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Motivation to Break Through Occupational Barriers: A Case Study of

Female City Manager's Career Progression

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Doctor of Public Administration

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Motivation to Break Through Occupational Barriers: A Case Study of
Female City Manager's Career Progression

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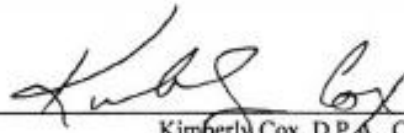
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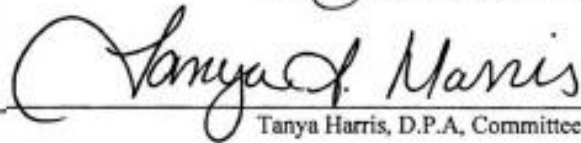
College of Arts and Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Public Administration



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ABSTRACT

According to data compiled by the International City/County Management Association's Career and Equity Advancement Team, in 2021, 19% of city managers were women. This low percentage of women in the role means that it is considered a male-dominated occupation. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Using the trait and behavioral theory of leadership, motivational theory, and role congruency theory as the theoretical frameworks, this study investigated, analyzed, and interpreted the findings obtained from interviews with 16 Colorado female city managers to assess the occupational barriers these women had to face as well as the motivation and characteristics they possess that aided their career progression. The findings from this study conclude that although the occupational barriers the participants faced were not as pronounced as the researcher initially anticipated, the female city managers interviewed were able to share valuable insight into what it means to be a city manager, including what motivates them to continue to work in the role, what leadership characteristics they felt were essential to success, and their recommendations for future city managers. Understanding what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers is vital in addressing occupational segregation within the public sector, and this research seeks to motivate and inspire future generations of women to pursue a career as a city manager and be successful in doing so.

Keywords: affirmative action, behavioral theory of leadership, city manager, gender roles, gender stereotypes, glass ceiling, glass cliff, glass walls, male-dominated field,

motivational theory, occupational barriers, occupational segregation, patriarchy, representative bureaucracy, role congruency theory, second-generation bias, stereotypes, trait theory of leadership.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my parents, Marc and Laura Fisher, who raised me to be a formidable force in this world and have supported me both personally and professionally. They have always been by my side and encouraged me to continue to push myself to new heights. I would not be the person I am today without them. Thank you for your love and support – you are truly the best. Peace Out – Love You – Bye!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, former Supreme Court Justice, once said, “Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn’t be that women are the exception” (BBC News, 2020, para. 8). Despite this powerful statement, the lack of female representation in the city manager role has been a noted area of occupational segregation since the position was established (Sneed, 2004).

History of the City Manager Role

In June 1887, 26 years before Woodrow Wilson became President of the United States, he published “The Study of Administration” in the *Political Science Quarterly* journal, in which he outlined that there should be a separation between the administration of government and the politics of government (W. Wilson, 1887). In 1900, Frank Goodnow expanded on Wilson’s ideas, stating that in addition to the separation between politics and administration, there needed to be an established hierarchy to promote accountability between politicians and administrators, which he referred to as democratic accountability (Montjoy & Watson, 1995). Goodnow explained that to ensure there was democratic accountability, the role of each party needed to be clearly defined. Today, the political and administrative dichotomy exists in the council–city manager relationship.

Role of the City Manager

City managers are appointed to serve as experts who execute the policies set by the governing body and oversee the daily administrative functions of the municipality (Beaty & Davis, 2012). City managers are essential to local government because they help navigate the political dichotomy by promoting democratic accountability, upholding

ethical and fair standards, and enhancing municipal departments' effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy. City managers are often referred to as the leaders in the shadows because so much of what they do is not seen by the public (Siegel, 2015).

In addition, city managers also serve as the intersection between policy managers (the boards and councils) and administrative staff. The manager reports to the board or council and carries out any of the goals and objectives decided on by the majority. To ensure those tasks are accomplished, the city manager is responsible for supporting all municipal departments, delivering public services, and overseeing and implementing the budget (Yang et al., 2022). The role of the city manager is imperative to a jurisdiction's success; however, it is also a vocational field that is occupationally segregated by gender.

Women in the City Manager Role

In 1974, the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) established a Task Force on Women in the Profession after identifying that only 1.3% of city managers in the United States were women (Antil et al., 2014). At the time, the task force recommended that the ICMA focus on providing training, networking opportunities, educational outreach through publications and informational sessions with boards and commissions and ensuring the task force continued.

Between 1974 and 2021, the IMCA identified an increase in females in the city manager role: 1974, 1.3%; 1997, 11%; 2014, 14.4%; 2015, 15.7%; and 2021, 19% (Antil et al., 2014; French & Eskridge, 2021; ICMA, 2021). However, this nominal growth over the years demonstrates that the public sector needs help integrating women into the city manager role (Fox & Schuhmann, 1999). Municipalities are pulling from the same

talent pool that consists primarily of White males and overlooking women who possess the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the job well (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a).

Statement of the Research Problem

According to data compiled by the ICMA's Career and Equity Advancement Team, in 2021, 19% of city managers were women. This low percentage of women in the role means that it is considered a male-dominated occupation (Ballard, 2015). Occupational segregation occurs when a particular demographic is under- or overrepresented within a specific vocational field. These fields are often referred to as nontraditional, in which less than 25% of the individuals are of a different demographic (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014).

Over the years, many researchers have studied the barriers related to female leaders' lack of career progression in male-dominated roles, including but not limited to glass ceilings, glass walls, glass cliffs, discriminative employment practices, and patriarchal perceptions of women's roles. Researchers have also studied issues related to representative bureaucracy, causes of occupational segregation, and ways to promote gender diversity within public organizations.

Limited research into what motivates women to combat occupational barriers exists (Webb Farley et al., 2021). To better understand why women strive to overcome occupational barriers, additional research is needed. Yang et al. (2022) stated, "Seeking to understand the obstacles to women's advancement in municipal management is a worthy endeavor as research shows that women bring a distinct voice to the field" (p. 573). Webb Farley et al. (2021) also noted that

studying the differences between men and women city managers' experiences and the reasons for pursuing their work (motivation), approaches to the people they serve (attitude), and sense of one's own professional self (identity) is valuable for what is a very understudied area of public administration. (p. 59)

By understanding the lived experiences of female city managers, researchers can explore what characteristics they possess to motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position.

Significance of the Problem

Many researchers have approached the lack of female representation in the city manager role as an issue of representative bureaucracy. Representative bureaucracy is a pillar of public administration and consists of active and passive representation. Passive representation occurs when representatives demographically mirror their constituency. Active representation takes place when representatives make decisions that directly impact the demographic with which they identify (Dolan & Rosenbloom, 2003). As of 2019, half of the population in the United States were women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), which means that under the theory of representative bureaucracy, there should be just as many female city managers as there are males.

Over time, however, the issue related to female representation in the city manager role has transitioned into one focused on leadership, motivational, and role congruency theory, specifically, the characteristics women possess that aid them in obtaining and maintaining the city manager role. Integrating women into leadership positions within municipal governments can improve how services are delivered because women have a different perception and understanding of what the community needs and how to interact

with constituents (Guul, 2018). Therefore, to increase female representation within the city manager position, it is crucial to evaluate these women's motivation and leadership characteristics to understand how they broke through the occupational barriers to obtain and maintain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position.

Understanding what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers will also be vital in addressing occupational segregation within the public sector. It can help motivate and inspire future generations of women to pursue a career as a city manager and be successful in doing so.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Using the trait and behavioral theory of leadership, motivational theory, and role congruency theory as the theoretical frameworks, this study investigated, analyzed, and interpreted the findings obtained from interviews with female city managers to assess the occupational barriers these women had to face as well as the motivation and characteristics they possess that aided their career progression.

Research Questions

The research questions the researcher used for the study were as follows:

1. How do women perceive gender as a factor in career progression?
2. What occupational barriers have women had to overcome during their career progression?

3. What is the relationship between occupational barriers and career progression for women working in local municipal government?
4. How do women describe their experiences working in the male-dominated field of city management?
5. What are female city managers' motivational triggers that provide them with the fortitude to pursue career advancement in a male-dominated occupation?
6. What are the characteristics of female city managers that aided their career progression into the city manager role?

Theory Analysis

The study aimed to assess the characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers. The four theories used for this study include the trait and behavioral theory of leadership, role congruency theory, and motivational theory.

Trait Theory of Leadership

The trait theory of leadership suggests that there are certain personality traits a person has that make them an effective leader. This theory was developed from the foundation of the great man theory, which explains that great leaders are born, not made. Researchers expanded on that notion by studying leadership traits and preparing lists of certain characteristics that they determined successful leaders must have (Bass, 2008; Gehring, 2007; Harrison, 2018; Northouse, 2019).

Behavioral Theory of Leadership

One of the limitations of the trait theory of leadership is that there is no proof that having a specific leadership characteristic automatically means that a person will be a

good leader (Northouse, 2019). Therefore, in continuing to assess leadership traits, researchers developed the behavioral theory of leadership, which identifies that there are certain behaviors that a leader demonstrates related to tasks and employees that make them successful, and those behaviors are more important than the traits a leader exhibits.

Role Congruency Theory

Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruency theory explains the intersection between the traits typically associated with leaders and the shared beliefs regarding gender roles that men and women are supposed to adhere to. Under this theory, it is noted that men are typically more associated with being an effective leader. Therefore, the theory helps explain some of the prejudices women must overcome to attain leadership roles and some biases that can impact a female leader's success.

Motivational Theory

Motivational theories help provide insight into what drives a person to pursue specific goals and what characteristics give them the tenacity to succeed in their endeavors. Motivational theories evaluate what drives a person to pursue a particular goal or objective. For this study, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (in 1943), Herzberg's two-factor theory (in 1968), McClelland's theory of needs (in 1961), Vroom's theory of expectancy (in 1964), and Duckworth's grit theory (in 2016) were used to assess what motivates female city managers and the characteristics they possess that aided in their career progression.

Definitions

Affirmative Action. “A set of procedures designed to eliminate unlawful discrimination among applicants, remedy the results of such prior discrimination, and prevent such discrimination in the future” (Cornell Law School, n.d., para. 1).

Behavioral theory of leadership. Effective leaders demonstrate specific behaviors that make them successful in their respective roles (Northouse, 2019).

City manager. The highest nonelected municipal government leadership position.

Employee-centered leader. A leader who is focused on “the employees, their needs, and how to accomplish a desirable work environment” (Swan, 2018, p. 5933).

Gender roles. “The shared beliefs that apply to individuals on the basis of their socially identified sex” (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001, p. 783).

Gender schema. “Subconscious belief about the difference between males and females and the traits associated with different professions translate into the ways in which individuals are perceived and treated” (Beatty & Davis, 2012, p. 622).

Gender stereotypes. “Generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, men and women” (United Nations Human Rights, n.d., para. 1).

Glass ceiling. The “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions” (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p. 1).

Glass cliff. Women are hired into leadership positions in precarious situations, which results in higher professional risk (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a).

Glass walls. “Institutional barriers that isolate some employees – traditionally women and minorities – into jobs that [do not] lead to executive advancements within an organization” (Hanks, n.d., para. 1).

Job-centered leader. A leader who is focused on accomplishing tasks above all.

Labyrinth. The complex path to leadership is not clear or direct (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a).

Leader. “Defined as a person with the responsibility to influence one or more followers and directing them to achieve a set objective” (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014, p. 165).

Male-dominated field. Any occupation for which at least 75% of the total workforce is male and/or in which males occupy more than 85% of available mid- to upper-level management positions (Ballard, 2015).

Motivational theory. The study of what drives a person to meet a specific goal or objective.

Motivational triggers. “What prompts a person to act in a certain way or at least develop an inclination for specific behavior” (Pardee, 1990, p. 6).

Occupational barriers. The real and perceived obstacles that impact an individual’s career progression.

Occupational segregation. The overrepresentation or underrepresentation of one demographic.

Patriarchy. A social system in which men hold power and women are viewed as inferior.

Representative bureaucracy. The theory that the demographics of the democracy should match the demographics of the general population (Dolan & Rosenbloom, 2003).

Role congruency theory. The intersection between the traits typically associated with leaders and the shared beliefs regarding gender roles that men and women are supposed to adhere to.

Second-generation gender bias. “Invisible barriers to women’s advancement that arise from cultural beliefs about gender, workplace structures, practices, and patterns of intersection that inadvertently favor men” (D’Agostino et al., 2022, p. 335).

Stereotypes. Inaccurate generalizations regarding attributes or traits that are applied to a group of people (Koch et al., 2015; Wojtowicz, 2021).

Trait theory of leadership. Suggests that a person has specific personality traits that make them a successful leader.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study, which included the research problem, purpose statement, research questions, theory analysis, and the significance of the problem. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the theoretical framework for the study, focusing specifically on the trait and behavioral theory of leadership, motivational theory, and role congruency theory as well as occupational barriers, gender leadership characteristics, and the female city manager experience. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used for the study and the research design and data collection processes. Chapter 4 reviews and discusses the research

findings. Last, Chapter 5 analyzes the conclusions derived from the findings and identifies the implications of the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To better understand women's motivation to break through occupational barriers to become city managers, it is important to evaluate the concepts rooted in the trait and behavioral leadership theory, motivational theory, and role congruency theory as well as occupational barriers, gender leadership characteristics, and the female city manager experience.

Trait and Behavioral Leadership Theories

Leadership theories seek to explain why certain individuals become leaders and the characteristics or behaviors they might exhibit that make them effective leaders. Although there are 10 primary leadership theories, for this study, the researcher focused on the trait theory of leadership and the behavioral theory of leadership.

Trait Theory of Leadership

When the great man theory was formed in 1866 by Thomas Carlyle, the theory rested on the notion that people were born with specific traits that made them influential leaders and that one's ability to lead is an inheritable characteristic (Villanova University, 2022). Carl Jung referred to these genetic traits as temperaments (Boeree, 2009). In 1943, Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers, two of Jung's students, created the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI), a personality test based on Jung's temperaments (Boeree, 2009). The MBTI evaluates where a person falls with regard to the following categories: introversion and extraversion; sensing people and intuiting people; thinkers and feelers; and judging versus perceiving.

Hans Eysenck expanded Jung's temperaments and the MBTI when he developed Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. Rather than looking at where someone falls within

sets of comparisons, Han Eysenck noted that people operate within three trait dimensions. First was introversion-extroversion. Second was neuroticism, in which if someone scored high, they were more likely to demonstrate neurotic tendencies like obsession, phobias, compulsions, and depression. Third was psychoticism, in which people who scored high in this dimension were more likely to have psychosis and struggle dealing with reality (Boeree, 2009).

Although researchers have since questioned the validity of the great man theory, specifically its equity and universality, it paved the way for other leadership theories such as the trait theory of leadership (Northouse, 2019). The trait theory of leadership suggests that a person's personality traits make them an effective leader and that these traits tie into how a leader behaves in a certain situation (Harrison, 2018; Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). Over the years, researchers have sought to develop a list of those traits, which has proven to be complicated. Figure 1 shows the different traits identified by researchers since the 1940s.

Northouse (2019) evaluated the personality traits identified over the years and selected five, which he noted as ones that appeared consistently among the studies (see Figure 2).

Although Northouse (2019) tried to summarize what he believed to be more universal leadership traits among the various lists that had been developed, more key characteristics of effective leaders emerge every year, leading to a lack of consensus on what traits should be listed under the trait theory of leadership. Because of this inconsistency, researchers have noted that there is no evidence that specific traits automatically translate into a person being an effective leader (Gehring, 2007; Harrison,

2018; Northouse, 2019). For example, even if someone is intelligent, they still need to gain the skills to lead employees and an organization. Researchers have also questioned the likelihood that a leader would embody all the leadership characteristics on a particular list. The list is subjective as well in that it is left to an individual's interpretation (Harrison, 2018; Northouse, 2019).

Figure 1

Studies of Leadership Traits and Characteristics

Stogdill (1948)	Mann (1959)	Stogdill (1974)	Lord, DeVader, and Alliger (1986)	Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991)
Intelligence Alertness Insight Responsibility Initiative Persistence Self-confidence	Intelligence Masculinity Adjustment Dominance Extroversion Conservatism	Achievement Persistence Insight Initiative Self-confidence Responsibility Cooperativeness	Intelligence Masculinity Dominance	Drive Motivation Integrity / Honesty Confidence Cognitive ability Task knowledge

Source: Adapted from Northouse (2007:18)

Note. From *An Assessment of Leadership Competencies for Effective Change Management in a Chemical Organization* (Master's thesis, North-West University), by M. W. Boloko, 2018, p. 42 (https://repository.nwu.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10394/30628/Boloko_M_2018.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1).

Although there are some flaws with this trait theory, researchers have identified that many leaders still subscribe to the notion that certain personality traits may lead to a person being more successful in a leadership role (Bass, 2008; Gehring, 2007; Northouse, 2019). If a person were to describe what an effective leader looks like, it is likely that they would use terms that mirror those previously identified under the trait theory of leadership. This theory has also served as the foundation for leadership styles such as situational and transformational leadership (Harrison, 2018).

Figure 2

Northouse's List of Leadership Traits

Intelligence: “Strong verbal ability, perceptual ability, and reasoning.”
Self-confidence: “Ability to be certain about one’s competencies and skills.”
Determination: “The desire to get the job done and it includes characteristics such as initiative, persistence, dominance, and drive.”
Integrity: “The quality of honesty and trustworthiness.”
Sociability: “A leader’s inclination to seek out pleasant social relationships.”

