title or higher position.

While over half of women in college business programs express a desired career track to executive leadership, they are usually given human capital development for skill and knowledge improvement, not social capital development experiences. This case study explored the effectiveness of using social capital to overcome gender barriers, as well as the intersectionality of multiple barriers due to characteristics other than gender, for women to achieve career progression. To strengthen this interpretive case study, triangulation of the data in three phases of interviews was used to deeply understand the phenomenon of using social capital for career progression and executive leadership role attainment. While the participants were often encouraged to develop their human capital, they also built their social capital through their mentors who became their sponsors after seeing their hard work to improve their leadership and technical abilities. None of the participants were familiar with the concept of social capital, having never received advice or training using that term, which indicated the need to train women in social capital development, in addition to their human capital development, for career advancement and leadership role acquisition.

Strategies to Overcome the Problem

The strategies suggested by current research required both internal and external social capital development activities for and actions by women, which this research has enhanced the

understanding of their effectiveness in achieving career progression toward executive leadership roles. External activities, such as group discussion and consensus for equitable organizational structure and practices, have been shown to limit the impact of stereotypes on women (Blum et al., 1994). Both women and men who were surveyed in the last decade felt that organization-sponsored professional training, advanced education, and mentoring programs could help women be more prepared for leadership roles in conjunction with organizational requirements (Elmuti et al., 2009). In a more recent study, goal-setting strategies of quotas, targets, and reporting requirements for women in leadership were found to be successful to eliminate external barriers when key organizational stakeholders supported them (Sojo et al., 2016).

Internal personal development focused on increasing self-efficacy and power motivation through professional development training. While it has proven valuable to develop leadership skills, a study conducted by Ibarra, Carter, and Silva in 2010 found that women in business tend to be over-mentored and under-sponsored by being given advice instead of sponsorship to move forward in their career paths. Shakil and Redberg confirmed this finding in their 2017 study that men were given strategic advice about new roles and sponsored to acquire them. Sponsorship is a successful strategy to obtain executive leadership roles, which was studied further in this research as to how it accumulates social capital for leadership role acquisition to overcome external organizational barriers.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory (SCT) is the theoretical framework that I applied to my dissertation's problem of overcoming barriers for women to acquire executive leadership roles. The concept of social capital was created by Bourdieu in 1977 in "The Outline of a Theory of Practice" in which he identified three dimensions of creating personal power through economic,

cultural, and social capital (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Fitzsimmons and Callan (2016) noted that multiple models of social capital have developed since Bourdieu, and their current model used in this study integrates all previous models to demonstrate how capital for career success comes from power obtained through cultural, social, and material performance within a hierarchy. They found that CEO capital is usually attained from a track record in a specific industry and as a match for the “organizational needs for leadership” context within in an organization. A match or fit in a leadership role is subjective and culturally driven based on views of gender roles which are affected by gender bias that can reduce CEO capital for women.

Social capital theory applies Bourdieu’s epistemological categories of field, habitus, and capital to explain what, when, and why gender affects executive role acquisition (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Field refers to the structure in which one operates, such as an organization. Habitus is how we act, think, feel, and represent ourselves to others. Habitus forms in childhood by listening to and observing others to interpret how one acquires social capital and continues to develop throughout one’s career within organizations. A lack of habitus in childhood can be developed in adulthood during one’s career. Capital are the material and symbolic goods that one seeks in life, in this study it is accumulated and used to move upward in one’s career to executive leadership.

Two previous studies by Fitzsimmons and Callan in 2014 and 2016 applied a capital perspective on how men and women were appointed to leadership positions in medium to large corporations. They found that organizations that are dominated by male leaders who impose their views about capital without organizational resistance, use field, habitus, and capital tools to narrow women’s acceptable leadership behaviors, thereby limiting women’s developmental career opportunities and executive leadership role acquisition. This was evidenced by longer times until

promotions throughout women's careers as compared to men, especially at senior levels, even though the women outperformed the men. Fitzsimmons and Callan (2016) posited that the challenge is to shift this gendered way of thinking to produce more capital acquisition for women. They stated that shifting one's vision of the social world and the gender roles within it takes time and collaboration of individuals within organizations, communities, and governments to create perceptions of capital valuation and accumulation irrespective of gender.

Fitzsimmons et al. (2014) found that building social capital has proven to be more useful to career advancement than actual work performance for men and women. They studied the timing and structure of career experiences which differ for male and female CEOs and have shown significant implications for the timing of training and development of organizational leaders early in careers. Fitzsimmons et al. (2014) surmised that early work experiences developed self-efficacy that enabled and multiplied capital accumulation throughout a career. From a social capital development perspective, they assessed that an early career focus on leadership training and development can fill experiential gaps from childhood, compensating for a lack of habitus. This demonstrated that human capital development and social capital work together in building habitus.

Social capital accumulation is not linear nor simple and withdrawal from the workforce has been shown to cause women to miss critical roles and erode their existing capital, while those who did not take an extended leave continued acquiring knowledge, skills, and social capital for higher level roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Fitzsimmons and Callan found in their 2016 study that early career capital-building with high-profile clients, assignments and projects is a key strategy for women maintaining equal career development to men and access to build further capital to overcome selection and promotion gender bias. A recent business case expanded the

importance of this research by finding that supporting women's leadership quantified organizational financial performance and provided alternate non-gendered conceptualizations of capital valued for leadership role acquisition (Hoobler et al., 2018).

Networking has also been a proven strategy to develop better work assignments which produced higher social capital potential. Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that successful managers spent 70% more time engaged in networking and 10% more time in routine communication activities within organizations than less successful managers, thereby building more social capital. Yet women are less likely to network internally for leadership opportunities than to accept change management roles that are prone to failure and can undermine self-efficacy capital development and reputation for future CEO roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). While gender egalitarian cultures have valued female leadership and given women role assignments to develop their leadership potential, changing non-egalitarian perceptions and cultures requires more studies of women leader successes (Hoobler et al., 2018). This study described seven women leaders' successes within their fields, to inform women who are seeking executive leadership roles.

Overview of the Research Methodology

A qualitative research study was conducted in three phases. Phase one started with an online survey distributed through LinkedIn connections to share with women who currently held an executive leadership role in a business. From these survey responses, I identified who was willing to participate in phase two of one-on-one interviews and a phase three focus group discussion. The participants were asked what barriers they had experienced or had seen other women experience in obtaining leadership roles and what strategies they used or saw others use to overcome those barriers in all three phases to triangulate the data. The demographic and

descriptive data was coded and categorized into themes in the research analysis. I found that sponsorship, networking, mentoring, and self-efficacy development by overcoming barriers were methods to overcome gender bias in leadership role attainment. The intersectionality of race, weight, and age were characteristics on which the participants were stereotyped in addition to their gender barriers experienced.

An interpretive case study approach was used to collect data on multiple participant cases. This approach helped to construct an in-depth understanding of women executive leaders' professional experiences to apply social capital theory epistemological categories of field, habitus, and capital. This approach helped me to identify themes and chronology of life experiences, as well as work strategies that proved useful in overcoming actual and perceived barriers to leadership role acquisition.

Key Term Definitions

The following definitions provide a uniform understanding of terms used throughout the study.

Barrier – challenge or obstacle to career goal attainment (Blum et al., 1994).

Bias – a belief of those who are like (positive) and unlike (negative) oneself, in this study gender bias is preferring a leader that is male, not female (Koch et al., 2015).

Capital Accumulation (also called “capital”) – amassing value objectively or subjectively within an organization (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Diversity – different genders, races, cultures, values in organizational leaders (Combs, 2016).

Equitable Organizational Structure – treating all people fairly and equally in an organization (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016).

Executive Leader – directs employees in an organization to fulfill organizational goals at the highest organizational leadership level (Beeson & Valerio, 2012).

Gender Equity – men and women receive equal treatment (Daley, 2019).

Gender Gap – inequitable proportion of leaders due to gender (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2019).

Glass Ceiling – invisible barrier or obstacle to advancing to the top executive level of an organizational hierarchy (Chin, 2011).

Intersectionality – the simultaneous interaction of multiple social constructs of gender, race, class, education, experience, and sexuality that effect behavior and create expectations of social inequality (Atewologun, 2018).

Leadership Labyrinth – path of obstacles due to gender barriers for women in obtaining an organizational leadership role (Eagly & Carly, 2007).

Mentoring – counseling and advising for professional development and personal growth (Beaupre, 2019).

Networking – cultivating relationships for career growth (Ely et al, 2011).

Organizational Segregation – assigning organizational roles based on gendered stereotypes (Martell et al., 2012).

Self-Efficacy – belief in oneself, confidence based on past experience and feedback that motivates for career progression (Bandura, 1977).

Social Capital – a measure of value or power in a social structure (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Social Psychology – how people’s thoughts, feelings and behaviors are determined by their perceptions and experiences (Braun et al., 2017).

Sponsorship – recommend someone for a role and taking responsibility for their performance (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Stereotype – simplified image or idea of someone’s characteristic not based on the whole individual (Koch et al., 2015).

Summary

Barriers to leadership continue to be a struggle for many women who desire executive leadership roles in their careers, and the lack of knowledge and skills to overcome barriers continues the gender gap in leadership in the U.S. (Diehl et al., 2020). Many research studies have been conducted in the last half-century to understand the barriers and have made suggestions of human capital development, such as professional development, mentoring, and training for women to overcome their barriers, but the gender gap remains despite the findings and recommendations from previous studies (Ibarra et al., 2010). This research study applied a new theoretical approach of social capital acquisition to understand how executive-level women leaders have successfully overcome their barriers. I used an interpretive case study design to analyze and document the findings to inform those who are struggling to achieve their leadership career goals.

By taking a social capital theory approach to understanding executive women leaders’ experiences and perspectives, this research expanded social capital theory application in organizations, combined gender gap research with the intersectionality of personal characteristic to gender barriers, and extended previous human capital development activities, such as training to develop social capital through networking and acquiring sponsorship. One intention for the future of this work is to disseminate findings to educate women in becoming executive leaders. Another intention is to inform organizations of the barriers that their employees are experiencing,

despite past efforts to increase women's human capital, and achieve sustainable development of gender equality, which will support organizational growth. In turn, this can address and close the organizational leadership gender gap in the U.S. by informing both women and organizations about the leadership labyrinth of barriers for women and social capital strategies that overcome their barriers to obtain executive leadership positions. Table 1.1 provides a summary of this chapter and the study.

Table 1.1 Study Summary

Background	Gender barriers to executive leadership exist with strategies that overcome them for women’s career progression and executive role attainment
Problem	Women accounted for 57% of the U.S. workforce and less than 27% of executive business leaders and less than 6% of CEOs in 2019
Study Purpose	Social Capital Implications for the Gender Gap in Organizational Leadership
Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors, or habitus, of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their field industry or organization?2. What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race, and any other characteristic they possess that made them lose capital?3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them to gain capital?
Literature Review Concepts	Internal Barriers of Low Self-Efficacy, Inequitable Family Demands, and Lack of Support creates Lack of Will External Barriers of Bias, Stereotypes, and Lack of Opportunity Individual Strategies of Social Capital Development, Professional Training and Education, Mentoring, and Sponsorship Organizational Strategies of Cultural Adaptation, Mentoring with Sponsorship, Hiring & Promotion, Succession Planning, Diverse & Equitable Structure, and Societal Mandates through Quota Legislation
Significance	Implications to end the gap and create more sustainable, equitable, and diverse organizational leadership, as well as enable women to achieve career goals
Theoretical Application Methodology	Social Capital Theory (SCT) constructs of field, habitus, and capital Qualitative Case Study

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter summarizes a literature review on gender barriers for women, experienced internally through the personalization of barriers that are imposed externally by others in organizations and society. Many previous studies about women leaders have focused on identifying the barriers to women to inform organizational change to eliminate the barriers and promote more women into executive leadership roles. Focusing on problems and less on solutions has proven ineffective in developing significantly higher numbers of female executive leaders. I hope to extend previous research by identifying strategies that women in executive leadership roles have used to successfully overcome gender barriers. In recent years, Social Capital Theory (SCT) has been applied increasingly to understand not only what women's successful strategies are, but also why the strategies work, to inform aspiring women leaders for future success (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Search Methods

A literature review was conducted to analyze existing empirical research on gender barriers to women, why they persist in an increasingly diverse workforce in the U.S., and effective strategies to overcome the barriers. The sources were identified using the following online research tools: Google Scholar, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Scholarly journals were accessed online through Academy of Management (AOM) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Emerald Insight, Science Direct, Oxford Academic, and SAGE companion. Online searches were conducted using the following keywords and phrases: women leaders, barriers to leadership, barriers for women, gender bias, gender inequity, gender barriers, organizational barriers, strategies for women leaders, leadership role acquisition, mentoring, sponsorship, diverse

leadership, bias, stereotypes, self-efficacy, family demands, social capital theory, and intersectionality in leadership.

An historical review of SCT was conducted starting with Marx's views of society power structure in the 1920's, then Bourdieu's use of SCT and his research in the 1970s, and the application of SCT to business and management organizations in the 1980s to the 1990s by Coleman and Lin. Today there are many variations of SCT, this study will apply SCT to organizations to explain the lack of parity in female leadership role acquisition in United States companies and how women can strategize development of social capital to overcome the barriers.

Barriers

While this research chapter was being written, a qualitative study was published by Diehl et al. (2020) that measures women leaders' perceptions of gender barriers, identifying the subtle and overt manifestations in organizations. Diehl et al. (2020) created *A Gender Bias Scale for Women Leaders* that was validated from a national sample of executive leaders from higher education, faith-based organizations, physicians, and attorneys, which identified organizational intervention to minimize the negative effects of gender barriers (see Appendix B). While the U.S. Women's Movement from 1960-1970's and the recent #MeToo and Time's Up movements have put a spotlight on gender bias and overt gender discrimination in the U.S., workplace inequalities persist in more subtle and covert patterns of structure and practices, that favor men and minimize women's leadership opportunities (Diehl et al., 2020). The external behaviors in organizations are internalized in women when they reduce their executive leadership career aspirations, and this is one of the key reasons for the continuation of the gender gap in U.S. corporate executive leadership. Gender bias imposed externally in organizations and in society has been studied as to how it creates psychological internal barriers in women.

Internal Personal Barriers

Gender bias affects women internally in how they are motivated to pursue both leadership roles in organizations and equitable family roles in their personal lives, as well as, externally within organizations in their career development and sense of organizational fit. The internalization of external negative experiences makes the barriers that women face interrelated as studies have found that when others hold women back in their careers, women start to hold themselves back as well (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Sheryl Sandberg wrote *Lean In* in 2009 to encourage women to work past external barriers by overcoming their internal barriers. Marissa Hoy wrote *Lean Out* in 2011 to encourage awareness and efforts to overcome the external barriers imposed on women by organizations and society. I sought to explore both types of barriers in this study, as the internal barriers are often caused by the external barriers.

The internal barriers found in the literature review that continue to keep women from obtaining organizational leadership roles are low self-efficacy or low confidence in oneself, inequitable family demands that are accepted or self-imposed, and lack of work support in which women do not seek the support that they need to progress in their careers or when they assert their need, they are punished for it with loss of credibility in their jobs. In the sections that follow, I discuss each of the internal barriers in further detail and cite the studies that support them.

Low Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in oneself that motivates behaviors of initiation and execution toward a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy is developed over one's lifetime through life experiences and learning and it is diminished when expectations of success prove too difficult due to obstacles. Gender bias creates obstacles that hold back women from advancing in their careers and historically provide women with lower leader evaluations than their male colleagues. Chemers, Watson, and May (2000)

found in their study that work evaluations composed of ratings from peers and superiors are strongly related to one's sense of efficacy where gender-biased lower ratings for women develop low self-efficacy in women more often than men who strive to attain leadership roles.

Gist (1987) found that when women have no female role models in organizations, internal barriers to performance can become significant even when they have high self-efficacy based on skills and relationships, but their self-efficacy is not verified as valued in the organization. This was found in research over 30 years ago as well as in this study's findings. Self-imposed internal barriers develop when women stop trying to work toward career goals by limiting their skill acquisition, expending less effort at work, and accepting reduced opportunity from external barriers (Gist, 1987). Elmuti et al. (2009) studied these challenges and found that many women lose their drive to obtain executive leadership positions in organizations once they achieve a management position due to obstacles of discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, and lack of opportunities that cause slower career advancement and less stretch or challenging assignments for women than men.

Gender role socialization adds to lowering self-efficacy when women underrate themselves after they speak up or try to contribute and then get interrupted by men (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Gender roles at home also decrease women's self-efficacy when balancing work and personal demands seems difficult or impossible due to organizations that do not provide flexibility and individual ownership of work time.

Inequitable Family Demands. Many women with families have more responsibilities in their personal lives than their spouses, as many women are the primary caregiver for their immediate and extended families while working a full-time job (Flippin, 2017). Eagly and Carli (2007) found that this was most stated by women when they are asked what holds them back from

working toward professional leadership roles. Eagly and Carli (2007) also found that career derailment and reduced earnings occur when women take more days off, work part-time, and take extended leaves of absence due to family demands. Even when women balance work and personal demands to put in the time for promotion, they are often not considered by decision makers for promotions because they have children of ages that demand evening care, while the same is not considered for men (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Eagly and Carli's (2007) study of women's career paths to leadership realized that their journey is not a linear path, but a labyrinth of obstacles to overcome. They observed that managers tend to advance more rapidly in organizational hierarchies, or get on the fast track, when they do extensive social capital development more than their skillful performance alone. Women's struggle with balancing family and work often creates a lack of investment in social capital development in professional networks acquired by socializing inside and outside of their organizations during non-work hours. Eagly and Carli (2007) found that women in predominantly male industries often face the obstacle of being excluded from masculine activities in their organizations, that makes social capital development more difficult for women than men. Internal barriers for women form from external organizational barriers when they are not imposed on working men and erode self-efficacy for working women. Exclusion and double standards create a lack of work support that women experience and men do not, further eroding their career development.

Lack of Support creates Lack of Will. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2019) studied the personal internalization of benevolent sexism, a form of gender stereotyping at work that occurs when male leaders try to protect women from dangerous work in organizations, causing women to receive less challenging and high-profile work assignments than men, therefore trying less for

roles that would make them be viewed as a leader. They found that those women who do get challenging roles can burn out trying to prove themselves or become so dissatisfied that they must work so much harder for similar recognition to men who simply do their jobs. Research of these gender stereotypes has shown them to be psychologically harming and negatively affecting women's behavior by lowering their sense of self-efficacy (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019).

It may seem that the easy answer to overcome these barriers is for women to dispute inequitable treatment, but Eagly and Carli (2007) found that when women behave assertively to disagree or question leaders who have behaved stereotypically, they lose influence at work, whereas men gain influence and are viewed as leaders when exhibiting these assertive behaviors. Eagly and Carli (2007) called this "women behaving like men," which was found to be socially unacceptable in organizations. Social role congruity studies by Tibbs et al. in 2016 and Braun et al. in 2017 concluded that gender stereotypes persist in viewing women as followers and men as leaders. Authenticity is valued in male leaders, but not in female leaders, as women who behave authentically in organizations are often perceived as lower-performing than those who fit in the range of acceptable behaviors (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). These internal barriers persist due to external organizational barriers in their cultures and structures that create and sustain the labyrinth to career success for women.

External Organizational Barriers

External barriers for women occur in society and in organizations that implement structures, policies, and practices that moderate the emergence of women into executive leadership positions (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). These form a career labyrinth, creating a longer path of organizational obstacles from barriers to leadership for women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The causes of organizational obstacles are often unrecognized behaviors of bias and

stereotypes. Gardiner & Tiggemann found in their 1999 study that when women comprise less than 25% of an organization's management level, females are at their highest risk of stereotypical appraisal, but when they represent larger numbers of organizational leaders, the perception of appraisal eliminates gender as a factor (as cited in Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

Bias & Stereotypes. There are widely shared unconscious and conscious mental associations, or biases, about leaders, preferring men over women, which maintains more males in leadership roles than women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Even people who say that they are not traditional thinkers subscribe to traditional gender roles as perpetuated by society and evidenced in workplace interactions, hiring algorithms, and performance reviews (Daley, 2019). Gender bias has been shown in studies to adversely affect women in male-dominated organizations and industries whether they have male or female leaders who decide on promotions to leadership roles. Biased role stereotypes can be prescriptive beliefs about what social groups ought to do and descriptive beliefs about what men and women do (Richardson & Loubier, 2008). These gendered views of leaders create double binds when women exhibit the same leadership skills as men to obtain a leadership role, but women do not advance to leadership roles comparable to the number of men because women's behaviors are judged unlike a leader (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

A qualitative study conducted from 1989-2009 in the largest U.S. corporations, found that male chief executive officers (CEOs) affected the consideration of their successor's gender by gatekeeping who they deemed worthy of CEO leadership development, which has excluded women from consideration for CEO positions (Dwivedi, Joshi, & Misangyi, 2018). Another study found that women were typically considered to be better team players than men when they exhibited a relational work style, but when women behaved in an individualistic leadership style, they were criticized as not being a team player nor a potential leader, whereas men were praised

for their individuality (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Another double bind was observed when women were not recognized appropriately for their work or contribution, so they may have needed to self-promote to get the recognition that they deserve. When women self-promoted, they were seen as less likable than men who did the same and were viewed as competent (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019).

Double binds promote men as being better leaders than women with similar leadership ability and this limits women's promotability to executive leadership roles. Historically, women receive less promotions than men and less opportunities for advancement into management positions than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). A gender-biased view of leadership through a maleness lens prohibits women as being seen as leaders at every level of an organization, requiring a leadership transition strategy implementation for success (Dwivedi, Joshi, & Misangyi, (2018). The leader= male lens creates and sustains gender-biased social structures with compensation and personnel practices that perpetuate organizations working against women obtaining leadership roles (Blum et al., 1994). While organizational leaders speak of supporting diversity and gender-equity in its leadership ranks, this is not accomplished with statements alone. Stereotypes of an effective leader must be gender-neutral for women to obtain and be perceived as successful in a leadership role (Dwivedi, Joshi, & Misangyi, 2018). Organizational hierarchy and structural mechanisms need to be systemically designed to promote more women to leadership roles. Without a structure to implement diverse organizational leadership, barriers from bias and stereotypes will continue to produce a lack of opportunity for women's executive leadership role acquisition.

Lack of Opportunity. While the term "the glass ceiling" has been replaced with the "labyrinth of leadership" for women, coined by Eagly & Carli in 2007. Women's lack of career

advancement to leadership positions is so pervasive in the U.S. that there are multiple phrases for it, including leaky pipelines, sticky floors, and glass cliffs (Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers, 2017). A *leaky pipeline* is when women are less likely to obtain a leadership role than men consistently over time within in an organization. *Sticky floor* refers to less promotion opportunities for women than men that holds women back from progressing in their careers. *Glass cliff* is when women move up in their careers to an executive leadership role that has a high risk of failure, that men do not want to take for that reason, which results in the female leader being fired for failing at an impossible assignment. Pasquerella & Clauss-Ehlers (2017) conclude that “falling off the glass cliff” makes it even harder for women to get other executive leadership role opportunities.

Career advancement barriers are often created through organizational segregation from the collective biased behaviors that view men as leaders and women in supporting roles, giving women less opportunity to obtain executive leadership roles in organizations (Martell, Emrich & Robison-Cox, 2012). Social capital has been shown in studies to overcome this segregation and is gained through strategic networking that builds relationships with people who can help build a path to future leadership roles. Strategic networking involves selling oneself to attain desired career roles and provides resources and information to apply strategically as to where and how to sell oneself (Ibarra, 2017). Ibarra (2017) has found that strategic networking is harder for women in environments with male-dominated organizational leaders that tend to promote similar people due to human bias. Women have a harder time developing strategic networks because it takes more time to function in two separate spheres of work and social activities. Men often combine work contacts with personal activities, such as playing golf or going for dinner, which creates trust and network faster among men. How can women improve their social capital with these gendered barriers? How does the intersectionality of other or multiple characteristics create new

barriers or add to existing gender barriers? What is the effect of an intersection of barriers on a social capital strategy to achieve an executive leadership role?

Intersectionality of Barriers to Leadership

Multiple barriers that individual employees experience simultaneously have been studied as to their intersecting effect on leadership opportunities and were found to increase marginalization of those individuals, as well as negatively influence organizational implementation reform, performance perception, and upward mobility opportunities (Breslin et al., 2017). While diverse organizational leadership is often proclaimed by executives to be desired and is found to be financially beneficial to organizations, organizational structures, policies, and practices fail to demonstrate diverse and equitable implementation. Working in organizations that claimed to value diversity and inclusion, the women of color participants in this study received biased feedback from co-workers concerning their race, age, and weight, which marginalized them briefly until they worked harder to improve their human and social capital.

Intersectionality is a process of marginalization consisting of mindset and language that was examined individually and organizationally by identifying the intersection of multiple barriers experienced by this study's participants (Atewologun, 2018). Atewologun (2018) states that empirical research on individual intersectionality aids in the understanding of how women identify themselves as leaders and connect within the systemic dynamic of an organizational power structure. Studying intersectionality in the workplace and the sustaining of social inequalities through power relations is called "systemic intersectionality" and is key to understanding how to transform organizations into diverse leadership development systems (Choo & Ferree, 2010). This study sought to understand power relations created and sustained through

social capital by analyzing participants' concepts of power related to the acquisition of their executive leadership roles.

Social Capital Theory

Theoretical conceptualization of capital began with Marx's 1933 definition of capital as surplus value created by productivity and the process to capture surplus value in production (Lin, 2001). Human capital theory evolved from this theory as what an individual knows, has skills and experience in, and is usually produced from development of and investment in an employee, such as training (Novak & Bocarnea, 2008). Novak and Bocarnea (2008) posit that social capital is related to human capital because they both are created between people in the form of information, leads, ideas, and power. They found in their study that within a hierarchical social structure, social capital is an outcome of opportunity for gain and reciprocity, such as advancement to a leadership position that develops an individual while benefiting an organization. A dependent relationship exists between human and social capital in that the more social capital a manager has, the higher their human capital investment will be to continue to develop more opportunities for social capital for the individual and the organization (Burt, 1997).

Social capital theory (SCT) was first developed by Bourdieu when he wrote about the relationship between social structure, culture and action that creates symbolic power (Swartz, 2012). Bourdieu's work became widely known in the 1970's when he examined how stratified hierarchical social systems persisted and were reproduced without resistance and conscious recognition by its members. Bourdieu identified power relations among institutions, groups, and individuals by categorizing three dimensions of creating personal power through economic, cultural, and social capital (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). He studied how members unwittingly reproduce organizational social stratification while pursuing strategies to achieve their interests

within organizations (Swartz, 2012). This dissertation studied how women changed their economic and cultural capitals by building social capital to create personal power. Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) studied black women and their acquisition of economic self-sufficiency to build social capital for leadership role attainment.

In recent years, social capital theory has been studied by academic sociologists and different types of social theories have emerged, including Coleman's Social Theory (Coleman, 1990). In *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman (1990) stated that human capital and social capital are complementary as the human skills gained from experience and knowledge can create social status to receive social capital. While Coleman (1990) focused his research on rational actions to gain social capital, he found that social capital depends upon the individual (habitus) and their environment (field).

Bourdieu's theory of social capital is the foundation of Coleman's social theory as it integrates organizational hierarchy related to individual capital for career success that comes from power obtained through cultural, social, and material performance within a hierarchy (as cited in Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Lin (2001) combined individual and organizational social capital when he found that using the resources in one's social networks created relational and informational ties in the organization's network to generate a return for the individual, as well as the organization. The return to the individual can be a structural position in an organization (existing or another) which can further grow the individual's social capital and causal sequences of capital development (Lin, 2001). Individuals with wide-ranging networks and high-status contacts tend to find better jobs and are recruited without looking for a job (Lin et al., 2010). This occurs when the individual's social capital is viewed as benefiting the organization and not necessarily a reflection of the individual's potential work contribution (Belliveau et al., 1996).

The benefit is the actionable use of the individual's social capital to build the organization's social capital internally and externally (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital builds social networks of understanding and collaboration in organizations, which is key to individual and company performance (Cross & Parker, 2004). This is especially vital to organizational economic growth as U.S. organizations are becoming "flatter" or less hierarchical to compete in a rapidly changing technological economy. With baby boomers retiring and current U.S. demographics diversifying, there is a leadership talent shortage now which is projected to continue for many more decades, so it makes sense to promote female managers into leadership positions after the organizations pay time and money to develop them (Richardson & Loubier, 2008).

Social Capital Theories Related to Barriers for Women

Tie Theories & Embeddedness. Social capital has been studied and found to be sourced from objective actual physical connections or ties in a social network, like an organization, as well as subjective perceptions of relationships (Kwon & Adler, 2014). Kwon and Adler (2014) found that subjective perceptions of others can produce more social capital influence than objective physical ties from the amount of access to resources one has. Their study distinguished *having* social capital from *using* social capital because having access to social capital does not guarantee career mobilization to an executive leadership role. Bonding from relational ties is the term used to describe *having* social capital built from relationships with others, while bridging is the term for understanding the opportunities that relationships create for social capital development, and lastly, linking is the term for *using* social capital to accomplish career leadership goals (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006). Social capital begins and ends with relational networking to create ties among people in organizations.

Granovetter was the first to study in the 1970's the strength of weak ties outside of one's organization that creates social capital of information and unknown resources, such as job openings (as cited in Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Granovetter asserted that weak ties are better than strong ties of established relationships in creating timing, access, and referral for career advancement, which in turn multiplies social capital development. Lin expanded this concept in the 1980-2000's that the strength of the tie was not as important for career success as the bridging to connect the ties in a network for social capital development.

This opened SCT into the study of its dimensions of structure and content, to explain how content acquisition can overcome a lack of organizational structure for women to develop social capital that enable their career success in acquiring executive leadership roles. A model for social capital theory of career success was developed in the early 2000's to understand the value of the number of contacts obtained through networking with those in other functions and at higher organizational levels (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Seibert et al.'s study found that these number and location factors were key to SCT career success in the timely access to information for improved job performance, more access to material resources for career promotion, and sponsorship to gain legitimacy and visibility in organizations to obtain the top leadership positions. Having multiple mentors was found in Seibert et al.'s study to reap the greatest career benefits from acquiring social capital. Receiving mentoring is especially helpful for those who are not motivated to develop social capital, like many women, when a mentor's experienced mentoring sponsorship is modeled for others' career progression.

Not all individuals are motivated by self-interest to develop social capital to obtain leadership roles (Kwon & Adler, 2014). Kwon and Adler's research conducted throughout the 2000's has shown that trust, values, norms, and community membership are key motivators to

build social capital. Kwon and Adler's study found that a lack of these motivators affects the willingness to develop one's social capital and to be willing to sponsor another for promotion to a leadership position, especially if the mentee does not assertively pursue the position. Kwon and Adler stated in their 2014 social capital study that future research is needed on the social capital implications of gender inequality, that the reproduction of inequalities due to bias creates cumulative disadvantage in a career, and how challenging biases can create advantages, such as career progression of women. Kwon and Adler concluded that a lack of social capital acquisition results when biased leaders want to keep the highest leadership roles for themselves and people like them in organizations, which perpetuates bias in organizations structurally.

Social capital development resources are embedded structurally in organizational systems and networks and relationally in personal relationships among individuals (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Nahapiet and Ghoshal found that both structural and relational forms of social capital can counteract biased experiences in organizations when experiences are deliberately designed with the purpose of building all employee social capital for the betterment of organizations. U.S. corporations have been studied in recent years for their organizational hierarchies and their cultural impact on social capital development as it relates to male and female leadership development and acquisition.

Network Theory of Corporate Leadership. The link between access to social capital and the use of it was studied by Lin in 2001 to identify how leaders benefit from social capital. CEO capital is usually attained from a track record in a specific industry and as a contextual match for the organizational needs for leadership (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Match, commonly referred to as fit, is subjectively and culturally driven based on views of gender roles and bias within organizations. Studies have shown a link between employees' social capital and

career advancement through better access to information and career sponsorship (Swanson et al., 2020). Swanson et al. (2020) found that building social capital improves individual and organizational performance.

Bourdieu's social capital theory applies epistemological categories of field, habitus and capital which can explain how gender affects executive leadership role acquisition (as cited in Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Fitzsimmons and Callan's study applied Bourdieu's categories of field as the structure in which one operates, such as an organization or industry; habitus is how we act, think, feel, and represent ourselves to others, which we begin learning how to acquire by observing others in childhood; and capital is the material and symbolic goods that one seeks in life, in this study to advance upward in a career path to an executive leadership role.

Fitzsimmons and Callan also applied Bourdieu's SCT framework in another 2016 study on how men and women were appointed to leadership positions in medium-large corporations. Fitzsimmons and Callan found that organizations that are dominated by male leaders who impose their views about capital without organizational resistance, use field, habitus, and capital tools to narrow women's acceptable leadership behaviors, thereby limiting women's developmental career opportunities and executive leadership role acquisition. Fitzsimmons and Callan noted evidence of longer times until promotions throughout women's careers as compared to men, especially at senior levels, even though women perform higher than the men. Fitzsimmons and Callan identified that the organizational challenge is to shift this gendered way of thinking to produce more capital acquisition for women. Fitzsimmons and Callan observed that shifting an organizational culture and the gender roles within it takes time and collaboration of individuals within organizations, communities, and governments to create perceptions of capital valuation and accumulation irrespective of gender to generate career advancement equitably.

Strategies for Women Related to Social Capital without Theories

Career Advancement. Self-concept as a leader, or having a leadership identity, makes one more likely to seek leadership experiences and roles in an upward career direction (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2019). Commonly referred to as self-motivation, this is not only internal but also an external social process in which others in an organization see someone as a leader or potential leader, contributing to their social capital development and accumulation (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Fitzsimmons and Callan (2019) found in many of their research studies in the past decade that organizations tend to focus on developing individual human capital without addressing their social capital needs for career success. This creates multiple barriers to career advancement for individuals who face organizational gender barriers, as their social standing creates less access to developmental pathways to leadership positions that multiply over time (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2019). In their study on gender disparity in the C-suite, Fitzsimmons et al. (2014) found that building social capital had been more useful to career advancement than actual work performance and that the timing and structure of career experiences differ for male and female CEOs, which have shown significant implications for training and development of organizational leaders. Fitzsimmons et al. surmised that early work experiences develop self-efficacy which enable capital accumulation throughout one's career and leadership training and development early in one's career can fill experiential gaps from childhood, compensating for a lack of habitus, and starts lifelong career social capital development.

Capital accumulation is not linear nor simple and withdrawal from the workforce, as many women do during childbearing years, has been shown to cause women to miss critical roles and erode their existing capital, while those who do not take an extended leave continue acquiring knowledge, skills, and social capital for higher level roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

Fitzsimmons and Callan's study found that early career capital-building with high-profile clients, assignments and projects is a proven strategy for women to maintain comparable career development to men and access further capital to overcome selection and promotion gender bias. Hoobler et al. (2018) created a business case that supports that women leaders create higher organizational financial performance and provide alternate conceptualizations of capital value for leadership role acquisition.

Social capital development through networking is also a proven strategy to develop better work assignments which continue to produce higher social capital potential. Seibert et al. (2001) found that successful managers spend 70% more time engaged in networking and 10% more time in routine communication activities within organizations than less successful managers.

Unfortunately, women are less likely to network internally for leadership opportunities than to accept change management roles that are prone to failure, therefore, can undermine self-efficacy capital development and reputation for future CEO roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). While gender egalitarian cultures value female leadership and give women role assignments to develop their leadership potential, proven practices to change gender-biased organizational structures and cultures requires more studies of women leader successes (Hoobler et al., 2018).

Organizational Structure. A structural approach to transfers and exchanges of relationships in hierarchical organizations is key to understanding and succeeding in informal networks of collaboration inside and outside of organizations (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2010). Professional opportunities are often developed through relevant relationships that have useful resources to increase social capital (Baker in Muir, 2003). Muir states that it is critical for individuals to strategize their work assignments and social capital acquisition to have successful

careers in organizations that no longer offer lifelong employment nor defined career paths through the maximization of networking, teamwork, and group dynamics.

Selection behaviors of employers can eliminate employee social capital even after social networks are used to get the first job in an organization (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2010).

Discrimination is often not personal nor intentional, but structural in that it perpetuates social practices that maintain less diverse senior leaders (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2019). Balkundi and Kilduff (2006) found that understanding an organization's social structure and consequential decisions is key to thriving and moving forward in one's individual career path in an organization. Their study showed that understanding is created by awareness of organization's relations, employees' involvement and their social connections, and social structures. They posited that leadership is itself the managing of social relationships within organizational structures.

According to Lin (1999), social capital makes a significant contribution to role attainment beyond one's personal resources and he stated that conceptualization through further study is warranted to further expand on social capital theory. Lin's 1999 research found that women tend to use informal channels for role attainment, which puts them at a disadvantage of obtaining highest leadership roles and keeps women in lower positions. He also found that the status of contacts and tapping into the social capital of others, such as sponsors, makes a major difference in role acquisition. Lin also found that inequality of social capital for women creates an additional barrier to leadership role acquisition by limiting opportunities for career mobilization for promotion. Lin suggested in 1999 that the lack of supply of qualified women for top leadership positions had been addressed with mentoring and professional development programs in mid-management levels for women, now the demand side of the labor market must follow in the recruitment activities of organizations comparable to the social capital of networking and social

skills of potential women leaders. Executive leaders require high social capital, more than human capital of education, training, and skills, to work with people inside and outside of the organization, hence the need for women to develop their social capital throughout their whole careers to acquire and be able to use that power for executive role attainment.

Strategies to Overcome Barriers

Research on the barriers for women to obtain leadership roles often suggests strategies that have been used to overcome the barriers. This literature review includes strategies that have been previously studied and what areas have been identified for future research. These research findings are summarized into two categories of individual habitus and organizational field strategies.

Individual Strategies

Individual strategies are activities that individuals do to achieve their career development goals, especially for executive leadership role acquisition. The literature has indicated strategies of developing social capital, as well as, receiving leadership training, mentoring and sponsorship to acquire an executive leadership position.

Social Capital Development. To overcome the low number of women in leadership positions in organizations, growing new professional and personal relationships outside, as well as, inside organizations, builds social capital that produces sustainable value to gain positive career outcome (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Being strategic in developing social capital through mentoring relationships gains access to resources, information, and sponsorship that has been found to enable career progression (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Strategic networks can be built external to organizations through industry associations, alumni groups, and professional networking groups (Ibarra, 2017). Ibarra states that taking on bigger and more visible roles

external to one's organization and speaking up about those roles to be known and seen by others as a leader, is crucial to this strategy's success, eventually leading to higher level internal leader connections through external networking contacts. To gain access to bigger roles, human capital development from professional training, education, and mentoring creates more work opportunities to develop personally and add to the organization's skill base. These individual strategies were used by all of this study's participants to increase their social capital to work past gender barriers and excel to higher technical and leadership positions.

Leadership Development Training. Building human capital through leadership development and efficacy training enables women to build skills, coping abilities, and gives them exposure to opportunities that could minimize women's barriers to success (Gist, 1987). Studies in positive work cultures have shown the importance of investing in human capital development to develop the skills to create social capital for career advancement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). I have found in my professional training classes that training women to control their reactions to gender stereotypes by responding effectively with positive reframing of biased conversations, creates more productive discussions and work outcomes. Training specifically in assigned leadership roles helps women self-identity as a leader through the validation of others while developing leadership skills and abilities, thereby increasing women's sense of self-efficacy (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019).

Mentoring. Having a higher-level role model to strongly identify with helps achieve a similar success level (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2019). Purposeful and specific feedback given by mentors helps gain knowledge on how to build social capital for career progression (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers (2017) identified that focusing on task achievement and performance outcome is what male leaders do while female leaders focus more

on relationships and work satisfaction. Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers found that having multiple mentors, male and female, gave more opportunity to gain different perspectives of leadership roles, developed self-efficacy through role modeling, and acquired social capital through mentoring and sponsorship. Pasquerella and Clauss-Ehlers stated that mentoring that develops self-efficacy and confidence enables women to not personalize or internalize experienced gender bias, but to respond effectively by promoting awareness and understanding of it that can gradually eliminate stereotypes in the workplace.

Sponsorship. While sponsorship is often viewed as a mentoring task, it is quite different in how its relational ties develop social capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Mentoring is relational communication from a mentor to a mentee based on the mentor's knowledge and experience. While this is information that can help the mentee grow and develop, it does not assure upward career movement. Sponsorship is a relationship in which the sponsor expects a benefit in exchange for sponsoring a protégé for a promotion or position. There is a higher level of trust and interconnectedness in sponsorship that Coleman (1994) researched and wrote about in his conceptualization of social capital exchange in organizations.

Sponsorship, not mentorship, develops relational embeddedness ties which create social exchanges between followers and managers in organizations that can open formerly closed organizational networks (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Sponsorship is the connector of structural organizational relational embeddedness to produce social capital that women lack in organizations that are male dominant or practice gender bias. Gloria shared in this study that her career growth and job promotions happened due to her male boss' sponsorship, not his mentoring, in the military.

These individual changes help women grow and develop as leaders and understand how to overcome barriers to leadership. A sustained pipeline of equitable leadership roles in organizations requires organizations to understand how their structures and cultures work against women. Procedures, practices, and communication patterns change organizational culture, leadership advancement, and career development patterns so that women will no longer have to maneuver through a career labyrinth to executive leadership.

Organizational Strategies

Organizational strategies have been studied that can be implemented within and by organizations to enable women to build social capital to obtain executive leadership roles. I identified in the literature review the following strategies for further research and implementation: cultural adaptation within organizations to promote diverse leadership, formalized sponsorship in conjunction with mentoring programs, diverse hiring and promotion practices, intentional succession planning to diversify leadership and modifying organizational structures to be more inclusive of diversity and diverse leaders. Lastly, quota legislation is discussed as a recent strategy within national jurisdictions to enact more women executive leaders in organizations.

Organizational Culture Adaptation. An organization's culture, practices, and policies that are biased against women being promoted to executive leadership roles can be changed. Diversity training for all employees increases awareness of the effect of gender bias on women at work and cultural adaptation is achieved with training follow up by management that maintains accountability for all (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Eagly and Carli found that assessing work contribution based on the subjective judgment of length of hours spent at work penalizes women who have excessive family duties, and that changing to objective assessment through productivity measures of work habits and actual output equalizes career opportunities. Eagly and Carli suggest

limiting unconscious and conscious bias in performance evaluations by using explicit criteria in all organizational hiring and promotion and that external recruitment venues should be used rather than hiring solely based on social networks and referrals. Implementing a critical mass of women in organization's executive positions was found by Eagly and Carli to eliminate stereotypes that women can only hold lower or follower positions. Eagly and Carli found that maintaining diversity of team members in every team and avoiding having only one woman per group project stops tokenism of women in organizations and minimizes gender bias.

Eagly and Carli's 2007 study found that organizations and women benefit from designing women's career paths with developmental job experiences and not keeping women in support areas their whole careers. This would stop giving ambitious women no choice but to leave and go to other organizations for more challenging work. To level the playing field, Eagly and Carli suggest that offering family-friendly practices for all employees, such as flex time, telecommuting, and on-site childcare, enables women to build social capital and not lose it when they have to leave the workforce for family needs. Organizational provision of mentoring and sponsoring activities for women to develop their social capital network during work time is another way that Eagly and Carli believe that the playing field can be leveled for women. Eagly and Carli's strategies only work with organizational leadership support and accountability.

Mentoring with Sponsorship. Formal programs that solicit mentors for all employees helps women understand how to position themselves for promotion and advocate for them with decision-makers (Amis et al., 2020). Amis et al.'s (2020) study found that progressive and productive feedback patterns from mentors creates challenging job assignments and developmental training to maintain growth in performance. Their study found that role allocation and compensation based on merit, achievement, and efficiency eliminates organizational

occupancy allocation or “fit” with ascribed wages for social classification. Organizational leaders should give specific individual feedback related to network promotability and comparative to others who are being considered for promotion (Khattab et al., 2018). This creates a culture where anyone can be a leader if they are willing to work for it. While the formal organizational mentoring programs failed the women of color participants in this study, when they found informal mentors for mentoring and sponsorship, they were able to achieve continual career growth.

Hiring and Promotion. Amis et al.’s (2020) study on the organizational reproduction of inequality explained how hiring practices perpetuate inequality when they aim to perpetuate cultural similarity by cutting short evaluation of candidates due to informal network access for screening and selection. Amis et al. (2020) found that predetermined hiring and promotion practices, as well as less opportunities to shine for consideration, propagate limiting dissimilar candidates. In contrast, emphasizing individual qualities of hard work, performance, and success can eliminate network influence or similarity, but it was found in this study that Gloria gained career growth opportunities through a male boss who sponsored her for promotion even when the military did not promote women into leadership roles. These practices are not only beneficial to women seeking leadership roles, but they also improve the organization by connecting human capital to social capital to create a common goal for individuals and organizations to continually learn and grow together (Fullan, 2016).

Succession Planning. Dwivedi et al. (2018) studied a qualitative comparison of female CEO successions to male predecessor CEO’s and found that to overcome the low number of women in executive leadership positions in organizations, three organization and predecessor enacted strategies are successful for women more than men, based on the following male CEO

legacy practices: handover, partnering, and turnaround. The findings from this study suggest that two conditions, the female CEO successor is an insider of her organization, and the male CEO predecessor had a long tenure within the organization, were both enablers of female CEO role acquisition and success in the role.

An organizational structure enables legacy handover by providing pre-succession sponsorship and mentoring by long-term male predecessors to insider women successors (Dwivedi et al., 2018). They found that when former male CEOs obtain a board chair position and continue mentoring and sponsoring the female successor CEO, social capital accumulation for the female CEO continues in male-dominated industries and that organizations that promote inclusiveness or have established diversity programs also continue to enable women CEO social capital accumulation.

Dwivedi et al.'s legacy partnering occurs when the successor female CEO shares background and experiences with the predecessor male CEO, thereby generating social capital by matching his power imprint on the organization. They found that legacy turnaround consists of the previous strategy factors and adds the continued work of the former CEO, now Director of the Board, mentoring the successor female CEO on how to improve poorly performing organizations. Male successor experiences were quite different than female successors in this study, which found that men could be outsiders to the organization, receive only brief mentoring from the predecessor CEO, and still be viewed as a successful CEO leader.