Note. From (2019). *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (pp. 23–26), by P. G. Northouse, 2019, Sage Publications.

Behavioral Theory of Leadership

Although the trait theory of leadership continues to build on the assumption that leaders are born and not made, the behavioral theory of leadership identifies that leadership skills can be developed and that how a person behaves is a more significant indicator of how effective they will be in a leadership role (Gehring, 2007; Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014). The focus is more on what the leader does and less on who they are and their personality traits (Northouse, 2019). Under this theory, a leader’s behavior is tied to their “consideration (concern for people and relationship behaviors) and commencing structure (concern for production and task behaviors)” (Kahn et al., 2016, p. 2) and takes into consideration what level of priority they place on each one. Although there have been many studies on behavioral theory, Likert’s Management Systems and Blake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid have contributed significantly to the theoretical framework (Fisk et al., 2012; Harrison, 2018; Swan, 2018).

Likert's Management Systems

Rensis Likert conducted a study in the 1960s to determine the difference between effective and ineffective leaders. After analyzing questionnaires from over 200 managers from different organizations, Likert noted that there are two types of leaders: the job-centered leader, who is focused on getting the tasks done, and the employee-centered leader, who is focused on ensuring that the employees are successful and have the tools that they need to complete their job (Fisk et al., 2012; Swan, 2018). From this leadership framework, Likert then identified a management system that evaluated performance effectiveness regarding leaders who were more job-centered versus employee-centered. Under this management structure, leaders could expect to see different levels of performance and productivity among employees based on operating systems. Figure 3 summarizes the four levels of management identified by Likert.

Blake and Mouton's Management Grid

Blake and Mouton expanded Likert's model in the 1990s when they developed the managerial grid featured in Figure 4. Under this model, there are five ways a manager acts, and depending on their style, there may be varying production levels and concerns for people (Harrison, 2018):

- **Authority Compliance:** This leader has a high concern for production and low concern for people. The emphasis is on getting work done at the expense of building good working relationships.
- **Impoverished Management:** This leader has a low concern for people and production. There is a hands-off attitude and minimal effort on building relationships or getting the tasks completed.

Figure 3

Likert's Management System

Leadership variable	System 1: Autocratic	System 2: Benevolent
Confidence and trust in work team members	Shows no confidence and no trust in team members	Demonstrates confidence and trust but as master to servant
Work team members feeling of freedom	Team members do not feel at all free to discuss things about the job with manager	Team members not comfortable about discussing things about the job with manager
Leader seeking involvement with team members	Does not seek ideas and opinions of team members in solving job problems	Sometimes gets job problem-solving ideas from team members
Leadership variable	System 3: Participative	System 4: Democratic
Confidence and trust in work team members	Demonstrates confidence and trust; still keeps control of decisions	Demonstrates confidence and trust in all actions towards team members
Work team members feeling of freedom	Team members feel free to discuss things about the job with manager	Team members feel free to discuss job/job problems with manager
Leader seeking involvement with team members	Solicits and uses ideas from team members to help solve job problems	Team members are consulted for ideas and opinions and on how problems are best solved

Note. From *Understanding the Leader in You: Roles for Leaders and Followers* (p. 39), by P. Miller and C. Dalglish, 2016 (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327416648_Understanding_the_Leader_in_You_Roles_for_Leaders_and_Followers).

- **Middle of the Road Management:** This leader has a middle concern for production and people. There is a moderate effort to accomplish the tasks by creating a good working environment. However, the result is not optimum. It is more like a Jack of all trades and master of none approach.
- **Team Management:** This leader has a high concern for people and production. There is a very good working environment and relationship between the leaders and the employees, but the focus still remains on achieving the organizational goals. It could be termed the Jack of all Trades and master of all approach. (Harrison, 2018, pp. 24–25)

Although different behavioral categories have been assigned to this theory, the behavioral theory of leadership has brought a major shift in leadership theory. It also significantly affects how managers' leadership styles intersect with performance measurement and relationship development (Harrison, 2018).

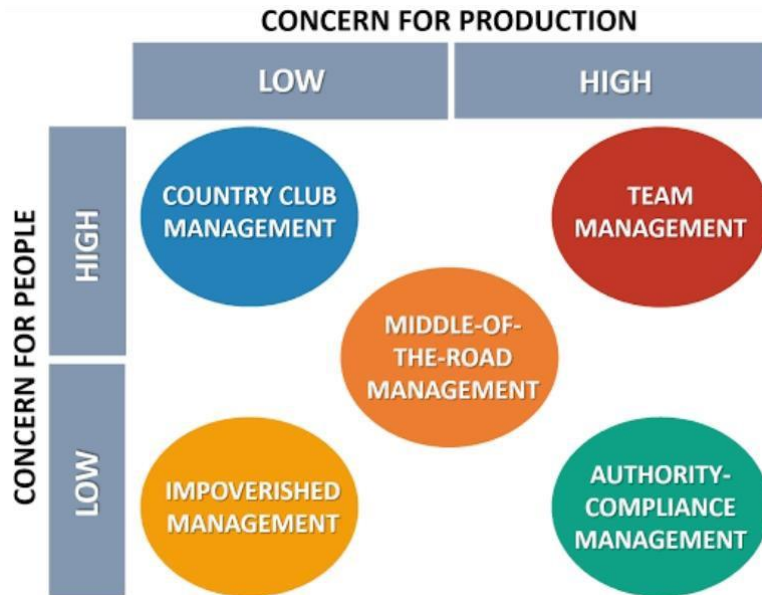
Trait and Behavioral Leadership Theories and City Managers

City management is the highest nonelected municipal government leadership role, so it is to be expected that anyone who obtains the position is an effective leader. The theoretical frameworks tied to trait and behavioral leadership helps to understand how city managers might conduct themselves when it comes to interacting with their subordinates and taking on projects as well as what personality characteristics they might possess. Understanding both trait and behavioral leadership theory is crucial to evaluating how a leader might measure up to both. Effective leadership is tied to knowing oneself (Sethuraman & Suresh, 2014) and how the different aspects of leadership can aid in a city manager's success in leading their respective team, supporting

the community where they serve, and overall, being successful in a high-ranking leadership role.

Figure 4

Blake and Mouton's Management Grid



Note. From “Blake-Mouton’s Managerial Grid Theory,” by S. Prabhakaran, 2021, *Medium*, p. 1 (<https://medium.com/the-shadow/blake-moutons-managerial-grid-theory-aa0842e771a>).

Motivational Theory

Although a significant amount of research and literature have described women’s challenges in occupationally segregated fields, very little information exists on what motivates women to overcome barriers to reach their vocational aspirations.

Motivational theory studies what drives a person to meet a specific goal or objective.

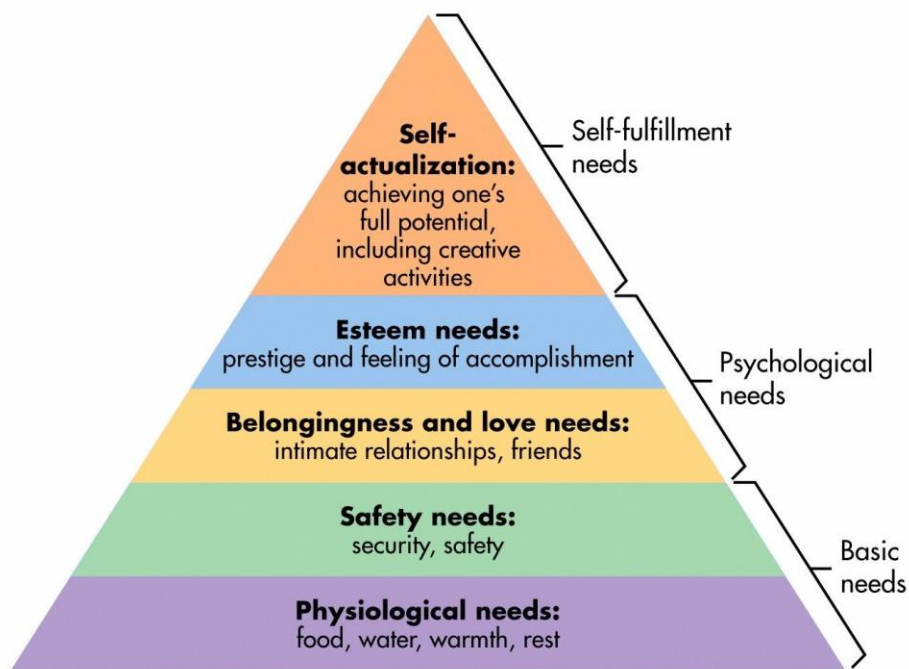
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Motivational theory can be tied back to Abraham Maslow (1948), who developed a model that identified human needs: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem,

and self-actualization (Pardee, 1990). Maslow argued that as individuals' basic needs are met, they become motivated to reach the higher levels within the hierarchy of needs pyramid, ending in self-actualization, at which the person realizes their “potentialities for continued self-development and the desire to become more and more of what one is and what one is capable of becoming” (Pardee, 1990, p. 9). Maslow focused on the full spectrum of human needs, but he specifically chose self-actualization as the peak because he was interested in human potential and how that is fulfilled through individual motivation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Note. From “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” by S. Mcleod, 2023, *Simply Psychology*, p. 7 (<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>).

Hertzberg's Two-Factor Theory

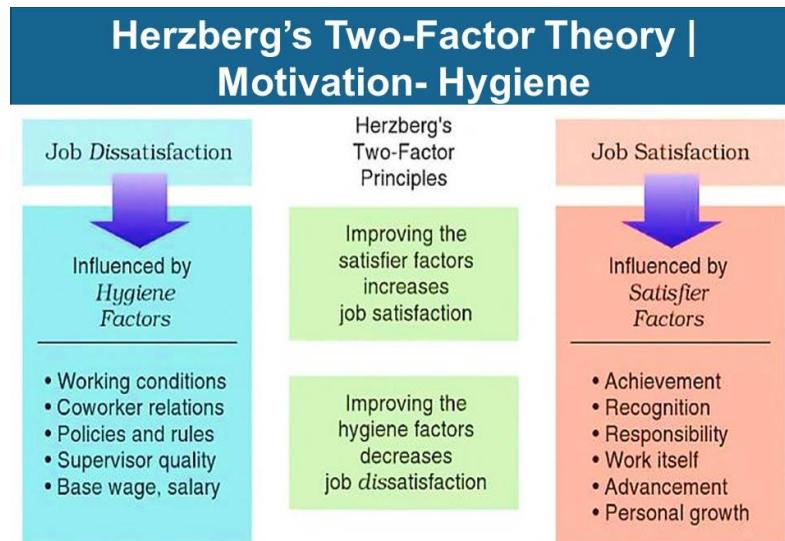
When assessing motivation, researchers have noted that multiple factors contribute to job satisfaction and drive; however, Frederick Herzberg broke job satisfaction into two components: hygiene and motivation (see Figure 6; Syptak et al., 1999). Hygiene issues, such as working conditions, policies and procedures, and pay, do not motivate employees but can help address dissatisfaction. Herzberg (in 1968) identified that what motivates employees are things that fulfill “individuals’ needs for meaning and personal growth” (Syptak et al., 1999, para. 6), such as recognition, upward mobility within the organization, and the overall work itself. Hur (2018) noted that city managers are motivated by hygiene within the realm of municipal government because they can expect to advance in their careers. However, they are also motivated by the work itself and being able to take pride in their job.

McClelland's Theory of Needs

David McClelland (in 1961) identified that people are motivated by three needs: power, affiliation, and achievement (see Figure 7; Pennsylvania State University, 2008). McClelland explained that there are high and low achievers, and what category people fall into is directly related to how they approach these three needs. The need for power manifests in the person's influence and control over others. The need for affiliation is having good, collaborative relationships with others. The need for achievement emphasizes accomplishing tasks and demonstrating high performance. Rybnicek et al. (2019) noted, however, that each person's needs related to power, affiliation, and achievement vary based on individual and professional factors such as where the person is in their career development and what their ultimate goals are.

Figure 6

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory



Note. From “Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory of Motivation,” by K. S. Rao, 2017, *Business Minds Today*, p. 2 (<https://www.bmindstoday.com/herzberg-s-two-factor-theory-of-motivation/>).

Figure 7

McClelland's Theory of Needs



Note. From “The Three Needs Theory of Motivation,” by S. Chappell, 2022, *Management Works*, p. 1 (<https://managementworksmmedia.com/f/the-three-needs-theory-of-motivation>).

Vroom's Theory of Expectancy

Like McClelland, Victor Vroom identified three factors that impact motivation: valence, expectancy, and instrumentality. According to World of Work Project (n.d.),

Specifically, Vroom says that an individual's motivation is affected by how much they value any reward associated with an action (Valence), how much they believe that by putting effort into something they will be able to generate good results (Expectancy) and how much they believe that generating good results will result in a reward (Instrumentality). (para. 2)

These three factors are ultimately tied to people's expectations for the future as a means of motivation.

Understanding what motivates employees, especially in the public sector, is essential to public administration. Using Vroom's theory of expectancy, Baci (2017) noted that most people choose to enter the public sector because they value delivering public services responsibly and equitably; however, once employed in the public sector, expectancy, instrumentality, and valence motivate employees to stay (see Figure 8).

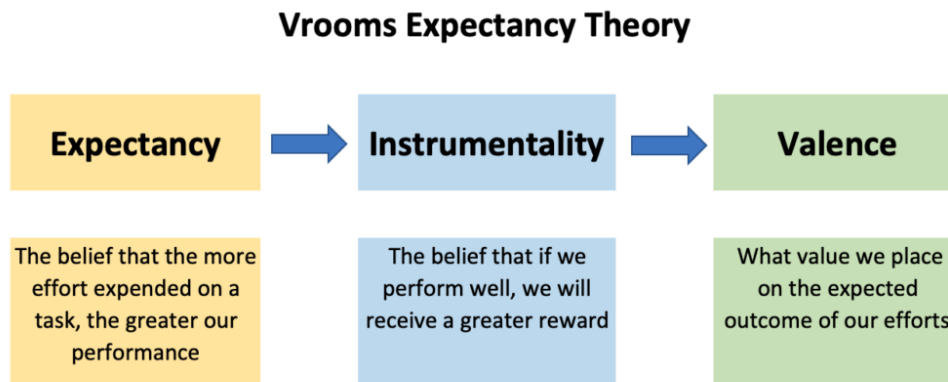
Duckworth's Grit Theory

These former motivational theorists paved the way for one of the newest motivational theories: Angela Duckworth's (2016) grit theory. Grit theory studies why some people fail and some succeed. Duckworth explained that grit consists of a combination of talent and achievement. Specifically, she focused on the following equations:

- Talent x Effort = Skill
- Skill x Effort = Achievement

Figure 8

Vroom's Theory of Expectancy



Note. From “Vroom’s Expectancy Theory,” by E. Martin, 2020, p. 2 (<https://sanzubusiness training.com/vrooms-expectancy-theory/>).

Using these equations as the framework, Duckworth (2016) explained that skill, talent, effort, and achievement are only possible if there is interest, practice, passion, and hope, which are all components of grit. To be successful, a person must genuinely care and be excited about what they are working toward. Second comes practice. Although there are naturally talented people, for many, there is a commitment to getting better every day. Then there is purpose. As Duckworth explained, people are motivated when they feel that their work matters and that their work will impact their respective field. Finally, there is hope, with which even when people have doubts or are knocked down, they get back up again and keep working toward their goals.

Motivational Theories and City Managers

Maslow, Hertzberg, McClelland, Vroom, and Duckworth contributed significantly to the study of motivational theory. Although they each took a different approach, they all recognized that every person has something that motivates them to achieve a specific goal or objective. That drive may come from a need to have power,

the need to reach a level of self-fulfillment, or the desire to find meaning in one's life. Whatever the motivation, an individual must have the grit to overcome any barriers that may stand in the way of achieving those goals. For women seeking to progress in their careers and obtain the city manager position, understanding what motivates them to break through occupational barriers is vital. Therefore, motivational theory is one of the foundational theories used for this study.

Occupational Barriers

Women's career progression is one example of when motivational theory plays out, especially when women seek leadership advancements in male-dominated fields. For decades, the U.S. workforce has been confronted with occupational segregation, by which there is an overrepresentation or underrepresentation of one gender in a specific vocational field. These fields are often referred to as nontraditional and, according to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 2006 and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, include occupations in which less than 25% of the individuals are of a different demographic (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2014). When looking specifically at gender, Ballard (2015) defined a vocation as occupationally segregated if at least 75% of the total workforce is male and/or when males occupy more than 85% of available mid- to upper-level management positions. This sex segregation leads to a disproportionate number of men and women in various occupational fields (Koch et al., 2015).

Occupational segregation typically occurs because of an assumption that specific jobs are better suited for men versus women. Even though women make up almost half of the workforce, studies have shown that as they progress through the leadership ranks,

the number of women in mid-to-upper-level management drastically decreases, especially within male-dominated fields. French and Eskridge (2021) identified that many of these occupational barriers “are due to gender division of labor, gender relations of power, emotion and human relations, and gender culture and symbolism” (p. 705). Therefore, to understand how women have overcome occupational barriers, it is essential to recognize some factors that lead to occupational segregation in the first place, including but not limited to glass ceilings, glass walls, glass cliffs, patriarchy, and organizational discrimination.

Glass Ceilings

The U.S. Department of Labor (1991) defined the glass ceiling as “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions” (p. 1). Glass ceilings are constructed so that women are removed from current vocational opportunities because of gender stereotypes and a misperception that certain characteristics help a person move up in their career (Abdallah & Jibai, 2020; French & Eskridge, 2021; Naff, 2001).