Organizational Structure. Terms used in organizations that position men as leaders and women as support staff create cultural norms and social orders that reinforce inequitable gender roles (Amis et al., 2020). Amis et al. found that control over technical and expert knowledge limits access to top positions, especially when women are viewed as placed in roles due to

affirmative action initiatives instead of demonstrated ability. Underrepresentation in leadership positions begins in careers based on lower social capital “fit” positions with decreased network ties to those with higher “fit” positions, which perpetuates limited professional opportunities and leadership advancement (Khattab et al., 2018).

Hierarchies and bureaucracies create social orders for economic efficiency and affect organizational equality and opportunities for advancement and division of labor by gender (Amis et al., 2020). Amis et al. found that the discussion of efficiency and meritocracy, regardless of individual identity in organizations, masks the inequality that hierarchical structures create and continue. Networking programs can minimize the effects of hierarchical structure by providing motivational role models in organizations for human capital development (Khattab et al., 2018). Khattab et al. found that the elimination of up-or-out career structures makes the statement that everyone is considered for promotion to leadership roles with objective performance criteria.

Human capital are the employee skills and knowledge that create expanded learning and growth for organizations which, in turn, produces social capital through increased clients and business (Hitt et al., 2003). Hitt et al.’s (2003) study identified that strategic decisions and performance are enhanced by organizations capitalizing on the combination of human and social capitals when they benefit financially from diverse and equitable leadership by expanding their performance and sustaining competitive advantage over competitors who are less diverse. Yet, this financial incentive has not proven effective in increasing gender equity in leadership roles by organizational mandate, so governing bodies such as countries and states have started implementing quota laws for gender equity in corporate leadership.

Societal Mandate through Quota Legislation. It is assumed that organizations are rational entities comprised of neutral practices and structures, but a recent study conducted by

Amis et al. (2020) found that organizations are collectively rationalized with exclusionary structures when biased inequalities remain unchallenged. Amis et al. (2020) sought to analyze what, how and why inequalities persist despite leaders' statements of belief in equity in organizational leadership and found that what organizational leaders do to promote, allocate roles, and compensate employees, produces, and reproduces inequality in organizations. The cumulative effect of reinforcing behaviors constrains upward mobility and is demonstrated in the barriers to women obtaining leadership roles.

A strategy that is starting to gain traction in the United States, which has already taken place in the past two decades in fifteen other countries, is the use of legislation to set quotas requiring a minimum number of women in corporate board of director positions for all corporations. Not only to structuralize equity in the numbers of women leaders, but also to start to redefine capital in organizations with historical gender bias (Seierstad et al., 2020). Seierstad et al. (2020) found that redefining organizational capital first began to be put into law in Norway in 2003 with a 40% minimum quota and later in 14 other countries have since implemented, with California being the first U.S. state to implement in 2019. From a social capital perspective, this is a forced structural change in the field regulation and definition in corporations that is more gender inclusive and less conventionally male. The state legislatures of New Jersey and Illinois are currently researching the use of gender equity quota laws.

Summary

This literature review described the barriers imposed upon women due to gender bias that maintain inequitable leadership role acquisition and create a labyrinth to career success for women. The past two decades of research have shown that women internalize organizational barriers in their habitus, which reduces their self-efficacy and creates behavioral choices at work

that impede their career leadership goals and reduce their social capital. Their social capital is further decreased when women fail to balance inequitable family demands with little support at work for work-life balance, which was found in this study for Sarah when she stepped out of work to adjust to motherhood until she and her husband worked together to balance home and child-rearing responsibilities. The research demonstrated that even when women do not internalize the barriers and decrease their social capital, they are often provided less opportunities for professional growth and less challenging job assignments during and after pregnancy that would enable them to build social capital for career advancement to executive roles.

Organizational development studies have focused on the external barriers imposed upon women by gendered organizational structures, policies, and culture. These include leaky pipelines, sticky floors, glass cliffs, and glass ceilings which have morphed into a labyrinth of strategic career development for women with varied hurdles to overcome. Hiring and promotion practices requiring social capital provide women with less upward opportunities to develop and be considered, multiplying the effect of barriers by keeping women in lower management positions and unable to develop social capital for executive leadership roles (Amis et al., 2020).

The literature review included qualitative and quantitative studies to explain how women experience barriers to career advancement to leadership role acquisition in organizations. The intersectionality literature revealed a dual approach of understanding how one's individual identity is affected by barriers and how the systemic barriers sustain the organizational barriers that women face in their careers, which was found in this study for the women of color. This study and scholarly research findings suggest a dual approach to overcome barriers through internal development with training, mentoring and sponsorship, as well as an external change in organizations to redesign their structures and cultures to embrace diversity and implement more

diverse leadership, thereby minimizing gender-biased policies and procedures. A summary of the most notable research studies that guided this study are shown in Table 2.1.

This study applied a case study approach to further research understanding of what women perceive their barriers to be and how their perceptions turned into strategic actions that achieved desired career success. To convey the conceptual as actionable concepts found in the research, Social Capital Theory was applied to understand the barriers and strategies that women can implement to gain social capital to acquire executive leadership roles.

Table 2.1 Key Theorists

Theory Area	Concept	Key Authors
Barriers for Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal • External 	Chrobot-Mason et al (2019), Diehl et al (2020), Eagly & Carli (2007), Elmuti et al (2009), Ibarra (2017), Steele & Flippin (2017)
Strategies for Women to Overcome Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual • Organizational 	Amis et al (2020), Gist (1987), Hargraves & Fullan (2012), Pasquerlela & Claus-Ehlers (2017), Seibert, Kramer & Liden (2001)
Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition • Ties & Embeddedness • Networking 	Burt (1997), Coleman (1990), Fitzsimmons & Callan (2016), Kwon & Adler (2104), Lin (1999-2001), Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998)
Intersectionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Race/Ethnicity • Education • Experience 	Atewologun (2018) Breslin, Pandey & Riccucci (2017) Choo & Ferree (2010)

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Methodology

This study examined the perceptions and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles, as an interpretive case study, to give insight to women who have not yet found effective strategies to overcome their barriers to obtaining desired leadership roles. This study of human perceptions and experiences lent itself to a qualitative research approach as it used qualitative inquiry to understand women's career experiences and application of social capital that resulted in the acquisition of executive leadership roles (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Qualitative inquiry produced rich descriptions of experiences and perceptions of the intersection of gender and other characteristics that created barriers to obtaining leadership roles, as well as organizational structural inequalities experienced by women (Breslin et al., 2017).

Women who participated in this study were asked to identify any barriers and strategies that they experienced in their paths to leadership. While it was commonly believed in the U.S. that the "glass ceiling" to women's executive role acquisition had broken or that deliberate efforts to thwart women's success in leadership role acquisition and career advancement had ended, this study took an interpretive case study approach and found that barriers do still exist for women currently in U.S. businesses, but the women participants did not let the barriers hold them back in their career goals when they strategized using their social capital to overcome them to obtain executive leadership roles.

Research Questions

To understand and interpret the multiple characteristics and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles and identify social capital terms of field, habitus and capital within them, the following research questions were studied:

1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors (habitus) of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their industry or organization (field)?
2. What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race, and any other characteristic they possess (lack or loss of capital)?
3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them (gain in capital)?

Research Design

I used an interpretive case study approach to collect seven in-depth cases to study the phenomenon of how American women executive leaders have overcome barriers to executive leadership (Stake, 1995). In phase one, I implemented an online survey that asked demographic, contextual and perceptual information to elicit data that started the data gathering process and determined participant profiles of women who have lived experiences of women executive leaders in business, which is this study's target population (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The online survey identified what barriers to leadership the participants had faced and how they overcame their career obstacles to achieve executive leadership roles. From the online survey responses, I determined there were twelve eligible participants who were invited to be the study participants to complete phase two of the study, which consisted of two one-on-one interviews and phase three of a focus group discussion. Seven participants completed the study and provided extant data from all phases of the study to expand the contextual and perceptual data gathered from the initial online survey (Stake, 1995). From the seven participant perspectives, I applied social capital terms of field, habitus and capital to code their strategies to overcome barriers to leadership (George & Bennett, 2005).

I used multiple data-gathering techniques by collecting data from an online survey, two one-on-one interviews, and a focus group discussion, that triangulated this study's findings and provided an in-depth understanding of the barriers experienced and the strategies that women used to overcome their barriers to executive leadership positions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Table 1 illustrates these data gathering techniques and their alignment to this study's research questions. I maintained a researcher journal to memo participants' interview question responses and bracket my perceptions to those of the participants' to try to minimize researcher bias in coding to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Yin, 2017).

To capture the complexity of intersectionality of multiple characteristics' of barriers experienced, I used Atewologun's (2018) five recommended tools to establish intersectionality research context by 1) cultivating reflexivity of cause and effect barrier perceptions and experiences, 2) questioning on privilege versus penalty, 3) asking participants to identify their social identities with demographic questions throughout each phase of the study, 4) collecting and coding data based on intersectional identity for each participant, and 5) collecting participant audio and visual data for my research analysis (Booyesen, Bendle, & Pringle, 2018). Reflexivity of the cause and effect of barriers experienced occurred when I reviewed the first interview responses to create the career timeline for the second interview discussion, in which I asked the participants to review and correct my interpretation of their responses and compare their experiences to the gender barrier scale in Appendix B. I asked follow-up questions in the first interviews for each participant after they responded to my questions in Appendix A, specifically why they thought that they had experienced what they had described in their responses, to which all participants identified their intersectional characteristics of gender, race, age, and weight as reasons for their barriers experienced. Demographic questions were asked during all phases of

the study and are detailed in Table 3.1 in the research question #2 row that references each question number from the interview protocol in Appendix A. The collection and coding of intersectional data is described in Table 4.1 Participant Demographics in Chapter 4. Lastly, transcripts were created from the audio and video recordings of each participant in their one-on-one first interviews and their focus groups.

Table 3.1 Research Question Alignment Matrix for Study Participants

RESEARCH QUESTION	QUALITATIVE INSTRUMENTS	QUESTION TYPE	PROTOCOL QUESTIONS*	ANALYSIS
<p>RQ1: What are the professional experiences and behaviors (habitus) of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their industry or organization (field)?</p>	<p>Phase one: Structured Online Survey</p>	<p>Multiple-Choice Demographics</p> <p>Open-Ended: Organizational Position/Title, Describe your career path to your current leadership role</p>	<p>a-j, 1-13</p>	<p>Code themes of demographics as INTERSECTIONALITY characteristics; career experiences and behaviors as HABITUS; and industry and organization as FIELD</p>
<p>RQ2: What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race and any other characteristic they possess (lack or loss of capital)?</p>	<p>Phase one: Structured Online Survey</p> <p>Phase two: Semi-Structured One-on-One Interviews</p> <p>Phase three: Focus Group Semi-Structured Discussion</p>	<p>Multiple-Choice: Choose internal & external barriers experienced from list provided</p> <p>Open-Ended fill-in for Other</p>	<p>j, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13</p>	<p>Code themes of barriers according to internal and external constructs, lack or loss of CAPITAL, and INTERSECTIONALITY characteristics</p>
<p>RQ3: What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them (gain or increase in capital)?</p>	<p>Phase one: Online Survey</p> <p>Phase two: One-on-One Interviews</p> <p>Phase three: Focus Group Discussion</p>	<p>Open-Ended</p>	<p>j, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13</p>	<p>Code themes of strategies according to personal and organizational constructs, gain in CAPITAL, and INTERSECTIONALITY characteristics</p>

* See Interview Protocol in Appendix A for protocol questions' detail.

Research Sample

A network sampling strategy was used in phase one of the study to distribute an online survey to my personal and professional networks. This enabled me to gather a targeted sample of willing participants to qualify them as executive women leaders in U.S. businesses and invite them to participate in a deeper exploration of their career experiences through one-on-one virtual interviews and a focus group discussion (Crowe et al., 2011). I posted in Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter the need for executive women leaders to complete my online survey to assist me in data collection for my dissertation research. I asked those who saw the post to share it within their networks and request their online connections' assistance on my behalf.

I posted my online survey link, study description and requested women executive leaders to assist in my study by completing the survey or forwarding it to other women leaders through professional organizations of which I am a member, including Catalyst.org, the Academy of Management (AOM), and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), to send my emailed online survey link to women leaders in their databases. My sampling strategy changed from network to purposive to continue with current U.S. business leaders when I solicited twelve executive leaders to continue from phase one's online survey to phase two's one-on-one interviews and phase three's focus group. Seven women agreed to participate in the full study. The three phases provided deeper exploration of the complexity of their lived experiences through my research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

The participant selection criteria and definition of "executive woman leader" for this study is a woman currently directing employees in an organization to fulfill organizational goals at the organization's highest leadership level. In some organizations this is called the "C-suite" with a job title beginning with the word "Chief." In other organizations, an executive title that begins

with “Director” or “Executive” holds the highest leadership responsibilities. I chose not to limit the participants to C-suite only titles, as some organizations are now changing executive titles to eliminate classes of employees by flattening organizational hierarchies (Heathfield, 2020).

Data Collection

I obtained descriptive data in the online survey, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions, which I coded and categorized to conduct my research analysis (Yin, 2017). To establish an analytical framework, the first phase online survey was structured to compare the data across individuals, time, and settings, which was changed to a semi-structured approach in phases two and three, the one-on-one interviews and focus groups respectively, to focus on the phenomena of barriers and strategies used to overcome them while connecting the data to the participants’ pseudonyms (Maxwell, 2013).

The use of a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended and clarifying questions in phases two and three allowed the study to evolve naturally so that participants could share their experiences in their own way. The phase one online survey established trust by stating that participant information would be kept confidential and that they could review their responses before the dissertation is published (Maxwell, 2013). Trust was created through the rapport of the online survey, which used U.S. Census standard demographic questions and finished with a chronological order question about their career paths, including barriers and strategies to overcome them.

Protection of Participants

The online survey was confidential and asked for each participant’s written consent to share their submitted information anonymously through the signing of a Hood College Informed Consent Form. The last online survey question asked each participant if they wished to continue

to the online one-on-one interview and online focus group discussion, stating that they could withdraw from the study at any phase. Those who continued to phases two and three selected a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity from other participants.

Setting

I created an online survey on SurveyMonkey.com and used Zoom for virtual one-on-one for the interviews and for the focus groups, which all participants chose to not display their faces on video and entered their pseudonyms for their meeting names. I stated that I was recording all of them verbally and visually for later transcription.

Expert Review

My doctoral committee and Dr. Beverly Stanford, an expert in qualitative study, reviewed the online survey and the interview questions for the one-on-one interviews and the focus group. I then conducted a pilot test by asking a community leader in my doctoral cohort class to complete the online survey to verify timing and understanding of the context of the research, including participant definitions of the research questions, before disseminating the survey link to my social media connections (Maxwell, 2013).

Data Collection Tools

I used Survey Monkey's data download feature to convert participants' online survey responses into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Due to current COVID-19 restrictions on in-person meetings in 2020-2021, I used recorded Zoom meetings to conduct my one-on-one interviews and focus groups and took manual notes during the interviews. I used Rev.com and NVivo online software to transcribe the interview and focus group findings. After transcription, I coded the findings in NVivo to consolidate all phases of the study's findings.

Data Analysis

I began this study's research with a pre-interview online survey containing multiple-choice demographic and open-ended questions, then I reviewed the information collected from the surveys and documented the descriptive data to identify intersectionality of the demographics and the open-ended responses for each participant (Yin, 2017). I then documented descriptive statistics for the seven participants who completed the one-on-one interviews and the focus group discussions, all of which was conducted virtually and was voice and visually recorded, then transcribed. Joseph Maxwell describes this as the first phase of data analysis in his 2013 book "Qualitative Research Design." When multiple participants are studied in a case study approach, a typical analytical strategy is to detail descriptions of themes with each participant, followed by a thematic analysis across all participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

In my second phase of data analysis, I identified and coded patterns of words and categorical concepts a priori to connect conceptual terms of internal and external barriers, as well as individual and organizational strategies. I then summarized those findings from the first interview transcripts to ask for participant verification in the second interview by comparing those themes to the barrier concepts found in the Gender Bias Scale by Diehl et al. (2020) in Appendix B, which I also provided to the participants for the second one-on-one interview.

To connect the social capital theoretical terms of field, habitus, and capital to this study's conceptual terms, I asked participants for their life experiences related to social capital increase and decrease in their careers during the focus group discussions (Stemler, 2000). After the one-on-one interviews and focus group findings were collected, I coded them and created a data analysis matrix in NVivo to show the relational connections indicated from the study's findings (Maxwell, 2013). I coded themes that presented themselves in the findings that related to social

capital theoretical terms through memos in NVivo. Finally, I coded the findings according to intersectionality terms of diversity and inclusivity of race, weight, and age, to avoid biasing the data coding to my life experiences.

Role of the Researcher

In-depth interviews gather an account of a lived experience from a first-hand approach (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). I have lived experience as a female business leader who experienced many barriers to acquiring an executive position late in my career. My experienced barriers influenced me to leave a career in business to create and lead my own training business. My role in this study is to inform others by sharing of the study's findings of other women's career experiences, not to influence their responses or perceptions of their experiences. To that end, I did not share my lived experiences with the participants, but simply asked for theirs.

Researcher Bias

In conducting an interpretive case study such as this, I, as the researcher, am defining the content and questions to examine the phenomenon of social capital development and use as a strategy for women to achieve executive career goals, which can bound the findings (Crowe et al., 2011). To avoid bounding or defining the case according to my lived experiences, I focused on the participants' responses and ask for their validation of my account of the content and intent of their responses. I also used third-party services to transcribe the focus group discussion.

I studied one industry sample of executive women in business as participants. I am a member of this population and I felt that it needed further study to develop better theoretical strategies. To ensure the rigor of this case study, I triangulated the data in three phases of interviews, including online survey, two one-on-one interviews, and in focus group discussions

(Crowe et al., 2011). In the second one-on-one interview, I created a career timeline with the participants to validate my recording and understanding of their career experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Anonymity and confidentiality of survey respondents and interviewees was maintained and addressed in the signed informed consent statements received from each participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). IRB approval from Hood College for this dissertation research was obtained before the study began (see Appendix D). Participants choose pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality and their contributions will only be referenced according to their pseudonyms.

Trustworthiness & Triangulation

Maxwell (2013) stated that trustworthiness of the data is created in its validity in qualitative research, which asserts the correct description, interpretation, and conclusion of the findings. A threat to validity is that other interpretations of the data can be made, so I asked the study participants to read and validate that the intent of their responses was accurate after I coded them to their pseudonym. Another method of validating the study's findings was to triangulate the data through different methods of collection to try to eliminate systemic bias in the research process (Maxwell, 2013). I triangulated the data through three methods of collection, described as phases and depicted in Table 3.1 and found saturation in participant responses by the final focus group phase.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation inherent in this qualitative research study was that by using a convenience network sample, I was interviewing women who were like me in age, education, class, and race. Intersectionality research has recently been conducted on the multiple and simultaneously

experienced barriers on marginalized non-white women seeking to obtain executive leadership roles (Breslin et al., 2017). Gender is one characteristic among others that instigates biased behavior toward leadership role acquisition, the intersection of multiple barriers simultaneously in the life stories recounted from participants revealed more hardship in work culture to non-white participants, which was internalized into resilience and strength-building.

Another limitation is that this study was conducted in 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited all study communication to online tools. This made data collection easier by not requiring travel, as well as reducing time and expense. It limited my observations of participants' responses during the focus group discussions when all participants kept their video cameras off to maintain anonymity, but not during one-on-one interviews when they kept their cameras on.

A delimitation, a parameter imposed by me as the researcher, is that I chose to only study women's experiences, not male executive leaders', therefore some of the barriers may not be gender-specific or gender-related, which could suggest future study of leadership barriers that affect all aspiring leaders. This may lead to plausible rival non-gendered explanations of challenges to leadership role acquisition (Yin, 2017).

Another delimitation is that I am one person analyzing the life experiences of women that I do not know, my bias and different contextual experiences may affect the analysis of the research findings. Generalizability is not the goal of qualitative research, but transferability of findings to similar contexts and situations is, and if I have not experienced what a participant has experienced, it may limit my ability as the researcher to convey it and demonstrate its transferability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

Summary

This chapter explained the case study approach of this qualitative study to examine and describe the perceptions and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles in U.S. businesses. Qualitative inquiry was used to understand women's life and career experiences and apply them to social capital theory to inform aspirational women leaders. Three research questions explored their lived experiences, gender barriers and strategies used to overcome the barriers. The limitations and delimitations of the study were addressed, as well as the ethical treatment of participants and maintaining their confidentiality throughout the study.

An online research strategy was mandated by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 pandemic, which consisted of an online network sampling method used in three phases: an online survey, virtual one-on-one interviews, and online focus group discussions. Triangulation of the three data collection phases were coded and validated by the participants after summarization of the study's findings were completed in Chapter 4 and discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

Table 3.2 provides a summary of this chapter and the study's methodology.

Table 3.2 Methodology Summary

Methodology	Qualitative study of women executive leaders' interpretations and experiences of barriers and strategies applied to Social Capital Theory
Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors, or habitus, of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their field industry or organization?2. What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race, and any other characteristic they possess that made them lose capital?3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them to gain capital?
Research Design	Interpretive case study approach to collect seven in-depth cases
Research Sample	Network sampling of executive women leaders in U.S. businesses
Data Collection	3 Phases: 1 st - online survey, 2 nd - one-on-one interviews, and 3 rd - focus group discussions
Data Analysis	<p>The online survey contained multiple-choice demographic and open-ended questions to determine who would participate in the study and their intersectional demographics</p> <p>After the first one-on-one interviews, I coded patterns of barrier and strategy concepts a priori to expand responses in the second interviews</p> <p>After the focus group discussions, I coded social capital increases and decreases from all phases' findings to produce themes</p>
Ethical Considerations	Anonymity and confidentiality of survey respondents and interviewee
Trustworthiness	The study participants verified the content and intent of responses. Saturation was reached in the final phase showing that triangulation of the data was achieved through three different methods of collection
Limitations	A convenience network sample was used COVID-19 pandemic protocol of online communication only
Delimitations	Only studied women's experiences, not male executive leaders One researcher analyzed the life experiences of unknown women

CHAPTER 4. PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction to the Study and the Researcher

This qualitative research study explored the strategies that have overcome barriers to executive leadership roles for women in business. The underrepresentation of women in corporate leadership positions continues to be problematic for women who account for 57% of the U.S. labor force and only 26.5% of U.S. executive business roles in 2019 according to Catalyst.org. This dissertation sought to understand why the gender gap in leadership persists after decades of recommended and implemented human capital development. The literature review suggested that women lack social capital of sponsorship for executive roles, not human capital of education and skills, to achieve these positions in business.

This chapter describes the study participants and their lived experiences as female executives to answer the research questions in social capital terms (in parentheses):

1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors (habitus) of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their industry or organization (field)?
2. What internal and external barriers did they experience intersected with gender, such as ethnicity, age, education and any other characteristic they possess (lack or loss of capital)?
3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them (gain in capital)?

Interest for the study came from my personal experience in briefly occupying an executive leadership role in business after a career progression of mostly lateral moves in middle management and after stepping out of the workforce briefly during difficult pregnancies. I performed consultant work at home during my time out of the workplace for organizations that I had previously worked for in full-time management positions, to show work continuation on my

resume during the time that I had stepped out. When I wanted to return to a management position after my two children were born, my husband did not support my return to full-time work while we were married and after we were divorced years later. Upon returning to management level work after my divorce, I became frustrated with a lack of upward career mobility and being told that because I did not have executive leadership experience, I would not be considered for executive roles. I started my own consulting and training business five years ago, with the support of my second and current husband and after my children had become adults. I contractually train adults in leadership, team building and communication skill development. One of the first classes that I trained as a contractor for an international training company was a “Women in Leadership” class to which I initially thought that women did not need training different from men. Once I started training leadership classes for women and other leadership classes for men and women, I saw that women experienced gendered stereotypes and biases externally in their organizations and families that many had internalized by limiting themselves in their careers. Women students often asked me in classes to mentor and advise them on how to get past barriers to upward career mobility. I realized that this was an area that needed research to help build understanding of how executive women leaders have successfully achieved their career goals. Results and publication from this research could help women, those who work with them, and those who train them, to understand their gendered journey of career progression to executive leadership, as well as the intersection of barriers related to ethnicity, age and physical appearance characteristics.

In the United States, women in business are typically encouraged to seek mentorship and achieve at least a master’s degree in business to be considered for management and executive roles in organizations (Ibarra et al., 2010). This is a human capital approach of improving skills

and ability to achieve career goals and a lack of social capital development for executive leadership role acquisition (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2019). While this has made women proficient in performing jobs and leadership roles, it has not eliminated the gap in female leaders at the executive leadership level. Social capital through relationship-building, networking and sponsorship creates power, or a value proposition, for executive leadership role attainment (Ibarra, 2017). Research studies have shown that men are mentored and sponsored for promotion without asking for the sponsorship, while women must ask for it (Ibarra et al., 2010). Social capital development and acquisition compounds over the life of one's career with early capital creating future capital increase (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016).

This study found that sponsorship was a strategy used for participants' executive role acquisitions and those who were deliberate in building sponsorship obtained multiple executive positions as opposed to participants who received sponsorship for their latest and only executive role. The following sections of this chapter will detail the participants' career journeys and the strategies that they used in a description of the sample. Then I will give an overview of the research methodology with an analysis of the findings, to describe how they created social capital by networking to find mentors who sponsored them for career advancement.

Description of the Sample

This study included women currently in executive leadership roles in businesses located in the United States. To find women executive leaders who were willing to participate in this study, I distributed an online survey (see Appendix A) to qualify participants through multiple online techniques, including posting a flyer of the description of the study and the survey link on LinkedIn (see Appendix C), an emailed survey link on the online message boards for Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Academy of Management (AOM), and by using

a snowballing technique of referrals from social media connections who asked their connected network of executive women leaders to complete the survey. Twenty-six women completed the online survey and were emailed the survey consent form to complete and return (see Appendix E). Twelve survey respondents met the participant criteria of 18+ years old and currently held an executive leadership role in a business organization. I emailed and texted the 12 potential participants to request that they complete and return the study consent form to participate in the study (see Appendix F). Five women did not respond and were dropped from consideration for the study. The final sample of seven women completed and returned their consent forms and completed two interviews and a focus group discussion, from which the findings were collected and analyzed. By using social media to find participants and by conducting the interviews and focus group discussions using Zoom, as mandated by Hood College IRB due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Appendix D), I was able to virtually meet and communicate with women throughout the U.S. to have in-depth discussions about their career experiences. Some of the participants told me in their interviews that they researched my background through my LinkedIn account and thought that they had similar work backgrounds as me. This perceived common background created an atmosphere of congeniality in discussion with me during the interviews and with other participants in the focus group discussion. Some of the participants asked to be given the other participants' real names to be able to stay connected with each other after my study was completed and to continue to communicate with each other to help each other network for their businesses, which would continue to increase their social capital. Those who wanted to network were willing to waive their confidentiality after the study.

I requested demographic information from all participants in the online survey, interviews and focus group discussions to provide intersectionality data related to the situational data that

participants shared about their life experiences. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the participant demographics. The sample included representation from multiple U.S. ethnicities with three women who are Caucasian, three women who are African American, and one woman who is Asian American. All participants are college graduates, and all had completed masters level work, while one participant had also completed a doctorate degree, and another had begun her doctoral schooling in 2020. Age appeared to affect participants' experiences with six of the participants aged 50-60's sharing more male-centric work cultures in which women were not considered as much as men for executive leadership roles, whereas the youngest participant in her 40's did not express experiencing discrimination based on her gender but struggled with finding leaders to emulate who were Asian American. All participants were married and two had divorced. All had small families and one participant who occupied multiple executive roles in her career did not have any children. Three participants discussed the importance of spousal support to balance family and executive job demands, while four did not discuss their families until asked for their demographic data.

In the online survey, I had asked in what industry they currently worked with the options of business, government, education and other. Only participants who currently worked in business were selected to participate because the study focused on corporate business leaders. All participants had worked in multiple industries throughout their careers including non-profits, for-profits, education, military, law, and government. Those who worked in male-dominant industries of manufacturing, information technology (IT), and media experienced the most overtly biased statements and behaviors from management executives concerning their gender and race.

I had asked in the online survey if they had a career goal of obtaining an executive leadership position, but I did not include the responses in the demographics table because I found

that most of the participants did not have that goal even though they had achieved the role. I discovered in their interview responses that they all had a growth mindset to continue to learn and develop into new roles that challenged them, so the goal was not a driver in their career achievements as I had originally thought it would be, they were motivated by their journey of growth and development. Lyndie was a Senior Vice President and still aspired to move higher in her organization, when she could not move higher in her current organization, she left and became the CEO of her own business after the study was completed. Four participants are executive owners of their own businesses that provide services based on their skills and experiences developed in past organizations. They built and continue to build their client bases from social capital, which will be detailed in the findings section of this chapter.

Table 4.1 Participant Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Job Title	Age	Ethnicity	Highest Education	Marital Status	Children
Sally	Controller	50's	Caucasian	MBA	D	1
Gloria	Director	50's	Caucasian	Doctorate	M	1
Coco	Founder	50's	African American	MBA	D	1
Sarah	VP	40's	Asian American	MBA	M	1
Madison	CEO	50's	Caucasian	JD	M	1
Hilary	CEO	60's	African American	Doctorate	M	0
Lyndie	SVP	50's	African American	MBA	M	2

Research Methodology and Analysis

A qualitative research methodology was used for data collection and analysis of the phenomenology or lived experiences of the participants. Verbal descriptions of the participants'

perceptions of their lived experiences created a narrative of their career journeys to executive role attainment. A case study approach was used to explore the research questions while capturing an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of the participants' real-life experiences (Crowe et al., 2011). Interpretivist constructivism was used to understand individual interpretation and shared social meanings or contexts of the participants' career experiences as they related to social capital theory and the impact of increased and decreased social capital in achieving career goals (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Interpretivism is the intention to understand the participants' life experiences from their social interactions in work and personal life, while constructivism relies upon the participants views of their lives from social and historical perspectives. This is also referred to as social constructivism because their views and experiences are formed through interactions with others (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

To establish interpretivist constructivism in this study with a sample of seven participants, I conducted multiple discussions with each participant to understand and capture the depth of their lived experiences to apply to social capital theory. I began the study by disseminating an online survey through social media accounts to begin collection of participant data. I then invited current female executive leaders in business industries who had completed the online survey to participate in two one-on-one interviews and a focus group discussion to share their experiences of barriers and strategies to overcome them in their careers. In the first interview, I gathered detailed life information for each participant, then I created a timeline of their careers with the details that they had provided while emphasizing barriers and strategies in bold and colored text, red for barriers and green for strategies to overcome their barriers. Next, I gave them a recent study's list of gender barriers (in Appendix B) to help them think about their career experiences communicated in the first one-on-one interview. In the second one-on-one interview, I verified

each participant's meanings and social experiences through an historical construction of a timeline for each, to verify my understanding of the findings and to prepare the focus group questions to accomplish triangulation by the final phase of the study. Many of the participants said that the list of gender barriers helped them to think of more barriers that they had experienced and give more detail about their experiences with barriers. To maintain participant anonymity, I deliberately have not included the participants' career timelines, but I have included my career timeline in Appendix H as an example.

While most of the focus group questions asked about barriers and strategies that the participants had experienced in their careers, the last focus group question discussed social capital theory and asked the participants to directly apply their life experiences to their ability to increase and decrease social capital within their careers (see Appendix A). Their responses enabled me to verify my interpretation of their increases and decreases in social capital from the experiences that they had communicated to me in their first and second one-on-one interviews. Saturation of the findings was accomplished with the focus group discussions and the participants' application of social capital to obtain their executive leadership roles was demonstrated by all participants as a strategy to eliminate the gender gap in business leadership, as well as the intersection of multiple characteristics' barriers and biases experienced.

Presentation of Findings with Analysis

This study examined the barriers to women's executive leadership roles and the strategies that they used to overcome their barriers through the application of social capital and from a lens of the intersectionality of their unique characteristics. Barriers were categorized by their sources as externally and internally imposed upon women. External barriers were defined as others' bias, stereotypes and lack of job opportunities offered to women. Internal barriers were defined as low

self-efficacy, lack of will and family demands. The strategies to overcome barriers were categorized by their enactors, either individuals or organizations. Individually, executive women leaders focus much time on developing themselves by taking on challenging assignments, increasing their education and skills, and receiving mentoring for feedback and improvement. Organizations can offer a culture in which all employees can be leaders, professional development programs are offered to all employees, and a promotion and leadership succession structure exists for all who work toward those goals.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize the participants' career journeys from their responses to the online survey, interview and focus group questions which were based on the study's three research questions about career barriers and strategies implemented to overcome them to obtain their executive leadership roles. In Table 3.1 Research Question Alignment Matrix for Study Participants in the previous chapter, I connected the study's research questions to social capital theoretical concepts, which will be described in depth in the rest of this chapter. I used qualitative content analysis of participants' textually transcribed interview question responses and focus group conversations, to describe participants' career experiences and behaviors from a social capital perspective (Kohlbacher, 2006).

Participants' Habitus of Career Experiences and Behaviors

Habitus in social capital theory is the career journey of the participants' experiences and behaviors to obtain executive leadership roles. Such roles are obtained within industries and organizations, referred to as field in social capital theory (Fitzsimmins & Callan, 2016). Individual participant descriptions follow with their life experiences and perceptions of those experiences summarized from their online survey, one-on-one interviews and focus group responses, to describe each individual participant's unique career journey. Participant

pseudonyms were used instead of their real names and some life details have been omitted deliberately to maintain participant anonymity.

Sally was the first study participant to respond to the online survey and complete the one-on-one interview in which she recounted many female co-workers' harassing behaviors toward her throughout her career in her male-dominant manufacturing industry. Sally is Caucasian and a Controller in her 50's. She is a member of an executive team in a manufacturing business in the Midwestern United States. Sally has spent her career in accounting roles in manufacturing companies and moved outward and upward for her career progression in an industry field that she categorizes as an "old boys' club" in her one-on-one interviews and focus group discussion. She said that the only women that she knew that held executive roles were in human resources (HR) and financial administration roles. She recognized that these were stereotypical female roles in the focus group and called the HR executive a "company babysitter."

Sally stated in all phases of the study that gender had prohibited advancement in her organizations and created toxic work cultures where females sabotaged each other to compete for a token female executive role. She stated that there were no correction efforts to eliminate the toxic behaviors or culture from the male executive leaders. Sally sought mentoring from bosses to cope with the female co-worker harassment and was encouraged to learn and develop communication skills to work productively with co-workers. Formal development programs and informal education through mentoring assisted her in advancing in her career by acquiring new learning and skills that she could market for lateral and vertical moves in accounting roles in various manufacturing companies. Within the past year, she was promoted into the executive team by a female CFO and mentor, using her social capital gained from the CFO's sponsorship.

Sally shared in her first one-on-one interview that while her work environment was often not supportive of women's career advancement, her ex-husband was supportive in caring for their daughter, who complained that her mother worked late a lot, and he encouraged their daughter to respect that her mother worked late and went to college at night to improve herself and her career opportunities.

Gloria was the second participant to complete the one-on-one interview in which she described herself as determined to accomplish her career progression. She is Caucasian, in her 50's, and a director of a change consulting business in the Mid-Atlantic United States. Gloria learned about leadership early in her career through a male mentor who sponsored her while she worked in the military. This experience impressed upon her that sponsorship was a successful strategy in achieving career goals. While working in the military, she simultaneously worked full-time in non-profit leadership and for-profit consulting roles. She said in her first one-on-one interview that she was raised to be a hard worker and she began her career working in her family's business at age 11. Her family did not believe that she could obtain an executive leadership position in the military's male-dominant culture. She said that made her work harder to obtain her career goals and not let barriers hold her back. Gloria said in the focus group discussion that work-life balance was not a priority for her in her career, which she now wishes it would have been.

Gloria spoke about a huge military transformation in the 1990's to let women compete for jobs that previously only men had been allowed to perform. Despite that change, she was taken out of a warfare designator career track and put into an administrative role. She said that they could "pound sand with that" and she figured out another way to get to where she wanted to go in her military career, which led her into the intelligence field.

Gloria stated in her first one-on-one interview that she strategically built her technical and leadership skills in the military to position herself for management roles in large U.S. consulting firms. She had to constantly prove her abilities and work long hours to achieve optimal work assignments and to gain sponsors who understood her organization's culture, which she credits for her career advancement. She talked about a great sponsor that she had early in her career and when he went away, she found a sponsor who was not liked by many in one of her organizations, and that sponsor's negative image was associated with her. She worked hard to overcome her inherited negative image and gain organizational credibility by taking on tough assignments and working 18 hours a day to prove herself.

Gloria mentioned only one internal barrier that she self-imposed was that any time that she was offered a new role or promotion, she stepped back to a lower position than she was being offered and could potentially do, to make sure that she understood the climate that she was stepping into. She felt that strategy was successful in her consulting jobs because she experienced consultants had to quickly prove themselves as capable and experts in their job assignments for organizational and client credibility. Once she understood a new job's cultural component, she would accept the promotion and then she could wow them to get them behind her and promote her up again. While she never referred to this as building social capital, she was increasing her social capital by building team member relationships and sponsorship for promotions.

Coco is the recent Founder of her own consulting business in the Midwestern United States, after retiring from her career in a male-dominant information technology (IT) industry. She is African American and in her 50's. She started her career as a technical expert and project team leader in the mid-1980's. She was known for her high quality of work which was consistently recognized throughout her career by organizational executives, that she described as

“good old boys.” In her early 20’s, she was promoted into management without any formal management training, based on her technical and relationship-building skills. By her late 20’s in the early 1990’s, she experienced burnout from the 24/7 work demands of her IT management position and made a lateral move to a non-supervisory role where she could live closer to family for assistance with childcare after her divorce. She stated in her one-on-one interviews that her IT field was predominantly managed by white males, that she never had a supervisor who was a female in her whole career, though she did have a few female co-workers later in her career before retiring recently. Even when she deliberately did not seek management positions so that she could care for her special needs child, her co-workers viewed her as a leader for her knowledge and how she treated them. Near the end of her career, she was written about in a national publication for her excellent work quality and credentials in the IT industry, yet managers who did not know her questioned her capability in projects and often stated that they were surprised at how impressive her work was. Early in her career she thought that others doubted her work ability because of her young age, and later she believed that racial bias, in combination with her gender, were the reasons that she experienced co-workers doubting her ability throughout her career. Despite this racist and gendered stereotyping, she said in her interviews that it never stopped her from moving ahead in her career, that she would actively go out and look for change to create career growth and learning in other work projects.

Coco stated in her interviews and focus group discussion that she did not have a mentor, although she says that she had some good bosses. She mentored other women of color to navigate the racial politics in her organization, which she felt that she effectively avoided but may have lost social capital for desired job opportunities. She was once sponsored by an African American male executive, who was two levels above her, for a leadership position that was not in

her area of expertise. She asked for another position that was in line with her expertise and he put her on a track for that promotion to a Senior Manager position. Coco was often promoted, but her promotions were not officially announced in her organization as was commonly done for others. She was diagnosed with Adult ADHD in the early 2000's and mentioned her disability after the study interviews and focus groups were completed. She felt that her diagnosis helped her to improve her work quality because it made her research and prepare more thoroughly, which enhanced her problem-solving ability in her field and made her more promotable than others who were not willing to problem solve.

Coco first held an executive leadership role when she started her own IT consulting business in 2020. She used relationship-building to network throughout her career internally and externally to her organizations to create and expand her current business with positive social capital created from referrals and references from employees in the previous organizations in which she worked.

Coco stated in her online survey response that she “tried to be in the room with the decision makers and make herself a trusted advisor who always stayed ahead of market trends.” She said that she was always in learning mode and spent a lot of time relationship-building. She did not seek an executive leadership role from her social capital gains from her relationships because of her early-career managerial burnout but she knew how to build and use social capital for career growth when she wanted to learn a new work skill.

Sarah repeatedly said in her interviews and focus group discussions that “you have to see it to be it,” which is why she had not aspired to be an executive leader early in her career. She is Asian American and a Vice President in technology in the Midwestern United States. Sarah is currently in her early 40's and obtained her current executive leadership role in her late 30's. She

completed bachelors and master's degrees early in her career and held her first executive leadership role in her 20's. Development and learning have moved Sarah into management and leadership roles even though she said that she did not aspire to become an executive leader because she did not see people who looked like her in those roles.

Sarah stated in her first one-on-one interview that she found an Asian American woman executive leader to mentor her when organizational mentoring programs did not produce good mentors for her. It was after her Asian American mentor helped her understand how to navigate work experiences with their similar cultural background and gave her feedback and sponsorship with introductions and recommendations, that Sarah believed that she could become an executive leader in her career.

Sarah stepped out of work for a year in the middle of her career due to a difficult pregnancy and adjustment to motherhood. She stepped back into IT consulting work for its flexible work hours, to balance her work and family roles. A recruiter found her through her social media network and offered her current executive leadership role opportunity. She claimed that the support that she received from her husband in co-parenting their child made it possible for her to succeed in her current executive role. She described in the focus group discussion that the emotional labor of raising a child was like a second job until she and her husband worked through it by learning how to communicate better with each other and developed equal division of home responsibilities. She said that she would have had to not do her current executive job now if he had not worked with her.

Sarah said in her second one-on-one interview that she networks constantly, often acting as a connector for others' careers. She has an affinity group of professionals from her early career that mentor and sponsor one another for career progression. She said that she builds productive

work relationships and enables her bosses to sponsor her. She was offered professional training with her executive team to improve their communications skills with one another. Through this training, Sarah learned that she is a “hyper achiever” which she believes has helped her to constantly move forward in her career, but that also inhibits her awareness and sense of satisfaction. She is working on building awareness to process situations, modify her behavior, and develop her leadership learning. She has also participated in training and professional development external to her organization through professional associations.

She stated in the focus group discussion that she has always trusted her work leaders because they looked out for her with intentional strategy to align where they wanted to go organizationally with her roles. She is currently the youngest senior leader in her executive team, so she always comes prepared with data and reports that support her recommended strategies for credibility and to gain her female CEO’s sponsorship of her ideas. While social capital was not a term that she used during the study, she strategizes networking, relationship building and sponsorship to build social capital for career success and advancement for herself and others.

Madison became an independent problem-solver in her youth which enabled her to exit her dissatisfying legal career to do professional coaching work that she was passionate about. She is Caucasian, in her 50’s, and the CEO of her own consulting business in the Mid-Atlantic United States. She stated in the one-on-one interview and focus group discussions that her upbringing required her to be a self-sufficient problem-solver at a young age because both of her parents worked professionally and completed their college degrees during her youth. This “you can be anything you want to be” upbringing has served her well as a leader who coaches others how to effectively lead. She feels that her upbringing enabled her to view barriers as challenges to overcome and learn from, not to hold her back. She completed bachelor’s, master’s, and Juris

Doctorate (JD) degrees within six years and before starting her career. She stated that if she wanted to do something in her youth then she figured it out on her own. She said that she “marched to her own drum” which helped her lead herself throughout her career.

Madison started her career as a lawyer and experienced bias when her male co-workers were offered more opportunities and respect. She decided to leave the law profession because the work pattern at her organization was to work alone, and she was an extrovert who needed interaction with others to thrive. She felt a sense of failure, a form of low self-efficacy, when she decided to stop practicing law, even though it was her choice to work more with others and be her authentic self in her work, but she did not let that be a barrier. Her business continues to grow because she says that she is self-directed to see and build opportunities and good fits with clients. She does not see any barriers in her life, just challenges that are a normal part of what she does. She said in the focus group that she thinks that her gender works for her because clients feel supported and connected to her.

Madison started her business over 20 years ago to coach others in their professional and leadership development. In the focus group discussion in response to the last question about how she has developed and used social capital, she said that she constantly builds relationships within clients’ and professional membership organizations to grow her business. Madison is a board member in women’s associations and is often asked to speak at their conferences and provide services to those associations. She said that she also has male clients who believe in her, recommend her, and give her business opportunities as well. Her networking and relationship-building activities maintain her habitus of positive social capital in her field. Her clients say that she really cares about their success while she is focused on getting improved work results in addition to developing them personally. She said in the first one-on-one interview that her

communication style is to be “kind with her candor because she is a relationship person who has to be straight and honest with people.”

Hilary stated in her first interview that she created and “used her superpower for good” after many years of working in a male-dominant technology industry and experiencing criticism of her unique characteristics. She is in her early 60’s and the CEO of her own business that provides organizational development consulting in the Mid-Atlantic United States, after retiring from various executive leadership roles in IT. An African American woman, Hilary said in her one-on-one interview that she had experienced many stereotypes and biases her whole career related to her ethnicity and gender, as well as criticism of her appearance, her weight, and her lack of technical work skills early in her career that only white men were given the opportunity to develop in her work organizations. She said in her one-on-one interview that being a female in a male-dominated organization and profession made others view her as administrative, but she learned technical skills because she is a fighter and resilient. She said that she changed what she could by influencing others to support diversity and inclusion of women in the organizations in which she worked. She moved into increasingly responsible positions as a technical expert in computer programs by problem-solving people and organizations. She said that there was no one to teach her, so she learned how to lead in her executive jobs by reading and taking professional development opportunities. She said that she did what was within her own means to help herself and other women excel in her IT industry.

Hilary said that she was encouraged to find a mentor in her development programs but did not find women like her in her IT organizations. She said that she received more criticism than mentoring throughout her career, which helped her to develop by challenging herself to learn and improve her skills. Hilary asked a conference speaker what she could do to find mentors and he

advised her to be a mentor to others. She developed sponsorship from those she mentored, which helped her in her career while she helped others in their careers. Over 20 years ago, she contacted an African American woman, who was a notable leader in her IT industry, and asked for advice in dealing effectively with bureaucracy and upper management in their technology industry. They have remained friends and continue to mentor each other for growth, as well as sponsor one another for challenging positions. These mentoring relationships created social capital for career progression, although she called it luck in her one-on-one interview.

Hilary shared in her one-on-one interview that she was initially not considered for a promotion to her last executive leadership role by the hiring white males who “groomed each other” for those positions. She later received sponsorship for an interview for that position when her newly appointed boss’s boss, an African American male, decided to place new top leaders in the organization that were not the same good old boys. He stated that he intentionally wanted to change the organization through more diverse and inclusive interviewees than those who had applied. She was then able to interview for her current position. She said that she did a lot of work for it, presented a new technology innovation at a conference from that work, and at the conference she met the lady who was going to interview applicants for that job. This lady mentored and sponsored Hilary to receive visibility for developing her new innovation at the same time that her boss’s boss had declared publicly that he wanted to initiate that innovation in her organization. She felt this all happened out of luck, but she worked hard for it and gained sponsorship for the position, which she later obtained. Hilary developed social capital through networking, relationship building, and sponsorship which was gained through her ability to communicate her experiences from a growth mindset which enabled others to learn from her.