Typically, those who climb the corporate ladder possess a higher level of education, have extensive vocational experience, and can work longer hours (Beatty & Davis, 2012; Naff, 2001). Women often must maintain a family–work–life balance and cannot dedicate their lives to work, which means they are sometimes passed up for career advancements or choose not to seek higher positions because they cannot commit to the long hours typically required in higher leadership roles (Adisa et al., 2021; Antil et al., 2014; French & Eskridge, 2021; Hannah-Spurlock & Silverboard, 2021; Kahu &

Morgan, 2007; McDowell, 2017). These traditional gender stereotypes have kept women from advancing in their careers (Alkadry et al., 2019). They will continue to do so unless the stereotypes and institutional structures are reevaluated and changed, especially the notion that women must choose between their family or their career (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a, 2020b).

Glass Walls

According to Hanks (n.d.), the term glass walls refers to institutional barriers that isolate some employees, traditionally women and minorities, into jobs that do not lead to executive advancements within an organization. Unlike glass ceilings, which refer to obstacles that block an individual's advancement beyond a certain level, glass walls allow for advancement within a specific department. However, they bar the individual from reaching higher leadership positions. (para. 1)

Under the glass wall effect, women are more likely to end up in dead-end careers or positions with less authority (Yang et al., 2022).

To better understand the impacts of the glass wall theory, political scientist Theodore J. Lowi (1972) focused on four departmental classifications: distributive, regulatory, redistributive, and financial administration and general control. A distributive agency delivers a specific public good or service, such as public works, planning and zoning, and utility departments. A regulatory agency controls individuals' behavior, such as police and correctional departments, or establishes policies and procedures that control collective behavior, such as environmental or fiscal agencies. Redistributive agencies administer programs that help others, such as health, human services, and education.

Financial administration and general control include financial management departments such as the treasury (Guy, 1993). Among these departments, women are often more likely to end up in redistributive agencies because they are considered to be more emotionally empathetic, which is needed in those fields (Alkadry et al., 2019; French & Eskridge, 2021; McDowell, 2017; A. E. Smith, 2015). Although a city manager will oversee and be involved in all departments, Lowi (1972) identified that gender bias and organizational culture within each department can directly impact women's ability to advance (Newman, 1994).

Glass Cliffs

DeHart-Davis et al. (2020a) noted that “even the women who do manage to break the ceiling, ride the escalator, scale the walls, and navigate the labyrinth continue to face challenges once they arrive at the top” (p. 38). The next barrier women may face is the glass cliffs, in which women are brought into precarious situations with a high likelihood of failure and long-term damage to their careers (A. E. Smith, 2015). When an organization is in crisis, they may seek to hire a woman to serve as the executive officer because they need feminine leadership qualities to bring about healing, which is referred to this as the “think crisis – think female” effect (Bruckmüller et al., 2014; Yang, Connolly, and Connolly, 2022)

Women often pursue labyrinth employment because it gives them a chance to prove themselves and bring about the change the organization seeks (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a). Although admirable, the pressure to succeed is a risk when an organization is in flux. If the female leader can overcome the pressure, they are a hero. If they do not, their leadership is more apt to be scrutinized, their reputations damaged, and the bias that

women are ineffective leaders is likely to be confirmed (Cook & Glass, 2014). This glass cliffs effect means that even the most minor mistakes may result in a loss of status, which is hard for any leader to recover from (Brescoll et al., 2010).

Female leaders who step into these roles are also more likely to be blamed if the organization cannot recover and be labeled as part of the problem even if they were not with the organization when the crisis unfolded (Yang et al., 2022). When this happens, the organization will have a tendency to bring back a male leader as a sign that things are back to normal because a male is in charge, a phenomenon referred to as the savior effect.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a psychic prison that produces and reproduces “organizational structures that give dominance to males and traditional male values” (Morgan, 2006, p. 218). Patriarchy reinforces Lowi’s (1972) departmental categories by perpetuating the notion that women belong in specific roles like nursing or clerical work. At the same time, men occupy manually laborious or more senior leadership positions. Patriarchy is deeply embedded into many organizational structures and directly impacts how gender-related issues are framed and subsequently dealt with (A. Rao, 2016). Patriarchy also reinforces gender bias, which can directly impact career advancement because women are evaluated based on their gender rather than their leadership qualities and characteristics; this often results in women being viewed as inferior to their male counterparts. If selected for leadership roles, it is likely that a woman will feel isolated from the “good ol’ boys” network and may experience hostile sexism, especially if men feel women are threatening their jobs (Carbajal, 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2014; Koch et al., 2014).

Many organizations are patriarchal, whereby the organizational culture is centered on more opportunities and advantages for men (Yang et al., 2022). Work schedules and a general lack of interest in pursuing flexible working practices are examples of domination. According to Focus on Labor Exploitation (2017), “Where a family depends upon a woman workers’ employment for survival, women are less likely to leave or challenge abusive working conditions” (para. 4). Women might also be forced to accept lower-paying or part-time jobs to have the flexibility to take care of their domestic duties, such as caring for their children or elderly parents. As noted in a survey conducted in 2017 by the Pew Research Center, women who work in male-dominated fields have identified that “their gender has made it harder for them to get ahead at work, they are less likely to say women are treated fairly in personnel matters, and they report experiencing gender discrimination at significantly higher rates” (Parker, 2018, para. 3). This type of domination and workforce discrimination often perpetuate the issues women and minorities experience at work.

Organizational Discrimination

Organizational discrimination identifies that the organizational structure itself perpetuates occupational segregation. Organizations determine who is hired, fired, and promoted. If organizations maintain a perspective that a particular demographic is better suited for a job than another, that mentality only continues the cycle of occupational segregation. An organization’s culture plays a significant role in occupational segregation because there are set “values, ideas, beliefs, norms, rituals, and other patterns of shared meaning that guide organizational life” (Morgan, 2006, p. 6). Depending on the agency’s culture, those values may perpetuate the glass ceiling, glass wall, and glass

cliff theories because of a resistance to change (Sneed, 2004), and can impact employee retention and feeling of inclusivity among coworkers and the organization (Das & Kotikula, 2019).

Second-Generation Bias

Many of the preconceptions that exist today toward women are a part of what is now termed second-generation bias. Second-generation biases are not those deliberate actions to exclude women but subtle biases within a workplace culture that prohibit women from advancing in their careers (D'Agostino et al., 2022). Ibarra et al. (2013) referred to this as the “something in the water” feeling when cultural assumptions and organizational structures create an environment in which men are favored over women and women are disadvantaged (p. 6). This second-generation bias perpetuates the messages women receive that if they do become leaders, they are the exception (Bruckmüller et al., 2014). If they do not become leaders, it is their fault because of their shortcomings (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Gender Leadership Characteristics

Gender plays a role in how women and men approach leadership and how their leadership is perceived. Fox and Schuhmann (2000) referred to this as gender power, whereby women are more focused on social production and collaboration, and men emphasize social control and domination. Women use their feminine qualities to advance the organization (Webb Farley et al., 2021) and are more likely to collaborate and promote participation among all stakeholders, be communicative by readily sharing information, and recognize and support their subordinates (Fox & Schuhmann, 1999, 2000; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). In 2011, Khalili completed a study

on whether there was a gender difference in emotional intelligence between men and women. He identified that “men participants demonstrated higher level of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management compared with women. On the other hand, females illustrated that totally they are more emotionally intelligence than males” (Khalili, 2011, p. 8). In addition to being emotionally intelligent, women are more likely to be nurturing, fiscally stable, and committed to the organization (Richardson, 2004).

However, what is unique about gender leadership characteristics is that there is still a stigma in place, which Beaty and Davis (2012) referred to as a gender schema. Under this gender schema, women are frequently not viewed as competent administrative leaders because they “are often hesitant to demonstrate the necessary attributes to the highest level, including assertiveness, networking skills, and motivation” (French & Eskridge, 2021, p. 705). Webb Farley et al. (2021) referred to this as the confidence gap, in which women feel they need more confidence to apply for the city manager position (Abdallah & Jibai, 2020). However, confidence among female leaders is viewed as a violation of social roles and gender stereotypes (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a). For example, when women show confidence, there is typically a negative connection between success and likeability; for men, that same confidence is viewed as a positive (Vorhees & Lee-Skaggs, 2014). Therefore, women must continually balance their leadership style with the perceptions of others to ensure that they are not viewed negatively.

Should a municipal government seek to advance representative bureaucracy, embracing the differences between male and female leaders can positively impact community initiatives. According to Guul (2018), there is evidence that

supports the theory that gender matching improves the quality of the service provision because of better understanding and better interaction, which may by itself translate into better citizen outcomes, or that this occurs as a result of increased coproduction activity by the citizen. (p. 407)

Because women have different experiences than men, they tend to differ in their motivation, identities, and attitudes and are more apt to advocate for different policies and priorities, be more responsive to citizen's needs, and seek to include various stakeholders in decision making (Fox & Schuhmann, 2000; Koenig et al., 2011; Vorhees & Lee-Skaggs, 2014; Webb Farley et al., 2021).

Role Congruency Theory

Under the realm of gender leadership characteristics, role congruency theory emerged, which identifies a disconnect between the stereotypes typically associated with women and those of a leader. Eagly and Karau founded the role congruency theory in 2002. It is used to explain how the stereotypes associated with gender leadership characteristics may impact how women are perceived as leaders, their ability to attain a leadership role, and, once in the role, how others will perceive their effectiveness as a leader (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kim et al., 2020). Role congruency theory developed out of Eagly and Karau's (2002) social role theory of sex differences, which noted that there are gender differences that play a role in why men are more likely to emerge as leaders than women. Badura et al. (2018) explained that "external pressures through socialization, backlash directed at individuals who deviate from gender roles, as well as internal pressure to possess sex-typed traits" (p. 338) contribute to the discrepancy in the number of male leaders versus female leaders. Under the role

congruency theory, Eagly and Karau (2002) identified that there are two types of prejudice in effect:

In general, prejudice can arise from the relations that people perceive between the characteristics of members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy or aspire to occupy (Eagly, in press). A potential for prejudice exists when social perceivers hold a stereotype about a social group that is incongruent with the attributes that are thought to be required for success in certain classes of social roles. When a stereotyped group member and an incongruent social role become joined in the mind of the perceiver, this inconsistency lowers the evaluation of the group member as an actual or potential occupant of the role. In general, prejudice toward female leaders follows from the incongruity that many people perceive between the characteristics of women and the requirements of leader roles. (pp. 573–574)

Gender roles focus on the attitudes and behaviors of men and women, and those stereotypes dictate what is appropriate for men versus women (Guy, 1993; Kelly, 1991). Women are more apt to demonstrate communal behaviors, which are those associated with caring for the welfare of others, such as being nice, nurturing, caring, and compassionate. Men, on the other hand, exhibit agentic behaviors, which are more controlling and assertive, such as being dominant, independent, competitive, and assertive (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020b; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koch et al., 2015; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Duehr and Bono (2006) explained that “agentic and communal characteristics are differently attributed to men and women because unequal distribution into occupations and families fosters such

expectations” (p. 817). Men and women are expected to behave in a way that is representative of their respective gender.

Gender roles are also broken down into descriptive norms, which are how men and women behave, and injunctive norms, which are expectations people have for how men and women should behave (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). Therefore, when someone violates the standards for their gender, they are likely to be unfavorably evaluated because their behaviors are incompatible with the expected behaviors.

Heilman (2001) referred to this as counter-normative behavior, which results in women being limited in their choices between conforming to gender norms and potentially risking not being seen as a viable leader or exhibiting agentic behaviors and being prepared to face any backlash that may come with that (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Koch et al., 2015; Rudman & Glick, 2001). To overcome these limitations, Koenig et al. (2011) noted that women benefit from exhibiting androgynous behavior to fulfill both the gender and leadership role expectations by not being too feminine or masculine, something that their male counterparts do not have to navigate (Hutchinson et al., 2014).

Kim et al. (2020) studied role congruency theory related to leadership, gender, and dominant personalities. A dominant personality is tied to a person who has “the propensity to act in a confident, forceful, and persuasive manner” (Kim et al., 2020, p. 1). Under the role congruency theory, dominance is typically more associated with men, which means it is acceptable for men to engage in dominant personality behaviors but less for women (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a). This relationship is referred to as perceived normality, in which things are normal or strange depending on the descriptive and injunctive norms associated with each gender (Kim et al., 2020).

Prejudice subsequently impacts women's ability to access leadership roles or overcome occupational barriers. It can also impact people's attitudes toward female leaders and causes people to question whether women are strong or ambitious enough to be effective leaders, especially in a male-dominated field (Badura et al., 2018; Eagly & Karau, 2002; McDowell, 2017). This paradigm is referred to as the "think manager, think male" schema, by which people are more likely to view men as more effective leaders simply because of the gender stereotypes and their perceptions of what characteristics a person needs to possess to be a good leader (Kim et al., 2020; Koenig et al., 2011; Ritter & Yoder, 2004; Wojtowicz, 2021). Under this schema, a good manager is likelier to have masculine traits that society feels are needed to be a successful leader (Heilman, 2001).

Female City Manager

Researchers have sought to understand the lived experiences of female city managers by having them share their thoughts, feelings, reflections, and stories. By providing women with the space to tell their own stories, reflection allows them to identify and articulate their leadership philosophies, to better understand some of the reasons behind the decisions they have made in their careers, and recognize how reflective practices can help further their leadership decisions and aspirations (D. N. Smith & Suby-Long, 2019). Literature has revealed that visibility, mentorship, representative bureaucracy, and policy changes are essential in advancing women into the city manager role.

Visibility

With the slow integration of women into the city manager role, many female city managers have shared that they feel like outsiders or that they are on display, especially when they are the only women in the room (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a, 2020b; Guy, 1993). DeHart-Davis et al. (2020a) referred to this as the double edge sword of visibility. Being visible is appropriate because it allows a female city manager to position herself as the organization's leader. However, that visibility also increases the likelihood that women are subject to stereotypes, by which their every move is scrutinized, and they must work harder to prove that they are effective at serving in the role of city manager (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a; Guy, 1993). For some, this viability may be a deterrent from entering the field, or these women may lose their sense of purpose because they are too focused on minor details out of fear that they will fail at the task at hand (Ibarra et al., 2013). However, as more women enter the field, this token status begins to dissipate, and there is less pressure on the female leader (Cook & Glass, 2014).

Mentorship

Mentorship plays a significant role in women progressing into the city manager role because mentors can provide advice, help with networking, and increase self-confidence, which is often a barrier for women when seeking career advancement (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020b; French & Eskridge, 2021; Hannah-Spurlock & Silverboard, 2021; Szymborski, 1998; Webb Farley et al., 2021). In municipal government, there is not a defined path for women to become city managers, as evidenced by examples of city clerks or treasurers having just as equal an opportunity of serving as the city manager as someone who was serving as an assistant or deputy city manager role (Szymborski,

1998). This lack of a defined path is called a labyrinth, in which women must navigate their career paths with minimal guidance on the best course (DeHart-Davis et al., 2020a).

Mentorship by women who have already experienced what it means to combat occupational barriers is beneficial to help pave the way forward for other women.

Donaghy (2018) noted that when women are at the top of an organization, they “have the potential to inspire other women to seek promotions to senior management, encourage men to grow beyond gender biases, and embolden organizational cultural change” (p. 37). Mentorship also creates an environment in which women feel safe to talk openly about their struggles and be vulnerable without judgment or fear that doing so will impact their ability to progress in their careers (Ibarra et al., 2013). By understanding the experiences of other women holding leadership positions, mentors can share what skills and knowledge are needed to succeed (Moreno & McLean, 2016).

Representative Bureaucracy

In 1944, Donald Kingsley wrote a book titled *Representative Bureaucracy*, in which he argued that the demographics of the democracy should match the demographics of the general population (Dolan & Rosenbloom, 2003). Since that time, many scholars have continued to expand on the notion of representative bureaucracy. One of those scholars is Frederick Mosher, who identified that there is both passive and active representativeness, in which individuals in positions of authority are demographically representative of their constituency and advocate for the interests and desires of the demographic group they represent (Dolan & Rosenbloom, 2003). Samuel Krislov expanded on this notion further when he outlined five theoretical foundations of representative bureaucracy, which state (Dolan & Rosenbloom, 2003):

1. Passive representation focuses on rights, opportunities, political legitimacy, and performance.
2. Bureaucratic representation does not have to be perfect to be valuable, regardless of whether it is active or passive.
3. Political figures are not meant to be what Max Weber called bureaucratic cogs; instead, the focus should be on empowering and promoting bureaucrats to focus on all potentialities.
4. Since the government is large and powerful, the decisions made will directly impact society as a whole.
5. Representative bureaucracy is crucial because it strives to ensure that government is more accountable, legitimate, and equitable.

Passive Representation

Passive representation occurs when the individuals employed within the public sector demographically represent the community they serve (Dolan, 2000; A. E. Smith, 2015). Passive representation is often achieved by implementing employment practices that encourage hiring and promoting a diverse group.

Active Representation

Active representation, on the other hand, takes more active involvement on behalf of the governmental official. Through active representation, political officials make decisions that directly impact the demographic with which they align (A. E. Smith, 2015). As Dolan (2000) explained, when there is an increase in women working in administrative positions, more policy initiatives are put forth that are gender sensitive.