During her focus group discussion, the other participants asked to stay connected to her after this study. I too felt that her life story and humor with which she told it was inspirational.

Lyndie is a high achiever who constantly developed her skills and abilities to move up and often in her career. She is in her mid-50's and was a Senior Vice President of a media corporation in the Midwestern United States at the time of her one-on-one interviews and focus group discussion. She is an African American who has moved up, sometimes out of organizations, about every four years to sustain upward career progression. This strategy worked for her most of her career until recently. She had not been promoted to her organization's highest executive leadership positions in the past seven years, but she said that she had been asked to train white men and women who were given those roles. She stated in her one-on-one interview that she did not think that she had ever experienced external barriers because she was used to figuring things out for herself to move forward in her career.

Lyndie said that she did not have mentors in her career even though she actively requested mentorship from women leaders but received no responses. She said in the focus group that because she was not mentored, she now mentored women in her recently started coaching business that she was running full-time while working full-time in her executive role during this study. She felt that since others would not mentor her when she needed it, that experience shaped her internally" to challenge herself to be what other people needed."

Lyndie did not let barriers hinder her career success by decreasing her social capital, she had strategically networked to expand her industry relationships and gained access to work experiences through higher-level executives who have sponsored her for executive roles. In her interviews, Lyndie claimed to be relationship-focused, whether peer-to-peer or with manager's peers, to manage up and around to reach those who would expand her network.

In addition to constantly working on building relationships, Lyndie has always focused throughout her career on learning and developing her leadership ability. After completing a master's degree in business, she strategically moved from the non-profit sector to the for-profit sector for career growth and development. She shared in her first interview that she was given an interview at the end of the hiring process for her first for-profit position out of courtesy from a networking relationship, but she worked hard to impress the interviewer and was offered the job.

Lyndie noticed that white women who came into her current company were put in training and development programs upon entry, but high-ranking people of color were not put in them. She said that she received the same level of development and training as her white counterparts, but she had to ask for it. She did not see this as a barrier, but a lesson to not be afraid to ask for your own training and development. She stated that "if you think that you are worthy of it and your performance reflects that, then you should ask for it." She said that every time she asked, she was granted those opportunities, until her most recent job.

Lyndie developed her communication skills to enable her career success, to build solid work relationships, and to obtain desired executive roles. She stated in her interview that she is a vocal advocate of integrity, a truth-teller who told people what they needed to hear and not necessarily what they wanted to hear. She trusted her intentions and instincts with confidence. When she did not trust her instincts about racial inequities that she had experienced in her organizations, she doubted herself, so she talked with others who had similar experiences for validation before discussing biased behaviors with executives. She learned to interpret how others received her by lowering her voice and smiling while speaking so that others would hear her and not feel threatened by her confidence and honesty. She was able to move consistently throughout her career to increasingly responsible positions through the social capital that she had

built in her work and networking relationships and that she had gained from their sponsorship for promotions.

Decreases in Social Capital

This study looked at barriers externally imposed by others and internally imposed upon themselves throughout the participants' careers due to their gender, intersected with their ethnicity, age, weight and family status. I assumed in this study, based on past research studies, that the barriers would have decreased the participants' social capital and hampered their career progression. The participants stated in the interviews and focus groups that they had experienced challenges, but that they would not call them barriers because they did not hold them back in their careers. They viewed their challenges as necessary to learn how to work through and created learning, thereby creating a gain in human capital of self-development and improvement that they might not have otherwise earned. This way of thinking about barriers as opportunities for growth and learning indicated that the participants had growth mindsets (Dweck, 2008). When asked if they would have preferred to not have experienced their barriers, they replied that they would not have eliminated them because their experienced barriers challenged them to work harder, to focus on increasing their social capital, and enabled them to obtain executive leadership roles. Hilary said that if it were not for "hurdles" imposed by others, she would have been a "high-performing, lower-level technician" her whole career instead of the executive leader that she was, because the barriers made her work harder to learn how to become a leader.

Dweck revisited her growth mindset research in 2015 and stated that how one perceives their abilities played a key role in one's motivation toward achievement. She said that focusing on learning through hard work is a growth mindset strategy of seeking the benefits of that work. Following are the participants' responses to interview and focus group questions that

demonstrated their growth mindsets that produced overall career social capital gains after they experienced slightly decreased social capital during the imposition of barriers. Appendix G has a summary table of all barriers experienced by each participant.

External Barriers of Bias, Lack of Opportunity, and Stereotypes.

External barriers are imposed by others in organizations and in industries, particularly within those that are male-dominant in their workforce and executive management. In social capital terms, organizations and industries are the field in which one works. The study's participants who worked in male-dominant IT, manufacturing and media industries said that they had to work much harder than their male coworkers to progress in their careers and acquire their executive leadership roles. They indicated that their fields were becoming more equitable for women because they could now discuss with management and report to human resources, without repercussion, about their experienced inequities in job assignments and promotions, which has informed executives in their organizations the need to remove those barriers. Four of the seven participants left organizations that imposed external barriers and started their own businesses to lead, even though they stated that the barriers did not hold them back in their careers. The three participants who remained executive leaders in others' organizations had no longer experienced external barriers. Their experiences with external barriers follow.

Sally said in her interview and focus group discussion that she had to constantly move out of male-dominant organizations for upward career progression and was recently promoted to her first executive role by a female boss. She stated that her manufacturing industry and organizations were boys' clubs and that women "knew that management was as far as she could go" in those organizations. She said that she would not be allowed into the executive team for her accounting and leadership ability when only one token female had been allowed in the executive team. She

said that the organizational culture at her last job was so toxic that women sabotaged each other to appear better to executives in the hopes of obtaining the token female executive role someday, which she said that she did not desire because it was an HR role to “babysit the staff.” She made a lateral move from that toxic culture to work for a woman CFO in another manufacturing company and build social capital in a business that valued diverse leadership.

Gloria learned about gaining social capital early in her career when she was mentored and sponsored by a commanding officer in the military. That experience imprinted upon her the value of sponsorship for career progression, which served her well to strategize upward movement into management and executive roles in non-profit organizations that led to better-paying and progressively responsible roles later in her career in for-profit consulting firms. She shared in the focus group that although the military is still male-dominant, by the 1990’s women could compete for roles that men traditionally had, but when she did not have commanding officer sponsorship, she was automatically put into a stereotypical female administrative role. She said that she experienced a lot of people telling her what she could and could not do, but she did not let them stop her from getting where she wanted to go in her career. She said that she noticed that women had to work twice as hard as men to become recognized, but she thought that more women today were supporting one another to accomplish their career goals. Gloria said in her interview that she felt that organizations grew from women’s knowledge and contributions and women today are growing more confident because they are now validated and supported at work.

Coco received technical training and advanced into management early in her career in the 1980’s after demonstrating her high skill level in IT. But as she became more knowledgeable about her IT industry advancements than her upper management, she was questioned by managers who did not believe in her skills. She stated in her interview that she realized later after talking to

other African Americans who had similar experiences, that it was because she was one of the few African American women employees, specifically 12 out of 100 employees in her male-dominant organization. She was often told after completing a project that managers were impressed and that they did not think that she could do such a high quality of work. Despite managers' disbelief in her abilities, she networked with new team members and shared her experience and credentials upon first meeting to establish credibility and to keep moving forward in projects. She built social capital in her work relationships, and she said that her co-workers did not want her to leave their teams for new projects.

Sarah began working in IT in the 2000's when women were encouraged to join the male-dominant industry. She completed both of her college degrees early in her career for upward mobility and acquired her first executive role in her late 30's. She stated in her interviews that she did not set a goal of executive role attainment because she did not see executives who looked like her. She found very few executive role models and they were "mostly white, older men in power," so she "worked on what she could do to succeed" in her career because she could not change her gender or race. From her Asian American upbringing, her parents told her to assimilate with a stronger presence in voice and opinions for American culture. After searching for work role models, she found someone who looked like her and was someone that she wanted to emulate. From this mentorship, her mentor helped her to realize that she could succeed in her career without changing herself and by navigating through her career journey. She experienced disbelief in her presentations because she was the youngest member on the executive team. To establish credibility, she often expressed her opinions and came very prepared to meetings to prove her expertise. She received feedback from peers throughout her career that they assumed

that she would be less assertive and articulate than she was, which she perceived as bias expressed due to her age and ethnicity.

Madison stated in her interview and focus group that she did not perceive that any barriers were imposed upon her, and she did not impose any barriers upon herself because her upbringing taught her to figure things out for herself and to work for what she wanted. Although she did state that she had a law firm boss who treated her differently than a man that she worked with who was given more opportunities and respect, but she felt that most men that she worked with were very supportive of her. When she became dissatisfied with her law career, she started her own business in the early 2000's of executive development. She said in her interview that she provided coaching that she was never given, but she built fortitude in developing her business by being her authentic self to create good fits with clients. She made a career choice early in her career to create her own business and executive position to lead it, unlike the other participants who worked in others' organizations most of their careers before starting their own businesses later in their careers.

Hilary started her career in the male-dominated IT industry in the early 1980's when there were few women and few people of color. She stated in her interview that "women were viewed as administrative and not technical." Early in her career she received a lot of criticism of her work skills and her appearance, including her hair style, weight, and nail color. From that feedback, she changed herself by modifying her appearance, socializing with male managers to get technical assignments to improve her technical skills (usually not given to women), and she built alliances for promotions. She said that she eventually stopped apologizing for what others did not like about her and stopped feeling inferior so that her barriers became "hurdles" that she jumped over and around to accomplish her career goals.

Lyndie said in her interview and focus group that she felt that she had not been affected by barriers as she had moved up in her career steadily through her own strategic plan of moving up or out of organizations every four years. This strategy had worked for her to obtain an executive leadership role, but she was still unable to achieve the highest executive positions in her media organization of predominantly white male executives. In the past seven years she felt that there was “a glass ceiling for people who looked like her.” She saw her white counterparts being elevated to President or Executive Vice President roles over her and those same opportunities were not offered to her. When she talked to a black female HR executive about not getting promotion offers in the past few years, the HR executive told her that she should be grateful for her salary at her age because it was higher than most people in the company. Lyndie asked her if she had ever said that to older white male executives and she admitted that she had not. Lyndie said that she was raised to not let other people put her in a box that only they felt comfortable with, so she did not let external barriers impact her career. She developed her own business to mentor women and grew her business while continuing to work full-time in her SVP job. She said that she built social capital by networking external to her organization when she could not internally.

Internal Barriers of Low Self-Efficacy, Family Demands and Lack of Will.

Internal barriers are imposed by habitus in social capital theory or women’s lived experiences and behaviors. Barriers that women impose upon themselves are often caused by external barriers that they have experienced, which have contributed loss of social capital in their careers. This study’s participants did not develop low self-efficacy or disbelief in their abilities, they followed a growth mindset that they could develop themselves and their abilities through learning and change. The participants had small families of two or less children and collaborative

spouses, so their family demands created no social capital loss in their careers and the only lack of will communicated by the participants during their interviews was to “step back” from promotions to assess their personal and organizational situations, but they eventually took promotions of jobs with increasing responsibility to grow their careers.

Sally stated in her interview that she has had family support throughout her career, including her ex-husband caring for their daughter and praising her work ethic when her child missed her on late work nights. She had not expressed any lack of will to move upward in her career. Male and female bosses had mentored Sally to complete professional training to increase her communication and coping skills. She obtained professional training and moved out of a toxic organization to advance her career. This was not the only time that the “good old boy” network limited her career options for executive leadership roles, but it enabled a toxic work culture in which women sabotaged each other’s work to appear better for career advancement. Those women’s internally-barriered behaviors informed Sally when she mentored women to not engage in that negative work behavior to excel in their careers.

Coco’s social capital increased early in her career when she was promoted into a management role in her early 20’s based on her technical and relationship-building skills, but with no management training. The demands of that management role exhausted her, and she became sick from being on call 24/7. She said in her interview and focus group discussion that she “stepped back from managerial promotions” after that experience to avoid future burnout and to balance family demands. She did not feel that stepping back had harmed her career progression until she began to contemplate its effect on her career in our interview discussion. She thought that possibly one instance of stepping back had lost her social capital in her career but not significantly, as she felt that she was constantly learning and had many notable accomplishments.

Stepping back is a lack of will to compete for promotions, but she eventually took on more and more challenging projects once she balanced her family demands.

Gloria also stepped back from promotions throughout her career to understand new organizational cultures in which she would work. Low self-efficacy was not the issue for this lack of will to pursue promotions, she took the time that she needed to reflect and replenish before taking on new roles. She was harassed early in her career in a male-dominant organization, and with high self-efficacy she demanded that organizational executives stop the behavior, which they did. She built her efficacy by partnering with others and learning from them to improve her skills and build her network. She experienced gender inequity in her organizations and prepared herself to excel in her career by “working twice as hard as men in similar positions.” In her most recent executive position, she said that she took her time in considering and accepting the role to avoid taking a token woman leadership role in an organization of all male leaders. She said in the focus group discussion that she wished she would have focused more on work-life balance but did not mention it as an internal barrier in her interviews.

Sarah shared in her first one-on-one interview that she experienced a difficult pregnancy and adjustment to motherhood, so she stepped out of her career after giving birth to her child for a year. She did not know how to balance motherhood with her work ethic to be good at a demanding executive job, so she took a consulting job that had more flexibility. A recruiter contacted her about her current executive leadership role, so Sarah communicated with her husband to balance family demands so that she could be successful in that role. She did not lack will in her professional career, but she said in the focus group that she lacked social capital in her personal life with her child’s school and classmates’ parents because she was more focused on her career.

Madison also achieved work-life balance while co-parenting with her husband. She did not feel that she had faced internal barriers or obstacles in her career, just things that she had to deal with and figure out. While she said in her first interview that she briefly felt as if she had failed in her career when she stopped practicing law, she realized that it was her decision to leave and start her own business, so she did not let that diminish her self-efficacy. She said that her husband was a great support and mentor who broadened her perspective with his different views. Early in her career she looked at what it meant for her to succeed, and she felt very isolated. She found mentors and developed good relationships to start her consulting business based on her learning from others and imparted that learning to help clients navigate their careers and organizations.

Hilary worked throughout her career on improving her self-efficacy when faced with constant gender, racial and weight discrimination. She shared in the focus group that she learned from a high school counselor that she was intelligent and could go to college based on her individual ability to learn. Her self-efficacy increased throughout her career because she felt that her intelligence and self-leadership was the only way that she would grow in her IT profession of predominantly white males. She had no lack of will in her career, when co-workers challenged or discriminated against her, she became more resolute to work around them and to improve herself to achieve her career goals. She did not have children and those family demands during her career, but she now balances caring for her elderly mother while running her business.

She said in the focus group discussion that she did not have a role model who looked like her or who did what she did, so she “pulled herself up when down and kept working toward what she wanted” to do in her career. She said that she was the first African American female in her first IT leadership role, and she was very visible, which she had heard similar experiences from

other people like her. She said in the focus group that she became a “little bristly” when others said that they found it easy to relate to her and she had no one that she could find to relate to through most of her career. She mentored women by being very transparent about what it was like for African American women to gain leadership roles in IT and the hard work it took to accomplish an executive leadership role.

Lyndie was told by her parents to “not let anyone put her in a place that she did not want to be,” which began her strong sense of self-efficacy that she has strengthened throughout her career. She said that she had not experienced any internal barriers and did not believe that the external barriers of bias and stereotypes held her back in her career in any way because she would not let them. She said in her interview and focus group that when faced with challenges, she fought for what she believed that she deserved with hard work and integrity. She said that she was “never content to settle”, and she deserved to ask for more based on her hard work.

A consistent theme in the participants’ responses when they were asked about internal barriers is that they did not create barriers for themselves in their careers, they worked harder on improving their communication skills to work past and learn from external barriers imposed upon them by others. This is a growth mindset technique of learning from challenges to accomplish career goals (Dweck, 2015, September 22). The participants shared stories of increased social capital quickly after experiencing barriers that could decrease their capital, even if they did not acknowledge having experienced the barriers.

Increases in Social Capital

Strategies that increase social capital in the field of organizations are professional development programs, having a culture of inclusion with a structure of diverse leadership and succession planning to enable those who work toward career advancement and executive

leadership roles to obtain their career goals within their organization. Women who create a habitus of taking advantage of organizational programs, culture and structure increase their social capital, as well as their human capital of skill and leadership improvement. The literature review revealed that often in organizations, human capital development in the form of training and mentoring is encouraged for women's leadership development, but increasing social capital through relationship-building, networking and sponsorship are not done as much for women as men in organizations. Five study participants shared similar career experiences that they actively pursued social capital increase through sponsorship gained early and often in their careers which enabled them to acquire executive leadership roles early and they held multiple executive leadership roles in their careers. Whereas, the two participants who passively received sponsorship had obtained their first executive roles later in their careers in their 50's.

Organizational Strategies of Culture, Programs and Structure.

Sally moved to and from multiple male-dominant manufacturing organizations to escape toxic work cultures and the lack of upward career mobility for women. The organizational structure that she endured in the manufacturing industry field was hierarchical and dominantly male executives. She built her credibility and human capital by attending college on her own while working full-time in accounting until she found a woman executive to mentor and sponsor her for promotion. Her social capital increase occurred late in her career as she now holds her only executive leadership position. Her male-dominant manufacturing industry created a lack of social capital development opportunities for her as a woman.

Gloria noted in her interview that her career development was dependent upon bosses championing her when her male-dominant military organization did not promote women often. This was true even after the policy change in the 1990's when women could compete for jobs that

only men had held in the military, but she was moved to an administrative position so that she could not be promoted based on the policy change. She moved into the intelligence field to gain career development and an eventual leadership position. Some division leaders in the U.S. military did enforce the policy change, but she experienced how some did not. Gloria learned from her military experience to value diversity of people and perspectives that grew her organizations and the individuals within them. This culture change allowed for women to build social capital toward executive role attainment.

Gloria stated in her focus group discussion that by the mid-2000's, human resource departments were viewed as part of the corporate partnership and no longer as stereotypical female support roles. She said that a culture change allowed women to contribute to the organization's knowledge base and women were then valued for what they brought to the table. She thought that this was a new perspective that made her organizations grow in ways that they had not before. She said that she saw herself and other women grow individually when they were valued, which built self-confidence and efficacy because they were validated by their work. In her most recent executive role, she leads a change management department in a male-dominant organization, not as a token executive female, but as a valued different perspective of leadership. She said in the focus group discussion that she sponsors her team members for promotion and has noticed an organizational culture shift toward team development in the 2000's.

Coco said in her interview that her value to her organization was that she did what other people did not want to do, which gave her access to her organizations' training programs, and she became an expert in IT services vital to the organizations in which she worked. These programs enabled her to increase her human capital to excel in projects and her career because she said that she was in continual learning mode on technology changes. When she was ready to learn

something new to do a different project, she said that she would have to put together an “exit plan” because she became a subject matter expert in her project teams and her teammates did not want her to leave projects that she managed. She said that she was a relationship-builder, which increased her social capital in her teams, but she did not try to increase her social capital with upper management so that she could avoid promotion to managerial roles that had burned her out early in her career. She also felt that she was targeted for management roles as token hirings due to her race and she did not want to damage her working relationships by taking a token job. She made more lateral moves in her career to various project lead roles which decreased her social capital. Her first executive role started in 2020 running her IT consulting business grown from the social capital she had built with previous organizations’ team members.

Sarah was the youngest study participant and moved into executive leadership roles the fastest of the participants. She started her career in 2005 and obtained her first executive leadership position in 2011 after completing her MBA. She said in her interviews that she was offered professional development training in her organizations and professional association membership with development programs throughout her career. This learning culture and structure enabled her to develop her human and social capital to thrive in female-dominant organizations that supported her career growth. When she became an executive leader, she actively tried to make her organizations’ structures more culturally diverse so that employees could see themselves represented in their organization’s employees and executives, which she had not experienced in the beginning of her career, by building her my own networks, moving up others who had more diverse upbringings and were people of color like her. She said in her interviews and focus group that navigating cultural upbringing was different in America than traditional Asia and what was considered successful behaviors were different. Despite working in

organizational structures that promoted women, the organizational cultures lacked support of young employees who had to prove themselves more than older employees. She experienced pushback from fellow executives in her organizations for being a young executive in her 30's, so she developed a pattern of meeting preparedness and sponsorship from the CEO for credibility, a combination of human and social capital strategy.

Madison said in the focus group that she has set a professional example for her staff and clients by promoting an organizational culture of trust, strong relationships, and a collaborative work environment. She said that she has built a culture of willing collaboration without politics in her business, that people would not hire her if they did not trust and like her, as well as they have brought her new business from their business communities. She is on the board of directors for women's professional membership organizations for which she has spoken regularly at conferences and provided services to the associations and their members. She has male clients who have given her business opportunities as well. Inside and outside of her organization, she increased her social capital while developing others' human capital.

Hilary said in her interview and focus group that because of being in her 60's, female and an African American, she experienced inequitable organizational structures her whole career. Her white male-dominant organizations did not have a culture or structure that supported diverse leadership until that began to change in the past few years during her last executive position held in another's organization. She experienced overt racist and sexist comments, women were assumed to only be able to hold administrative positions, and there was a lack of technical development for people of color and for women. When she became an executive leader, she said that she "created her own organization" where she could influence and enlighten people by sharing her experiences with co-workers to help them learn how to become less biased. She

promoted and supported diversity and inclusion efforts to try to support women and help more women get into the IT field. She had to socially engage with managers to be allowed to participate in her organizations' professional and technical development programs. She built her social capital through relationships to create her human capital for her development.

Lyndie had moved up her organizations' structures and had held multiple executive leadership roles until the past seven years when she had not been promoted to her organization's highest executive level, but she has been asked to train those who were hired for those positions. The executives in her organization had tried to change their culture to be more inclusive of people of color and asked her how they could modify their practices to accomplish diversity that appealed congruent with their client base. She suggested that they hire more diverse employees, but they did not appreciate her confident communication when it focused on what was inequitable in the organization. Sensing her social capital decreasing in her employer's organization, Lyndie has focused lately on building her coaching business where she can build social capital with her clients, as well as with external professional organizations' executives.

Internal Strategies of Development, Mentoring, Networking and Sponsorship.

All participants had a habitus of seeking learning opportunities to increase their human capital through advanced college education and professional development training. This enabled them to be considered for career advancement and promotions, as well as satisfy their internal need for learning and growth. All participants completed at least master's level college work at the encouragement of their bosses and mentors and used their learning to overcome challenges, or barriers, to improve their professional and technical skills.

The participants were encouraged to find mentors for learning and development, but the African American women expressed that they had a difficult time finding other women of color

who were willing to mentor them. They became mentors and received mentoring feedback from those that they mentored, as well as career sponsorship from their mentees. Those who struggled with finding mentors used feedback from “good” bosses to improve themselves.

Sally said in her interview that she had several male bosses who mentored her and taught her a lot by advising her to complete a college degree for promotability and to take professional development training to improve her communication skills. She finished her bachelor’s degree and some masters’ degree work until she realized that she did not need to finish her MBA to become a Controller because of her progressive accounting experience. Sally spoke very little about networking activities except to say that other women in the accounting field reached out to her for mentoring advice. She did not use the term “sponsorship” as a career strategy, but she said that her most recent boss helped her obtain her current executive role.

Gloria obtained her bachelor’s and master’s degrees and is now starting her doctoral degree for continued personal development. She said in her interviews that she has relied more on social capital gained from sponsorship and being an ally to others than her human capital development for her career growth. She learned early in her career that sponsorship from a revered organizational leader was a multiplier of career success and job opportunities. She said in the focus group discussion that she had an intrinsic desire and need to keep moving forward in her career. When a senior male manager saw her drive, he offered to mentor her early in her career and soon others in the organization started coming to her for her thoughts. He sponsored her by touting her capability which she said grew her credibility exponentially and enabled her to offer more than she could alone in her organization and with more weight. When she did not have sponsorship or when she had a sponsor with a negative reputation, she figured out other ways to get where she wanted to go by continuing to grow, learn and offer her capability and “offer her

skills where they were truly wanted.’ She built networks and relationships and impressed others by trying things that they did not think that she could do and “knocking their socks off.” She created other career paths when she lacked sponsorship and she built alliances by supporting others because she felt that “there was room for everybody to succeed.” Gloria felt that when she was fortunate enough to move up, it was because of others and that she would not have been in her executive role that she is in today if she had not had leaders who championed her as the right person for that leadership job. She said in the focus group that she knew who she wanted to be allied with and not allied with and when the right opportunity came along, she was able to recognize it.

Coco said in her interviews that she had spent her career leading information technology (IT) change and implementation projects in which she built good working relationships internally, tried to be in the room with decision makers, and she networked externally in professional organizations to develop industry learning and credibility. She said in the focus group that she had some good bosses, but none that she considered to be mentors. Because she struggled to find mentorship and she had experienced racial discrimination at work, she shared her work experiences to mentor younger African American co-workers to help them navigate the racial stereotypes to achieve promotions. She remains connected to her mentees after retiring and they have given her references for her business. She continues to develop social capital to grow her business by helping others increase their human capital through her mentoring.

Sarah said in her interview that she always took advantage of training and mentoring offered by her organizations. When her organizations’ mentoring programs provided her with “bad mentors,” she found mentors through external professional development programs and developed her own network for mentors. She learned a lot about how IT data analysis can

improve businesses by a boss and mentor early in her career, which helped her understand the value of continued learning and communicating those findings to others for the betterment of her organizations. She said in her interview that she felt confident in her personal identity, the value that she has brought to the organizations in which she has worked, and her ability to “self-educate” for career development outside of her organization that her organization sponsors. Once Sarah found an Asian American woman mentor, she then aspired to be an executive like her mentor without changing who she was. IT professionals of similar racial backgrounds have reached out to Sarah in recent years to connect, network and seek career advice. She has made a small affinity group of her mentees because she firmly believes that “if you can see it, you can be it,” and she is committed to help others find mentors who are like them.

Madison said in her interview and focus group that she was raised to be self-reliant and well-educated, an early start to her habitus of self-development. She completed three college degrees in six years before starting her career. When she was young and her parents were often working or going to school, therefore absent from her home, they told her that she could do whatever she wanted in life, but she knew that she had to figure things out on her own. Madison said in the focus group that she did not know to look for mentors for advice until she felt alone when she started her business, so she sought mentors to help her develop and grow her business. Her business continued to evolve to meet different clients’ needs, so she felt that she was always in a position of just figuring out next steps to keep moving forward in her career and business. She said that her best source of mentors were women that she met in professional organizations who supported each other, as well as her husband from whom she often sought perspective on hard business questions.

Hilary received mentoring from her high school counselor to use her academic talent to go to college to develop her skills and career opportunities. She continued to develop herself by taking technical training that she was offered at work, she completed bachelor's, master's, and doctoral college degrees, and she said that she is constantly assessing what has worked for her to accomplish her career goals. She held numerous executive positions before she retired and started her own change consulting business a few years ago. It took her many years in her career to find a mentor in her IT industry who looked like her. She said in her interview and focus group that she mentored herself to learn, improved herself, and accomplished her career goals by working hard, being willing to change, and not waiting for things to come to her. She felt that her career experiences have made her resilient to overcome any hurdles in her life.

In her first interview she stated that, as a black woman, she was perceived at work as being smart-mouthed, sassy, and the stereotypical angry black woman when she spoke her truth and was honest. She felt that when she spoke truthfully about the discrimination that she experienced in her male-dominant industry, that she did it to change organizational experiences for the better and that was a good contribution which she called her "superpower" that she would not let anyone make her feel was bad. She said that when she believed that her superpower was used for good, then she was very transparent about what it was like and what it took for an African American woman to succeed in her industry. To expand learning to achieve organizational change of more diversity and inclusion, she said that she "found a way to network for her introverted personality" by volunteering to be a keynote speaker at women's and IT conferences. In her focus group discussion, she said that she wanted to change her networking approach to focus more on individuals and less on whole audiences of people, but once we talked

about the importance of building social capital for career and business growth, she said that she was rethinking that.

Lyndie, like Hilary, mentored herself often in her early career because she had not found a mentor who looked like her. She had completed two college degrees and implemented self-improvement based on feedback from bosses. She said in her interview that she always networked external to her organizations for career opportunities. In the beginning of her career, she reached out to established women to see if they would mentor her and she never received responses. She said that experience shaped her to now provide mentoring to women and she started her business while still working full-time “to be what other people needed and what she needed in her 20’s when she did not have any mentors.”

After being told that she was very capable but that there was no room for her to advance in an organization when she was 27 years old, she decided to move up or out of an organization every four years to keep growing. She said that she was not focused on going to higher levels, but she loved her media work and was passionate about learning and doing more in her career. She said that she had always been very proactive in asking for what she wanted in her career. Now that she feels that her career has stalled and she has not been able to move into a higher executive role in her current organization, she has focused on building social capital outside of her work organization with people like her company’s executives who are middle-aged white men. She has done a lot of keynote speaking in the past ten years to talk about her passion for her work. At a conference at which she spoke recently, she realized that she had a limited network of middle-aged white men, so she made a spreadsheet of white men that she wanted to get to know better and ways that she could “learn more about their habitats.” She joined a board of all white males strategically to learn more about their habitus and to network with them.

Lyndie has had difficulty communicating with the male executives in her organization so she focused on developing her self-awareness to lower her voice and smile when speaking so that others would hear her and not be intimidated by her confidence. A previous boss told her to take the emotion out of her speech so that others could understand better what she was saying.

Summary Analysis of Social Capital in the Participants' Career Journeys

Based on their interview and focus group responses, all participants indicated that they used a strategy of developing strong educational and skill development in their careers. Their human capital consisted of advanced college degree completion, continual skill acquisition and learning through professional development, as well as seeking mentorship from and mentoring others. Women in U.S. businesses have been told for decades to increase their human capital to obtain their highest career goals and yet the gender gap persists in U.S. business executive leadership. This study found that when these executive women leaders' careers had stalled because their barriers held them back, those times were when they lacked social capital in their fields. They then networked and built internal and external work relationships to increase their social capital. This study found that when they did not obtain sponsorship from higher executives in their organizations, they did not continue to move up in the executive leadership ranks of their organizations.

All study participants were advised by mentors and bosses to continually increase their human capital, which they did throughout their whole careers. They valued learning with a growth mindset aimed at their continued development personally and professionally. Sally and Coco described human capital improvement as their strategy for career progression and their work relationships were focused on completing work more than on growing their career advancement opportunities. They indicated in their online survey responses that they felt that they currently

held executive level leadership roles, but I would not classify their positions of Controller and Founder as high as the executive organizational leadership level that the other five participants had achieved through social capital accumulation.

Sally and Coco communicated in the interviews and focus group discussion about their barriers and strategies to overcome them with negative framing of their continued frustration with those situations and that they used a strategy of working around problem situations by letting their bosses work through their social issues with co-workers, rather than building and using their own social capital to resolve their problems themselves. Both increased their human capital skill development immediately after difficult social situations as Sally took training classes to build her communication skills, at the recommendation of her boss, and Coco developed her human capital skills with new technical training to move to new project teams. Fitzsimmons and Callan (2019) posited that increased senior leadership development requires leadership status that is conferred by others. Coco stated that her co-workers saw her as a leader even though she did not have that position title, but she also stated in her interviews that she was a subject matter expert in her projects, which is not the same as being a leader. As with many women who attend the professional development classes that I train through my business, Sally and Coco were not advised of nor aware of the need for social capital development for upward career progression to executive leadership roles.

Gloria, Sarah, and Madison identified in their interviews that they had experienced family nurturing of their leadership development, which DeRue and Ashford (2010) found in their leadership identity research to be foundational in creating reciprocal role adoption that leads to executive leadership endorsement. Reciprocal role adoption is the habitus of building mutual influence in social interactions which laid the foundation for them to be seen as leaders and

offered mentoring and sponsorship early in and throughout their careers. Fitzsimmons et al. (2014) found that building social capital early in one's career develops self-efficacy which enables capital accumulation throughout one's career and can compensate for a lack of habitus, such as when Gloria stepped back before accepting promotions to assess the organizational culture, when Sarah stepped out of work for a year while adjusting to motherhood, and when Madison left her law career to start her own business. While they may have slowed their social capital accumulation at work briefly at times, they maintained their external networks' social capital and human capital accumulation throughout their careers.

As African American women who have held multiple executive leadership roles during their careers in male-dominant industries, Hilary's and Lyndie's career journeys demonstrated a combination of human capital and social capital development to overcome the intersectionality of multiple barriers with gender, including their race, physical attributes, and communication style. They both indicated that sponsorship built through relationships was a key strategy for them to acquire social capital to obtain their highest executive roles. Hilary obtained an executive job interview that she had been previously denied by networking and gaining sponsorship with the job interviewer at a conference. Lyndie obtained her bosses' sponsorship for promotions and move up successively in her career until recently when her boss's boss did not sponsor her. When her field limited her career progression, she started her own business to run as the CEO in coaching women in career and personal development.

Researcher Observations. The purpose of this study was to inform women who desired executive leadership positions on strategies that have enabled women executive leaders to acquire those roles. The gender gap in leadership will persist until women and organizations are educated in the importance of not only encouraging women to increase their human capital of skills and

knowledge through mentoring, education, and development, but also to increase their social capital of power and value through sponsorship, networking and gaining allies in their organizations and industries. If we focused women's professional development on relationship strategies to increase social capital early and often in their careers, as the participants in this study have demonstrated, women of all intersections will acquire the social capital that they need to achieve their career goals and executive leadership positions.

I observed in the interviews and focus group discussions that Sally and Coco were mentored by bosses on human capital development, but not advised nor did they work to accumulate social capital until late in their careers. Because they did not accumulate social capital early and often in their careers as the other participants had, they did not achieve similar highest organizational executive level positions as the other five participants occupied at the time of the study. Sally moved out of organizations due to their toxic cultures and let her bosses handle those issues for her, although she eventually took communication development classes at the recommendation of a mentoring boss. She only demonstrated the use of social capital for career progression in her 50's and communicate that she still was overwhelmed by her experiences of women bullying her throughout her career. Coco had a similar career as Hilary and both were the few African American women in their IT industries, yet Coco avoided social capital opportunities and Hilary took her experienced stereotypes and biases as challenges to develop herself to position herself to participate in organizational gatherings to gain social capital among her peers and superiors. Coco said in her online survey that she "tried to be in the room with the decision makers...to make herself a trusted advisor," but she did so as a technical expert, not forming allies or sponsorship for career progression to managerial and leadership positions, which she stated in her interviews that she tried to avoid most of her career. Coco's first executive role was in her

own consulting business which she said that she built her client base and referrals from her past work relationships, a use of social capital.

Gloria was the only participant that stated that sponsorship received early and often in her career was the reason for her upward career progression to executive leadership. She talked in the interviews and focus group about her early career experience with a male mentor who sponsored her by championing her, which was when she first realized that was how she could move up in her career in the male-dominant U.S. military. She later experienced in a consulting job that when she moved from a great sponsor to a sponsor who was not liked in the organization that she had to “create her own sponsorship or persona to get credibility.” Gloria was very relational in her speech pattern by encouraging and including the other participants in the focus group discussion. She said that she had received coaching on her communication pattern to balance her directness, I observed that this caring approach to communication made her seem like the participant leader in her focus group.

All participants seemed confident and supportive of helping other women, which they stated was why they agreed to participate in this study. Hilary and Lyndie had the very engaging personalities, Hilary was very funny and Lyndie was very energetic and encouraging. They both stated in their focus group discussion that they had experienced similar career experiences with their first executive roles which they both obtained in the late 1990’s. Both have held six executive leadership positions in their careers. They were close in age, and both are African American women who worked predominantly in male-dominant industries until recently leaving and starting their own businesses. While Hilary said that she had obtained her highest desired executive leadership role, Lyndie had remained in her last executive role for over seven years unable to move higher while she trained white men and women who were promoted above her.

They both said that they experienced frequent discrimination from “good old boys.” I was sad to hear about how badly they were treated because of their race, weight, and confident communication styles throughout their entire careers. Despite the intersection of multiple characteristics to gender that would typically reduce social capital, they focused on learning, improving their skills, and moving forward in their careers early and often through relationship-building that gained them social capital for promotion.

As I reflect on the participants’ shared experiences, I see similarities to my career experiences. Like Lyndie, I started my consulting business to achieve an executive leadership role when my social capital did not produce a promotion to a higher executive level position that I had desired, and I had proven capable of performing. As a Caucasian woman, I did not receive overt statements expressing gender bias that may have prevented me from being considered for those opportunities. There were numerous times in my career that a male boss made comments about my appearance being the reason for my business success, so I believe it was possible. My direct and honest communication pattern is like all the participants, as well as my desire to overcome obstacles through learning and development. I identified with the participants’ life stories when they discussed stepping out of work after the birth of a child, stepping back from job offers to assess organizations’ willingness to accommodate my family demands with my work schedule, and maneuvering the boy’s club in working for others and in my consulting business. Table 4.2 includes participant quotes about their experiences of barriers and strategies.

Table 4.2 Participant Quotes

Participant	Barrier Quote	Strategy Quote
Sally	It's a boy's club that you couldn't get past for executive job opportunities.	I had to leave to get promoted...my current boss mentored me to get my promotion.
Gloria	My leadership ability was known and either considered not a right fit or threat.	In my career, I found that when I partnered with people, I got so much more out of that opportunity, and I learned more.
Coco	I didn't know if the lack of co-worker support was because I was black, young, female, or all three.	A black male manager two levels above me put me on track for a promotion.
Sarah	As a woman of Asian descent, I didn't see leaders like me, so I didn't see myself in leadership roles.	I have always trusted my leaders as they always looked out for me with intentional strategy for my role and where they wanted to go with the organization.
Madison	I was treated differently than a man I worked with who got more opportunities and respect.	I don't take things personally or let it deter me. I march to my own drum, which probably helps.
Hilary	As a black woman, you are perceived as smart-mouthed, sassy, and the stereotypical angry black woman when you speak your truth and are honest.	My superpower is that no one can make me feel that my truth is bad.
Lyndie	I had to ask for the same level of development and training as my white counterparts...high-ranking people of color were not put in them.	Throughout my career, I have been relationship-focused, peer-to-peer, manager's peers, managing relationships up around managers who don't want you to expand your network.

The participants have experienced many external barriers and they used those experiences to challenge themselves to learn, develop, and grow their human capital and social capital, not letting their barriers hold them back for long. Hilary said that experiencing her external barriers

pushed her to move forward in her career in ways that she might not have tried without them. The participants' strategies demonstrated the effectiveness of having and practicing a growth mindset to learn and work through challenges to achieve career progression and executive leadership positions (Dweck, 2008). Dweck's 2015 commentary on growth mindset expanded the concept by stating that the goal is the journey, not the destination, for success. In this study, success was described by the participants as not obtaining an executive leadership role, but the continued learning and development that challenged and satisfied their growth needs.

While the participants' experienced barriers multiplied due to the intersection of their gender, race, age and weight characteristics, their strategies fell into two categories of sponsorship and resilience that worked for their careers regardless of their intersectionality. This indicated successful strategies to achieve goals for those who seek career advancement, those who train others in career advancement, and organizations who want to promote diversity and equity in leadership. The next chapter will discuss these findings thematically, as well as describe implications and recommendations for future research, application, and policies.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction and Overview

Gendered barriers for women persist in U.S. businesses and industries, particularly in male-dominant fields, which has maintained a gender gap in executive leadership. This chapter discusses themes that emerged in the study's findings related to barriers based on gender with the intersection of their race, age, weight, and appearance characteristics. The barriers helped them to develop strategies to overcome them, which increased their social capital. I interpreted the findings from the online survey responses, and the interview and focus group transcripts and recordings, then I compared all findings to the literature conducted on barriers, strategies, and social capital theory to apply them to the lived experiences of the women executive leaders in this study.

The purpose of this study was to understand barriers that women have experienced and the strategies that they have used to overcome them to acquire their executive leadership roles. Three research questions were studied to describe the conceptual framework based on perceptions of women who have obtained executive leadership roles, through a lens of intersectionality and in social capital theoretical terms of field, habitus and capital. The first research question explored the professional experiences and behaviors, or habitus, of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their field industry or organization. The second research question asked the participants about the internal and external barriers they had experienced in their careers related to gender, intersected with their race and other characteristics that made them lose capital. The third research question asked the participants what strategies they used to overcome barriers and how they gained capital that moved them up in their careers to obtain executive leadership positions.

Based on these three research questions and the participants' responses, I will discuss the study assumptions, discuss the findings, compare the findings to the literature, discuss themes that emerged from the study's findings on barriers and strategies, and suggest future research, practice, and policy implications. This study will contribute to research on gendered and intersectional issues in leadership attainment in business, by informing women who desire executive leadership roles on strategies to develop social capital early and often in their careers, as well as organizations and trainers on practices that developing leaders need to learn to prepare women for executive leadership roles.

Discussion of Study Assumptions

The study findings supported that social capital development and application were successful strategies to career progression toward executive roles. Before I summarize the findings, I will discuss two assumptions that I made before starting this study that were found in the literature, but not supported by the findings. Next, I will discuss how the study participants responded in the interview and focus group discussion questions with positive reframing of barriers that they saw as opportunities for development and growth. Then, I will discuss the application of the findings based on the study's social capital theoretical constructs for future development and training to eliminate the gender gap in executive business leadership. Lastly, I will discuss new techniques using focus group discussions to continue to advance leadership learning for women.

I had assumed in the proposal for this study that the women who would meet the participant criteria of currently holding an executive leadership role in a for-profit business, would have moved up in their careers within for-profit businesses to acquire enough social capital for executive leadership role acquisition in their organizational field. According to Fullan's (2016)

research on social capital, a certain quantity and quality of interactions and relationships must occur in a field to obtain enough capital to achieve an executive role in an organization. All seven of the participants had moved up in their careers through various industries, including non-profit, for-profit, government, law, and the U.S. military, and had occupied an executive leadership role in business at the time of the study. All but Sarah had obtained an executive leadership role by the end of their careers. Sarah is now in her 40's and acquired her first executive role in her 20's through social capital accumulation in multiple organizations and networking groups. These findings support "A Social Capital Theory of Career Success," where social capital created in network structures with access to information, social resources, and career sponsorship is more important than acquiring social capital within one type of organization or industry (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

To be a study participant, the women who completed the first phase online survey at the end of 2020 had to have held an executive leadership role in a business. I had assumed that the women would have had a career goal to obtain an executive leadership role and had worked toward that goal using their social capital, but a career goal was not indicated by most of the study participants in the online survey responses.

Three out of the seven participants had an executive leadership career goal, while four did not as shown in Table 5.1. The four who did not were two African Americans, one Asian American and one Caucasian. Madison was the only Caucasian and she said that she left her legal career to create and run a coaching business after not receiving visible work assignments as her male colleague had received. Similarly, the four did not see executive leaders who looked like them in their male dominant organizations and Sarah was the only participant to state that she did not aspire to become an executive leader because she did not see Asian Americans like her in

executive leadership roles in her organization. This demonstrated how representation, particularly for women of color who have traditionally been given less possibility of building social capital through job opportunities, had developed their own motivation to be an executive leader for the learning and development obtained, not for a title. Sarah stated that once she made the effort to find a mentor who looked like her and who held an executive leadership role in her organization, then she felt that she could work to obtain such a position.

The other three participants who did have executive leadership career goals, moved around industries during their careers to overcome barriers of no opportunities for women in male-dominant organizations. Sally moved from various organizations within the U.S. manufacturing industry that predominantly promoted men to executive leadership roles, until her current role in which a woman CFO promoted Sally to her current executive position. Gloria moved to different industries and departments that had more direct career paths to executive leadership and waited to take her current executive role until she could verify that it was not a token female position. Lyndie moved to more challenging jobs about every four years after a female executive told her early in her career that she had no growth opportunities in the organization for Lyndie, but that she was deserving of a promotion, so Lyndie decided to make those opportunities for herself in her career. At the time of the interviews, Lyndie was in an executive leadership role and had not been able to obtain a desired higher executive role in her for-profit organization for the past seven years, which were held by white males and females, so she created her own business which she led as a CEO simultaneously.

This study found that having an executive leadership goal was not indicative of achieving an executive leadership role. Therefore, it should not be used by organizations as a criterion for leadership development program offerings to women. The women in this study used their social

capital to move up in organizations for increased learning and development. Four out of seven participants left organizations that limited their personal development through social capital they had acquired through networking relationships and sponsorship inside and outside of their organizations. The three participants who did not feel held back in their current executive leadership roles at their current organizations have not formed their own businesses.

Table 5.1 Participant Executive Goal

Participant	Ethnicity	Executive Goal	Age of Other Org Exec Role	Age of Own Org Exec Role
Sally	Caucasian	Yes	50's	--
Gloria	Caucasian	Yes	30's	--
Coco	African American	No	--	50's
Sarah	Asian American	No	20's	--
Madison	Caucasian	No	--	30's
Hilary	African American	No	40's	50's
Lyndie	African American	Yes	30's	50's

Discussion & Summary of the Findings

Barriers Viewed as Challenges. The barriers experienced by the participants did not hold them back in their careers and were referred to as challenges, hurdles, obstacles, learning opportunities, and time for change. Sally and Coco were the only participants who worked around barriers by moving mostly laterally in their careers. They remained in managerial and project lead positions most of their careers until occupying their current leadership roles within the past year. The other five participants moved only upward during their careers, and they stated that their barriers gave them the impetus to change and improve their human capital, as well as increase their social capital to network past those who imposed barriers. These five participants who used their social capital effectively were empowered by their barriers to work harder, learn more, improve themselves, and they said that they would not have eliminated them because of the

learning that they gained from them. This indicated a growth mindset that they were motivated to learn how to develop social capital for career growth and continued learning for advancement (Dweck, 2008).

Self-motivation is not only internal but also an external social process in which others in an organization see someone as a leader or potential leader after proving themselves when faced with challenges, which the participants indicated had contributed to their social capital development and accumulation (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Lyndie experienced constant upward career mobility until stalling in the past seven years as her barriers multiplied over time within her same organization while her social capital had diminished. She recently asked her HR manager for a promotion and a raise that she felt she deserved. The African American female HR manager told her that she had already accomplished a lot and should stop asking for more, but also admitted, when Lyndie asked her, that she had never said the same to the white male executives in the organization. This demonstrated what Fitzsimmons and Callan (2019) found, that when women achieve high career positions, their decrease in social capital multiplies due to less access to developmental pathways to higher leadership positions.