Surrogate Representation

Surrogate representation is “the degree to which passive representativeness becomes active or kinetic representation” (Bowling et al., 2006, p. 832). For active representation to be effective, women who occupy leadership positions need to be able to represent the interests and perspectives of women. The passive-to-active continuum pushes a leader from being demographically representative to establishing values and attitudes that will advance the interest of that demographic (Bowling et al., 2006). However, to ensure the city manager role is demographically representative of the workforce, there needs to be more vertical representation by which women are provided a pathway to move into those leadership roles (Guy, 1993).

Equal Opportunity Policies, Procedures, and Laws

By understanding the occupational barriers women face, academics, executives, and human resource development practitioners can focus on ensuring there are opportunities for female leadership advancement by implementing training and leadership development programs, by intervening more to make sure women have equal opportunities to pursue leadership roles, and by implementing policies, procedures, and laws which enhance equal opportunity. These laws are important because diversity within an organization can directly impact the workplace culture and performance because employees feel comfortable at work because of less stereotyping and harassment and more productivity and innovation (Antil et al., 2014).

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action is one of the most prominent legislative acts today that seeks to ensure diversity within the workforce. Affirmative action is “a set of procedures

designed to; eliminate unlawful discrimination among applicants, remedy the results of such prior discrimination, and prevent such discrimination in the future” (Cornell Law School, n.d., para. 1), and it strives to ensure that women and minorities are more fully represented within different levels of government. However, for affirmative action to be successful, organizations need to commit to advancing women into leadership positions even if a woman has never held that role before (Guy, 1993) and to making changes to their recruitment, onboarding, compensation, and promotional programs (Beaty & Davis, 2012; DeHart-Davis et al., 2020b).

Although affirmative action seeks to ensure an equal representation of all demographics within an organization, there is a trickle-down effect in that employees are more likely to feel safer reporting discrimination. Though this may seem counter-intuitive given that an organization’s goal should be to decrease incidents, this reporting increase demonstrates an organization’s health because a culture has been built on a commitment to equality, fair treatment of all, and a safe working environment (Alteri, 2020).

Female Career Progression

As Ibarra et al. (2013) stated,

Becoming a leader involves much more than being put in a leadership role, acquiring new skills, and adapting one’s style to the requirements of that role. It involves a fundamental identity shift. Organizations inadvertently undermine this process when they advise women to proactively seek leadership roles without addressing policies and practices that communicate a mismatch between how

women are seen and the qualities and experiences people tend to associate with leaders. (pp. 1–2)

As women seek to progress in their careers, it is essential to evaluate some of the occupational barriers they must overcome, change policies and procedures that create biases against women, and continue motivating and encouraging them to seek career advancements.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Using the trait and behavioral theory of leadership, motivational theory, and role congruency theory as the theoretical frameworks, this study investigated, analyzed, and interpreted the findings obtained from interviews with female city managers to assess the occupational barriers these women had to face as well as the motivation and characteristics they possess that aided their career progression.

Research Questions

The research questions the researcher used for the dissertation were as follows:

1. How do women perceive gender as a factor in career progression?
2. What occupational barriers have women had to overcome during their career progression?
3. What is the relationship between occupational barriers and career progression for women working in local municipal government?
4. How do women describe their experiences working in the male-dominated field of city management?
5. What are female city managers' motivational triggers that provide them with the fortitude to pursue career advancement in a male-dominated occupation?
6. What are the characteristics of female city managers that aided their career progression into the city manager role?

Research Design

A qualitative case study analysis was used for this study's research design. By using a narrative-based case study, the researcher was able to build an understanding of women's experience working in a city manager role. Using the female experience lens, the study was intended to explain what characteristics these women possess that aided in obtaining and maintaining the city manager role. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, as cited in Siegel, 2015) outlined the value of narratives by noting,

Stories offer insights into how actors make choices, understand their actions, and experience frustration and satisfactions. Stories give research a pungency and vitality often absent from mainstream social science because they give such prominence to individual actions and motives and the human condition. (p. 7)

A case study analysis allows the researcher to explore and better understand the complex phenomenon of female city managers in a real-world context (Yin, 2018).

Population

To narrow the sample size, the researcher focused explicitly on the state of Colorado, where the researcher resides and serves as the town administrator for a small municipality. According to the ICMA (2021), there are 65 female city managers out of 185 positions in Colorado, which means there is a larger population from which data could be obtained on what qualities and characteristics helped these women through their career progression. The researcher interviewed 16 female city managers, which is roughly 25% of the total population of female city managers in Colorado.

The sample size allowed the data to reach a point of saturation, which occurs when the data collected begin to mirror and repeat statements made in prior interviews

(Saunders et al., 2018). When no additional information emerges from the interviews, it signals that it is time to analyze the data, solidify the codes, and identify themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A sample of this size also allowed the researcher to control any variations.

The study only involved female city managers because they are the ones who are more intimately aware of their experiences and, therefore, were able to speak to, reflect on, and express what they went through during their career progression (Palinkas et al., 2015). To ensure that the female city manager had enough experience working in municipal government to provide insight, the researcher used the IMCA's credentialing criteria of at least a minimum of 7 years in the field. Although the city managers interviewed were not all ICMA-credentialed city managers, this criterion helped ensure that the persons interviewed were qualified to speak to their motivation and experience in obtaining the city manager role.

Sample

Purposive sampling was used for this dissertation because it focused on individuals with a specific characteristic, which for this study was gender and leadership rank. A list of female city managers was obtained from the Colorado Municipal League (CML). Because these participants all work for municipalities, their contact information was public.

The female city managers were contacted by email, inviting them to participate in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the data collected remained confidential. There were no incentives for participating outside of the participant contributing to the field of study. The names of all individuals involved and the municipalities where they

work were anonymized so that participants could not be identified. Participants who consented to be involved in the study completed an informed consent form, which they reviewed and signed before any interviews took place. The researcher did not anticipate any risk or distress during data collection or harm to the participants. The researcher maintained contact with the participants following the study to answer any questions about the study and provide them with a copy of the final dissertation report.

Instrumentation

The researcher used a qualitative case study analysis to gather information on female city managers' experiences related to their career advancement. One-to-one interviews were conducted through Zoom®, and open-ended, nonleading questions were asked, allowing the participant to respond freely and guide the conversation rather than the researcher controlling the narrative. In conducting interviews with these women, the researcher assessed what characteristics provided them with the motivation needed to seek a higher leadership position within municipal government and what characteristics helped them succeed in the city manager role. From the interviews, the researcher identified themes that emerged from the information provided by the participants. The interviews were transcribed so a written record of what was said could be referenced during the data analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

Interviews

The source of data collection was interviews. Upon obtaining the contact information for the female city managers who met the sampling criteria, the researcher invited those women to participate in the study. The email included information about

the researcher, the purpose of the study, an explanation of how the interview would be structured and conducted, and an overview of how the information obtained from the interview would be used. The researcher also ensured there was a note in the email explaining that participation was voluntary and that the participant could withdraw consent to participate at any time.

A list of semistructured open-ended questions was developed for the interviews that asked the participants to share their experiences in obtaining and maintaining the city manager role. The goal of the questions was to engage in a conversation to gain information. Through this reflection, the participants could better identify and articulate their leadership philosophies and some of the reasons behind their career decisions that they may not have previously thought about (D. N. Smith & Suby-Long, 2019).

During the interviews, which were conducted through the virtual meeting system Zoom®, the researcher observed the participant's nonverbal communication, including but not limited to their tone, the pace of speech, gaps of silence, voice pitch, and body movements (Ballard, 2015). Nonverbal communication helped assess how the participants felt throughout the interview and their comfort level.

The data collected were kept confidential in password-protected files that were destroyed 3 years following the completion of the study.

Interview Questions Validation

To ensure that the interviews accurately captured a female's experience in the city manager role and her motivation to break through occupational barriers to obtain the position, the researcher solicited a panel of experts to review the interview questions developed and verify that those questions would assist in addressing the research

questions posed. This panel of experts consisted of five retired female city/county managers who worked in Colorado. These experts evaluated the survey questions for both content and construct by verifying that the questions were clear, concise, would solicit meaningful responses, and were structured in a way that would allow the interview to flow smoothly from one area of focus to another (Tsang et al., 2017). The panel of experts also provided recommendations for additional questions to be asked to solicit further input from the city managers to be interviewed.

Transcription

After completing the interviews, the Zoom® recordings were uploaded to GoTranscript®, a transcription service. The researcher opted to have all transcriptions done verbatim versus the automated transcription service because verbatim has an accuracy rate of 98.6%. Once the files were transcribed, the researcher used a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS) called Quirkos® to aid with coding. The CAQDAS program allowed the researcher to import the interview transcriptions, label and code statements made by the participants, and identify themes that emerged by combining similar statements into a code book (Seidman, 2019). Quirkos® also enabled the researcher to work with the materials online where everything was accessible and coded excerpts could be moved around easily.

Coding Data

Coding an interview is a process in which the researcher assesses the meaning behind the text, referred to as the dialectical process, by which the participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is responding to their words, concentrating on his or her intuition and intellect on the process. What

emerges is a synthesis of what the participant has said and how the researcher has responded. (Seidman, 2019, p. 134)

This is an essential part of the data analysis process because it assists the researcher in evaluating what the participant was sharing in the interview, determining the similarities and differences in the responses, and assessing what themes emerge that answer the research questions posed. When evaluating what statements within an interview are worthy of coding, the researcher considered whether the information was relevant to the study, whether it would spark consideration beyond the text itself, and whether the information could stand on its own without needing to provide additional context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In case study research, there are two components to coding—within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A within-case analysis is when the researcher evaluates one specific case, which for the researcher was each female's experience as a city manager and how she overcame occupational barriers to attain the role. The second part is cross-case analysis, when the researcher synthesizes the data to evaluate where those intersections are regarding shared experiences.

Limitations in Coding

When evaluating qualitative data, coding is just one option. However, the researcher felt it was the most appropriate given the research style. One of the noted limitations to coding is that the researcher is tasked with labeling the excerpts and identifying codes to which those excerpts might belong. When doing this, there is a potential that the researcher may try to manipulate the labels to fit codes the researcher

already believes are accurate rather than letting the interviews guide what codes are developed (Seidman, 2019).

To avoid introducing bias, the researcher only reviewed and coded the interviews after they were all complete. Not only did this ensure the coding was not forced to match the researcher's perception, but it also helped to make sure the questions asked throughout the semistructured interviews were not modified in a way that could manipulate answers from the participants to mirror interviews already completed. In addition, the themes identified from the interviews were sent to all the participants for review as a part of the respondent validation.

Respondent Reliability and Validation

For a qualitative study to be reliable and valid, there must be a level of trustworthiness within the data collected (Golafshani, 2003). For this research, internal consistency reliability was used, in which the data collected reached a point of stability within the data sets because the information obtained repeated itself (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity was determined by whether the data collected responded to the research questions and whether the results were truthful and accurate (Creswell & Poth, 2013; Golafshani, 2003).

To test both, triangulation of the data occurred. The participants reviewed the data obtained through interviews to confirm the reliability and validity of the statements they made and the themes identified by the researcher. Through respondent validation, also known as member checks, the researcher obtained feedback on the data collected and verified that the researcher did not misinterpret, misunderstand, or introduce her own bias into the research. By reviewing the preliminary data analysis, the women involved in

these member checks could verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and offer recommendations for strengthening the narratives to ensure the content obtained from the interviews was well captured within the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher asked each participant to be involved in the respondent validation following the interview. Each one completed the member check phase of the data analysis process.

Limitations and Delimitations

A series of limitations and delimitations emerged throughout the study.

Limitations are weaknesses of the study that are outside of the researcher's control.

Delimitations are the self-imposed limitations by the researcher, often to make the study more manageable (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Limitations

The length of time a participant had served as a city manager was a limitation. For example, a female city manager with 20 years of experience had a different assessment of their career progression than a city manager who had only been in the role for 7 years. For the city managers with decades of experience, the work culture they had to face while seeking advancement in their career was different from current work cultures, and some cited that they started in city management back when theories like the glass ceiling were starting to be acknowledged.

The size of the municipality where the women interviewed worked was also a limitation in that some municipalities were in larger metropolitan areas, but others were small communities. Although job duties were similar for city managers within each jurisdiction, how those responsibilities were executed varied based on the municipality's

size. Many of the city managers in small municipalities also maintained a dual role, and three served as the clerk and the manager.

Finally, by only selecting female city managers in Colorado, the results were not generalizable. Although the results provided insight into the experiences females seeking the position might go through in Colorado, other states might have different experiences based on their cultures.

Delimitations

The length of time served in the city manager role was also a delimitation because the researcher opted only to interview women who had worked in government for a minimum of 7 years, which means the experience of women who recently entered the field was not integrated. However, the researcher believed it was important to interview women with significant experience in a municipal government role because they could speak to their career progression experiences more than someone new to the vocational field.

The researcher only interviewed women who were city managers. Therefore, this study did not evaluate the career progression experiences of all city managers regardless of gender. In addition, the researcher did not interview all of the female city managers in Colorado but rather a small sample size, which meant that the information obtained during the qualitative interviews did not encompass the specific experience of every female city manager but instead aimed to provide enough data to assess themes that would likely resonate with women in the city manager role throughout Colorado.

Summary

The qualitative case study analysis research design selected for this dissertation evaluated how the female city managers interviewed broke through barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Although this study only focused on female city managers in Colorado who have worked in government for at least 7 years, the data collected and analyzed were intended to explain which characteristics aided their success in obtaining and maintaining the city manager role and to address the research questions posed.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview and Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. This study investigated, analyzed, and interpreted the findings obtained from interviews with female city managers to assess the occupational barriers these women faced and the motivation and characteristics they possessed that aided their career progression. Chapter 4 introduces the results of the qualitative case study.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do women perceive gender as a factor in career progression?
2. What occupational barriers have women had to overcome during their career progression?
3. What is the relationship between occupational barriers and career progression for women working in local municipal government?
4. How do women describe their experiences working in the male-dominated field of city management?
5. What are female city managers' motivational triggers that provide them with the fortitude to pursue career advancement in a male-dominated occupation?
6. What are the characteristics of female city managers that aided their career progression into the city manager role?

Research Design

A qualitative case study research design was used for this dissertation. By completing interviews with the female city managers, the researcher was able to develop an understanding of women's experiences working in a city manager role.

Sample Size

When establishing the sample size, the researcher obtained a list of all the managers in Colorado from the Colorado Municipal League (CML). CML provided the names of every city manager, including their title and municipality. However, the spreadsheet obtained did not include their gender, and CML informed the researcher that it was not something they tracked. Therefore, to identify the gender of each manager, the researcher used the internet to look up the manager and determine their gender. The researcher visited the municipality's website, searched for the manager through Google® and social media platforms like LinkedIn®, and researched news articles about the manager. Photos and pronouns used helped to verify the gender of each city manager.

Once the spreadsheet was updated with the manager's gender, a secondary search was completed for all the identified female city managers to assess which ones met the eligibility criteria of 7 years working in government. The same sources were used to obtain this information, focusing specifically on the announcements for when these women were selected to be managers because those typically included their history working in government. Verification that these female city managers met the 7-year criteria also occurred during the interviews when the women were asked to share their career progression leading up to their appointment as city managers.

Once the women who met the minimum sampling criteria were identified, the researcher obtained their contact information from the municipal website where they worked because that information was also not provided by CML. Email addresses are public information, so they were easy to locate. An email was sent to each manager inviting them to participate in the study. Fourteen female city managers were initially contacted. Of that group, 11 responded, confirming they would participate in the study.

Purposive and Snowball Sampling

The original sample size goal was 15% of female city managers in Colorado, approximately 10 women. Throughout the interview process, unsolicited snowball sampling started to occur. The women interviewed shared the names of other female city managers who should be involved because they felt those women's experiences overcoming occupational barriers could assist the research. The researcher contacted another 16 female city managers. Five more women were interviewed, increasing the sample size to 16 participants, 25% of female city managers in Colorado.

Informed Consent

Each participant was sent a Participant Statement of Informed Consent Form through DocuSign®, which they reviewed before their interview. Once the consent form was signed, a date and time for an interview via Zoom® was set.

Participant Demographics

The researcher only interviewed women currently serving as city managers in Colorado.

First Female City Managers

Ten of the female city managers interviewed served as the first female city manager for the municipality where they worked.

Size of Municipality

Colorado does not have a standard for when a municipality is deemed a town versus a city. However, the researcher felt it beneficial for the reader to understand the population size of the jurisdictions where these women worked (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Female City Managers Interviewed by Municipality Size

Population size	Number of female managers interviewed
Less than 999	2
1,000 – 4,999	8
5,000 – 9,999	3
10,000 – 49,999	1
50,000 – 99,999	1
More than 100,000	1

Length of Time Working in Government

Table 2 provides each participant's pseudonym and the total years they have worked in government. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities. All the women interviewed spent at least 7 years in government working for a municipality, aside from Genevieve Woodward, who spent 19 years of her 20-year career working in federal, state, and county government and only 13 months in municipal government. Woodward was one of the participants identified as a part of the snowball

sampling. Because she had spent most of her career in government, the researcher opted to include her in the sample size.

Table 2

Pseudonyms for Participants and Length of Time Working in Government

Pseudonym	Length of time working in government
Genevieve Woodward	20 years
Jade Jackson	33 years
Molly Holt	13 years
Maggie Curtis	8.5 years
Danielle Craig	11 years
Julia Tillery	23 years
Lucy Pascall	18 years
Violet Wollery	22 years
Hazel Woods	23 years
Sophie Carlson	21 years
Kayla Roffe	26 years
Dawn Harvey	16 years
Kendall Vaughn	38 years
Talia Daves	18 years
Audrey Rodriquez	20 years
Hayden Pearson	29 years

Government Structure and Job Title

There are both towns and cities in Colorado, and what designates a community as a town or city depends on that jurisdiction's preference. According to Rayes (2020),

There is no single difference between the two designations that can be applied to all of the state's communities equally. What a place calls itself has more to do

with the community's desired image, priorities and history than anything else.