Barriers did not stop the participants' career growth, they all expressed that their barriers forced them to change, improve, and learn for career progression. In the one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, the participants wanted to change the dialogue around the questions that were asked about barriers to discuss the challenges they experienced and how those experiences helped them to build skills and resilience in their careers, instead of holding them back in their careers, as previous research by Eagly and Carli (2007), Elmuti et al. (2009), Fitzsimmons and Callan (2016), and Flippin (2017), has suggested about barriers. While all participants believed that gendered stereotypes were not as prevalent in current society and

organizations as much as they were early in their careers, they believed that they still occurred in U.S. industries, especially those that have male-dominant leadership. They felt that women are now able to find other women for mentorship and support to take on work challenges and to develop and improve their skills for career progression. The women of color expressed that they could not find mentors who looked like them and often had to mentor themselves, but that they now mentor other women of color when asked.

The importance of looking forward and not backward in their lives was indicated in the participants' responses to their one-on-one interview questions. When some participants responded that they had not experienced barriers in the focus group discussion, all participants provided more detailed accounts of barriers experienced than in their one-on-one interviews which they said was because they did not dwell on the barriers of the past. This could have been a social desirability bias response to give a socially desirable response instead of their true feelings (Grimm, 2010). Hilary called this out in the focus group that she did experience barriers related to her gender, race, and weight, but then she said that they were not really barriers because she built resilience from them to develop her leadership abilities and figured out ways around them to achieve her executive leadership roles. Resilience was gained from learning from external barriers imposed by others, which they felt had strengthened their skills and ability, and so they did not develop internal barriers of low self-efficacy. All participants talked about taking time for themselves to replenish from and reflect on the negative effects of barriers to their self-efficacy and then they said that they focused on learning from those experiences to compete harder and work more effectively for career progression, which demonstrated a growth mindset (Dweck, 2015, September 22). Their resilience to improve their self-efficacy enhanced their

ability to develop social capital throughout their careers by building relationships, networking, and gaining sponsorship and will be explained further in this chapter.

Fitzsimmons and Callan studied how men and women were appointed to leadership positions in medium-large corporations in 2016. They found that organizations that are dominated by male leaders who impose their views about capital without organizational resistance, use field, habitus, and capital to narrow women's acceptable leadership behaviors, thereby limiting women's developmental career opportunities and executive leadership role acquisition. They noted evidence of longer times until promotions throughout women's careers as compared to men, especially at senior levels, even though women performed higher than the men. They identified that the organizational challenge was to shift this gendered way of thinking to produce more capital acquisition for women. This study's participants have built their social capital through relationship-building, networking, and sponsorship, despite experiencing male-dominant leadership in their organizations and a lack of organizational structure to promote more diverse executive leaders.

Five women self-identified as introverted in the focus group discussions and said that they had to modify their preferred behavior patterns to network for social capital gain. Two women identified as extroverts and stated that they strategically used alliance-building and sponsorship for career growth and executive leadership success. The participants credited their human capital development to improve their leadership and skills as how they achieved progressive leadership positions and did not seem to realize, nor did they discuss, the impact of their social capital development to their career success until they responded to the last focus group question that asked about their social capital gain and loss in their careers.

I heard from all participants that they were told to acquire mentoring and advanced college education, or human capital development, to move up in their careers, but they were not advised within their organizations to develop their social capital. I found in my dissertation literature search the same advice for many women in business, with Fitzsimmons and Callan (2019) stating in many of their research studies in the past decade that organizations tended to focus on developing individual human capital without addressing their social capital needs for career success. All participants were told by bosses throughout their careers to find mentors for job learning and credibility. Those who found mentors were advised to network and build good work relationships that resulted in social capital gain, but all participants said they had not heard about social capital before this study. Gloria was the only participant to discuss the impact that multiple sponsorships had on her career advancement.

Those participants who gained sponsorship from mentors and bosses gained multiple executive roles in their careers or had occupied executive roles most of their careers, despite the intersectionality of race and that they could not find mentors early in their careers, which makes them now willing to mentor other women. This supported Ibarra's (2017) research on the importance of strategic networks for women to obtain organizational leadership roles and that she found in her studies that women executive leaders are now more willing to mentor and sponsor other women.

Proactive Strategies to Gain Social Capital. Sarah withdrew from the workforce, as I also did after the birth of a child, which has caused many women to miss critical roles and erode their existing capital, while those who do not take an extended leave continue acquiring knowledge, skills, and social capital for higher level roles (Fitzsimmons & Callan, 2016). Upon returning to work within a year, Sarah stepped out of an executive role into a contract role and

was then offered an executive role opportunity by a recruiter external to her organization through her continued social media networking, which increased her social capital accumulation overall even if not in the organization in which she had worked at the time.

Coco and Gloria said that they stepped back from management roles to learn about the new work culture in those roles, which enabled them to understand the social capital potential in a new field by learning about their organizations before taking promotions. This strategy resulted in social capital increases in their new roles. Coco acquired social capital by building relationships primarily with co-equals, while Gloria learned from co-equals and sought sponsorship from higher authorities. Sarah, Lyndie, and Hilary built social capital from sponsorship from women of color and those in executive roles, thereby acquiring executive roles early and often in their careers through their bosses' sponsorship.

Balkundi and Kilduff (2006) found that understanding an organization's social structure and consequential decisions is key to thriving and moving forward in one's individual career path in an organization. Their study showed that understanding is created by awareness of organization's relations, employees' involvement and their social connections, and social structures. They stated that leadership is itself the managing of social relationships within organizational structures. Social relationship building develops social capital inside and outside of organizations which the study participants continually developed in their careers to maintain higher social capital gain than loss due to barriers.

Intersectionality Created More Barriers and More Growth. The women of color participants experienced verbal stereotyping and disbelief in their abilities consistently throughout their careers that the Caucasian participants did not overtly experience. Yet, that did not hold them back from continuing to develop themselves and build their networks, building both their

human and social capital. Sarah, Hilary, and Lyndie acquired executive roles early and often throughout their careers, while Coco strategically avoided management roles to develop her technical skills and maximize her human capital contributions to her organizations.

Atewologun (2018) stated that individual intersectionality aids in the understanding of how women identify themselves as leaders and connect within the systemic dynamic of an organizational power structure. The African American women in this study were told repeatedly that they were viewed as “less than” their white male counterparts, so they built social capital in different ways. Coco built social capital through relationships with co-workers and bosses which helped her learn from them to develop and improve her human capital skills to lead projects effectively. Hilary said in her first interview that she “developed her own organization” within the organization in which she worked. This strategy helped her to develop her unique leadership identity which she called her “superpower,” resulting in others respecting her as a leader in her organization. Lyndie communicated within her organization with integrity and honesty and built upward relationships and sponsorship for social capital gain and upward career mobility into various executive leadership roles.

Human Capital with Social Capital Gained Career Success. Being strategic in developing social capital through mentoring relationships gains access to resources, information and sponsorship that has been found to enable career progression (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). This social capital strategy found in the literature review was also demonstrated in the study’s findings as the participants used their mentors to sponsor them to acquire their executive leadership roles. The study found that this strategy also produced themes in the study that were not mentioned in the literature, such as later-career moves to entrepreneurialism and the relation

of organizational capital to individual social capital. Both will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

The African American women felt that they did not have formal mentors, although they shared in the interviews that they often asked bosses for mentoring advice which helped them develop their skills and gain sponsorship for leadership roles. Because they felt that they did not have formal mentors, they said that they mentored other women of color to excel in their organizations. Coco said in her first interview that she gave more mentoring than she had received in her career. When she received sponsorship from her boss's boss, who was an African American man, she obtained an upper management role that she desired. Hilary sought and found an African American woman executive in her IT industry to mentor her and they developed a long friendship in which they both mentored each other, as well as informed and sponsored each other for growth opportunities.

The three Caucasian women participants had mentors who were male and female managers in their careers, and they shared their unique experiences in the interviews. Sally said that she moved up in her career from the advice of bosses who mentored her, and sponsorship from a white female boss helped her to obtain her executive leadership position. Gloria learned early in her career from a male mentor and sponsor about the power of having allies in her career to move her forward, which she used to build social capital to gain progressive leadership roles. Madison sought mentorship from female and male clients to grow her career and business and in return mentored those who have helped her.

Ibarra (2017) found that taking on bigger and more visible roles external to one's organization and speaking up about those roles to be known and seen by others as a leader, is crucial to career success. By gaining visibility in one's field, human capital and social capital

work together to create more job opportunities that grow social capital exponentially. Madison, Hilary, and Lyndie accomplished increased social capital for higher roles and more work opportunities when they spoke as keynote speakers, presented at professional conferences, and authored books on leadership outside of their organizations.

Entrepreneurialism Result of Social Capital. I used a network sampling method to find participants for this study and I searched for executive women leaders by their job titles to request that they complete my online survey and to determine if they met my participation requirements. Four participants who met my study requirements, Coco, Madison, Hilary, and Lyndie, had created their own businesses and occupied executive leadership roles in their businesses. Coco retired from her IT industry job and started her own IT consulting firm in 2020. She built new client business from social capital accumulated from past work relationships. Madison left the legal industry about 20 years ago to start her own executive coaching business. She grew her business with social capital built from legal and women's professional association relationships and sponsors. Hilary retired from her IT industry, after holding five executive leadership roles, and started her management consulting business a few years ago. Lyndie was working as an executive leader in a large media company at the time of the study, while running her own mentoring and coaching business as its CEO, which is now her sole executive position.

All participants stated that handling change was essential to grow and progress in their careers. The participants embraced change to continue to thrive in their careers as executive leaders, even if that meant creating their own businesses before and after retirement. The three African American women recounted many stereotypes that they had experienced in others' organizations throughout their careers when asked about barriers in their careers. When asked about the strategies that they used to overcome their barriers, they talked about their resilience,

constant desire to learn, the need to change, and the desire to always challenge themselves to grow. While their negative work cultures had worsened morale and lowered self-efficacy for many of my past “women in leadership” students, it pushed this study’s participants to improve their human capital beyond what they might have accomplished on their own without experiencing those barriers. Hilary stated that she would have been a “high-performing, lower-level technician” if she had not experienced her barriers and moved to different jobs to get past her obstacles.

Networking Through Relationships Built Social Capital. Lin (2001) found that using the resources in one’s social networks created relational and informational ties in the organization’s network to generate a return for the individual, as well as the organization. The return to the individual can be a structural position in an organization (existing or another) which can further grow the individual’s social capital and causal sequences of capital development (Lin, 2001). Individuals with wide-ranging networks and high-status contacts tend to find better jobs and are recruited without looking for a job (Lin et al., 2010). This was true for Sarah, she acquired her current executive leadership role through a recruiter who connected through her external social network (gain in social capital), while in her 30’s (low social capital built), and after stepping out of the workforce for a year while adjusting to motherhood (decrease in social capital). Sarah’s external network increased so much social capital that it outweighed her losses in social capital. This is consistent in the research on the strength of weak ties outside of one’s organization that have been found to create social capital from information and unknown resources (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Networks can be built strategically external to organizations through industry associations, alumni groups, and professional networking groups (Ibarra, 2017). Madison and Coco have built

social capital for their businesses through relationships and sponsors external to their organizations. Granovetter's (1973) research asserted that weak ties were better than strong ties of established relationships in creating timing, access, and referral for career advancement, which in turn multiplied social capital development. Lin (1999, 2001, 2008) expanded social capital tie theory showing that the strength of the tie was not as important for career success as the bridging to connect the ties in a network for social capital development. Hilary held six executive leadership roles by bridging her weak ties with individuals outside of her organization to her strong ties within her organization, even when they were not her allies due to gender-biased views of women being more administrative than technical in IT.

Organizational Capital Builds Individual Capital. Organizations with positive work cultures have invested in human capital development to develop employees' leadership skills, which has also created social capital for career advancement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). All participants have taken advantage of organizational development opportunities and requested them when they were not offered by turning a "lack of opportunity" external barrier into a strategy of their human capital development. This strategy resulted in technical and leadership skill development and eventual promotion into higher positions in their organizations or in other organizations in their industries, which also increased their social capital in their fields.

Within a hierarchical social structure, social capital is an outcome of opportunity for gain and reciprocity, such as advancement to a leadership position that develops an individual and benefits an organization. A dependent relationship exists between human and social capital in that the more social capital a manager has, the higher their human capital investment will be to continue to develop more opportunities for social capital for the individual and the organization (Burt, 1997). Encouraging women to develop their social capital along with their human capital

is often missed in organizational mentoring and development programs, as none of the study participants were familiar with the concept of social capital even though they had been accumulating it for career progression into their executive leadership roles.

Unlike Sarah, Gloria and Coco slowed their professional development by stepping back to consider promotions offered, to read their organizations' culture before taking on an advanced role. Gloria eventually took on the new roles, thereby increasing social capital throughout her career, while Coco avoided advancement into management positions, thereby reducing her social capital with upper management. This is evidenced by her stating that they would not acknowledge her exceptional technical work accomplishments within her organization after she was recognized nationally for her work. Women who aspire to executive leadership roles should avoid stepping back in a way that diminishes social capital, like Sarah and Gloria who did not stop building social capital to advance in their careers in others' organizations.

Table 5.2 summarizes the last three findings related to the participants' entrepreneurialism, networking for sponsorship, and the career effect of individual capital aligned with organizational capital for executive role attainment.

Table 5.2 Participant Career Results from Sponsorship

Participant	Ethnicity	Executive Goal	Age of Other Org Exec Role	Age of Own Org Exec Role	
★ Sally	Caucasian	Yes	50's	--	
★ Gloria	Caucasian	Yes	30's	--	
Coco	African American	No	--	50's	✗
★ Sarah	Asian American	No	20's	--	
Madison	Caucasian	No	--	30's	✗
Hilary	African American	No	40's	50's	✗
Lyndie	African American	Yes	30's	50's	✗

★ Sponsor currently in other's org	No Sponsor currently in other's org Network to create sponsors	✗
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Conceptual Framework of the Findings

Figure 5.1 shows the change in this study's conceptual framework based on the findings with the study's social capital theoretical terms in red. Since four out of seven participants did not have a career goal of obtaining an executive leadership role and all participants stated that the learning and growing through career challenges was a driver, it was removed. All participants had worked in various industries throughout their careers, so I changed the triangle of women's habitus that looked like they had remained in one organization or industry field to not appear as if the women had moved up a hierarchy of one field, but to show their development to acquire an executive role in their current business field.

Individual strategies of human capital development were renamed as human capital strategies to show how human capital and social capital are strategies that work together to create capital in an organizational field. The literature and study findings showed that when the individual capital of an executive leader is valuable to the organization, both human and social capital continue to grow for the individual because the organizational capital equals the

individual's capital in that field. All participants were highly educated and had completed at least master's degree work, so college education was specified in the human capital strategies.

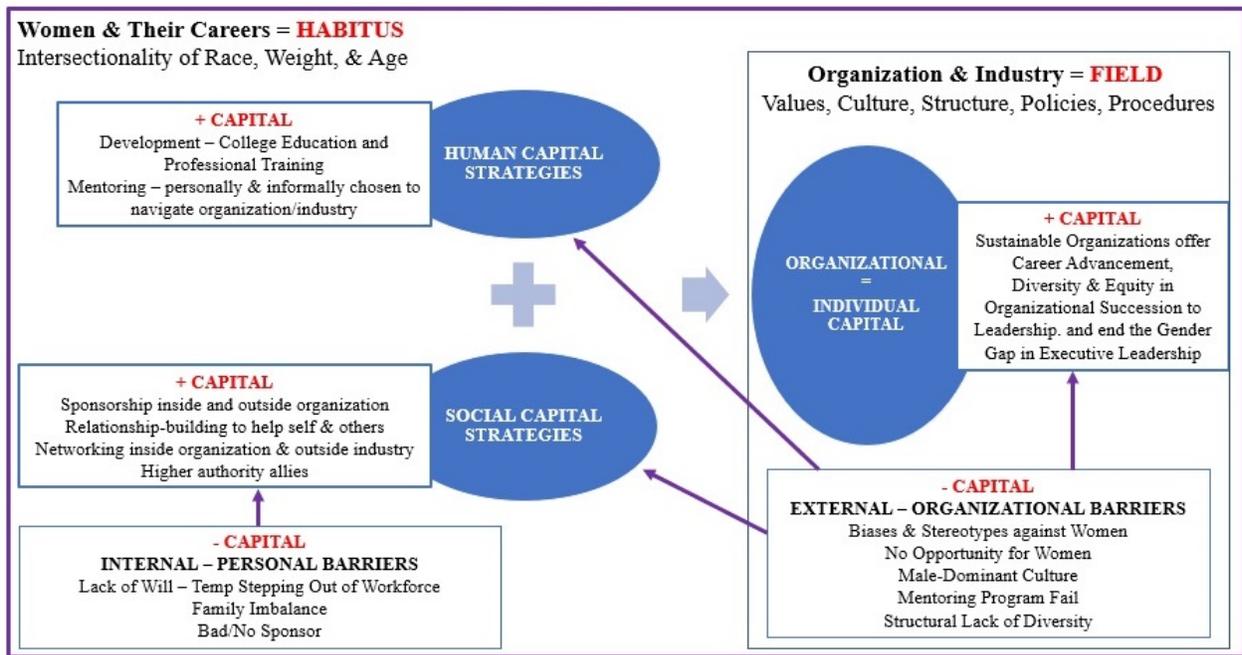


Figure 5.1. Revised Conceptual Framework with Study Findings

The organizational strategies from the literature review were moved in the conceptual framework to external organizational barriers because the participants in male-dominant organizations and industries stated that they progressed despite their work cultures and structures and had to ask for development programs that were not offered to them. The participants stated that organizations have changed in the last decade and are now declaring values of diversity and inclusion and equal opportunity for women to advance, but only Sarah, the youngest participant, shared details about her female-dominant organization formally supporting her career development. Sponsorship from mentors and bosses that they individually sought were stated most often by the participants as enabling their career successes, not their organizations' programs. The women of color stated that they did not receive any or good mentoring from their

organization's formal programs, so they found good mentors informally outside of their organizations, who became sponsors after they had mentored them in return.

The concept of strategically obtaining higher authority allies was added as a social capital strategy because it was used when the participants' immediate bosses would not sponsor them. Loss of capital due to barriers were only temporary capital losses because the participants did not let their experienced barriers hold them back for long in their careers. All participants worked past their barriers by increasing their human and social capital, thereby building their individual capital, as well as their organization's capital, by creating increased opportunities, productivity, and leadership abilities individually and organizationally.

The concept of organizational capital equal to individual capital was added to the conceptual framework because it has economically and socially beneficial outcomes of organizational sustainability through diverse and equitable leadership, in addition to individual women's career potential development and succession to executive leadership roles.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that convenience network sampling from my LinkedIn social network found seven women very similar to me and each other in age and professional experiences, as well as in geographic location. All participants resided in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwestern United States, where I do now and have in the past resided, respectively. Gloria told me that she had researched me on social media before her first interview and made comments during her interview and focus group discussion that I would know what she meant when she shared her career experiences in consulting because I worked in consulting. As I stated in Chapter 1, I started my business after a lack of social capital kept me from acquiring an executive role in others' organizations. I did not talk about my work experiences with the participants nor relate to

their shared experiences during the study, but they could see that I had a similar career path to them in my LinkedIn profile. To minimize interviewer bias of imposing my own views from my experiences, I asked all participants to verify my understanding of their lived experiences in the interviews and focus group discussions so that it conveyed their perceptions, which were like my experiences.

Another limitation was researcher bias in the use of “barrier” terminology used for interview and focus group questions, as the participants replied with “challenges” that they had experienced and stated that they did not perceive any barriers experienced in their careers because they were not held back. I tried to minimize researcher bias and not bound the conceptual term by repeating participants’ comments during the interview and focus group discussions to verify my understanding of their intent. I also asked clarification questions to expand their responses in the first and second interviews for each participant, as well as during the focus group discussions, to not bound the findings to my definitions (Crowe et al., 2011). I realize that social desirability may have been occurring where the participants did not want to seem disagreeable or negative when responding to my interview questions. Another researcher bias is that I eliminated plausible rival non-gendered explanations of challenges to executive leadership role acquisition because I had chosen to only study women executive leaders and not men (Yin, 2017).

The last limitation was data collection bias that I, as the researcher, was the only person who had conducted, recorded, and transcribed participants’ responses to interview and focus group questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, I conducted all interview and focus group communication through online Zoom meetings and email correspondence. When one participant told me after completion of the study that she was diagnosed with a disability during her career, I realized that while I was investigating the

intersectionality of other characteristics to gender, that I did not give an example of disability as a characteristic that could have imposed a barrier. A qualitative case study approach indicates the transferability of findings to similar contexts and situations in social capital theory, which may have been limited by my data collection bias and my ability as the researcher to convey and demonstrate social capital concepts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). While I chose to conduct a qualitative study to understand the lived experiences of women executive leaders, the small sample size for a case study approach provided a lack of generalizability, whereas a quantitative study with a larger sample size could have produced more reliability for future research.

Recommendations for Research

Quantitative research should be expanded on the dependent relationship of human capital and social capital to expand the extensive research conducted on barriers to leadership role acquisition which only states the problems and not the solutions. Data from research surveys could quantify the causal relationship between both capitals and should be shared with Organizational Theory researchers to develop long-term studies to provide more quantifiable data for social capital development practices for marginalized groups in organizations. This could inform organizational structure, culture and policies for more equitable capital accumulation as current organizational strategies failed this study's participants. More fluid gender conceptions of executive leadership characteristics could also encourage social capital development for more diverse and equitable organizations and leadership.

The study participants described difficulty finding mentors or role models that looked like them in their organizations, therefore four out of seven did not aspire to achieve executive leadership roles. Sarah often stated that it helped to "see it to be it" for women of color to want to become executive leaders. Until the percentage of women executive business leaders (26.5%

according to Catalyst.org) reflects the percentage of women in the U.S. workforce (57% according to the U.S. Department of Labor in 2019), diversity training and mentoring programs for women that are offered by organizations need to conduct research on how to build resilience to excel past workplace bias. This can build self-efficacy for those who internalize experienced barriers and lose social capital, by helping women positively frame their biased work experiences as learning opportunities (develop a growth mindset) and prepare women for social capital accumulation for executive leadership opportunities.

The study of neurodiversity, or range of difference in brain function and behaviors for those on the autism spectrum, in the context of leadership development should be expanded to understand how it could be a benefit and a barrier within work settings. A study participant shared that her disability made her more meticulous and precise in her work, but it also made reading social cues more difficult for her. Further research should be conducted to understand how social capital development is affected by neurodiverse characteristics, as well as its intersection with other personal characteristics that affect leadership role acquisition.

Recommendations for Practice

Human capital development is often the focus of women's professional training for leadership development, which grows their skills and knowledge, but social capital development should be included in professional training for upward career mobility. Fitzsimmons and Callan's (2016) study found that early career capital-building with high-profile clients, assignments and projects is a proven strategy for women to maintain comparable career development to men and access further capital to overcome selection and promotion gender bias. Professional development trainers should explain the dependent relationship of social capital to human capital

development, as well as how to develop social capital for future skill development and leadership role acquisition, for women's further career progression to executive leadership roles.