(para. 3)

Therefore, the title used for the highest nonelected municipal government leader depends on whether the municipality is a town or a city. For example, among the participants, nine were town managers/administrators, and seven were city managers. Of the town administrators, three maintained a hybrid role of town clerk/town administrator, and one of the city managers was also a county manager. It is important to note that for this study, all participants were referred to as city managers even if that was not their official title.

Regardless of the title, the women interviewed were all the chief executive within their municipality and operated under a council-manager organizational structure (see Figure 9). Municipal Research and Services Center (n.d.) reported,

The council-manager form consists of an elected city council (which may be elected at-large or from districts) which is responsible for policymaking, and a professional city manager, appointed by the council, who is responsible for administration. The city manager provides policy advice, directs the daily operations of city government, handles personnel functions (including the power to appoint and remove employees) and is responsible for preparing the city budget. (para. 17)

The council-manager form of government is a common government structure in Colorado (Creighton et al., 2018).

Figure 9

Council-Manager Form of Government



Note. From "The Role of the Mayor," by Local Government in Virginia, n.d., p. 2 (<http://578125292684560794.weebly.com/role-of-the-mayor.html>).

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were conducted with each of the participants. The initial questions and the supplemental questions (if needed) that were prepared before the interviews are as follows (see Appendix A).

1. Please tell me about your duties and responsibilities with the [Town/City of BLANK].
 - How long have you been a city manager?
2. Why did you want to become a city manager?

- Did you always want to work in municipal government? If not, what was your career desire?
 - Do you envision spending the remainder of your career in city management?
3. What positions did you have prior to becoming a city manager?
 - How did you progress to the city manager role?
 - What other professional leadership roles have you held?
 4. Please describe any barriers you faced in reaching the city manager role during your career progression.
 - When facing those barriers, how did you feel?
 5. What did you do to overcome the barriers you faced?
 - What specific actions did you take to address those barriers?
 6. What impact did any of these barriers have on your career progression?
 - Did you experience any career impacts because of these barriers?
 7. Do you feel there are any advantages to being a female city manager?
 - Were there times when your gender aided you in your career progression?
 8. How do you feel your gender impacted your career progression?
 - Were there times when your gender served as a barrier to your career progression?
 9. Please describe your experience as a woman working in a male-dominated field.
 - Do you feel male and female city managers have different experiences in the role? If so, what is the difference?
 10. How has your experience changed during the time you have been working as a city manager?

- What was your experience as a female city manager when you started your career versus now?
11. How do you think your experience compares to other female city managers?
 - What do you think contributes to different experiences?
 12. What characteristics do you possess that helped you be successful in the city manager role?
 - What characteristics do you think city managers should possess?
 13. What motivates you to continue serving in the city manager role?
 - What drives you to do this work?
 14. What factors do you believe contributed to your success as a city manager?
 - Did you have any mentors that assisted you during your career progression?
 15. How do you think the people who work with you would describe you?
 - How would your city council or trustees describe you?
 - How would your direct reports respond to that question?
 16. What leadership qualities do you believe female city managers possess that differentiate them from their male counterparts?
 - How would you characterize women's leadership styles versus men's leadership styles?
 17. What do you believe is the value of having women in the city manager role?
 - How do female city managers impact a municipality in a way that male city managers generally do not?

Although every interview started with the researcher asking the participant to outline their career progression to the city manager role, the researcher allowed the

participant to guide the structure of the interview from there. In other words, the researcher did not ask questions in the order they were listed but instead asked questions based on the flow of the conversations. This resulted in only some of the questions initially prepared being asked of every participant and new questions being introduced when it was deemed more information on the topic being discussed was valuable. By making the interviews less formal, the researcher observed that allowed the participant to feel comfortable sharing what came to mind. The researcher did not limit where the conversation went but ensured that if it got off-topic, it was redirected using some preidentified questions.

By creating a more open environment, the researcher witnessed the participants all appearing comfortable engaging in a conversation, and they were open and willing to share specific details about their experiences as female city managers. The conversations flowed well with minimal moments of silence between questions. The interviews were set for an hour, but the actual time spent with the participants ranged from 31 min to 1 hr and 14 min. The total interview time among the 16 participants was 14 hr and 45 min.

Data Analysis

The study was initially broken up into five primary areas of focus: occupational barriers, career progression, leadership characteristics (both gender and nongender related), motivation to obtain and maintain the city manager role, and experience in the position. After completing the interviews, the value of mentorship and networking, as well as the future of city management, were noted as additional areas of focus. A series of codes were identified within each focus area, outlined as subheadings in the following analysis. Direct quotes from the participants were included to provide additional context.

What is outlined in Chapter 4 are the results of the interviews. The researcher's interpretations of how the results tie to the research questions and theoretical frameworks are captured in Chapter 5.

Occupational Barriers

With city management being considered a male-dominated field nationwide, questions were asked about whether the women interviewed ever encountered any occupational barriers during their career progression, to which Julia Tillery stated, "We still do, babe. Are you kidding me?" Two of the participants who started their municipal government careers over 20 years ago noted they were advancing in their careers at a time when the glass ceiling was being discussed among all vocational fields. Violet Wollery said, "I think I was one of those that broke through it." Although there was a general acknowledgment among every participant that the occupation has come a long way in terms of seeing more women in the city manager role, 88% of the women interviewed were still able to identify overt and subtle examples of occupational barriers they faced.

The Only Woman in the Room

All but two women interviewed spoke to times when they were the only woman in the room, and half mentioned specific situations when that continues to happen, such as meetings with land developers, working with all-male boards and commissions, or gatherings among fellow city managers who are all men. When sharing examples, the interactions with developers were the most memorable for three participants. The following are two specific narratives highlighting the expectations within a different

male-dominated field in which the leader of an organization is typically assumed to be male. Kendall Vaughn stated,

That was one of those big punctuations in my life. I was the city manager, and some developers were coming in and wanted to meet ... to present some development that they wanted to do here. ... I had my public works director, my planning director, economic development director, I think that's it, and maybe our city attorney. All of which were my employees, and they were male, right? This group was doing their presentation and I kept asking questions. I remember at the beginning one guy's like, "Can I have some more coffee?" He looked right at me, and I said, "Sure, I'll go get you some more coffee." So I went and got coffee. Then he wanted cream, I was like, "Sure, I'll do that for you." I kept asking questions, and I was irritating them you can tell because they wouldn't look at me, they were looking at the other men in the room. ... At the end, I said, "Well what's your next step? What are you going to do after this? What's your plan?" That's when they said, "We're going to go talk to the city manager." I said, "Well, good, I think you're really going to like him," and I left. The staff was just shocked because they saw it too. That was really a good lesson for them because they saw how it was so overt the way I was being treated by these guys. They wouldn't warm up to me. They just wouldn't accept me as the leader because of my gender.

Julia Tillery stated,

I was just in a meeting on Friday with developers and they did not give me eye contact. I was the only female in the room and as they're explaining their

process, they look at our economic development director, they look at our new deputy that's a male, and it's not dismissive, but it's right on the verge of it. It doesn't bother me a bit. I know who's going to make the decision at the end and if they're not schooled enough to understand, to do some research on who's in the room, all right, your product better be something that we can't live without because if it isn't, do we want you in our community? No, probably not. It doesn't have anything to do with me. It has to do with your ability to live in the real world. ... It's so misogynistic. It's pervasive.

Dawn Harvey echoed similar situations with contractors but also shared that even at board meetings, the trustees look to the public works director to explain something she is well-versed in. Although this was a noted irritant, Harvey stated that she is used to it now and was uncertain whether the gender bias would ever change. However, there was an acknowledgment from a quarter of the participants who direct male reports, which are often a part of these conversations, that they have been working to disrupt the assumption that they are the decision-makers just because they are men.

Second-Generation Gender Bias

Although the overt situations of gender bias were vivid memories for those female city managers who experienced them, a third of the women interviewed recalled specific examples of second-generation gender bias, which is a subtle bias against women. Jade Jackson spoke about working for a male city manager when she was with the clerk's department, who used his power to force people to do whatever he wanted because he knew no one would stand up to him, especially the women. Molly Holt explained that

when she expressed interest in pursuing a city management career, the male city manager at the time encouraged her to stick with events instead.

The women who shared these second-generation bias experiences often added the caveat that they could not say for sure if it were gender specific, but to them, it felt that these actions by the men they worked with were gender related. Hazel Woods stated,

I've been on the receiving end of inappropriate comments when I first took this role. Oh, you're the city manager. What that means is, oh, you're a female and you're a manager. You can feel it. It's the subtle nonverbal cues [and] messages that are delivered from individuals.

Need to Prove Oneself

Despite these women being in the highest nonelected leadership role, half of the participants shared that being the only female in the room meant they had to prove they were qualified enough to be there. Maggie Curtis referred to it as a warming period when she had to demonstrate as soon as she stepped into a new role that she did know what she was doing and was meant to be in the position. Although the warming period was something a few participants spoke to when they were first establishing relationships with internal and external stakeholders, Sophie Carlson shared that she prepares herself to deal with gender-related occupational barriers at every stage of her career and is continually “figuring out how not to be the cute blonde over at the city, and have people realize I know my shit.”

Proving oneself also went hand in hand with overcompensating. Violet Wollery remembers saying to herself,

I'm not going to ask anybody to do a job I won't do myself. I need to show these guys that I'm willing to put on my boots and my jeans and do whatever I expect them to do. I walk the talk about all that.

Kendall Vaughn added that she expects to be discounted when she walks into a room because she is female and recognizes that she will always have to prove to people that she is more intelligent than they think. Kayla Roffe and Kendall Vaughn also spoke to the historical perception that the only way a woman could be in a leadership position was if she engaged in sexual favors. Kayla Roffe stated,

In a lot of ways in my age, I think there was a lot of assumptions that women slept their way to the top. I just finally started ignoring that stigma. We are smart, we can add, we can manage, we understand how to run and organize a company. We're not all secretaries. I'm 62 right now, so I had a lot of years of in between women's rights, and I think I was brought up to know that it didn't matter what gender you were, you had to prove who you were.

Talia Daves spoke to women's tendency to overcompensate to please people. However, she noted that she does not think it is necessary and likely a burden women place on themselves. Daves explained that the guilt female city managers feel leads to overcompensation. The guilt could stem from inaccurate assumptions that they are not supporting the community well enough (an internal preconceived notion)

Good Ol' Boys Club

All the participants recognized that the city management role was male dominated; however, 81% explained that there has and likely will still be a good ol' boys club in play that female city managers will need to navigate. No participant shared in

specific detail the desire to end the good ol' boys club but rather accepted it as a part of reality for city managers. Kayla Roffe shared that she was almost passed up for a job because the perception was that she would not know how to deal with the good ol' boys club, something that was later commended when she demonstrated she could perform the duties of city manager despite it being a male-dominated field.

The good ol' boys club is often associated with men in positions of power. However, three participants felt the impact male perception of female leadership had on their career progression among even direct reports. Violet Wollery recalled talking to the police chief about needing to cut his budget and his response being, "You are not my boss." Kendall Vaughn shared an example of rising from within a department and not receiving respect and acknowledgment from her male peers. She stated,

My peers were, let's see, there were five individuals, and they were all men, and they were each of them right around 10 years older than me and happened to have pretty traditional old-school lives like wife was at home taking care of the home. Imagine that mindset. The city manager was looking for the next director and said, "[Kendall], will you take this role?"

Vaughn shared that the men who she now supervised did not support her, and eventually, she had to confront them about their behavior. When recalling this incident, Vaughn remembered telling them,

I'm done. I don't deserve this treatment and I'm in the position and you're not and get over it. [I've] put up with it for months and months and we're done. ... We've got work to do, and you're not going to sabotage me, or you're going ... to go work somewhere else.

Under the good ol' boys club, three participants stated their perception is that some wanted the women to fail. Violet Wollery shared an example when the former male city manager she was replacing refused to aid in the successful transfer of duties. "I think he was hoping I'd fall flat on my face so that people could see how good they had it under him." Wollery noted that she thinks some men are threatened by confident females who might have a skillset they do not, which contributes to why there is sometimes resistance from men to accept female leadership.

Pay Inequity

Other studies have highlighted the pay inequity between men and women, and although that was not a focus of this dissertation, four participants spoke to pay inequity throughout their careers. Individuals like Audrey Rodriguez chose to take a pay cut to gain experience. Others, like Kayla Roffe, witnessed that women who transitioned from clerk to the manager were often paid less. Roffe also shared about municipalities that had contacted her to come and help them when they were without a manager; however, she declined to assist because those municipalities were not offering a fair wage in her opinion. Sophie Carlson and Violet Wollery stated that they had seen \$20,000 to \$40,000 pay discrepancies between them and prior male city managers. Although Wollery explained she has never been paid the same as the male city manager she took over from. Carlson shared that when she was offered \$30,000 less than her male counterpart when she was assistant city manager, she went to the city manager and demanded it be changed or she would quit or file a formal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint.

Age Bias

Every participant was asked to share some occupational barriers they had to overcome. Although 14 participants shared examples related to their gender, it was surprising that for four, their age was just as significant of a barrier if not more, especially for the women who started working in municipal government at a young age. Hayden Pearson stated,

I think the other part that was hard is when you're a female, you have that against you sometimes, but when you're a young female, then you've got two whammies because there's times I could be sitting in a room with more education, more experience than a lot of the males in there, but because I was young, sometimes it was like I didn't know what I was talking about ... being female and young—individuals just sometimes seem to be a little more dismissive when you have those two together.

Kendall Vaughn shared that “it's hard to establish and to command the respect and it's hard to establish yourself as a leader when you are seen as this kid.” Sophie Carlson recalled leading a department at a young age when she was tasked with changing the culture after the previous manager had been fired for a toxic work environment. Carlson acknowledged that was a serious undertaking for someone 26 years old at the time.

When the younger female participants were beginning their careers, they noted they were constantly battling their age and that they had to prove that just because they did not have much vocational experience, it did not necessarily mean they did not have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful in the role. However, Hayden

Pearson felt that the age bias would change soon. She said, “I think the size of each generation has been getting smaller. I think there’s almost a forced acceptance that is allowing younger individuals to maybe gain more traction than what they could previously.”

Family Commitments

Although it is illegal to ask someone about their family commitments or future childbearing plans during the recruitment process, one woman recalled being asked questions in her interview about whether she would have a family and, if so, whether those family commitments would impact her ability to do the job. When asked those questions, Audrey Rodriguez viewed them as red flags: “I don’t have kids, but it shouldn’t be a factor, right?” Rodriguez added that the interviewer inserted their bias by asking those types of questions. She stated,

I do think there is maybe this feeling that a man, if they have kids, would be more supported by their spouse in that role of city manager, whereas a female if she were the city manager and had kids, she may not be as available or willing to do the evening meetings and things like that.

Among the 12 interviews when family was referenced, there was a division between the women who maintained the city manager role while raising children and those who did not. The researcher did not ask any participants about their home lives and whether they were married or had children, so any information on this topic was voluntary. Five of those who spoke about their family dynamics acknowledged that the expectations for the role and the time commitment took them away from their family. Violet Wollery called it supermom syndrome. She said, “I wanted to just prove to

everybody I can raise a family and hold this job and do them both really well.” Talia Daves called it mom guilt and shared stories about when she missed out on time with family because of work commitments. Others chose to initially work in different roles in both the public and private sectors, allowing them more flexibility to raise their family. Despite working in local government for decades, Julia Tillery only sought the city manager role once her children were older because she valued spending time with them during their formative years.

Double Standards

A quarter of the participants noted there is a double standard between acceptable behavior for women and men. Talia Daves shared that she and her peers often discussed the double standard and cited a specific example of when a man was interviewing for a deputy city manager position and cried in the interview. Daves stated that when she discussed this situation with others, they acknowledged that a woman would not be considered for the role if she were to cry in an interview.

Sophie Carlson shared her story about when the mayor told her that she was not nimble or flexible when she disagreed with a direction being given. She stated,

The feedback I got was that I wasn’t prepared and that I was too emotional and angry in that meeting. I absolutely think that gender played into that. Here was this nice woman who runs things behind the scenes, who actually used her voice and her anger in public.

Talia Daves had a similar experience when she demonstrated publicly that she was upset when the board did not listen to her recommendation on terminating a contract with a project management group. After outwardly showing frustration, Daves explained that

she was told she was overly emotional: “There are still little things that [women] have to be careful about [like] how much you can be or when to show emotion or when not to show emotion.”

Daves and Carlson had examples in which they were told they were too emotional, but Hayden Pearson received feedback about being too straightforward. “I will have ‘You need to be nicer,’ as part of my evaluation. Then I explained to [my male supervisor], ‘Listen, you wouldn’t be putting this in my evaluation if I was a guy.’ It would be that I’m assertive.”

Generational Differences

As the participants reflected on their occupational barriers, they all noted that things were improving. Hayden Pearson said,

I’m 45 now. I think, for women who are my age, or older even, for older women, I think it was even harder. I think for maybe each age group, hopefully, it’s getting a little bit easier. I say that more from the fact of its generationally, they can be the nicest men, but they weren’t used to some of the women being in some of these positions.

It was noted that with more women obtaining the city manager role, there is a shift so that men are not only tolerant of women in leadership, but they are also playing an active role in ensuring those avenues are available to them. Hayden Pearson stated, “I think as men are raised differently, that is changing it. I’m not saying it’s changing overnight but I think as we raise men differently, and they see women in these roles, and women see women in these roles.” The participants identified that times are changing, and they are excited to see how the younger generation of women can progress in their

careers to obtain the city manager role. Kendall Vaughn said, “I’m seeing a shift now and it’s quite invigorating to see. It’s not like it used to be.”

Career Progression

Each interview started with the researcher asking the participants to speak about their career progression and what led them to the city manager role. What was unexpected was that seven participants stated they never planned to pursue a career in government and only knew what a city manager was once they either started working for a local municipality or were enrolled in a high school or college course that taught about local government structure. Once exposed to the city manager job, though, most identified it as a role they wanted to obtain someday.

However, each participant’s path to city management was different; some spent their entire career in municipal government, including five completing internships with a municipality, and others transitioned from the private sector straight into the city manager role. What every participant had in common was that although some did have to overcome occupational barriers because of their gender, they did not view their gender as something that was a significant hindrance in their career progression. Instead, all spoke to their personality traits, separate from gender, as factors in their ability to obtain the highest nonelected leadership position.

Leadership Traits

During the interviews, participants were asked to name leadership characteristics typically associated with men and with women and ways in which their direct reports and council/board members would describe the participant’s leadership style. The purpose of asking both sets of questions was to evaluate whether terms used to describe the

participant's leadership style mirrored those that the participants felt were typically associated with women. In addition to those direct questions asked, throughout the interviews, many participants referred to additional leadership qualities they felt they possessed. When appropriate, the researcher also asked the participants to speak about leadership qualities they felt every city manager needed.

In this section, the researcher has provided a breakdown of the terms used to describe gender leadership characteristics and the terms personnel within the participant's respective municipalities might use to describe each female city manager. Those terms were then compared against the other narratives provided about leadership characteristics.

Gender Leadership Characteristics

When asked to speak to leadership characteristics representative of female versus male leaders, one of the initial participants interviewed spoke about the danger of generalizing. Being mindful of the feedback, the researcher clarified to participants when asking the question, "What leadership qualities do you believe female city managers possess that differentiate them from their male counterparts?" that the intention was not to generalize but rather assess themes. Although the question was framed in a way that allowed the participant to comment on male and female leadership attributes, only half of the participants commented on male leadership characteristics.

The researcher identified that many of the terms the participants used to describe male and female leaders were consistent with what researchers have identified as leadership characteristics that are stereotypically associated with the respective gender

under the role congruency theory. The terms used by the participants when describing both gender's leadership styles are listed in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Gender Leadership Characteristics

Female Characteristics	Male Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassionate, empathetic • Caring, nurturing, softer • More collaborative • Understands employees needs • Looks at the bigger picture • More finesse, better organized, attention to detail, multitasker • Puts community first • Effective communicators • Highly critical of themselves, unnecessarily competitive, sabotage female peers • Does not showboat, not as apt to outwardly celebrate accomplishments • Struggles to set boundaries due to a desire to please • Less likely to pursue career advancements if they do not meet all qualifications of the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My way or the highway • Less dramatic • Territorial • Confident • Struggles with supporting employees • Shys away from dealing with interpersonal issues and having tough conversations • Stoic • Does not compromise easily

When naming gender leadership characteristics, there was a universal acknowledgment that a person's characteristics come down to the individual. The participants shared that some women display more male leadership characteristics and some men embody more female leadership characteristics. It was noted, though, that when women are more assertive, they are also often criticized for it, creating the double standard outlined under the occupational barriers.

Female City Manager Leadership Characteristics

Every participant was asked how their direct reports would describe them and how their council/board might describe them. Figure 11 lists the terms that were used.

Figure 11

Participant's Leadership Characteristics

Employees Description

- Fun, upbeat, positive, personable, social
- Compassionate, thoughtful, kind, leads from the heart
- Approachable, down to earth, relatable
- Fair, professional, integrity
- Direct, holds people accountable
- Motivated, task-oriented, does not micromanage
- Forward thinking, looks at the big picture
- Technical, knowledgeable
- Can be high stress at time, always on the go
- Community focused

Board/Council Description

- Competent, capable, gets stuff done, has all the answers
- Humble, approachable, big heart
- Transparent, honesty, authentic, integrity
- Direct, straightforward, will challenge things
- Financially saavy
- Communicative
- Organized, gets stuff done
- Open-minded, forward thinking
- Professional, systematic
- Dedicated to the community

Fifteen participants identified some ways their direct reports and council/board would describe them; however, it was a challenging task for some. Five joked that the researcher should be asking the employees or council/board and had to take a moment to think about what those stakeholders would say before responding. Although all the

participants used various terms when describing their leadership style, there was an acknowledgment by each one that their job was to support the staff and the council/board, and the personality characteristics they demonstrated allowed them to succeed in providing that support. Danielle Craig explained that being an effective city manager is “somewhere between 30%, 40% knowledge and 60%, 70% personality.”

Leadership Characteristics All City Managers Must Have

Throughout the interviews, the participants spoke about either their leadership characteristics or what they felt were skills an effective leader needed to embody. By completing a cross-comparison of the feedback against the list of gender characteristics and the terms used to describe the participants, the researcher identified that these female city managers recognized that their success as a leader within municipal government was tied directly to understanding who they were as leaders.

You Must Know Who You Are

Although not every participant spoke in detail about the need to know who they are as a person and a leader, there was a strong sense of self, based on observations of how the participants communicated and presented themselves. All the participants felt they were strong leaders with the knowledge, skills, and ability to lead their municipality as the city manager effectively. Julia Tillery described herself as an exceptional leader and said she would want to work for herself. Four participants also used authenticity when describing what is a must among leaders. Molly Holt said,

I have no poker face; I can say that. Maybe it's just that I've never had the ability to morph into anything other than what I am. I can certainly morph into roles per se, like management role versus events role versus public relations role, but for

me, as a human being, I've just always had the one character per se. I've never had the concept of changing that for anybody. I just don't think it would be a good fit if I had to.

By knowing themselves and being comfortable in the role, city managers can make some of the tough calls required and be confident in the decisions made. Lucy Pascall stated,

It would be a bad thing to go into this kind of a position if you can't make a decision. People are always looking to you to make that final decision. It's great to get the input from all of your management team, but at the end of the day, somebody's got to make the decision to go or not go, and that's the manager that has to do that. If you can't do that and then not question your decision after it's made, then I think it's not going to be successful. You can't go back and question every decision. You got to make the decision, move on, see what's next, make the next decision, move on.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher witnessed the female participants being their authentic selves, which was made evident by their willingness to be transparent, open, and self-aware of their strengths and areas of improvement as well as their roles and responsibilities as female city managers.

Experience in the Role

To better understand the participants' experiences as city managers, the researcher asked questions related to what they were most proud of and some of their challenges. The responses were focused very specifically on projects happening within the different municipalities, and therefore, it took time to identify a theme under those sets of

questions. However, in asking the participants to share words of wisdom for city managers or their expectations for the role in the future, the researcher was able to identify the 24/7 nature of the job, the need to be a multitasker and the complexity of navigating council/board dynamics as themes among the participants.

The Job is 24/7

Being a city manager is not a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday job because things are happening 7 days a week, 24 hr a day, which means the expectation to work more than 40 hr a week was the lived experience for all but one city manager. The following are excerpts from some of the participant's interviews that validate this assertion:

- I think you give up a lot of your personal life in a way, a lot of your personal time. There's a lot of weekends or you need to show up at community events. You need to have a lot of evening meetings, whether it's town council or planning commission or special meetings and things like that. If you're the type of person that wants to go home at five o'clock and not think about the job, it's probably not the position for you. (Audrey Rodriquez).
- I'm 24/7. When I'm walking my dog, I'm a city manager. You don't get to take it off. (Hazel Woods)
- That fishbowl effect is very real. That you will get to the point where you don't even want to go out for dinner in town, because someone's always asking you about work. People will still be respectful and say, "I know you're not working, but can I ask you a quick question?" You have to be realistic that this is going to be 24/7, unless you figure out a way to cut it off. (Violet Wollery)

- The job never stops. It's always something. I learned some very hard lessons over the years. We were on vacation and I missed the entire dinner that night with family because I was outside on the phone with the town attorney about something. (Talia Daves)
- Vacations get shifted. If something comes up, you have to be willing to take a call at midnight. If there's something going on in the city, you have to be willing to take a call at any hour of the day if the mayor or city council is calling. (Lucy Pascall)
- Just at the small town level, I can say we wear many hats that it's almost impossible to not be all-consuming given that I cover everything. (Molly Holt)

Although the participants recognized the relatively all-consuming aspects of the role, there was also an acknowledgment that being more flexible could help the role feel less daunting. Ten of the participants spoke about how moving to remote work only during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic proved municipalities could still operate in a hybrid capacity and that even with public health order restrictions changing, city managers should evaluate ways they could allow people to work in a hybrid capacity should they chose. In addition, seven participants stated they were working on developing better boundaries to create a home–work–life balance.

Ultimate Multitasker

Being a multitasker is one of the leadership characteristics that the participants identified as both a female trait and a trait at least six noted as something they are good at. Four participants used the term pivot when describing how city managers needed to be able to switch from one task to the next very quickly. Audrey Rodriguez stated,

You could be putting out fires one minute, dealing with citizen complaints or a sewer line that's exploded, and then the next minute, you're trying to work preparing the budget. You do need to be able to be flexible and nimble.

Julia Tillery stated that being able to multitask was in women's DNA. She said,

We know what it means to juggle 18 things every single day. We've never had the luxury to be able to say, "Okay, well, first I'm going to focus on this and then I'm going to focus on this, and then I'm going to focus on this." We've never had that luxury from the beginning of time.

Genevieve Woodward compared being a city manager to being a two-headed octopus with 16 arms. At the same time, Lucy Pascall referenced a duck who appears calm on the surface but is paddling rapidly under the water.

With multitasking comes a general assumption that city managers know it all. Although there are many circumstances when that might be true, Molly Holt shared that being a city manager is not rocket science:

Some of it can get quite complicated, but for the most part, I feel like you have to know a fair amount about a very wide array of topics. One of my prior folks that used to help walk me through things he said, "The depth of knowledge for a town manager is an inch thick and a mile wide."

For the city managers working in smaller municipalities, there was an understanding among all that being a small municipality meant fewer staff members could take on projects, which in turn meant the city manager was intimately involved in the day-to-day tasks. City managers in larger municipalities viewed their roles as more the orchestrator of people and things. Lucy Pascall stated,

The biggest part of my role is making sure that I can keep all the balls in the air that are what's going on in the city right now. Keep council apprised of all of that and not drop something in a really horrible way.

The Boards and Councils Are Everchanging

One thing that is always guaranteed in municipal government is change (Jarrett & Gentrup, 2021; J. Wilson, 2023). Depending on a municipality's term structure, boards and councils could change as frequently as every 2 years (or sooner if there is a vacancy). This ever-changing environment is one city managers must be prepared to navigate because they are the staff member who works directly with the elected officials. They also must be prepared to support the staff because a change in a board or council could also result in a change in priorities. Hayden Pearson noted that with the constant change of the board and proprieties, her job is more of a lightning rod.

With this change, there was also an understanding that a female city manager's contract could be terminated. Maggie Curtis stated,

Every 2 years you could be on the chopping block, and that's a risk you take as a town manager. Any election cycle someone can get in there and decide you're done, and that's a harsh reality of that position, but I think if you're doing your job and you're doing it right, they may get rid of you, but they're going to ultimately pay for it.

Five participants spoke about the importance of negotiating employment contracts in a way so they are protected under a severance agreement if a board/council ever sought to terminate.

Motivation

With an acknowledgment that the city manager role is one of the more challenging positions in municipal government, the researcher asked what motivated the participants to come to work every day. Although all the participants spoke to projects they were working on as their current motivation, as the researcher conversed with them further, supporting staff and creating a healthy work culture, as well as their general love for their job, was their ultimate motivation to show up every day.

People and the Workplace Culture

When asked what each participant was most proud of and/or what motivated them, all but one stated it was the people they worked with, which is a female leadership characteristic in that they cared more about the workplace culture and well-being of the employees than other more tangible things.

To effectively support the employees, 11 participants highlighted the value of building a healthy workplace culture and that when selecting people to work for the municipality, the applicant's character was more important than their demographics. Molly Holt said,

My philosophy when hiring is I look for folks that will fit with our culture. So much, I believe, is trainable. You can't train attitude and you can't train fitting into culture. I have always approached hiring from the aspect of how will this individual fit in with our culture and not male or female or however they might identify. My interest is how do they fit in with our team?

Kayla Roffe noted that hiring the right person is essential, and getting to know the employees is key. Although it is often easier in smaller municipalities, Roffe explained

that she strives to ensure that she knows every employee and that they know her. She said, “I don’t want to send you out a vision and a mission statement and just think you get to know me.”

Lucy Pascall also placed value on establishing a supportive culture. Julia Tillery celebrated that she is fully staffed and has yet to have significant staff turnover. She tied the success to having a positive work culture in which everyone loves each other and has one another’s back. Julia Tillery advised,

Surround yourself with folks that have deep hearts. I’d much rather have somebody that could say, “I love you,” than somebody that [is] technically well versed, because you can always find a subject matter expert. They’re a dime a dozen but finding folks that have a backbone instead of a wishbone is key.

Talia Daves used the terms high-functioning and high-performing to describe the team she works with. Daves stated that she hires highly motivated people who take the initiative and are creative thinkers. Daves also spoke about the value of fun. She said,

If you don’t find the fun in this, you’re going to get burnt out really quickly. We work really hard to have a good time while we’re working. Make the job enjoyable, take time to de-stress. You got to be willing to laugh at yourself and have a good time with us because that’s really important. My expectation is, while you’re at work, I want you to, again, have a good time while you’re working, don’t have a good time instead of working. When you’re here, be on it, be ready, then go home.

Audrey Rodriguez also subscribed to the motto of work hard, play hard, by which employees are expected to provide results, but when they do, to celebrate those accomplishments and have fun.

Being a part of a team was a key motivator for all the participants to take on the challenges every city manager faces. Talia Daves and Lucy Pascall explained that they felt strongly that it was their responsibility to show up and be present every day because if they did not, no one else would, and they would be letting their team down. Although the city manager is the leader, each participant acknowledged that they could only do what they do because of the people they work with. Molly Holt said, “So little of what a town manager does is individual. Almost everything we do is based on a team effort.”

All the city managers interviewed identified that their work environments have changed since they stepped into a leadership role, whether by adding more women into the municipal workforce or changes within the workplace culture. Sophie Carlson shared that when she stepped into the city manager role, one of the first things she was tasked with was changing the workplace culture, and the people who gave the directive assumed that would happen quickly. Carlson explained that true, effective culture change takes at least 7 years to implement because people who were a part of the original culture need to adjust to the new way of working and have time to let the old memories of how things were always done fade away. The team also needs space to define what a healthy workplace culture looks like for them and ensure buy-in, so everyone knows what is expected of one another. For Violet Wollery, defining the culture came down to proclaiming to the board that everyone would be treated with respect, dignity, and kindness. Hayden Pearson explained that building an effective organization with a

healthy culture is much easier when employees want to come to work and enjoy working with their peers.

Love for the Role

Although days can be challenging, every participant shared how much they enjoyed their job and how their personality and leadership traits fit perfectly with the city manager role. Hazel Woods said, “I believe it’s a calling. As hard as it is, as annoying as some elements of it can be, it feels like a calling.” When these women spoke about what motivated them to come to work every day, the researcher could feel the passion in their voices, and there was a true sense of purpose for each person. Jade Jackson captured it best, though, when she said,

I tell people, I love it. I really do. I love the people that I work with. I love what we do. I love the fact that we are making sure things happen, that our citizens have what they need and what they want. Like I said, I just love to see things get done and I like to motivate people and I think I’ve been able to do that here and we’ve got a fairly young workforce and trying to say, ‘This is a really good job and here’s all the things that we do’ and keep them excited and wanting to be here as well.

Hazel Woods viewed her role as city manager as a way to contribute to her community: “I think I’ve always been a thinker and wanting to contribute at a higher level and somewhat altruistic in a sense of, we can shape things. We can make the world a better place, that public service perspective.” All the participants were passionate about supporting their community and using their talents. Five participants spoke about when it

was time to retire or move on; they wanted to be sure that they left the community in a better place.

Mentorship and Networking

In prior studies, mentoring and networking have been identified as ways in which more women can advance through the ranks to obtain the highest nonelected leadership role. The participants echoed that sentiment.

Mentors Are a Must

Fourteen participants recognized that their mentors helped them see city management as a career they could obtain and succeed in. Jade Jackson said, “I think I was always treated fairly and always given support and told ‘You can do anything you want and you should keep climbing the ladder.’” The mentors these participants identified included former city managers, peers, subordinates, and family members, and they were a mix of men and women. Some mentorships were solidified in official programs, and others were less formal.

Regardless of the structure, there was a general acknowledgment that mentors were essential for success. Julia Tillery stated,

If you do not have a strong mentor, I don’t see how the career’s going to be successful. It supersedes education. It supersedes your position. It supersedes your network. Supersedes what you read, who you hang out with. It’s really key.

Hayden Pearson explained that having a mentor who worked in local government gave her access to what was happening behind the curtains, which was invaluable in helping her develop the skills needed to be a successful city manager.