This study found that many women have left organizations or industries that hold them back in their careers, to create and lead their own businesses as entrepreneurial executive leaders. Entrepreneurialism Seminars for Women should be expanded to help women understand the resilience that they have gained from experienced bias and how they have learned, changed, and adapted to create and grow their businesses. This could enable women to understand the skills that they have learned and mastered to be successful to run their own businesses successfully and not as much of a learn-as-you-go experience like I have had. I have attended Small Business Development Center (SBDC) free local seminars for entrepreneurs, but none were designed specifically for women. The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers loans for women-owned small businesses, but no seminars on developing the business. A focus group format proved effective in gaining rich details of women's career experiences in this study, as the women built on each other's contributions and shared experiences for the benefit of all who participated. A national focus group seminar program with successful women entrepreneur speakers could discuss how they overcame organizational barriers to gain social capital and advise women who are in a field in which they are not gaining social capital and may want to start their own business, how to network and build relationships in their field to develop social capital.

I use a marketing strategy of posting my leadership blog on my website and social media accounts to gain connections online to increase social capital for my business growth. Madison and Lyndie use their LinkedIn accounts to promote their businesses and gain connections to grow their businesses. Sarah also uses LinkedIn to connect with her mentoring group and sponsor

mentees for career growth. Social media as a social capital development tool should be taught in the entrepreneur seminars and professional development training suggested previously.

In conducting the literature review for this study, I found many organizations that specialize in researching and training specific to women gaining leadership roles, including Catalyst and Chief. While they talk about mentoring, sponsorship and development of women, the discussion should also focus on social capital and its importance in gaining leadership roles. Discussing the difference between human capital and social capital development and their dependent relationship upon each other for career progression by developing skills and allies throughout one's career. From a growth mindset perspective, I suggest that a reframing of conversations and research about barriers for women and minorities be changed to how to effectively respond when experiencing unconscious bias to move our organizations toward valuing diversity and inclusion, as Hilary had done in her career and obtained multiple leadership roles in a male-dominant IT industry.

Scholar Practitioner Implications for Growth. I plan to publish a book about this study's findings to inform women who aspire to executive leadership roles. I will also develop professional training classes and college workshops using a focus group format for an intersection of women students and leaders to discuss the strategy of social capital development for life goal attainment. While the interviews in this study produced insights into women executive leaders' lived experiences, it was during the focus group discussions that the participants received mentoring from each other to develop strategies for accelerating through barriers to achieve continued career growth.

I will use this study's findings on barriers specific to male-dominant fields to develop training and workshops on the strategies found in this study that overcame them. I will share

learning from my past work experience in male-dominant fields and train women in productive communication patterns and in emotional intelligence understanding and development so that these barriers encourage individual strategies to overcome them, not internal barriers that hold them back.

Recommendations for Policy

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 when the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 2.2 million women involuntarily left the workforce within a year by October 2020. This disproportionate job loss was due to the pandemic shutdown producing a lack of daycare, shuttered schools, enhanced pay disparities, and a lack of public policy to support working women (Matuson, March 1, 2021). Executive women leaders have considered leaving their jobs during the pandemic because the inequity in their personal and professional lives is too great. The Biden Administration is now working with Congress on an infrastructure bill that includes paid childcare, sick leave, and family leave, as well as flexible scheduling, to try to minimize gender inequity (Fox, June 21, 2021). This type of legislation can eliminate some gender disparities in the U.S. workforce.

Organizational policies should be developed and enforced that focus on social capital development for diverse and inclusive organizational executive leadership. Currently only U.S. states legislate quotas for board of director membership, as in California, New Jersey, and Illinois. Organizational succession planning should include accountability for diversity in executive leadership that is quantifiably representative of the diversity of the organization, customer base, and communities in which organizations live. Organizational culture, behaviors, and policies that prohibit social capital development for non-white males should be reported and punished by organizational leaders. Promoting structures through organizational policy of who can obtain

social capital in organizations through values and norms have been found to be key motivators to build social capital (Kwon & Adler, 2014).

Conclusion

This study intended to contribute to previous research on barriers to women and the strategies that they have used to overcome their barriers to obtain an executive leadership role in business. It explored the lived experiences of executive women leaders in an interpretive and constructivist case study design approach. I applied the experiences of women executive leaders to social capital theory, as seen through a lens of intersectionality of race, age, and physical characteristics, to inform women who have not yet achieved executive leadership positions.

It was suggested in Fitzsimmons and Callan's 2016 study that more research needed to be conducted to apply social capital theory categories of field, habitus, and capital to understand how women move up in their careers and obtain executive leadership roles. This study has expanded their research by applying theoretical concepts of *field* as the organizations and industries in which women performed throughout their careers, *habitus* was described in how the women participants acted, thought, felt, and represented themselves to others, and *capital* was the material and symbolic goods from relationship-building that the women participants used in their lives to advance upward in their career paths to executive leadership roles. While the study's small sample size lacks generalizability, the richness of detail of the participants' lived experiences shows the implications of developing and applying social capital as a successful strategy in one's career to acquire challengingly progressive executive leadership roles.

The COVID-19 pandemic enabled me to conduct virtual interviews and in-depth focus group discussions with women executive business leaders from my home and their homes. I believe that I was able to gain deep and personal details of their lives than I may have with a more

formal interview process. The findings from this study gave insight to women on how to strategize their training and development of human capital and social capital for progressive career opportunities and to be resilient when faced with barriers so that they are only challenges to overcome through growth, learning, and confidence to achieve career progression and the highest executive leadership roles that they desire. Eagly and Carli (2007) described a “Leadership Labyrinth” of a journey of gendered career obstacles to overcome, but this study found that women who find sponsorship and ally with others throughout their careers, can achieve the social capital they need to obtain an executive leadership role that makes their organizational capital equal to their individual capital. This study has reframed the problem of the gender gap in U.S. business leadership by demonstrating how women’s career growth and aspirations can be strategically achieved by women’s and organizations’ efforts to build social capital in addition to human capital development strategies.

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APPENDICES

A: Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Participant Pseudonym: _____

Location: _____

Time: _____ Start to End _____

Main Research Question:

To understand and interpret the multiple characteristics and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles and identify social capital terms of field, habitus and capital within each research questions:

1. What are the professional experiences and behaviors (habitus) of women who have obtained an executive leadership role in their industry or organization (field)?
2. What internal and external barriers did they experience related to gender, race, and any other characteristic they possess (lack or loss of capital)?
3. What strategies did they use to overcome their barriers and how did they use them (gain in capital)?

Phase one - Online Survey

This is a structured format with demographic questions intersectionality classification.

- a. What is your sex? Male, Female
- b. Select your age group: 18-20's, 30-40's, 50- 60's, 70 and older
- c. Select your race/ethnicity: Caucasian, Black, Native American, Latin/Hispanic, Asian,
Other _____

- d. Select your highest education level: High School, Undergraduate College, Graduate College, College Doctorate, Other _____
- e. In what industry do you currently work, e.g., business, government, education: _____
- f. Are you currently or have you held in the past an executive leadership role? Yes/No
STOP HERE IF ANSWERED NO
- g. Did you have a career goal of obtaining an executive leadership position? Yes/No
- h. Your Current Title: _____
- i. Are you where you want to be in your career? Why!
- j. Describe your career path to your executive leadership position. Please include challenges and strategies that you may have used to accomplish your career goals.
- k. Would you be willing to participate in one-on-one interviews with the researcher and a focus group of individuals like yourself? Yes, No, Other _____
- l. Your personal information will remain confidential for this study and your responses will only be used with your permission and after your review. Please provide your name, a pseudonym of your choice, how you prefer to be contacted by the researcher, your phone and email contact information.

Phase two -- One-On-One Interview #1

This uses a semi-structured format that may change to follow conversation vocabulary choices, such as challenge vs. barrier.

1. What year did you first occupy an executive leadership position? How many years have you held an executive leadership role?
2. Describe your career path to executive leadership. How did others, if any, inspire you or model a career path for you? What did you find as challenges in your career?

3. What, if any, internal or personal challenges or barriers have you experienced in your career that slowed you in achieving your career goals? (A barrier is an obstacle that prevents you from moving forward, personal is something you imposed upon yourself internally.)
4. What and who caused your personal barriers?
5. Did you/How did you overcome your personal barriers?
6. What, if any, external barriers have you experienced in your career that were imposed by others? (such as by society, an organization, or another person.)
7. What and who caused your external barriers?
8. How did you overcome your external barriers?
9. Imagine not only a barrier-free road to your executive position, imagine what a trip to the top would be like if it was smooth and supportive, how would that look differently from what you have experienced?

Phase two -- One-On-One Interview #2

After the first one-on-one interview and before the focus group, I will conduct a second one-on-one interview with the participants to create a timeline of their career, placing the barriers and strategies to overcome them on the timeline. I will provide Diehl et al.'s 2020 "Gender Bias Scale for Women Leaders" to aid in thinking about barriers (see Appendix B) as an extra data source to triangulate the interview question responses.

Phase three – Focus Group

This is a semi-structured discussion format that may change to follow the natural conversation.

10. How did your external barriers or challenges impact your internal barriers? External means imposed by others, such as, society, organization, and people. Internal means you imposed limits upon yourself. Your career timeline may help you think about this.
11. How have you experienced a “Leadership Labyrinth” to your current executive leadership role? Leadership Labyrinth is a concept developed by Alice Eagly that means that women must navigate gendered obstacles in their career path to leadership.
12. How do you think that your career path is different from other women that you know who now hold executive leadership roles? Please be specific.
13. How did your social capital increase and decrease during your career? Social capital is the net value from activities that builds your value or power in an organization. Increasing social capital may occur from the following: networking, relationship-building, parental upbringing, confidence or belief in yourself, and the intersectionality of education, race, age, or other personal characteristics. Decreasing social capital may occur from the following: stepping out of work or jobs, career challenges, male-dominant culture, and the intersectionality of education, race, age or other personal characteristics.

B: Gender Bias Scale Comparison to this Study

Locale Category	Barrier Name	Example	Barrier Type **
Societal	Controlling women's voices	Restricting when/how women converse	External
	Cultural constraints	Not encouraging educational and career choices	External
	Gender stereotypes	Generalizations about women	External
	Gender unconsciousness	Workplace bias unacknowledged/unchallenged	External
Organizational	Leadership perceptions	Man=leader, Woman=support	External
	Scrutiny	Hypercritical evaluation of women more than men	External
	Devalued communal expectations	Assume women should take notes in meetings and plan social events	External
	Discrimination	Women denied opportunities	External
	Exclusion	Not invited to social events	External
	Glass cliff	High-risk assignments	External
	Lack of mentoring	Learn to lead on own	External
	Lack of support	Can't accomplish job	External
	Male gatekeeping	Men in key leadership roles	External
	Male culture	Dominant male interests	External
	Organizational ambivalence	Temporary instead of permanent job assignment when qualified	External
	Queen bee effect	Women at top don't help women below	External
	Salary inequality	Women paid less than men	External
	Tokenism	Only woman in a team	External
	Two-person career structure	Unpaid spouse requirements	External
	Unequal standards	Higher performance than males required for same reward	External
Workplace harassment	Bullying women	External	
Individual	Communication style	Not too assertive/passive	Internal
	Conscious unconsciousness	Women do not align with other women's causes	Internal
	Personalizing	Blaming self for others' faults	Internal
	Psychological glass ceiling	Unwilling to assert or undervaluing self	Internal
	Work-life conflict	Balancing personal family with work responsibilities keeps from pursuing job advancement	Internal

Source: Diehl, A., Stephenson, A., Dzubinski, L., Wang, D. (2020) Measuring the invisible: Development and multi-industry validation of the Gender Bias Scale for Women Leaders. Human Resource Development Quarterly. 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.21389>

** Barrier Type is internal or external in this study. Internal or personal barriers examined in this study are low self-efficacy, inequitable family demands, and lack of support. External gender barriers are inflicted on women, including bias, stereotypes, and a lack of work opportunities.

C: Online Survey Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

EXECUTIVE
•
WOMEN
•
LEADERS



Why

The purpose of this study is to understand the career experiences of women executive leaders and interpret them into social capital terms in a case study to inform women who aspire to hold corporate leadership roles.

Who

Women executives who currently hold a top leadership position in a company located in the U.S. Women leaders who are 18+ years old and of any race/ethnicity are invited.

How

Virtually on Zoom & Digitally via Email in November 2020 through May 2021 and will include:

1. Online survey (max 15 min) to find executive women leaders and identify their demographics and determine your pseudonym for anonymity
2. Two one-on-one interviews (max 60 min each)
3. Focus group (max 2 hrs)
4. Review and approve your documented responses (max 4 hrs)

Amy Castle-Rogers
Doctoral Candidate
Researcher

Questions?

Contact Amy at:
Amy@RogersConsulting.us
301-748-0376

Interested?

Go to
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WomenLeaders2021>
to start the online survey.

A maximum of 5 women will be asked to complete two interviews and the focus group via Zoom after signing a Hood College consent form.

D: Hood College IRB Approval



November 18, 2020

Ms. Amy Castle-Rogers
401 Rosemont Ave.
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Ms. Castle-Rogers,

The Hood College Institutional Review Board reviewed your revised proposal for the study entitled "*Strategies for Women to Overcome Barriers to Executive Leadership through the Application of Social Capital Theory and from a Lens of Intersectionality*" (Proposal Number 2021-7). The committee approves this study for a period of 12 months. This approval is limited to the activities described in the procedure narrative and extends to the performance of these activities at each respective site identified in the IRB research proposal. This approval does not authorize you to recruit participants or conduct your study on site at other institutions. Should you decide you would like to systematically recruit participants and/or conduct your study on location at other institutions or facilities you will need to receive IRB approval from those organizations *prior* to any recruitment activities or data collection.

In addition, due to the current COVID 19 precautions, Hood's IRB is restricting all in-person (e.g. face-to-face) data collection with participants at this time. You may only recruit participants and collect data online. You are not authorized to meet with your participants for the purpose of data collection until notice from this IRB. In accordance with this approval, the specific conditions for the conduct of this research and informed consent from participants must be obtained as indicated.

All individuals engaged in human subjects research are responsible for compliance with all applicable Hood Research Policies:

<https://www.hood.edu/sites/default/files/Hood%20IRB%20Policy%20revised%20September%202013.pdf>.

The Lead Researcher of the study is ultimately responsible for assuring all study team members review and adhere to applicable policies for the conduct of human sciences research.

The Hood College IRB approval expiration date is November 18, 2021. As a courtesy, approximately 30-60 days prior to expiration of this approval, it is your responsibility to apply for continuing review and receive continuing approval for the duration of the study as applicable. Lapses in approval should be avoided to protect the safety and welfare of enrolled participants.

No substantive changes are to be made to the approved protocol or the approved consent and assent forms without the prior review and approval of the Hood IRB. All substantive changes (e.g. change in procedure, number of subjects, personnel, study locations, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

Sincerely,

Diane R. Graves, PhD
Chair, Hood College Institutional Review Board

E: Consent Form for Online Survey

HOOD COLLEGE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB Use Only:

“Strategies for Women to Overcome Barriers to Executive Leadership through the Application of Social Capital Theory and from a Lens of Intersectionality”

1. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study’s online survey about experienced barriers to executive leadership roles and strategies to overcome them. You were selected as a possible study participant because you were sent the online survey to identify if you meet the requirements for this study. I ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to complete the online survey. I require participants in this study be at least 18 years old. The study is being conducted by Amy Castle-Rogers in the Doctorate in Organizational Leadership program.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand and interpret the characteristics and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles and identify social capital terms of field, habitus and capital. This will enable me to expand research from Fitzsimmons & Callan’s 2016 study “Applying a capital perspective to explain continued gender inequality in the C-suite” to describe strategies to overcome gender barriers to executive leadership.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will be involved with this online survey is a maximum of 30 minutes during the months of November 2020 to January 2021.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to complete this online survey, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Select a pseudonym that cannot be identified by others and will be used to identify your contributions to this study.
- If you meet the participant qualifications, to complete phase two of this study with two one-on-one interviews with the researcher on Zoom to answer questions about your career experiences and timeline if requested to do so
- If you meet the participant qualifications, to participate in phase three of this study in a focus group discussion with the researcher and other women of similar work experiences to you on Zoom.
- If you meet the participant qualifications, to review the researcher’s documentation of the transcriptions of your contributions to confirm intent and context.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

This study has the following risks: Discussion of personal and possibly emotional professional experiences. The use of pseudonyms may not completely ensure anonymity during participation in a focus group discussion of participants in the same professional organization.

The benefits of participation are: Sharing insight to help women who desire executive leadership positions and a \$50 Amazon gift card or donation of your choice after completing all three phases of the study. The online survey is phase one.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private. Your data records will be stored on a password-secured computer and backed up to a password-protected Google drive with only the researcher able to access your records. **In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.**

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships. After giving 10 days' notice to withdraw, your responses will be destroyed and will not be included in the study results if you request their removal. You may review any study results that you authorize for publication.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Amy Castle-Rogers. You may ask any questions you have right now. If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at 301-748-0376 and Amy@RogersConsulting.us .

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Diane Graves, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, irb@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study, I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant Signature

_____ **Date** _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ **Date** _____

F: Consent Form for Study Participation

HOOD COLLEGE INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB Use Only:

“Strategies for Women to Overcome Barriers to Executive Leadership through the Application of Social Capital Theory and from a Lens of Intersectionality”

1. INTRODUCTION

You are invited to be a participant in a research study about experienced barriers to executive leadership roles and strategies to overcome them. You were selected as a possible participant because you completed the online survey and met the requirements for this study. I ask that you read this document and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. I require participants in this study be at least 18 years old. The study is being conducted by Amy Castle-Rogers in the Doctorate in Organizational Leadership program.

2. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand and interpret the characteristics and experiences of women who have obtained executive leadership roles and identify social capital terms of field, habitus and capital. This will enable me to expand research from Fitzsimmons & Callan’s 2016 study “Applying a capital perspective to explain continued gender inequality in the C-suite” to describe strategies to overcome gender barriers to executive leadership.

3. DURATION

The length of time you will be involved with this study is 1 hour for each of two one-on-one interviews, 2 hours for a focus group discussion with other study participants, 4 hours to review and approve documentation of your responses with me, for a total of 8 hours between the months of October 2020 to May 2021.

4. PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- Select a pseudonym that cannot be identified by others and will be used to identify your contributions to this study.
- Complete two one-on-one interviews with the researcher on Zoom to answer questions about your career experiences and timeline.
- Participate in a focus group discussion with the researcher and other women of similar work experiences to you on Zoom.
- Review the researcher’s documentation of the transcriptions of your contributions to confirm intent and context.

5. RISKS/BENEFITS

This study has the following risks: Discussion of personal and possibly emotional professional experiences. The use of pseudonyms may not completely ensure anonymity during participation in a focus group discussion of participants in the same professional organizations.

The benefits of participation are: Sharing insight to help women who desire executive leadership positions and a \$50 Amazon gift card or donation of your choice after completing all phases of the study.

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The records of this study will be kept private. Your data records will be stored on a password-secured computer and backed up to a password-protected Google drive with only the researcher able to access your records. **In any sort of report that is published or presentation that is given, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.**

7. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Hood College or any of its representatives. **If you decide to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.** After giving 10 days' notice to withdraw, your responses will be destroyed and will not be included in the study results if you request their removal. You may review any study results that you authorize for publication.

8. CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

The researcher(s) conducting this study is Amy Castle-Rogers. You may ask any questions you have right now. **If you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at 301-748-0376 and Amy@RogersConsulting.us.**

If you have questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Diane Graves, Institutional Review Board Chair, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Ave., Frederick, MD 21701, irb@hood.edu.

9. STATEMENT OF CONSENT

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The procedures of this study have been explained to me and my questions have been addressed. The information that I provide is confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am at least eighteen years old. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw anytime without penalty. If I have any concerns about my experience in this study, I may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board or the Chair of the sponsoring department of this research regarding my concerns.

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

G: Gender Bias Scale Barriers Indicated by the Participants

External Barrier	Sally	Gloria	Sarah	Coco	Madison	Hilary	Lyndie
Controlling women's voices							
Cultural constraints							
Gender stereotypes			x			x	
Gender unconsciousness	x			x		x	
Leadership perceptions	x						
Scrutiny				x	x	x	x
Devalued communal expectations							
Discrimination	x	x		x	x	x	x
Exclusion						x	x
Glass cliff							
Lack of mentoring *	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lack of support		x					
Male gatekeeping	x					x	
Male culture	x	x		x		x	
Organizational ambivalence							
Queen bee effect			x	x			
Salary inequality	x						
Tokenism							
Two-person career structure			x				
Unequal standards		x		x			
Workplace harassment	x					x	x
TOTAL External Barriers	8	5	4	7	3	9	5

Internal Barrier **	Sally	Gloria	Sarah	Coco	Madison	Hilary	Lyndie
Communication style	x	x	x				x
Conscious unconsciousness	x		x	x			
Personalizing	x				x	x	x
Psychological glass ceiling		x	x	x	x	x	
Work-life conflict	x		x	x			
TOTAL Internal Barriers	4	2	4	3	2	2	2

* Lack of mentoring formally offered by the participants' organizations, all participants found their own mentors or asked bosses for advice.

** Internal barriers happened temporarily until the participants strategized learning and development to overcome them.

H: Career Timeline Example

Amy Castle-Rogers' Career Timeline

Barriers are in RED and Strategies are in GREEN.

UPBRINGING

Mom and Dad went to college at night while working full-time jobs and I was often taking care of my younger sister and brother. This made me very independent and self-sufficient.

WORK & EDUCATION HISTORY

1988-1991 -- Completed a Bachelor's in International Business with a Minor in French while working full-time in Accounts Receivable in a business to pay for college.

1991-1994 – worked administrative jobs in non-profit and university in Washington, D.C. area until meeting my first husband and marrying in October 1994. I worked for women bosses who mentored and promoted me within their organizations, and I completed an M.B.A. in International Business Management with a focus in Marketing while working full-time.

1994-1997 – Moved to the Twin Cities in Minnesota to be closer to husband's family, held two marketing analyst positions for which I was recognized for outstanding accomplishments.

1997-1999 – moved back to Maryland to be closer to my family to start a family. Obtained my first manager role and continued to work part-time at home after a difficult pregnancy and giving birth to my first child.

2000-2012 – Started part-time marketing consulting for my father's real estate business to remain at home with my first child and during second difficult pregnancy with my second child. One year after second child was born, I wanted to go back to full-time work, but my husband did not support that. We separated in 2002 and I became a realtor/team leader managing all the marketing and operations. In 2009 when the real estate market collapsed, I began training realtors in real estate licensing and continuing education while working as a full-time realtor and team leader. My father mentored and sponsored me for promotion, and I ran his business while he was semi-retired. Because the market continued to deteriorate and we had to lay off employees, I was not paid commensurate to my work, I stayed to keep his business going until I could not afford to do so. I remarried in 2006 to a husband who supported my career and continued development.

2012-2015 – I worked as a Business Development Manager for a non-profit and a for-profit business. The later business was not thriving, so I left to start my own business with the support of my husband who believed in my ability to train others.

2015-Present – FIRST EXECUTIVE ROLE - I am the owner of Rogers Consulting LLC, contractually training in leadership, team building, and communication skills. My favorite class to train is "Leadership for Women" where I can mentor future and current women leaders.

2018-2021 – With the support of my husband, I am completing a Doctorate in Organizational Leadership (DOL) to research, publish my findings, and develop training based on my findings.