Colorado's Network

In addition to solid mentorship, eight participants identified that they are starting to see more women serving in leadership roles within municipal government in Colorado, and many shared examples of how at annual conferences such as the ones put on by CML or Colorado City & County Management Association (CCCMA), there used only to be a handful of women and now they are seeing a more substantial balance between male and female attendees. CCCMA (n.d.) has also established a Colorado Women Leading Government (CWLG) committee, which “is committed to advancing the role of women and helping them succeed in the public sector. The mission of CWLG is to provide holistic professional development, networking, and career building opportunities that allow women to succeed in public service” (para. 2). Three participants spoke about this program, and one shared that she was the cofounder of CWLG.

In addition to these formal networks, three participants spoke about informal gatherings that have started since the COVID-19 pandemic among pockets of female city managers throughout the state. Talia Daves explained that a group of female city managers (usually about two to six) started getting together for wine over Zoom® to connect and talk through some of their challenges. She said,

It's been so helpful because it's helped us through the roughness of COVID and just the hardness of this job. ... We talk about things. A lot of the stuff might be different in size, in scope, but they'll be the same issue. Maybe I have five of something and they have 20 of something, but it's still the same something.

Hayden Pearson called these “Women in Government” gatherings. These informal get-togethers are new for most, but something Audrey Rodriguez noted as needed among women because traditional networking often is more geared toward men. She stated,

I also think that the networking and stuff needs to be maybe a little bit more open and inclusive for women. Nothing against my male counterparts but we have a statewide ICMA chapter called Colorado City and County Management Association and there’s a conference every year in Glenwood Springs. You just see there’s a lot of networking among the men there. They’ll get together at the bar and they’re playing pool together and they’re talking. Some of these younger men are getting these opportunities to network with older men who are in the profession, who can vouch for them then for future job opportunities, and it doesn’t feel like there’s as many women in that space.

Although only some participants took part in these formal or informal networking opportunities, there was a general acknowledgment that networking was always good regarding female career advancement.

Learning From Others

Irrespective of formal or informal mentorship, three participants also spoke about the value of learning from others, including what not to do. Hayden Pearson said,

For me, the best thing I did was when I was working, and I was surrounded by people, I was like a sponge. I’ve watched what worked and then I also watched what wasn’t working. As an employee, I remember the stuff that drove me crazy. I work to have an organization that’s not going to have that kind of stuff. I just say be a sponge.

Paving the Way for Women

For half of the participants, mentoring went two ways—they saw value in receiving mentorship and giving it. The participants recognized that being a woman in a male-dominated field meant it was their responsibility to continue to ensure that more women were given the space to enter the field of city management and be successful once obtaining the role. Hazel Woods stated,

That's where I think that as a democratic government, as a public institution, my responsibility is to ensure equity across the organization to role model and inspire what it looks like. ... We carry the burden or the torch, so to speak of being the reason why you can hire a female city manager.

Although Talia Daves acknowledged that mentorship has allowed women to gain more access to the city manager role, the work is not yet done. She stated,

We've made a little bit of dent and leeway, but oh my gosh, have we gotten where we should be? Absolutely not. There's a lot of work to be done. I know as managers, we walk this very fine line of being neutral, but we have got to make some progress. We've got to promote the profession and we have got to continue to help educate electees as to why more women need to be in these jobs. If we don't do that, then we aren't going to move the needle very far. We just won't.

Daves added that with so few women in the city manager role, "we fight really hard to make sure that we're doing a really good job because that means that others will get to fight and be more successful and do this work as well."

Although the general undertone was that mentorship for women was crucial in seeing an increase in the number of women in the city manager role, half of the

participants acknowledged that they needed to support everyone who wanted to be in city management regardless of gender. Hayden Pearson said, “We try to support everyone. We want to grow every single employee.”

Future of City Management

The participants were asked to speak about how the role of the city manager has changed over the years and what the future city manager’s role could look like for women.

Recruitment

For the majority, the recruitment process was an essential component of how more women could end up in the role. Of the women interviewed, 10 served as the first female city manager their current municipality had employed. When asked about the recruitment process, those who had to go through an official interview explained that they were being considered alongside male candidates only, no other female candidates. A quarter of the participants shared that in addition to seeing fewer women apply, they have also seen a decline in quality applicants across the board.

Two participants recalled that choosing to work in government was the safe option because the pay was good, and people could retire with pensions. Now that the private sector is offering, in many cases, higher wages and better retirement plans, government is no longer as lucrative a career as it once was, making recruitment much harder. Hazel Woods noted that municipalities must do a better job of highlighting that there are multiple entry points into government and trying to connect people with jobs that mirror their interests. Sophie Carlson explained that ensuring that government is more accessible would help people realize they could have a career in local government.

Although every organization needs to recruit externally at some point, seven participants spoke about the value of promoting from within. Kayla Roffe shared that when someone is promoted from within, they are already familiar with the organizational needs and what things the municipality is working on. When focusing on the city manager position, Maggie Curtis and Talia Daves explained that many municipalities are searching nationwide for their next city manager. However, some of the current employees within the organization are qualified to take on the role. Maggie Curtis stated,

I don't know if organizations aren't building that leadership from within.

Instead ... every time you go through a town manager you hear, "Oh we got to put out a search, we got to do this. We hire these firms." I get those forms all the time and ... I'm just curious as to why they're constantly reaching out when you probably have people within the organization that know the town, know the city, know the organization.

Self-Limitation

Seven participants noted that women tend to wait to apply for a role until they can check all the boxes, which is why municipalities might see little promotion from within. Lucy Pascall shared that women on her staff do not see themselves as ready to step into the city manager role. She also outlined that the limitations concerning women applying for leadership positions might be more internally driven than influenced by outside sources. However, women often use their gender as a reason for those barriers rather than identifying that they may be self-inflicted. Lucy Pascall stated,

If you don't allow that in your psyche or in your way of thinking, I think you can go through those barriers a lot easier because you don't make the assumption that

you're not getting it or that you're not capable or that somebody is treating you differently because you're a woman.

Educate the Future

As noted under the career progression section, many participants did not even know what a city manager was, and three of them stated they are still determining whether younger people know what the role is. Dawn Harvey and Violet Wollery explained that it is crucial to create interest in government, and Wollery noted it is important as early as elementary school. By coordinating with the schools regardless of the academic level, city managers can create more exposure to the role. Audrey Rodriquez stated,

I do think that city management is a great profession, whether you're male, female, or whatever. I think a lot of times we don't talk about it as an option. When I was in school, no one ever talked about being a city manager and that being a career field that was exciting and has a lot of opportunities. There are so many opportunities in local government and even counties and townships and all of that. It's just not something that I think as a profession or as a society, we talk much about. I've presented to our local high school, and they have no idea what a town manager does. They have no idea what services their town provides, that half the time they think I'm elected. I just think that as a society, there's just a real lack of understanding of local government which is strange to me because it is the one that's closest to the people. I think too if people understood all the different roles that there were. Even starting in high school or middle school, talking about, "Hey, here are the cool things that you get to work on as a town

manager or town clerk or development director or whatever,” I think it could really open up people’s eyes to new possibilities.

Diversity Above All

What was unique about all the female participants is that representative bureaucracy was more about having more diversity, not just more women. Sophie Carlson stated,

I’m more concerned about having diversity in the role and not just gender diversity. Having more individuals of color, individuals whose sexual orientation has different identities than traditional society culture or expectations. I find that when we do that, we tend to r[a]ise the voices of people in our communities who have been left out. Left out because they didn’t fit into the majority’s expectations of how to engage.

Audrey Rodriquez noted that ensuring individuals from different backgrounds and viewpoints are given an opportunity to serve as the city manager is valuable because it helps to bring a different level of creativity and sheds new light on situations.

Hazel Woods acknowledged that much work has been done, especially integrating women into the role. However, she explained that the profession needs to be more inclusive and welcoming of leaders from different demographics. Maggie Curtis added that when a specific group is singled out, it limits consideration for other groups. Instead, the advancement of all minorities should be evaluated because they are likely just as underrepresented.

One Woman Does Not Equal Diversity

Efforts like affirmative action seek to ensure there is diversity within an organization. However, a quarter of the participants cautioned that simply checking off a box that there is a woman in the role can do more harm than good. Julia Tillery spoke to social licensing, which she explained is when minorities are placed into leadership roles and it does not work out, organizations can deduce that down to “Well, we’ve done our share. We had a lady in here. It didn’t work but we did our part.”

Genevieve Woodward also noted that as soon as one minority is placed into a leadership role, even if the person does not fail, people accept that small percentage of minority integration as diversity. She said,

What I try to encourage is, there does need to be more women at the table, not to say, “Oh good, we’ve got a female face now,” but just the diversity, whether they’re minorities or females or males, there’s got to be more of a balance because of that.

Selecting the Best Person for the Job

Increasing the number of women serving in the city manager role was identified as necessary for all the participants. However, five women stated that when it came down to selecting someone for a job, demographics like gender did not play a role in their decision making. Hayden Pearson explained she would prefer people to approach hiring from a utopian standpoint “where it’s not about gender, it’s about people’s personalities.” Four of the participants identified that, for them, it comes down to a person’s work ethic. If they are willing to work hard and fulfill the role requirements, then that is the person who should be hired. Kendall Vaughn stated,

I'm not going to just hire a Black woman to ... be able to check some box if she's not qualified, period. I'm not going to do it. I don't care what color their skin is. I don't care who they sleep with and who they pray to. None of that matters to me. I need the most qualified person.

Words of Wisdom

As the interviews started to wrap up, the researcher asked whether the participants had any words of wisdom for future female managers. Molly Holt joked when she said, "None of us really know what we're doing." Half of the participants wanted future female city managers to know that the job is not for the faint of heart and that future managers must have the grit to get through those challenging days. Kendall Vaughn stated that it is a thankless profession, and four participants considered having thick skin necessary.

Despite offering these cautionary tales, Jade Jackson encouraged people to pursue the city manager position: "Don't be afraid to make the leap and go for it. You could do it. It's exciting work." Audrey Rodriguez also encouraged city managers to take a leap of faith and noted for her that included moving to a new state for the role.

Molly Holt shared that the role can sometimes be intimidating, especially when navigating something a manager has never dealt with. However, those challenges create an opportunity to learn new things. Genevieve Woodward stated,

We've got to keep our minds open. When you see the next window open, jump through it and try something new because management is, I guess about a skill set and practice. You just got to put it into practice.

Julia Tillery broke down how new managers are likely to feel in percentages. She stated,

You're going to be 50% of the time, you want to throw up because it's completely uncomfortable and you don't know what you don't know. The other 50% is what you got you there. It's your natural state. Over that year, period of time, you should begin to shift, you should be 60/40. You're becoming more comfortable, more engaged, more confident in what you're delivering, and then you get to that 70/30. That's the sweet spot. Optimal is 80/20. If I can get my team to 80/20, can you imagine a group of 20 people that are all top notch grade A kick-ass badasses operating optimally 80% at the time? Holy shit. It'd be nuts. That's what we try for. That other 20% is you remain comfortable being uncomfortable. You take chances, you want to throw up. You want to have that feeling of flying down the hill like when you were 12 and taking your hands off the handlebars. Like the holy shit moment. "Oh my God, it's fast. Am I going to crash?" Then you get down to the end and it's like, "Oh my God. Okay, well, I'm good. I'm good. I'm here. I'm feeling good."

Being in the space of the unknown is something many managers are only sometimes comfortable with. However, Audrey Rodriguez explained that a manager who comes in with their own agenda would likely not represent the community. All the participants identified at one point in their interview that their job is to serve the community at the directive of the council/board and that the direction of the governing body will continually ebb and flow.

Sophie Carlson shared that councils/boards likely will make bad decisions at times, which is ok and allowed. In understanding the role of a city manager, what is not allowed is to disregard the directive entirely. If a city manager does not align their values

with the community, they should consider moving to another municipality. Julia Tillery noted that the fit between the city manager and the community is a two-way street; it needs to work well for both for there to be respect, trust, and support. Hayden Pearson said, “I think part of it is you can’t want a position so much that you’re going to accept something you’re not comfortable with.”

When a city manager is in the right community, the participants spoke about having faith in oneself and reiterated the importance of teamwork. Jade Jackson stated, “You can’t do it all but don’t let anybody else tell you that because you can. You can do a lot and it’s taking care of your people. Make sure you know and take care of your people.” Hazel Woods explained that her job is to manage and support a team that will drive results.

Road to Retirement

All the participants shared that they plan to retire as city managers, and one had submitted her resignation the day before the interview. Although not every city manager envisioned spending the remainder of their career in the municipality where they currently work, they had a sense of the size and culture of a municipality where they would prefer to work. Two mentioned that the decision to move on would depend on whether they had a board or council they could not work with.

When asked what was next, two were already working toward a new career. Three shared that they were looking forward to spending their retirement traveling with their loved ones. However, four stated that they saw themselves serving in a consultant capacity, either as an interim city manager in a struggling municipality or using their expertise in leadership development or disaster management to coach others.

Because retirement was within reach for only one, the researcher noted that it was safe to assume the other 15 female city managers would continue to serve their communities and pave the path for other female city managers for at least a few more years.

Summary

Confucius said, “Choose a job you love, and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.” For all the participants, their love for the role, their community, and the team they worked with inspired them to do the work. Although the participants all had their own unique experiences progressing in their career to the city manager role, they shared many commonalities concerning the occupational barriers they had to overcome, their motivations to obtain and maintain the city manager role, the benefits of mentorship and networking, some of their experiences as female city managers, and their hopes for the future of city management. The work these participants have and will continue to do will create that path for other women to pursue the highest nonelected leadership role in municipal government.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The city manager role is one of the more challenging positions in local government because of the number of roles and responsibilities tied to the job. A city manager is not only tasked with managing the day-to-day operations; they have to be prepared to switch focus at a moment's notice and serve as the glue that keeps everyone together during continual times of change. For female city managers, some of the changes they have had to navigate regard finding their place in a male-dominated field. Despite facing occupational barriers, the 16 female city managers interviewed for this dissertation have all been able to celebrate that they obtained the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position and continue to remain successful in leading within their respective municipalities. Their experiences have helped to pave the way for future women seeking the city manager role, and the information they shared with the researcher aided in identifying the major findings and unexpected findings outlined in this final chapter.

Research Question Findings

Six research questions were identified for this dissertation. Based on the participant's responses, the following are the findings. The major findings section of this chapter provides an additional narrative for these findings.

Research Question 1

How do women perceive gender as a factor in career progression?

The female city managers interviewed acknowledged that they were women in a male-dominated field; however, being a woman in an occupationally segregated career had minimal impact on their career progression. More significantly, the participants did

not view their gender as something that would benefit or hinder their career progression.

Audrey Rodriguez said,

I've thought a lot about this over the years and I'm not sure how much gender actually is a factor. It could just be that I maybe have my horse blinders on a lot of times. I'm not sure that it really does matter all that much. If you're willing to work hard and do the things and fulfill the role in the requirements, I don't know that it matters if you're a male or a female.

This statement was replicated in some capacity throughout all the other interviews.

Research Question 2

What occupational barriers have women had to overcome during their career progression?

Much of the literature reviewed for this dissertation highlighted overt occupational barriers such as glass ceilings, glass walls, glass cliffs, discriminative employment practices, and patriarchal perceptions of women's roles. Although some of the women who have been in the field of city management for more than 20 years could speak to more blatant situations of gender discrimination, most participants spoke to second-gender biases. "It's just a subtle bias that people have, and you think now good grief" (Kendall Vaughn). Despite the less overt occupational barriers, the participants did not express a strong desire to change them. Instead, there was an understanding that those occupational barriers will likely always be in place and something female city managers must learn to navigate.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between occupational barriers and career progression for women working in local municipal government?

Like gender, the participants did not view any occupational barriers they faced as having a significant impact on their career progression. Lucy Pascall explained that she has never felt she had to overcome any occupational barriers in her career:

Part of it I think is the approach that I take to things and whether it's smart or stupid, I don't know. I have always felt that whether I was a woman or not should not impact what I was doing.

Jade Jackson echoed that she, too, did not view occupational barriers as having a significant impact on her career progression despite experiencing occupational barriers. She said,

I think I've actually been very, very lucky that wherever I have worked with exception of the last place ... I was always treated fairly and always given support and told "You can do anything you want, and you should keep climbing the ladder."

Research Question 4

How do women describe their experiences working in the male-dominated field of city management?

With gender and occupational barriers holding little weight with the participants, the notion that city management is a male-dominated field also had little impact.

Although there was an acknowledgment that there are still more men than women serving in the city manager role, the occupational segregation did not impact the participants'

experience in obtaining and maintaining the highest nonelected municipal leadership role. Hazel Woods stated,

I think historically management theory has gotten wrong what qualifications are needed for leaders and managers. It's more about servant leadership and getting involved than what they've taught previously. I think the reason it was male-dominated is because almost all the management positions in our society have been male-dominated.

The understanding that the field is still male dominated translated into a sense of pride and a responsibility to ensure that more women have access to the occupation so that the role could become a more representative bureaucracy. Talia Daves said,

I think you need to involve women for a few reasons. One, we're 50-plus percent representative of the population and we ought to make sure that women are at the table because they live in your community, right? Making sure that we're more reflective of leadership and communities as to what they look like as a community as a whole I think is an important goal in moving forward.

Research Question 5

What are female city managers' motivational triggers that provide them with the fortitude to pursue career advancement in a male-dominated occupation?

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared many motivations for wanting to seek the highest nonelected leadership position as well as the motivations for wanting to continue to work in the role. The motivation included tangible things, like completing a project or securing more funding. Dawn Harvey stated,

I'm really engaged and I love it when I'm in the middle of a project, development, or a city project, whatever it may be, that is very engaging to me, I like doing that. I really very much like negotiating. Those are the things that I look forward to. However, supporting staff and creating a healthy work culture were key motivating factors for all the participants. Lucy Pascall said, I think it was just feeling I was part of a team and I couldn't let the team down. That I wanted to show up here every day because that's what everybody was doing. I wanted to make things as smooth as possible and provide everybody with as much information as possible so that they weren't wondering every day what they were supposed to be doing.

Research Question 6

What are the characteristics of female city managers that aided their career progression into the city manager role?

The data that were obtained regarding the participants' characteristics that aided in their career progression varied, and the researcher acknowledged that the descriptors used were individualistic. In assessing the data, the researcher identified that many terms the participants used to describe themselves were stereotypically associated with the respective gender under the role congruency theory. Outlined below are some specific statements shared by the participants when asked to share how the employees and board/council would describe them that highlight female city managers' alignment with role congruency theory.

- I think the direct reports would probably describe me as someone who is pretty personable, enjoys working with people, and being social but also, I can be, I

think, task-oriented as well. ... I think the council would probably describe me as being professional and knowledgeable. (Audrey Rodriguez)

- That I'm big-pictured, that I'm facilitative, that I bring energy, and that I'm pretty thoughtful about how I pull things together. (Sophie Carlson)
- I think the staff would describe me as fair. ... Fairness is really important to me. Kindness is really important to me too. The way we treat each other. I believe in the phrase, strong back, soft heart. (Kendall Vaughn)
- I think they would say that I'm fair. I've got good integrity. I hold them accountable. I'm fun. I have compassion. (Genevieve Woodward)
- I think they would describe me as a very compassionate person. I know some employees have really described me as having a big heart. I'm the type of leader where I go out and I work events alongside employees. I don't put myself in a C-suite and isolate myself from employees. I go out and interact with employees and have a lot of one-on-one contact. I'm very approachable. I listen. I would say they would say I'm a huge advocate for them. (Hazel Woods)

Major Findings

This qualitative case study sought to explore what characteristics women possess that motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Throughout the study, the researcher asked questions to better understand the participants' career progression, their experience with occupational barriers, what motivates them to do the job, and what leadership characteristics they believed a city manager needed to be successful.

Gender, Career Progression, and City Management as a Male-Dominated Field

One component of this study was to understand how gender impacted a female city manager's career progression. What was unanticipated was that the women interviewed for this study did not think much about their gender when it came to their careers. Although they could identify existing occupational barriers, gender did not play a significant role in how they viewed the field of city management.

Every participant recognized that the field of city management is considered to be male dominated, which also did not appear to impact them. The participants' acknowledgment of the male-dominated field was more of an afterthought and something they did not or would not view as a limitation. Although there were comments about there still being a good ol' boys club, none of the participants commented about the need for that to dissipate but rather noted that it was just a part of the job and something female city managers would need to learn how to navigate.

Minimal Impact of Occupational Barriers on Career Progression

The researcher identified that the length of time that a participant had been serving as a city manager could be a limitation because those who had been in the field longer were progressing in their careers at a time when occupational barriers were more overt. That limitation was validated during the interviews with women who had started their careers in municipal government before the turn of the century and subsequently experienced more blatant gender discrimination. The impact the gender discrimination had on these participants was profound, as evident by their ability to describe in detail some of the overt comments and actions taken by their male counterparts.

Although for these more seasoned city managers their experiences with gender discrimination were more overt, all the female city managers interviewed could recall stories of gender bias. However, it was much less pronounced and fell more into the second-generation bias category. Like the field being male dominated, this gender bias was viewed as more of something that female city managers would need to prepare themselves for and less of a hindrance to their career progression or ability to do their jobs.

Despite the absence of a strong sense of duty to break down the occupational barriers, the participants viewed it as their responsibility to demonstrate firsthand that women can serve as female city managers and be successful in doing so. These participants noted that rather than spending their time advocating for a change in the demographics of the city manager role, they would lead by example and hope that by doing so, they would be able to pave a path for other female city managers, which in turn would increase the number of women in the role.

Leadership Matters Most

Although the participants all saw value in having a female city manager, they also noted that being a strong leader meant more than what gender someone was. This study focused on three theoretical frameworks related to leadership: the trait and behavioral theory of leadership and the role congruency theory. Although no direct questions were asked about each, these theoretical frameworks were made evident in the information obtained from the interviews.

Role Congruency Theory

Although city management is a male-dominated field, none of the participants subscribed to the notion that, as women, they were not suited for the role and should be working in more of a gender-appropriate field. However, they did speak about female leaders being more communal and that when they demonstrated agentic behaviors, it created a double standard. Under role congruency theory, women exhibit more communal behaviors, such as being caring, nurturing, nice, collaborative, and men are seen to be more dominant, independent, competitive, and assertive.

In reviewing the list of personality traits the participants felt that women exhibited versus men, there was a direct correlation to role congruency theory. For example, when describing typical female leadership characteristics, the participants used terms like compassionate, empathetic, softer, more finesse, and effective communicators. For male leadership characteristics, terms like territorial, confident, and stoic were used. It was also noted that when female city managers show more agentic behaviors, there was a double standard, and they are often criticized for showing those behaviors.

The role congruency theory outlines that for women to be successful, they would benefit from exhibiting androgynous behaviors to fulfill gender and leadership role expectations. However, none of the participants expressed concern about how females conduct themselves but recognized that their communal approach to leadership was something they were proud of. The participants highlighted that they could work collaboratively with others, which aided in their success in the role.

Trait Theory of Leadership

The trait theory of leadership identifies that certain personality characteristics are tied to an effective leader. Even though this theory was built from the great man theory, which viewed strong leaders as men, the participants explained that their communal leadership style made them effective. Although there is not a set list of personality traits that make someone an effective leader, Northouse (2019) assessed that many researchers noted that intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability were common themes. During the interviews, the participants spoke to one or more of these as essential leadership traits, and many used these terms or a synonym when asked how their employees and board/council would describe them.

Of all the traits listed by Northouse (2019), sociability appeared to be the one most female city managers centered on. According to Northouse, “Leaders who show sociability are friendly, outgoing, courteous, tactful, and diplomatic. They are sensitive to others’ needs and show concern for their well-being. Social leaders have good interpersonal skills and create cooperative relationships with their followers” (p. 25). Although sociability is tied to trait theory, this focus on communal behavior directly correlates with being employee-centered under the behavioral theory of leadership.

Behavioral Theory of Leadership

The commitment to the employees and developing a strong workplace culture were central themes throughout the interviews. That commitment to being employee-centered was highlighted in the two studies conducted under the behavioral theory of leadership outlined in the literature review section of this study.

Likert's System Management: Participative. Employee-centered, communal leaders fall into the participative group system in which the leader places value on participation and working with subordinates to accomplish a task. Under this system, managers are more likely to see higher performance and productivity, stronger two-way communication between manager and subordinate, and collaboration to accomplish the task (Fisk et al., 2012). The female city managers interviewed placed value on all the components found in participative system management, and they recognized that supporting their teams was essential to being an effective municipal government leader.

Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid. Under Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, the participants fell between middle-of-the-road management and team management (Fisk et al., 2012; Swan, 2018). Although all the women interviewed had a high concern for the people they worked with, they were also just as passionate about their work and shared in detail the projects they were currently tackling. However, at no point in the interviews did the researcher identify that the female city managers were willing to sacrifice one over the other but instead recognized the value of both people and productivity.

Need to Know Yourself

When describing leadership characteristics a city manager needed, for the participants, it came down to knowing themselves. According to Sethuraman and Suresh (2014), "Knowing one's own personality might help leaders to know and understand one self better" (p. 165). By knowing who they were as leaders and how they wanted to lead an organization, the participants could elevate and embrace their gender leadership

characteristics in a way that allowed them to be the communal leaders they wanted to be without appearing inferior.

Motivated by the Job

When creating the framework for this study, the researcher set out to assess what motivated female city managers to break through occupational barriers to gain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership role. However, when the participants shared that occupational barriers were not something they concerned themselves with, the motivational theory framework transitioned to be more centered on what motivated these participants to want to continue to serve in the city manager role, which they all shared was a passion for the job itself.

Under Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the final phase is self-actualization, in which a person strives for self-fulfillment. The participants explained that it is a part of their personality traits to always want to strive to do more and to reach new limits. Although their motivation was not tied directly to wanting to see more female city managers in the role, they recognized that by being the only women in the room, they had an opportunity to prove that they belonged in that room and were capable of doing the city manager role.

The need for power was never brought up, but the desire for affiliation and achievement under McClelland's theory of needs was apparent (Pennsylvania State University, 2008; Rybnicek et al., 2019). The participants all valued collaborating with others (affiliation) and being high performers with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to accomplish the tasks before them (achievement). This motivation to do a good job also served as a reward. Vroom's theory of expectancy explains that people are motivated by

whether the results of their actions will result in a reward (World of Work Project, n.d.). For the participants, that reward was serving their community well and doing right by their constituents.

Being motivated by the work helped the participants look past some of the negative hygiene factors related to the job, such as the 24/7 nature of the position and the ever-changing boards and commissions. The balance of hygiene factors to motivational factors is essential in Herzberg's two-way theory, and it appears that that balance does exist for these female city managers (Syptak et al., 1999).

Above all, though, the grit these participants exhibited to work through challenges, no matter how large or small, served as motivation. Under Duckworth's (2016) grit theory, skill, talent, effort, and achievement are only possible if interest, practice, passion, and hope exist. These participants demonstrated their passion and interest in the field of city management through the enthusiasm with which they described the role and the work they were doing. They also showed hope when sharing their goals and aspirations for the future.

Unexpected Findings

Some of the major findings were also unexpected findings. For starters, the minimal emphasis placed on city management being a male-dominated field by the participants and the lack of focus on occupational barriers and the impact those may have had on a female city manager's career progression was a surprise. Given that city management is a male-dominated field, the researcher developed research questions assuming that the occupational barriers the participants faced would have a more

pronounced impact on them. However, for many, it was an afterthought—just a part of the role rather than something worth putting energy into changing.

The other unexpected finding was that although the participants placed value in having women in the city manager role, they still maintained that selecting the right person for the job was more important than advancing women and that policy changes like Affirmative Action efforts could be more detrimental. They felt that whoever was hired for a city manager role should be the right person regardless of their gender.

Although all the participants wanted to see women considered for the role, they did not feel that if a man were selected, it automatically meant that the occupation was continuing to perpetuate the male domination but rather, that the male candidate must have been the right person for the role. When asked how to ensure there were more female city managers, the participants noted the value of networking and mentorship and that both were essential for career advancement.

Conclusions

This study sought to understand what characteristics female city managers possess to motivate them to break through occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. Although the occupational barriers the participants faced were not as pronounced as the researcher anticipated going into this study, the female city managers interviewed shared valuable insight into what it means to be a city manager. They outlined throughout their interviews what motivates them to continue to work in the role, what leadership characteristics they think are essential to success, and what their recommendations are for future city managers. They all placed value on paving the path for future female city managers, and they hoped that the field of

city management would continue to be viewed as a viable one for anyone interested in seeking a career in municipal government regardless of gender.

Implication for Action

For a municipality to be representative of its population, diversity across all levels must reflect in the staff hired, especially in those leadership positions. However, with over half the population being women, the targeted effort should continue to increase the number of female city managers from 19% now to 50% in the near future. Colorado is leading the way with 35% of city managers being women, and those women who are currently in the role see the value they play in helping other women advance. However, this advancement cannot come from putting women in leadership roles just to satisfy a diversity requirement.

Female leaders need to be trained and invested in. There needs to be more identified mentorship and networking opportunities in which women can connect with female city managers and learn more about what knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to hone in on to be successful in the role. Women also need to be taught that the communal behaviors they may naturally maintain are beneficial in management roles and that investing in people just as much as projects will serve them well in the role.

Organizations like CML and CCCMA have always focused on the advancement of women and should continue to do just that. The pendulum is swinging to where there are more women in the city manager role, and exposure, education, and outreach will only help to continue to see advancement in addressing any occupational barriers that may still exist and in inspiring women to seek out the highest nonelected municipal government leadership role.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was focused solely on female city managers' perspective on overcoming occupational barriers to attain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership position. However, throughout the study, the researcher identified areas in which additional research could be conducted.

Recommendation 1

Interview male city managers in Colorado who have also worked in municipal government for a minimum of 7 years to get their perspective. Most participants in this study identified that men played a significant role in their success through mentorship or recommending that the participant be hired for the city manager role. Therefore, the researcher feels there is value in learning directly from men how they view women's career progression into the city manager role, including occupational barriers they think women face and what they feel are their roles and responsibilities in assisting women to obtain the city manager role.

Recommendation 2

For female city managers who started their careers in municipal government and subsequently obtained leadership roles at a young age, understanding their age's impact on their career progression would be another recommended area of focus. The participants who experienced the barriers because of their age noted the complexity of being both a woman and young. The reference to age as an occupational barrier was an unexpected finding from this study and is worth more research.

Recommendation 3

To fully evaluate the leadership characteristics that the participants used to describe themselves, researchers could seek a 360 evaluation in which subordinates and the board/council members working with that female city manager were interviewed. This research would be beneficial if there is more interest in evaluating leadership characteristics under the role congruency theory and the trait and behavioral theory of leadership.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Former Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg was just one of many influential women who have spoken about the value of having women in leadership roles. Zainab Sali (n.d.), founder and CEO of Women for Women International, once stated, “Without women’s full inclusion at the decision making table, we cannot have any healthy decision making that is good for men and women alike” (para. 1), and Sheryl Sandberg (n.d.), former Chief Operating Officer of Facebook®, noted, “It’s time to cheer on girls and women who want to sit at the table” (para. 1). Advancing women in leadership roles is essential in moving toward a more representative bureaucracy, and the female city managers who participated in this research play a vital role in that work.

Because city management continues to be a male-dominated field, exposing more women to what it means to be a city manager, how their trait and behavioral leadership styles will serve them well in the role, and highlighting how supporting a community and working collaboratively with stakeholders is genuinely motivating, will also help continue to increase that ratio of men to women in the role. With fewer apparent occupational barriers for female city managers to overcome, the time is now to continue

mentoring and supporting women to obtain the highest nonelected municipal government leadership role.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Research Questions

- 1) How do women perceive gender as a factor in career progression?
- 2) What occupational barriers have women had to overcome during their career progression?
- 3) What is the relationship between occupational barriers and career progression for women working in local municipal government?
- 4) How do women describe their experiences working in the male-dominated field of city management?
- 5) What are female city managers' motivational triggers that provide them with the fortitude to pursue career advancement in a male-dominated occupation?
- 6) What are the characteristics of female city managers that aided their career progression into the city manager role?

Interview Questions	Research Question
The following questions will be asked of the participants.	What research question number is the interview question tied to?

<p>Please tell me about your duties and responsibilities with the [Town/City of BLANK].</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been a city manager? 	
<p>Why did you want to become a city manager?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you always want to work in municipal government? If not, what was your career desire? • Do you envision spending the remainder of your career in city management? 	
<p>What positions did you have prior to becoming a city manager?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you progress to the city manager role? • What other professional leadership roles have you held? 	
<p>Please describe any barriers you faced in reaching the city manager role during your career progression.</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When facing those barriers, how did you feel? 	2
<p>What did you do to overcome the barriers you faced?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific actions did you take to address those barriers? 	2

<p>What impact did any of these barriers have on your career progression?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you experience any career impacts because of these barriers? 	3
<p>Do you feel there are any advantages to being a female city manager?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there times when your gender aided you in your career progression? 	1
<p>How do you feel your gender impacted your career progression?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were there times when your gender served as a barrier to your career progression? 	1
<p>Please describe your experience as a woman working in a male-dominated field.</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel male and female city managers have different experiences in the role? If so, what is the difference? 	4

<p>How has your experience changed during the time you have been working as a city manager?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was your experience as a female city manager when you started your career versus now? 	4
<p>How do you think your experience compares to other female city managers?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think contributes to different experiences? 	4
<p>What characteristics do you possess that helped you be successful in the city manager role?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What characteristics do you think city managers should possess? 	5
<p>What motivates you to continue serving in the city manager role?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What drives you to do this work? 	5
<p>What factors do you believe contributed to your success as a city manager?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you have any mentors that assisted you during your career progression? 	6

<p>How do you think the people who work with you would describe you?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would your city council or trustees describe you? • How would your direct reports respond to that question? 	6
<p>What leadership qualities do you believe female city managers possess that differentiate them from their male counterparts?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you characterize women's leadership styles versus men's leadership styles? 	6
<p>What do you believe is the value of having women in the city manager role?</p> <p>Supplemental questions (if needed):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do female city managers impact a municipality in a way that male city managers generally do not? 	6

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

RE: IRB Review
IRB No.: 001-2223-EXP

Project: Motivation to Break Through Occupational Barriers: A Case Study of Female City Manager's Career Progression

Date Complete Application Received: July 31st, 2022
Date Final Revision Received: August 24th, 2022

Principle Investigator: Miranda Fisher
Co-PI: n/a
Faculty Advisor: Kimberly Cox

College/Department: OPS

IRB Determination: Expedited Application **Approved** – Student research using confidential interviews; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: August 30, 2022